

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER AND MARITIME SECURITY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

HEARING ON BORDER SECURITY THREATS TO THE HOMELAND: DHS'S RESPONSE  
TO INNOVATIVE TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES

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## Introduction

Chairwoman Miller, Ranking Member Cuellar, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee. Illicit trafficking poses a serious threat to our national security, presenting a formidable challenge not only for the United States but for our international partners as well. Our borders are being assailed by a dangerous adversary that is well-resourced, adaptive, and experienced at exploiting all avenues of approach to the United States. These transnational criminal networks employ all modes and means of conveyance across all transportation domains to reach U.S. and global markets. The challenge is daunting.

Illicit trafficking threatens our country at every land, air, and sea border and challenges the sovereignty of our many international partners. In particular, the tactics, techniques, and procedures employed by drug traffickers are methodologies that can be used by anyone wanting to move illicit people and/or cargo – including terrorists. The established routes, proven methods of conveyances, built-in logistics, communications, and command and control networks could be leveraged by a variety of groups seeking to do harm to the United States. While this potential exists, to date, Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South) and U.S. Southern Command have not seen any indication of terrorist organizations or their affiliates using illicit trafficking networks to reach the United States to commit acts of terrorism. We continue to monitor this possibility closely.

JIATF-South has broad legal authorities to conduct detection and monitoring operations against illicit trafficking in order to hand off targets to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. The highest priorities are nationally nominated targets of interest, from weapons of mass destruction to special interest aliens and high value targets. The next tier down comprises a broad spectrum of transnational threats, to include the cocaine trade that by itself is worth an estimated \$85 billion globally.<sup>1</sup> Staggering amounts of revenue and profit allow transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) to challenge nations by exacerbating corruption and undermining governance, rule of law, judicial systems, free press, democratic institution-building, and transparency, as indicated in the 2011 *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime* (CTOC).<sup>2</sup> Cocaine is still one of the most lucrative forms of profit for TCOs and is produced in marketable volumes and quality in three countries in South America: Colombia, Peru and Bolivia.<sup>3</sup> Peru and Bolivia have the potential to produce 41 percent and 25 percent of the total cocaine volume respectively, and Colombia potentially produces 34 percent.<sup>4</sup> According to Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), of the United States drug seizures subjected to forensic analysis, 97 percent comes from Colombia,<sup>5</sup> and it is this specific flow that threatens Central America, Mexico, and the United States.

With a homicide rate of 82 per 100,000,<sup>6</sup> Honduras is the most dangerous country in the world, including the current zones of conflict in the Middle East. San Pedro Sula, Honduras has a homicide rate of 159 deaths per 100,000 citizens, surpassing Ciudad Juarez, Mexico as the

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<sup>1</sup>UNODC World Drug Report 2011.

<sup>2</sup>The White House. President Obama's Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime.

<sup>3</sup>2010 Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement.

<sup>4</sup>2010 Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement. Potential production is assessed by arable hectares available for coca growth.

<sup>5</sup>DEA. Analysis of Cocaine Price and Quality.

<sup>6</sup>UNODC 2011 Homicide Rates by Country.

world's most violent city.<sup>7</sup> Violent TCOs and gang activity, supported by the flow of cocaine and other contraband towards the United States and the rest of the global market, are negatively impacting citizen security. As illicit drugs move outward to the consuming markets, the money from illicit drug transactions returns to the source and transit regions, creating instability within our partner countries by promoting corruption and undermining legitimate financial institutions. My statutory focus as Director of JIATF-South is combating the illicit drug trade by detecting the flow of drugs early in the supply chain and facilitating interdiction as far from our borders as possible, before illicit drugs are broken down into small, harder-to-detect load sizes. Operation MARTILLO is the focusing lens of a whole-of-government, international solution to this significant regional threat to national security. Coordinated by JIATF-South to support the President's CTOC strategy, Operation MARTILLO seeks to deny the use of the Central American littorals by TCOs while maximizing the drug interdiction efforts of our interagency partners in the principal geographic corridor through which the bulk of illicit drugs moves toward the United States.

### **Drug Movement in the Transit Zone: Go-Fasts, Semi-Submersibles and Fully Submersibles**

JIATF-South challenges drug traffickers in the air and on the sea 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in defense of America's borders. We are relentless and committed while operating in a resource-constrained environment. Our goal is to put drug traffickers at risk of interdiction and arrest at each and every step of their journey. We work very hard in constant support of law enforcement to ensure this all occurs seamlessly with the most effective use of our resources. Through better intelligence, technological innovations, and unprecedented interagency and international partnerships, JIATF-South has supported record cocaine disruptions, totaling 1,997 metric tons over the last ten years.<sup>8</sup>

From all indications, eighty percent of cocaine, bound for the United States, transits initially via maritime methods of conveyance, while the remaining 20percent makes its first moves by air.<sup>9</sup> Today, Honduras is the primary initial arrival point for cocaine as it leaves the source zone; in 2011, approximate 35 percent of the world's cocaine supply made its first landfall there.<sup>10</sup> Once on land, larger loads are eventually broken down into smaller packages before entering the United States. The Mexico/Central American corridor, which includes the waters of the Eastern Pacific and Western Caribbean, is the primary threat vector toward the United States, accounting for more than 90 percent of total documented cocaine movement.<sup>11</sup>

Cocaine from the source zone moves by a number of conveyances, the primary being go-fasts, usually open hulled boats anywhere from 20 to 50 feet in length with one to four powerful outboard engines. Carrying anywhere from 300 kilograms to 3.5 metric tons of cocaine, these vessels typically leave Colombia and follow the Western Caribbean coastline of Central America to make landfall, principally in Honduras. In the Eastern Pacific, the same types of vessels will leave Colombia or Ecuador, and transit off-shore to Guatemala and Mexico or follow the coastline to Panama or Costa Rica.

In 2011, the interagency's Consolidated Counter Drug Database (CCDB) indicated that there were 568 go-fast events moving 490 metric tons of cocaine from South America toward the

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<sup>7</sup> Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad, Justicia y Paz Penal A.C. (Citizen Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice), Mexico, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> JIATF-South analysis of Interagency Consolidated Counter Drug Database (CCDB).

<sup>9</sup> JIATF-South case analysis.

<sup>10</sup> JIATF-South analysis of Interagency Consolidated Counter Drug Database (CCDB)

<sup>11</sup> JIATF-South analysis of Interagency Consolidated Counter-Drug Database (CCDB).

United States. Ninety-four percent of those movements were along the Central American isthmus into Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico.<sup>12</sup> This massive volume moving off-shore and often through the countries of Central America is contributing to the instability and corruption seen in northern Central America, Mexico, and along our Southwest Border.

Though not present in the same numbers as go-fasts, the Self-Propelled Semi-Submersibles (SPSS) and Fully Submersible Vessels (FSV) are potentially an even more insidious threat to the security of the United States for two reasons: (1) their large, up to 10-ton payload capacity and (2) the extraordinary difficulty of detecting these vessels at sea. This makes them a dangerous drug conveyance that could potentially be adapted for transporting other more serious security threats to the United States.<sup>13</sup>

The SPSS is typically constructed in undergoverned spaces, often in the sparsely populated mangrove estuaries of Western Colombia and Ecuador. Costing less than a million dollars apiece to construct, they can move enough cocaine in a single trip to generate more than \$100 million in illicit proceeds for the traffickers.<sup>14</sup> JIATF-South detected an SPSS at sea for the first time in 2006. By 2009, the interagency detected as many as 60 SPSS events were moving as much as 330 metric tons per year. Prior to 2011, SPSS had only been employed by traffickers in the Eastern Pacific. However, since July 2011, JIATF-South has supported the disruption of five SPSS vessels in the Western Caribbean, each carrying more than 6.5 metric tons of cocaine.

There have been a total of 214 documented SPSS events, but only 45 were disrupted due largely to the difficulty of detecting such low-profile vessels.<sup>15</sup> The Congress, deserves a note of thanks for its foresight and wisdom in enacting 18 USC § 2285, the Drug Trafficking Vessel Interdiction Act of 2008, which made the mere operation of these stateless vessels in international waters a crime. This has greatly helped interdiction efforts because it eliminated the necessity for law enforcement authorities to recover contraband in order to affect successful arrests and prosecutions.

The SPSS was an evolutionary step in the creation of a covert capability to transport multi-ton loads of contraband without any logistical support or refueling. This capability is now present in the FSV. These vessels can get underway from the source region, fully loaded with up to 10 metric tons of cocaine and a crew of four, and travel up to 6,800 nautical miles unsupported.<sup>16</sup> Though there is currently no intelligence of shipments directly to the United States, this is a range capacity that can take an FSV from the west coast of Colombia to the coast near Los Angeles, or from the north coast of Colombia to Galveston. Unlike the SPSS, the FSV power plants are typically complex diesel-electric systems that allow them to operate submerged by day on battery power and to run on the surface at night while recharging their batteries. As complex and sophisticated as they may appear, FSVs are constructed in the same undergoverned locations as SPSSs. These areas are very difficult for law enforcement or even military forces to reach. However, three FSVs have been seized in remote jungle areas, the first in Ecuador in 2010, and the last two in Colombia. Each of these three vessels was unique in its construction and had cargo capacities of over seven metric tons. In 2011, the Interagency documented three FSV movements, none of which were successfully interdicted.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interagency Consolidated Counter-Drug Database (CCDB).

<sup>13</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, Assessments of seized SPSS and FSVs.

<sup>14</sup> JIATF-South and Office of Naval Intelligence assessment of seized SPSS.

<sup>15</sup> Interagency CCDB

<sup>16</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, Assessments of seized FSVs.

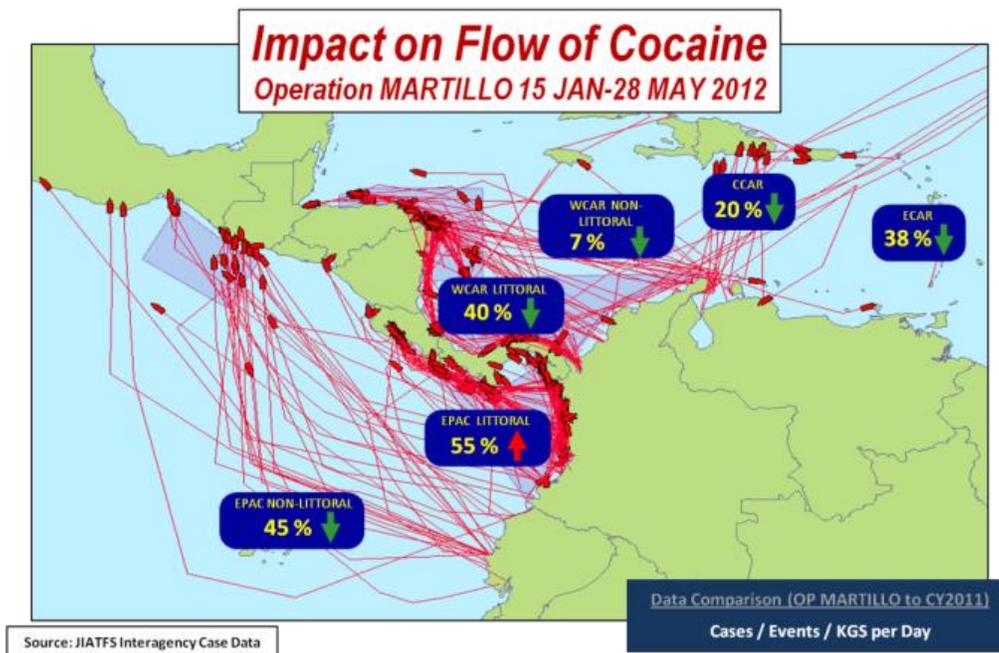
<sup>17</sup> Interagency CCDB.

### Operation MARTILLO: Supporting Regional Stability/National Security

Record interdiction years in the mid-2000s caused TCOs to react and mitigate their risk in several ways. SPSSs and FSVs were developed and their operations refined. Go-fast load sizes were reduced while the number of events increased significantly. Most alarmingly, TCO operations at sea were moved from deep water, where technological advantages favored U.S. interdiction forces, to the Central American littorals.<sup>18</sup>

This operational migration toward the Central American isthmus created an increasingly difficult and destabilizing situation whereby primary drug movements from the source zone made landfall earlier, often in countries incapable of stopping them. Operating in and around the territorial waters of Central America made international cooperation and bi-lateral agreements all the more critical to our success.

To counter this shift in flow and to alleviate pressure on Central American countries, Operation MARTILLO began in earnest on 15 January 2012. It is one component of a U.S. whole-of-government approach to counter the spread of Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) in Central America. By demonstrating a consistent presence in the littorals of Central America, the United States, and our international partners seek to force TOC networks to move their transshipment routes to deeper waters in the Pacific and Caribbean. Operation MARTILLO demonstrates a clear commitment on the part of Western Hemisphere nations and other allies to work together to combat the spread of TCOs, and to protect their citizens from the violence, harm and exploitation wrought by TCO networks. Operation MARTILLO created a framework whereby complementary operations by partner nations and other U. S. government agencies could increase the effectiveness and synergy against TCOs in a difficult budget and operating environment.



Since 15 January, JIATF-South has documented significant decreases in the flow of illicit drugs in the Central American corridor (see graphic above). Compared to the same period in 2011, the JIATF South documented flow of illicit drugs in the Central American corridor

<sup>18</sup> 2010 Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement.

dropped by 46 metric tons. While cocaine flow is down in most of the region, we did note a significant increase in activity in the Eastern Pacific littorals which we attribute to increased awareness of tracks brought by enhanced focus of our interagency and international partners in the region.<sup>19</sup> Our law enforcement partners are expending great effort to provide actionable information to support the operation. This translates to a significantly increased awareness of the movement of cocaine over previous years.

The overall significant decrease in movement indicates an impact on the traffickers caused by the presence of U.S. ships and aircraft, the efforts of our law enforcement partners and those of our allies and partner nations in the region. Further illustrating the commitment of our hemispheric partners, I note that partner nations have participated in 83 percent of disrupted events, acting as a force multiplier and playing an enormous role in the success of the operation. Though we have not yet seen the traffickers shift to another region in the Joint Operating Area, we assess that a continued persistent presence over time will force them to change their tactics and we are prepared to respond to that shift when the time comes.

## **Closing**

Our target set spans the full spectrum of national and international security, presenting a formidable transnational challenge for U.S. and allied nations. We fight a highly mobile, disciplined, and well-funded adversary that threatens democratic governments, terrorizes populations, impedes economic development, and creates regional instability. The mission to counter transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking cannot be viewed in isolation from our efforts to combat terrorism, because the patterns, tactics, and techniques employed by traffickers are the same as the methodologies used by anyone wanting to move illicit people or cargo - including terrorists.

Our operational successes indicate an increasing level of trafficker sophistication and innovation as they rapidly employ readily available cutting edge technologies, change their tactics, and shift seamlessly between modes of communication and methods of conveyance. Our success is dependent upon our collective capability to be more innovative, more adaptive, and more agile than our adversaries. Currently, we are unable to target 74 percent of high confidence events. Of the 26 percent that we are able to target the principle impediment to successful detection and monitoring is the lack of the necessary sensors to generate persistent wide area surveillance and precision geolocation. In spite of our challenges, we continue to be successful for two primary reasons. First, JIATF-South is a dynamic and evolutionary organization, one continuously adapting itself to evolving target sets. Second, the national and international unity of effort found within our command spans geographical and functional boundaries, bringing with it operational efficiencies and critical capabilities.

I close by once again thanking the Congress for its steadfast support of our men and women in uniform, who work every day to keep our nation safe and I look forward to our continued collaboration to counter transnational organized crime and the illicit traffic that supports it.

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<sup>19</sup> JIATF-South analysis of CCDB and JIATF-South case analysis.