

U.S. Indicts Guinea-Bissau's Military Chief in Drug Case

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DAKAR, Senegal — The head of Guinea-Bissau's armed forces, Gen. Antonio Injai, has been indicted by a federal grand jury in New York on cocaine and weapons-trafficking charges, the United States attorney's office in Manhattan said Thursday, part of an ambitious American operation targeting some of the most powerful figures in a country long considered a major haven for drug smuggling.

According to the indictment, Mr. Injai told informants for the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, who were posing as rebels with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, that he was willing to store tons of cocaine and ship it to the United States. He is also accused of agreeing to buy weapons for the FARC, which is designated a terrorist organization by the United States.

Two weeks ago, an ally of his, the former head of Bissau's Navy, was indicted on similar drug charges after being arrested in a sting off the coast of West Africa.

For years, Guinea-Bissau has been considered one of the world's premier examples of a narco-state, one where the government hierarchy is deeply implicated in the drug trade. But the cases bring those longstanding assertions quite a step further, offering what prosecutors describe as clear evidence of official involvement in trafficking, and aiming to haul senior figures into court.

Unlike the former naval boss, who was lured into a fake meeting on the high seas to be arrested, Mr. Injai remains free in Bissau, the dilapidated capital of the small Western African nation, where he has helped lead two coups d'état in the last three years and is widely considered the real force behind the impoverished country's nominal government.

In an interview last fall at the crumbling Portuguese colonial fort that serves as military headquarters in Bissau, the burly General Injai indignantly denied that he was involved in the drug trade. "Anybody who has the proof, present it!" he said at the time.

But during that same period, he was meeting with the D.E.A. informants, plotting the reception and shipment of tons of cocaine and weapons for the FARC, according to the indictment.

"The general agreed with the proposal to ship FARC cocaine to Guinea-Bissau for later distribution in the United States and to procure weapons for FARC, including surface-to-air missiles," the indictment says. Mr. Injai also demanded, and later received, an upfront payment of 20,000 euros from the informants, and was well pleased with it, according to the indictment.

And he told the informants that he would shortly be discussing the plan with the president of Guinea-Bissau. In interviews last fall, officials with both the government and the military agreed that relations between the two were excellent.

On Thursday evening, the Guinea-Bissau government spokesman, Fernando Vaz, said of the indictment: "We don't have any information on that. When we get the information, we will take a position."

General Injai was expected to address the charges against him on Friday at a news conference in Bissau.