



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Peter T. King

Opening Statement

November 16, 2012

Media Contact: Shane Wolfe

(202) 226-8417

**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX)
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management**

**"A Line in the Sand: Assessing Dangerous Threats to Our Nation's
Borders"**

**November 16, 2012
Remarks as Prepared**

International terrorist networks are expanding their ties to ruthless Mexican drug trafficking organizations and creating risks to our nation's borders and possible attack on our homeland. These are findings from our Subcommittee's investigative report released earlier this week. The majority report, entitled *A Line in the Sand: Confronting Crime, Violence and Terror at the Southwest Border* describes the growing concern that terrorist organizations will exploit burgeoning relationships with Latin American drug traffickers to infiltrate the Southwest border undetected.

Specifically, Iran is attempting to cement relations with certain Latin American countries to expand its influence and challenge the United States. Iran has cultivated stronger relationships with Venezuela. Examining travel between the two countries, according to Ambassador Roger Noriega—former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, direct commercial flights from Caracas to Tehran continue despite claims to the contrary. Iran also tries to flout international economic sanctions by using Venezuela as a major destination to ship its exports.

Far more alarming than increasing political and economic ties, Iran is also attempting to lay the foundation for military and covert operations within the U.S. by partnering with Mexican drug cartels. No better example illustrates this danger than the Iranian Qods Force's attempt to work with the Los Zetas drug cartel to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States on American soil. Some estimate that Hezbollah sympathizers operating in the U.S. could number in the hundreds.

Iran's strategic migration and its relationships in Latin America are a clear and present danger to American national security. Should tensions mount over Iran's nuclear program, these relationships could possibly result in strategic platforms for Iran to unleash terror operations on the U.S. homeland.

In addition, concerns increasingly exist that terrorist organizations are attempting to corrupt drug traffickers and other aliens entering the United States. For example, according to news reports from earlier this year, Osama bin Laden sought operatives with valid Mexican passports to enter the U.S. to conduct terror attacks. Bin Laden believed these operatives could more easily blend into American society and unleash terror attacks without warning.

Threats at our southern border also persist from the increasing sophistication of drug cartels. From elaborate underground tunnels costing over \$1 million to construct to mini-submarines used to circumvent our maritime security, these cartels will stop at nothing to ensure their "products" enter our homeland.

U.S. Border Patrol faces an ever-persistent challenge of identifying and apprehending "special interest aliens"—those aliens from countries designated by intelligence agencies as potential threats to our security. From fiscal years 2006 to 2011, Border Patrol officers apprehended nearly 2,000 special interest aliens.

With the Calderon government's tough stand against organized crime in Mexico, we have also witnessed the increasingly ruthless violence that the cartels employ to strike fear into those attempting to stop them. For example, in May 2012, twenty-three residents of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico were brazenly executed; nine of the bodies hung from a bridge at a busy intersection only a 10-minute drive from Texas.

Unfortunately, some of this violence has even spilled onto American soil. Since 2009, Mexican drug traffickers have fired upon nearly 60 Texas law

enforcement officers. Kidnappings in 2009 also spiked in McAllen, Texas. All of these threats are making the Southwest border increasingly dangerous.

Despite these growing threats, efforts to secure the Southern border have been mixed. Border Enforcement Security Task Forces—or BEST teams—have combined federal, state, and local resources and had a significant positive impact since their creation in 2005, such as seizing over 13,500 weapons and investigations resulting in over 4,500 convictions. Texas Department of Public Safety initiatives have also had an effect in reducing border crime, apprehending illegal drugs, and fostering improved law enforcement relationships resulting in improved information sharing.

However, with these successes, our efforts to secure the border have experienced challenges. The most high profile of which, the Secure Border Initiative Network or *SBI-Net*, failed to meet expectations and resulted in little return on its \$1 billion dollar investment. Due to the challenges with *SBI-Net*, the Administration abandoned the goal of securing the Southern border to instead focus first on the Arizona border. But we still may be years away from effectively securing Arizona and no definite timeframe for securing the rest of the Southern border exists. DHS reported in late 2011 that it could respond to illegal activity along 44 percent of the Southwest border, leaving 7,500 border miles inadequately protected.

Given all of the threats outlined in the Subcommittee's report, this approach is unacceptable. The 9/11 Commission wisely cautioned us about a failure of imagination and this criticism should be considered when securing our border. The next Congress and Administration need to develop an achievable plan to comprehensively secure our Southern border. By identifying the threats to our border and developing a plan to better secure our borders, this hearing can be a first step towards a significant issue that we will need to address in the next Congress: reforming our immigration system. I hope our witnesses today can share specific ideas on how we can better secure our borders and mitigate the grave threats from Iran and Latin American drug cartels.