

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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News

Gang faces 'last chance to turn on Kinahans'

Net is closing on drug cartel, warns garda commissioner

John Mooney Crime and Security Correspondent

The garda commissioner has urged members of the Kinahan cartel to "walk into their nearest American embassy" and give information on the gang to get the \$15 million reward from the US Drug Enforcement Administration.

In a wide-ranging interview about the security threats facing modern Ireland, Drew Harris said the Kinahan cartel's second and third-tier managers needed to be "practical" about their situation.

"The pressure is on. The net is closing. What I would say to them is you just need to look around you and see what is happening, and decide what your best actions are for the future."

"I would say to them, go into a US embassy, ask for the law enforcement attaché, because that collective \$15 million sits on three individuals. They need to start thinking about themselves in a pragmatic way," the commissioner said.

Harris added the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) had yet to pay out a reward for information leading to the arrest of Christopher "Christy" Kinahan, 66, and his sons Daniel, 46, and Christopher Jr, 43, after the imposition of powerful sanctions by the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

"I think if that happened we would know because that would



Drew Harris said the gardai were trying to identify gang members

mean the investigation would start moving on. Obviously the DEA may decide to run that covertly for a period of time but at some time we would be told," Harris said.

In the interview, the commissioner provided a rare glimpse into the structure, internal workings and personalities of the cartel which influence its activities.

Harris said the crime organisation had representatives in Europe, the Middle East and South America. Many of their financial advisers had yet to be identified by garda intelligence.

"They are working covertly. Work is ongoing to identify them. Not all of them would be known to us. They are operating in the background, maybe managing money as opposed to ever putting their hands near a drug consignment.

These are the individuals that we are seeking to identify," he said.

Harris added the cartel, reputed to have assets of €1 billion, was beset by internal tensions.

"How could there not be tensions? Their friends and influence have evaporated. Their overall stock value has been diminishing. So how could there not be tensions? That brings me back to those second and third-tier people – they need to start thinking about themselves in a pragmatic way, which is walking into an US embassy and asking to speak to an attaché," he said.

The commissioner added that he believed the cartel's leaders would be brought to justice but understood they could face "alternative endings" at the hands of rivals or their associates who wished to seize control.

Harris also discussed the threat posed by international terrorism arising from the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas. The conflict, he warned, had real implications for Irish and European security.

Harris said he was concerned that people could be motivated by what they were seeing in the Middle East to carry out an attack. "Some of these attacks are very difficult to interdict because there is a minimal amount of planning, just an individual who is literally armed with a knife," he said.

Full interview, page 10



George Gibney tried to obscure his face behind the car's sun visor as he left home in Florida yesterday

Gibney has nothing to worry over, says Florida housemate

Jacqui Goddard
Altamonte Springs, Florida

Tucked away in a three-bedroom bungalow in a quiet Florida neighbourhood, George Gibney sits tight – thousands of miles from the child sex abuse storm he thought he had escaped three decades ago.

At his home in Altamonte Springs, a 20-minute drive from the tourist bustle of Walt Disney World, the former swimming coach remained apparently determined not to let the possibility of a new prosecution sink him.

"He has nothing to worry about," his friend and housemate Pedro Colon said yesterday, standing barefoot in the front drive.

A wooden sign hung on the wall to the right of the front door. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord", it read, quoting from the Old Testament's Book of Joshua.

Inside, behind drawn curtains and closed blinds, Gibney, now in his seventies, was in defiant mood, still unwilling after decades of reflection to respond to the allegations that he is a serial paedophile.

"He won't be coming out, he has nothing to say, there's nothing to answer," said Colon, with whom Gibney, who now goes by his middle name of John, has lived for several years.

Against a strengthening storm of allegations back in Ireland, from where he fled after the collapse of his prosecution on child sex abuse charges in 1993, Gibney lives an unobtrusive life in a peaceful

Continued on page 2 →



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COLOMBIA
Drug cartels in South America are sending vast quantities of cocaine to Europe. The profits generated from the drugs trade are laundered by both criminal and terrorist organisations



LONDON
Christine Lee "knowingly engaged in political interference" in Britain on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), according to the warning circulated by MI5. She denies the claims

DUBLIN
Hostile states and cyber criminals are targeting technology, science and pharma firms headquartered in Dublin

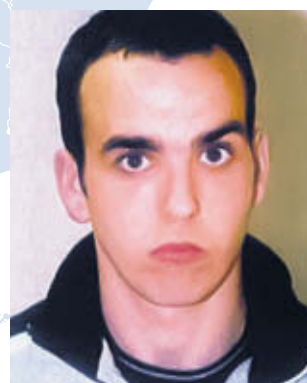


GAZA
The war between Hamas and Israel is radicalising Muslims across Europe. The gardai fear it may inspire lone wolf attacks

MALI
Sub-Saharan Africa has become a stronghold for Daesh/Islamic State, who are using the region to plan attacks on Europe



DUBAI
The emirate stands accused of sheltering organised crime gangs including the Kinahan cartel. It's also a central node for international money laundering



Terrorist threat is real – but we are always vigilant



Drew Harris faces challenges that his predecessors as garda commissioner would never have imagined, writes *John Mooney*

The world is facing enormous security challenges, from the Russian invasion of Ukraine to the climate crisis. The convergence of organised crime, terrorism, and the spectre of espionage by hostile states is once again casting a long shadow over Europe's security. In Ireland, the threat has surged to levels not witnessed in decades.

Drew Harris, the garda commissioner, is now having to contemplate challenges that his predecessors could scarcely have imagined.

His force is no longer just focused on criminals and the IRA but having to confront a diverse array of threats posed by transnational criminal gangs, cybercriminals based in Russia, right-wing extremists, international terrorists and spies, using a mixture of investigations, diplomacy and help from law enforcement agencies in other countries. Behind the scenes and under Harris's stewardship, the gardai are evolving to meet this new reality.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Harris points to the utilisation of diplomacy to confront the Kinahan cartel, the global criminal organisation that emerged from the Dublin underworld in the 1990s to become a dominant force in the drugs trade.

On assuming control of the gardai, Harris set out to build a coalition of police forces to target Christy Kinahan and his sons Daniel and Christopher Jr, who lead the gang from palatial mansions in Dubai. More recently, he sought help from the Emiratis and hopes the government will soon sign off on a memorandum of understanding to enhance further co-operation. "It's about keeping the net closing in, keeping the pressure on," says Harris, formerly of the PSNI and the first officer from an external police force to lead the gardai since the force's foundation in July 1921.

"The Kinahans had a very successful period in terms of both drug trafficking, investments and their divergence into the sports industry. Now look back to the announcement to impose sanctions on them by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control last year. It has made it very difficult for them to operate," he says.

The sanctions followed intense lobbying by Ireland and effectively forced financial institutions around the world to freeze accounts controlled by the cartel. In many ways, the cartel is a good example of the new type of threat that the gardai face. The cartel primarily exists to generate profits from crime but its actions occasionally trespass into terror-

ism and national security. The Kinahans have helped Iran assassinate its enemies in Europe and aided Hezbollah to launder money. The government has also spent tens of millions trying to stop Kinahan's gunmen from murdering people on the streets of Dublin. The cost of societal and health impact on society through drug dealing is unquantifiable.

Harris does not for a moment try to give the impression the battle is won, but is more a work in progress, while noting the gardai have imprisoned 60 of the cartel's associates. The investigation, he says, is now focused on identifying those who control its vast wealth but also its "second and third-tier" managers, those responsible for its day-to-day running.

"Some of them are in Dubai. Some of them elsewhere in the world. They should know time is running out," he says. "What I would say to them is you just need to look around you and see what is happening, and decide what your best actions are in the future. And I would say to them, go into a US embassy, ask for the law enforcement attaché, because that collective reward of \$15 million sits on three individuals. They need to know the pressure is just going to keep building, it's not going to diminish," he adds.

From the way he talks, Harris appears to be very familiar with the dynamics of the cartel, its internal structures and the personalities that influence its activities, though he does not give much thought to Kinahan himself.

"There are gangs and individuals who are connected to them throughout the world. There are individuals here who operate a franchise but there are a trusted set who are working close to them as well, who aren't working on a franchise. They are core management, logistics, infrastructure that they need to keep all of this moving along. They are elsewhere."

Where are they based?
"Some are in Dubai but they are across the world as well. We would look to South America but we think there are some working in Europe. They are working covertly. Work is ongoing to identify them. Not all of them would be known to us. They are operating in the background, maybe managing money as opposed to ever putting their hands near a drug consignment. These are the individuals that we are seeking to try to identify," he said.

Have any of them availed of the reward offered by the US?

"Not to our knowledge. If that happened we would know as that would mean the investigation would start moving on. Obviously the Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA] may decide to run

that covertly for a period of time, but at some time we would be told," he adds.

The commissioner's decision to publicly urge members of the cartel to provide inside information on Kinahan and his associates is classic Harris. It is a form of psychological warfare aimed at sowing panic and fear in the cartel and is probably timely as Harris suggests there must be tensions in the group.

"How could there not be tensions? Their friends and influence have evaporated. Their overall stock value has been diminishing. So how could there not be tensions? That brings me back to those second and third-tier people; they need to start thinking about themselves in a pragmatic way," he says.

The cartel is under investigation for supporting Iran and its Shia proxy Hezbollah, a relationship that has become the overriding problem for the US Treasury, the DEA and their allies in European law enforcement. Does the cartel present a unique type of problem?

"Terrorist organisations always require money. You can't run a terrorist organisation, even to employ people but also just to acquire munitions and equipment, without money. That's illegitimate money obviously. So that money sloshes about in the same place as money that's made from drug dealing, so naturally for any of these big transnational crime groups, the big terrorist efforts like Daesh, Hezbollah, Hamas, how are they managing that money? That's where you need to look as there may be crossovers," Harris says.

In recent weeks, Harris and the gardai's national intelligence service have been assessing the threat arising from the outbreak of war between Hamas and Israel. They did the same when Russia invaded Ukraine. Not since the emergence of Daesh as an offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004 has Europe had to plan actively for the likelihood of international terrorism. Harris is clear-sighted about the potential contagion emanating from the unfolding tragedy in Gaza.

"There has been a fatal stabbing in the UK, a fatal stabbing of a teacher in France, and two Swedish football supporters murdered in Brussels. I think the real concern is that the conflict in Gaza is a motivator, a stimulant not only for Hamas, but other groups. And the threat also extends into Africa," he says.

"There are shocking attacks that happen every other week, and they get missed in all of this but there is constant violence in Africa. Daesh carries a heavy responsibility in terms of those," he adds.

"What we would be concerned about across Europe is those individuals, who are socialised towards some of these

terrorist groupings be it Hamas, Hezbollah or Daesh ISKP [Islamic State – Khorasan Province], and then be motivated in terms of an attack. Some of these attacks are very difficult to interdict because there is a minimal amount of planning, just an individual who is literally armed with a knife. So it's one individual only but the conspiracy relates to internet traffic. So that's of huge concern," the commissioner says.

Judging threats and assessing risk is a fraught and imprecise game. While the threat to Ireland is real, Harris says it also needs to be contextualised.

"We are not in the same situation as some of the other major European countries being a desired target of choice for these groups. Neither are the organisations here to anywhere near the same extent, if at all, that one would recognise. So that's to the positive. But obviously we are feeding into a European picture regarding intelligence, the movement of suspects, the movement of individuals, the movement of those who in effect are irregular immigrants," says Harris, who is recognised internationally as an expert in dealing with high-risk covert operations.

He believes the same applies to the far right, and its potential to utilise violence on the streets of Dublin and elsewhere.

"The situation for Ireland is that we still have a very moderate mainstream political opinion and population. There is no real support for any hard-right grouping. It doesn't manifest itself. It is manifesting itself elsewhere in Europe. And when you have a population that is motivated, within that, you can grow an extreme cadre. That has been the experience right across Europe. But the citizens of Ireland don't respond in the same manner as populations elsewhere in terms of being caught up in radical right-wing type politics," he explained.

"I would say that at this moment, the greater threat is around international terrorism across Europe," says Harris, who has been personally affected by political violence. In 1989, his father, Alwyn, a superintendent in the RUC, was murdered by an IRA bomb placed under his car. It exploded as he drove to church with his wife, who survived the blast.

The threat posed by Russia and other hostile states is ever present and looms large. Russia has invaded Ukraine. China is challenging American dominance and Iran has amassed enough fissile material for a nuclear bomb and is using organised crime gangs to murder its enemies on European soil. Every member of the European Union is fighting a secret war to confront espionage, prevent the theft of intellectual property and state-sponsored terrorism. Ireland is particularly

vulnerable as it is not a member of Nato and has a weakened military.

Russian agents have been found living in Dublin under false names. China's intelligence services are collecting political and financial intelligence in Ireland. Iran, through its proxies, has forged relationships with the New IRA. Hostile states such as Russia have been operating in Ireland since the foundation of the state but it is only in recent years that the security services have begun to publicly acknowledge the existence of the problem. So how big is it?

"We have seen various events in the UK. The Salisbury poisoning [in 2018], for instance. Christine Lee, the individual with the parliamentary pass into the House of Commons; it's been very specific and dramatic events there which have unfolded. We are very aware of what the threats are and how they might manifest themselves and we keep our guard up but we just maybe haven't been as public as some of our counterparts," Harris says.

"There is an ongoing concern around hostile states and what their activities might be in Ireland. The set of values we live by as society are not universally shared around the world. So we are not blind to what the threats are and how they might manifest themselves here," he adds.

This is a sensitive area of policing which Harris is uncomfortable if not guarded when discussing.

"There is a huge amount of sharing around individuals who may have some background as an intelligence officer and may be in the country, and what they are doing. There is always a route in terms of conducting further inquiries and seeing what might be done," he says.

This specific threat is very applicable to American companies whose headquarters are located in Dublin. It's an area where the gardai are investing "a lot of effort," Harris says.

"That's important as well with our American colleagues as there is such a big footprint of industry here. They need to feel that this is a secure place to do business where they will be protected. The most graphic illustration of this is around cyberthreats. Very regularly we warn companies about their exposure, but if we have a suspicion around individuals, then we make further inquiries and then obviously see what their motivation is and what's happening," he says.

Do you warn potential victims? Harris is circumspect but acknowledges the force takes action but in a very discreet fashion. "The examples around this are very sensitive," he adds.

Next on the laundry list, Business, pages 2-3

“Some of the gang are in Dubai. They should know time is running out”

“We have seen various events in the UK. We keep our guard up”