



## **Tory MP tells committee that illegal tobacco sales financed 1993 World Trade Center attack**

Marie-Danielle Smith

March 2, 2018

OTTAWA — Former Conservative cabinet minister Diane Finley told a parliamentary committee this week she believes contraband tobacco sales financed “the blowing up of the Twin Towers,” as she argued against a government bill that would implement plain packaging for cigarettes.

Though Finley clarified to the National Post Friday that she was referring to the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, not the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, a leading terrorism researcher characterized it as a “conspiracy theory.”

“Illegal tobacco has been named as the key contributor financially to the blowing up of the Twin Towers. This is how serious this is. And whether people like to believe that or not, it has been proven to be a fact,” Finley said during a meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health Wednesday.

“The link to the Twin Towers is absolutely absurd,” Liberal MP Doug Eyolfson fired back, amid confusion as to whether Finley was referring to 9/11 or the earlier attack.

-On Friday, she walked back the claim contraband tobacco had been a major funding source, but insisted it was “part of” the financing of the 1993 bombing, in which a group of terrorists detonated a truck bomb below the World Trade Center’s North Tower, killing six and wounding more than 1,000. “The evidence is there that the two are connected,” she said.

“Those who know about terrorism know that a lot of the funding for these things comes from illegal tobacco and yet the government doesn’t seem to recognize this linkage, or if they are, they aren’t prepared to do anything about it,” she said.

“I am not aware of any research indicating that the plot to blow-up the World Trade Center in 1993 was financed in this manner,” said Lorne Dawson, director of the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security. “And I suspect this idea may stem from the conspiracy theories that have flourished since 9/11.”

In an interview Friday, Eyolfson said the word “absurd” hadn’t gone far enough. “It’s the worst kind of fear-mongering, and it’s quite frankly insulting the memories of the victims of such a tragedy,” he said. “Whether it referred to 9/11 or to the 1993 bombing, to make the link between plain tobacco packaging and terrorism is every bit as inappropriate.”

Tobacco companies have argued that plain packaging will benefit organized crime by making it easier to mimic legal cigarettes and packages, and easier to fool law enforcement. Such concerns formed the bulk of Finley’s testimony at committee, where she subbed in for a clause-by-clause review of Bill S-5 on Wednesday.

*I suspect this idea may stem from the conspiracy theories that have flourished since 9/11*

But tobacco industry lobby groups who have been fighting plain packaging wouldn’t go so far as to link black-market tobacco to a specific terrorist attack.

“There’s no doubt that contraband tobacco is used by international criminal groups, including terrorists, to finance their activities. Our primary concern is with the role that illegal cigarettes play in Canada,” the National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco said in a statement to the National Post.

There are proven links between organized crime and terrorism; cash from illicit drug sales, including contraband tobacco, forms one of many revenue streams that can fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

Cigarette smuggling, specifically, has been used to raise funds for foreign terrorist groups, according to a 2016 report by Royal Military College professor Christian Leuprecht published by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. It notes that “terrorists are resorting to organized criminal operations to facilitate their activities, and organized crime is resorting to terrorist measures to support theirs.”

Another report from the same think tank in 2013, authored by Carleton University’s Jean Daudelin, acknowledged the links between contraband tobacco and terrorism but cautioned its revenues are a drop in the bucket of North America’s total illicit drug trade.

“While tobacco smuggling certainly contributes to the pool of money that terrorist organizations could use, it is difficult to argue it represents a security threat because it facilitates terrorism,” Daudelin argued.

A 2003 report from the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, said that no connections had been found between cigarette smuggling and the 9/11 attackers. The report claimed that counterfeit cigarette tax stamps were found in an apartment used by the perpetrators of the 1993 bombing, but there is no citation on the information.

On the broader point of contraband tobacco, Finley’s opponents were supportive. None on the health committee felt that illegal tobacco isn’t a problem, but they disagreed that plain packaging would do anything to substantially support organized crime.

“If the concern is that contraband manufacturers are going to copy legitimate products as a means of confusing law enforcement officials, they’ll do that whatever the packaging is,” said NDP MP Don Davies.

Bill S-5 is expected to finish committee review on Monday. Because it originated in the Senate, all that stands in the way of stricter plain-packaging rules for cigarettes — and Canada’s first-ever rules on vaping, which are also contained in the bill — is a debate and third-reading vote in the House of Commons.