



Department of Justice

STATEMENT

OF

**THOMAS M. HARRIGAN
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR AND CHIEF OF OPERATIONS
DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION**

BEFORE THE

**SENATE CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL
UNITED STATES SENATE**

AT A HEARING ENTITLED

U.S. – CENTRAL AMERICA SECURITY COOPERATION

PRESENTED

MAY 25, 2011

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Drug trafficking and abuse exact a significant toll on the American public. More than 38,000 Americans – or approximately 12 times the number of people killed by terrorists on September 11, 2001 – died in 2007 as a direct result of the use of illicit drugs.. Approximately seven million people meet the classification for drug dependence or abuse squander their productive potential. Many of these addicts neglect or even abuse their children and/or commit a variety of crimes under the influence of, or in an attempt to obtain, illicit drugs. Tens of millions more suffer from this supposedly “victimless” crime, as law-abiding citizens are forced to share the roads with drivers under the influence of drugs, pay to clean up toxic waste from clandestine laboratories, , and put together the pieces of shattered lives. In truth, in order to calculate an actual cost of this threat, we must explore and examine the impact produced by transnational drug crime in corrupting government institutions, undermining public confidence in the rule of law, fostering violence, fueling regional instability, and funding terrorism.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is the U.S. law enforcement agency responsible for furthering U.S. counter-drug efforts abroad. Its mission is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle the major drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) involved in illegal drug trafficking activities that affect the United States. The DEA recognizes that in order to effectively attack the international drug trade, it has to forward deploy its personnel into the foreign arena. DEA has the largest federal law enforcement presence overseas. DEA has 83 offices in 63 countries and works with the U.S. Interagency and host government partners in assessing drug threats, consistent with local host government laws gathering intelligence, targeting major DTOs, and, in coordination with the Department of State (DOS), assisting host governments in developing comprehensive counternarcotics strategies.

Those who organize, finance, direct, and control these criminal enterprises thrive in areas where government control is weak. While the drug trade has the potential to fuel corruption and instability in all countries, it is no coincidence that the so-called “kingpins” who run these global

enterprises do not reside in the U.S., where they would be most vulnerable to a highly effective criminal justice system. Rather, they operate from locations which they perceive to be safe havens, and from there direct the activity of subordinates and surrogates who supply drugs to the U.S. market. This model is intended to not only frustrate attempts to successfully prosecute these criminals, but also to maximize the autonomy of their organizations in the countries where they are headquartered.

Mexican Cartel Impact on Central America

Central American governments have stated that drug trafficking and the increasing presence of both dangerous transnational gangs and powerful Mexican cartels, such as Sinaloa and Los Zetas, are the biggest factors behind rising violence levels in the region. Central America is a key transit route for cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine precursors heading to Mexico and the United States, and powerful Mexican cartels battle with one another and local drug traffickers for control over the valuable smuggling corridors along the isthmus. According to 2010 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) information, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador currently suffer from some of the highest murder rates in the Western Hemisphere, with rates at nearly one homicide per 1000 inhabitants. In both Guatemala and El Salvador, the rate of killing is now higher than during their civil wars, and Guatemala's government estimates that at least two-fifths of murders are linked to the drug trafficking. The presence of Mexican drug cartels and gangs in the region has also undermined much of the political and judicial stability that emerged following the resolution of the region's civil wars, and is known to have increased corruption levels in already shaky criminal justice systems. Additionally, insecurity caused by gangs and cartels also has a negative economic influence. According to an April 2011 report by the World Bank, dealing with crime and violence costs Central America around eight percent of its GDP.

Central America continues to be a major transshipment route for illegal drugs, weapons, and money trafficked between the United States, Mexico, and South America. A U.S. interagency assessment estimated that 95 percent of the detected cocaine departing South America for the U.S. in 2010 transited the Central America-Mexico corridor. As DTOs increase their operations in the region, tremendous pressure is placed upon host nation law enforcement and security forces to combat the growing threat. As a result, DEA has placed a renewed emphasis on attacking DTO networks operating within Central America.

Present Activities

The United States Government's present strategy in Central America is the Drug Flow Attack Strategy (DFAS). DFAS is an innovative strategy leveraging DEA, DoD, other U.S. law enforcement agencies, and host nation assets to combat illicit trafficking in the region. The goal is to significantly disrupt the flow of drugs, money, and chemicals between source zones and the U.S. by attacking vulnerabilities in the supply chains, transportation systems, and financial infrastructures of major DTOs. DFAS calls for aggressive, well-planned, and coordinated enforcement operations in cooperation with host nation counterparts in the Central American transit zones.

Operation All-inclusive (OAI) is the primary DFAS enforcement component in the source and transit zones. OAI is a combination of sequential and simultaneous land, air, maritime, and financial attacks targeted by DEA intelligence and involves synchronized interagency counterdrug operations designed to influence illicit trafficking patterns and increase disruptions of DTOs. Iterations of OAI have been staged annually since 2005. In just Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 alone, OAI resulted in the seizures of 70 metric tons of cocaine, 442 kilograms of heroin, 101 metric tons of marijuana, 538 kilograms of methamphetamine, 281,655 kilograms of precursor chemicals, \$40 million in currency and assets, 199 weapons, and led to the arrests of 1,198 individuals.

In support of DFAS and OAI, DEA maintains Country Offices (COs) in each of the seven Central American countries, as well as offices in other key regional countries, including Mexico and Colombia. In addition to permanently assigned personnel, DEA provides a fluctuating number of Temporary Duty (TDY) positions to our Missions in Central America based on operational needs, including Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams (FAST). Due to the success of FAST in Afghanistan and the unique capabilities of the FAST teams, they have been deployed for mission support in Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and Panama in support of DFAS. In those countries, FAST has not only worked significant high-level investigations and interdiction operations, in coordination with host nation law enforcement but they have also trained host nation counterparts to operate with FAST.

In Central America, there are DEA-sponsored Sensitive Investigation Units (SIUs) made up of host nation law enforcement officers in Guatemala and Panama. These SIU teams are involved in targeting and investigating all aspects of DTO criminal enterprises, to include narcotics, arms trafficking, and financial crimes. There are also other host nation DEA supported vetted units in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama.

Another successful tool we have in targeting DTOs is our ability to intercept their communications. This is critical to their disruption and dismantlement by law enforcement. In accordance with their domestic law, Panama, Costa Rica, and Guatemala currently utilize wire intercepts as an investigative tool. In FY 2010, El Salvador passed wire intercept legislation and is in the process of establishing the wire intercept program.

Trafficking Trends

The primary flow of drugs from South America destined for the United States travels through the Central American corridor. Presently, DTOs use land, maritime, and air-trafficking routes to move drugs up the Central American isthmus from South America to Mexico. DTOs exploit porous borders, government corruption, and poorly equipped, trained, and funded local counternarcotics law enforcement to transport their illicit cargo through the region. Panama, Honduras, and Guatemala remain the most utilized transshipment and consolidation points for South American cocaine before subsequent shipment to Mexico and the United States. Increasingly, precursor chemicals necessary for the manufacture of methamphetamine are being trafficked through Central America. South American heroin is also trafficked via the same methods as cocaine.

Maritime trafficking is the most commonly used trafficking method, both in regards to the primary entry of drugs into Central America and north to Guatemala. Upon reaching Guatemala, drugs largely move overland toward the United States. Due to a lack of reliable overland routes between Colombia and Panama, cocaine tends to arrive in Panama via maritime vessels. Maritime trafficking is accomplished via go-fast boats, fully or semi-submersibles, and fishing vessels. Traffickers prefer to use go-fast vessels for navigating the littoral routes along the thousands of remote islands and bays that dot the Central American coast on both the Caribbean and Pacific sides to move drugs up the isthmus, as they feel this protects them from capture by U.S. Coast Guard vessels.

Trafficking by containerized ship cargo through Central American ports is of increasing concern, as cargo ships from Central America travel worldwide. In most Central American countries, maritime port interdiction forces, like other law enforcement in the region, are generally poorly trained, equipped, and underfunded. Corruption is a significant problem with both law enforcement and the owners and operators of ports. Almost universally, Central American port authorities lack the ability to handle the vetting of the high volume of cargo in their ports. While attempts have been made by the U.S Government and their host nation counterparts to improve port security and interdiction, there is presently little capacity, other than an ongoing Container Security Initiative (CSI) program in Panama, to properly screen the volume of cargo that transits Central American ports.

Private and commercial aircraft transport multi-ton loads from South America into Central America. Traffickers continue to use short air routes to Panama and noncommercial flights from Venezuela to Honduras as their preferred air routes for the first leg of cocaine movement. A small percentage of drugs are trafficked, usually through commercial aircraft by courier or cargo, directly from Central America towards the United States, skipping Mexico entirely.

Once loads have been brought into Central America by initial maritime or air methods, they are often stockpiled or stored before being trafficked up the isthmus toward Guatemala and Belize for onward transport into Mexico. The extent of which traffickers utilize land routes, such as the Pan-American Highway and other official border crossings, is unknown as poorly equipped and understaffed border checkpoints leave road systems open for exploitation by traffickers. Traffickers use tractor trailers, trucks, cars, and international bus routes to carry drugs across land borders, and most of the drug loads spend time in storage sites throughout the isthmus. Traffickers also exploit unofficial overland crossings, either by foot traffic or off-road vehicles capable of traversing the remote terrain. Recently, Guatemala has become an increasingly important staging and consolidation point for cocaine before it is brought across the border into Mexico.

Moving Forward

Critical to sustaining success in the fight against the DTOs in Central America is the development of strong law enforcement partners that will have the resilience, skill, mobility, and capacity to secure their respective countries. To effectively break the power and impunity of these organizations, a synchronous regional approach that focuses on capacity building and institutional reform is necessary. DEA has the technical expertise, responsibility, and experience

to partner with host nation law enforcement to achieve the common goals and objectives related to the dismantling and disrupting of major DTOs and their networks.

DEA has developed a comprehensive five-year regional strategy designed to target major DTOs in order to cripple their organizations and deny them the ability to operate freely within the region. This plan is crafted to support the five pillars of the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) as well as the President's Central America Security Partnership—which will provide enhanced international cooperation with Colombia, Mexico and partners in Europe. The DEA regional strategy views these illicit organizations as business enterprises in order to *1) identify, investigate, apprehend, and prosecute DTO leadership; 2) attack the DTO command and control structure and its communications; 3) attack DTO transportation and logistics; and 4) reduce DTO economic power by attacking its financial structure.* This will be accomplished by focusing on three key areas under which DEA, other U.S. law enforcement agencies, and DoD can assist in building capacity and improving the effectiveness of host nation law enforcement against DTOs. These key areas are *1) Intelligence Collection and Fusion; 2) Interdiction and Enforcement; 3) Investigations and Prosecutions.*

By using a three-phased approach, operational assistance can be provided to build host nation capabilities in a systematic manner. Capacity building, however, is by nature a long-term commitment that draws upon numerous resources. Although each country in the Central American region faces its own unique challenges and set of circumstances, the DEA strategy has identified general trends and gaps in law enforcement capabilities, and seeks to address them in a standardized and integrated manner.

The establishment of judicial intercept platforms capable of legally monitoring and recording telephone and HF/VHF radio communications will dramatically enhance host nation intelligence collection efforts while providing evidence that is instrumental in prosecuting DTOs and their networks. By increasing their technical capabilities, host nation law enforcement and prosecutors can more effectively target, disrupt, and dismantle these organizations at the highest level by affording real-time intelligence and evidentiary content that can be shared with partner agencies located in Central America, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States.

Most of the region's law enforcement organizations suffer from a lack of training and equipment to properly counter illicit trafficking. These issues are almost universal and affect maritime, land-based, and air counternarcotics efforts. In order to improve interdiction and enforcement capabilities, DEA recommends that the U.S. Government redouble efforts to coordinate across the Inter-agency in order to provide standardized equipment and training to its partner and other security organizations across the region. This includes, but is not limited to, establishing a regional secure radio communications network, airborne and sea-based operating platforms, deployment of a regional license plate reader system, purchase of non-intrusive inspection equipment and ion scanners for points of entry, and the necessary training to utilize this equipment with the highest degree of proficiency. Additionally, many formal points of entry (i.e., seaports, airports, and border checkpoints) have been identified as particularly vulnerable and require basic equipment upgrades.

The development and capacity building efforts relating to interdiction and enforcement operations in Central America will support ongoing initiatives such as DFAS and OAI.

Over the years, DEA has had positive success in influencing changes in host nation investigative and prosecutorial capabilities and seeks to build upon this success across the region. Currently, many Central American nations lack the legal authorities necessary to conduct judicial wire-intercept and undercover operations, as well as the procedural mechanisms for utilizing informants or protecting government witnesses. DEA, working with the Departments of Justice (DOJ) and State (DOS), aims to assist host nations in developing national laws designed to enhance judicial capacity and the rule of law.

The development and expansion of SIUs would contribute to the strengthening of host nation investigative capacity toward dismantling DTOs, encourage cooperation throughout the region among law enforcement agencies, and support ongoing initiatives associated with judicial reform. The creation of Vetted Units, which would operate under the scope and established guidelines of the SIU program, could also bolster host nation capacity for conducting complex investigations for the purpose of obtaining successful prosecutions of DTO members. In the past, Vetted Units which operated in this manner received inclusion into the SIU program. These specialized units have been some of DEA's most successful programs internationally, and the DEA five year regional strategy aims to increase the success in this region.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Continuous evaluation will be critical to achieving the goals defined in this proposal. Evaluating the impact on DTO capacity can be measured through the arrest of key organization leadership and facilitators, the seizure of narcotics and other contraband, successful prosecutions, and reduction in violent crime. It can also be measured through the host nation's ability to fuse intelligence, produce target packages, and develop effective operations directed toward the DTOs. Monitoring and evaluation will provide for the ability to determine the effectiveness of ongoing programs and identify gaps that require remedial action. However, it should be noted that some important results, such as increased cooperation among regional host nation law enforcement, may be difficult to quantify.

Conclusion

The unique challenges posed by DTO's in each nation in the Central American region are amplified by the regional threat that organized crime presents. The most pressing of these threats are deeper penetration in the region by DTOs, increasingly advanced technology utilized by traffickers to transport their illicit cargos, a lack of coordination between countries that makes regional interdiction difficult, and low levels of government capacity in many of our regional host nation partners. The governments of Central America are all eager to break the stranglehold of DTOs and the accompanying violence that affects their countries by focusing on a regional strategy predicated on increased cooperation with each other and the U.S. Government.

DEA recognizes that it is imperative to collaborate with and leverage U.S. interagency resources, various law enforcement agencies' specific authorities and unique capabilities to be effective in

combating the poly-criminal nature of DTOs operating in Central America. This can advance systematic and cohesive approach for t standardized and integrated counternarcotics law enforcement efforts throughout the region, including the countries of Colombia and Mexico. Our five-year counternarcotics strategy, under the authority of the Chiefs of Mission (COMs), will accomplish this by building host nation capacity through additional training and equipment, and encouraging regional intelligence sharing in order to combat illicit trafficking.

It is critical to sustain the positive momentum achieved through DFAS and OAI, with the ultimate goal that Central American countries are capable of pursuing their own effective CN strategies with minimal USG support. We must manage expectations, and accept that as CN efforts increased in Mexico, so too did violence. We will work with our foreign partners to explore means of lessening the degree of any similar outcome in Central America. We must recognize that, in such violence, we are witnessing acts of true desperation- the actions of wounded, vulnerable, and dangerous criminal organizations. We also remain committed to working with our U.S law enforcement and intelligence partners to stem the flow of bulk cash and weapons south, while also working to sustain the disruption of drug transportation routes northward. Bringing to justice the organizations and principal members of organizations involved in the cultivation, manufacture, and distribution of controlled substances appearing in or destined for illicit trafficking in the United States remains the core of our focus.