



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS  
AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS

Prepared Statement of:

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Hearing Before the:

**House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere  
House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on the Coast Guard  
and Maritime Transportation**

**“Confronting Transnational Drug Smuggling:  
An Assessment of Regional Partnerships”**

*Tuesday, April 29, 2014*

Chairman Salmon, Chairman Hunter, Ranking Members Sires and Garamendi, and other distinguished Members, thank you for the opportunity to appear today, with my colleagues General Kelly and Admiral Papp, to discuss our work to improve citizen security in the Western Hemisphere, undermine transnational organized crime, and minimize its impact on the United States.

At the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, we help to train, mentor, and empower foreign partners to understand and undermine criminal groups and the ways in which they operate. We partner with the best and brightest in the United States to impart expertise and training, including the men and women of the United States Coast Guard and others at the Department of Homeland Security, the Departments of Justice, Defense, and Treasury, and numerous law enforcement organizations from our own backyards – our States, counties, and cities. While the State Department has no direct role in interdiction efforts, the governments we assist in the Western Hemisphere do. Our assistance efforts often result in enhanced foreign government capacity to interdict drugs, investigate crimes, and prosecute and jail criminals. Our assistance efforts have had a significant impact, enhancing maritime law enforcement capacity in the Bahamas, Jamaica, Panama, and Costa Rica. These successes, large and impressive as they are, pale in comparison to the magnitude of the drug transit threat in the hemisphere. However, we are making progress in building partner nation capacity.

### **Introduction of Transnational Crime in the Western Hemisphere**

The destructive power of transnational criminal organizations, including drug trafficking organizations, threatens our communities and civil institutions without regard to borders. In fact, multi-faceted criminal groups exploit national borders and the latest technology to move drugs and other contraband around the globe. Weak public institutions are overwhelmed by these criminal groups, which operate with relative impunity. The results include increased crime and violence, which undermine economic development and threaten democratic institutions. These criminal groups are very well financed, organized and determined. They systematically look for new ways to expand their profits and their influence, and they respond and adapt quickly to law enforcement techniques to find the path of least resistance. When the Colombian cartels dominated the hemispheric drug trade, Central America was largely bypassed. Today, however, many of the main drug trafficking routes run straight through Central America with approximately 80 percent of the drugs arriving in Central America via maritime conveyance. The Caribbean is also experiencing an increase in drug flows, with the majority of

transshipment occurring via maritime means. In 2011, cocaine transiting the Caribbean to the U.S. totaled approximately five percent, which increased to nine percent by 2012. By the end of 2013, cocaine flowing within the Western Hemisphere Transit zone increased to 16 percent of the 646 metric tons total flow.

## **Partnerships in the Hemisphere**

The United States has established partnerships in the hemisphere to offset shared threats and advance common interests. The collection of the Merida Initiative with Mexico, our long standing partnership with Colombia, the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) represent a strategic approach to enhance and professionalize civilian law enforcement institutions, court systems, and corrections capacity to investigate and undermine criminal groups, prosecute criminal offenders, and remove them from their operations.

With strong support from the United States Congress, and substantial commitment from the Government of Mexico, the Merida Initiative has helped to create new capabilities in Mexico's federal institutions, which have freed up resources previously not available to work with U.S. and other regional partners on narcotics interdiction programs and information sharing partnerships. In Colombia, our partnership over the past decade has given birth to expanded state presence in former conflict areas, many of which are known for the production or movement of narcotics, forcing traffickers to shutter or move their operations with regularity. As a strategic partner, the Colombian National Police is increasingly providing security expertise in the region, including anti-crime and counternarcotics assistance programs, that has trained nearly 22,000 law enforcement and police officials from 61 countries.

Central America remains a priority as approximately 80 percent of documented drug flow from South America transits Central American territory. Under CARSI, the United States is implementing a comprehensive and integrated approach to stem illegal trafficking. Make no mistake; it will take many more years to see the fruits of our efforts in Central America due to the magnitude of threats to rule of law and credible government institutions. But we're making progress. Model police precincts have brought increased security to some communities and excellent new vetted units are seizing drugs and illicit assets and making critical arrests which contribute to the unraveling of powerful drug trafficking organizations. We are actively partnered with host nation institutions to develop capacity for maritime interdiction operations and, in Honduras, we are planning for

a regional aviation program to curb the drug trafficking routes that are flourishing in under-governed spaces. In the Caribbean, CBSI focuses on training and capacity building, crime prevention, and working with our partners to ensure sustainability of these efforts, with an emphasis on increased cooperation and information sharing.

## **Support for Interdiction**

Enhanced interdiction capabilities are one element of each of our partnerships in the hemisphere and they have demonstrated results. With Merida-funded equipment and training, the Government of Mexico reports they have seized over \$3.8 billion in narcotics and illegal currency. Merida assistance, combined with the Government of Mexico's own investment in non-intrusive inspection equipment (NIIE), has helped the Government of Mexico develop an operational network of approximately 600 pieces of NIIE designed to seize drugs, cash and other contraband at ports of entry and between them.

In 2013, Colombian authorities reported seizing 211.8 metric tons (MT) of cocaine both domestically and by other governments with the support of Colombian intelligence. The Colombian National Police, with which the U.S. interagency works very closely, reported seizing 105.8 MT of cocaine and cocaine base in Colombia, worth over an estimated \$2 billion on American streets. In addition, tens of thousands of hectares of coca cultivation are destroyed every year, scores of cocaine laboratories are dismantled, and operations against drug trafficking organizations are conducted with the support of the United States.

In Central America, Costa Rica's DEA-mentored Maritime Interdiction Vetted Unit launched its first successful interdiction operation in early February of this year, seizing more than 900 kilograms of cocaine and apprehending three suspects. The Vetted Unit combines Coast Guard interdiction capacities with investigative police personnel to effectively prosecute traffickers operating off of Costa Rica's Pacific Coast.

And in the Caribbean, we are partnering with the U.S. Coast Guard to support three efforts that promote maritime security, an annual maritime exercise to validate the interoperability of U.S.-funded and donated boats; regular Counter Drug Maritime Summits to bring together maritime security and law enforcement and justice sector officials; and a Technical Assistance Field Team, or TAFT, that includes U.S. Coast Guard and military personnel. Within the State Department, both the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs and INL support the TAFT, which

advises Caribbean maritime security forces on how to sustain their operational equipment.

In addition, as a result of the combined efforts of the Departments of State and Justice, and the U.S. Coast Guard, the United States currently has over 41 bilateral and multilateral maritime counternarcotics agreements and operational procedures in force, some of which provide the United States with enhanced littoral access throughout the primary corridors of illicit trafficking and prevent traffickers from operating with impunity at the expense of partner nation sovereignty. In support of interagency and international efforts coordinated by USSOUTHCOM's Joint Interagency Task Force – South, Coast Guard maritime law enforcement operations and interdictions pursuant to these agreements bolster our regional success related to safety, security, and stability, and the Coast Guard is the lynchpin of our success.

## **Conclusion**

Hemispheric security is a work in progress, and far from an easy objective to achieve. When credible law enforcement capacity and systems of justice are built, criminal justice information sharing, judicial cooperation, human rights, and counternarcotics programs can take hold. Where they are absent, transnational criminals operate with impunity, threatening the safety and security of our citizens at home and abroad. While the task at hand is incredibly challenging, we know our coordinated efforts are yielding results. The partnerships between the State Department, partner nations, the Coast Guard, and USSOUTHCOM provide a proven and trusted mechanism that is being leveraged every day. Regional partnerships between nations are flourishing, joint operations have become more common, and information sharing is happening in a near real-time basis. These are all important developments that curtail, but do not cease trafficking operations. U.S. foreign assistance expertise and operations from our law enforcement and interagency partners are both critical to our interest in shaping a safer security environment in the region. The interdiction assets available from the United States may never be sufficient to make up for the inherent capability gaps abroad; however, our assistance efforts can enhance foreign government capacity to interdict drugs, investigate crimes, and prosecute and jail criminals.

Chairman Salmon, Chairman Duncan, Ranking Members Sires and Garamendi, and other distinguished Members, thank you for your sustained support and for your focus on this important topic. I look forward to answering your questions.