



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
Washington, D.C. 20503

“Western Hemisphere Drug Interdiction Efforts”

Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives

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Statement for the Record
of
Michael P. Botticelli
Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to submit this statement on behalf of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), a component of the Executive Office of the President. ONDCP was established in 1988 by Congress with the principal purpose of reducing illicit drug use, manufacturing, and trafficking; drug-related crime and violence; and drug-related health consequences. Our office establishes policies, priorities, and objectives for the Nation's drug control programs and ensures that adequate resources are provided to implement them. We also develop, evaluate, coordinate, and oversee the international and domestic implementation of the National Drug Control Policy by Executive Branch agencies to ensure such efforts sustain and complement state and local drug policy activities.

At ONDCP, we are charged with producing the *National Drug Control Strategy (Strategy)*, the Administration's primary blueprint for drug policy, along with a national drug control budget. The *Strategy* outlines a series of evidence-based reforms that treat our Nation's drug problem as a public health challenge, not just a criminal justice issue. It moves beyond an outdated "war on drugs" approach, and is guided by what science, experience, and compassion demonstrate about the true nature of drug use in America. As a nation, we have realized that we cannot arrest our way out of the problems we face, and we have modified our approach accordingly. We are focusing on preventing drug use before it begins, increasing access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders, and promoting alternatives to incarceration and other criminal justice reforms.

The *Strategy* also addresses the need to disrupt domestic drug trafficking and production and reduce the availability of foreign-produced drugs in the United States. Interdicting drugs and dismantling the domestic and transnational criminal organizations that profit from producing and trafficking them not only improves the public health and safety of our communities, but also contributes to the stability and security of the countries in which these organizations are based.

Our *Strategy* is comprehensive in order to address the variety of drug use challenges that are facing our Nation. For example, we are in the midst of an opioid drug abuse epidemic. In 2013, over 4.5 million Americans ages 12 and older reported using prescription pain relievers non-medically within the past month.¹ This makes nonmedical prescription pain reliever use more common than use of any category of illicit drug in the United States except for marijuana. In

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables*. Department of Health and Human Services. [November 2014]. Available: <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabsPDFWHTML2013/Web/HTML/NSDUH-DetTabsSect7peTabs1to45-2013.htm#tab7.3b>

addition, approximately 289,000 Americans reported past month use of heroin.² There has been a troubling increase in the number of people using heroin in recent years – from 373,000 past year users in 2007 to 681,000 in 2013.³ The increase in heroin use is fueled in part by the availability in the United States of low-cost heroin from elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere, and also fueled by the number of people in the United States misusing prescription pain relievers and moving on to cheaper and stronger alternatives.

Methamphetamine and new psychoactive substances, including synthetic cannabinoids like “spice” and synthetic cathinones like “bath salts”, are rising threats, and recently released U.S. Government coca crop estimates indicate that coca cultivation in Colombia increased 39 percent from 2013 to 2014.⁴

Marijuana remains the most commonly used illicit substance, and we remain concerned about its use and the public health and safety impact of state marijuana laws that increase the availability of the drug in our communities.

INTERDICTION

Drug interdiction is an essential element of preventing illicit drug use. We must make every possible effort to prevent dangerous substances and precursor chemicals from entering our country and from disrupting social systems throughout our hemisphere. The global trade in illicit drugs has emerged as a well-developed, asymmetric, transnational threat to international security and stability. The *Strategy* recognizes that the infrastructure of transnational criminal organizations – including profits, alliances, and criminal methods – all help facilitate and reinforce other systemic transnational threats such as arms and human trafficking, money laundering and illicit financial flows, and gangs. The drug trade also serves as a critical source of revenue for some terrorist groups and insurgencies and plays a critical destabilizing role in a number of regions of strategic importance to the United States. This is particularly so in our own hemisphere, and the *Strategy* calls for new, stronger bilateral and multilateral partnerships to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs to the United States and through other strategic areas.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables*. Department of Health and Human Services. [November 2014]. Available: <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabsPDFWHTML2013/Web/HTML/NSDUH-DetTabsSect7peTabs1to45-2013.htm#tab7.3A>

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables*. Department of Health and Human Services. [November 2014]. Available: <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabsPDFWHTML2013/Web/HTML/NSDUH-DetTabsSect7peTabs1to45-2013.htm#tab7.2A>

⁴ Unpublished U.S. Government estimates.

Transnational criminal organizations, already exerting corrupting influences on governance and social systems, are aggressively expanding their global markets, and the global reach of transnational criminal organizations has transformed the interdiction process into a worldwide, cooperative effort. The Western Hemisphere remains the most critical region for the United States. The violence that characterizes the current situation in the democratic nations of Central America is spreading rapidly throughout our hemisphere. The global drug trade is also impacting the less developed and highly vulnerable nations of Africa. Many of these small nations face a significant threat to their ability to maintain the basic rule of law. They are confronted with a similar situation faced by Colombia 10 to 15 years ago, when the influence of the drug cartels threatened to overwhelm that nation's democratic institutions. .

Transit Zone interdiction operations remain a critical element of our national security, as it relieves pressure on partner nations in the hemisphere, many of which are affected by the flow of illicit drugs, precursor chemicals for the creation of methamphetamine and new psychoactive compounds, and the illicit profits of illicit trafficking. Many of the smaller nations in our hemisphere simply do not have the resources to confront the capability, capacity, and corrupting influence of the transnational criminal organizations. The United States – and our European partners – can provide the detection and monitoring capability and resources, such as long-range maritime patrol aircraft and flight deck equipped ships that can operate for extended periods far from shore. Through this partnership in the Transit Zone, the United States and our partner nations not only remove drugs from the supply chain but can also get important information to disrupt and dismantle the transnational criminal organizations. We are working hard to develop the appropriate relationships with law enforcement, other interdiction experts, and partner nations to determine how best to disseminate the intelligence information gleaned from interdictions to best disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking and transnational criminal organizations.

Production estimates in the hemisphere and the termination of aerial eradication efforts portend a significant risk of increased flow of cocaine through this fragile region. Transit Zone interdiction removes bulk quantities before they reach our Central American and Caribbean neighbors, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. To address these concerns, the U.S. Southern Command has coordinated an increased level of effort employing additional resources which have been committed by the U.S. Coast Guard (long-range ships and aircraft) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (long-range aircraft). As a result, we have seen a significant increase in the number and total volume of interdictions, most of which have decreased the flow into Central America ultimately destined for the United States.

Additionally, because cases are often prosecuted in the United States, Transit Zone interdiction can also result in the development of sources of significant information that can be used to target and dismantle transnational criminal organizations. The Department of Justice's Organized

Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force program includes the Panama Express Strike Force and the Caribbean Corridor Initiative, both of which specialize in investigations of this nature, and both quite often provide real-time, tactically actionable information to support additional interdictions. Criminal justice systems in many nations currently cannot achieve the same impact. The United States is attempting to forge relationships in partner nations that will ensure that intelligence leads to better investigations and prosecutions of criminals at home and abroad.

Interdiction efforts are an essential element of a multi-layered strategy to counter the impact of transnational criminal organizations within the United States. To dismantle organizations that operate across international borders, we must ensure that law enforcement efforts are seamlessly coordinated through the full spectrum of transportation. The United States Interdiction Coordinator (USIC), currently ONDCP's Acting Director for Supply Reduction, is developing an update to the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (NICCP) – a plan to coordinate seamless interdiction operations along three lines of effort: beyond the Border; the Border region; and within the Border. Similarly, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has developed a Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan to coordinate DHS efforts along the border and the approaches thereto, including the Transit Zone. Both the NICCP and the DHS Campaign Plan recognize the reality that Transit Zone interdiction can provide information that supports a local investigation in the United States, and conversely, local investigations can provide information that can be followed back along the supply chain to support subsequent interdictions.

CONCLUSION

Interdiction reduces the availability of drugs in the United States, including low-cost heroin, methamphetamine, new psychoactive substances, and cocaine, and is an important part of our *National Drug Control Strategy* to address the health consequences of drug use in our Nation.

I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide this input.