

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER HENRY CUELLAR (D-TX)

Hearing: “Protecting the Homeland: How can DHS use DOD Technology to Secure the Border?”

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

November 15, 2011

As a Member of Congress representing a district along our southern border, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the benefits of the Department of Homeland Security’s collaboration with the Department of Defense on border security technology.

Last year, I was able to observe a limited joint DHS-DoD operation in Laredo, Texas where technology was used to help secure the border.

I was pleased that Mr. Borkowski agreed to join me in observing that operation and was gratified to learn that CBP now plans to procure some of the technology utilized during that operation for its own use along the southern border.

Similarly, I have long been a supporter of DHS’s use of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UASs) along our borders and in the Gulf of Mexico.

This is another example of technology developed for DoD that has proven invaluable in DHS’s border security mission.

Most recently, I traveled on a congressional delegation to the Middle East.

While in Iraq and Afghanistan, I saw and was briefed on various kinds of technology that may have application for homeland security purposes.

Also, as the military drawdown in Iraq continues, there may be technology and equipment that is no longer needed there, but may be of use to DHS here at home.

Furthermore, as National Guard units return home, including the Texas National Guard in my state, some of their equipment and resources may be brought to bear at the border.

Along with representatives from the Defense Department, Border Patrol, and DHS Science & Technology, I am also pleased to see the Coast Guard is present with us today.

Ultimately, whether we are talking about border security technology that facilitates the interdiction of narcotics, undocumented aliens, or those who might wish to do us harm, we know that people will take the route they perceive to offer the best opportunity to enter the country.

If we secure the land borders, people will try to come across our maritime borders and vice versa.

We are only as strong as our weakest link, which is why it is imperative that we support the work of the Coast Guard and its sister agencies within DHS.

Last year's Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010, now Public Law 111-281, included a provision I authored that directed the Coast Guard to prepare a mission requirement analysis for the navigable portions of the Rio Grande River.

On October 18, 2011, I received a copy of this report.

Though the document is For Official Use Only (FOUO), today I will be outlining a non-FOUO summary of the threat assessment section.

For instance, according to the Coast Guard, on a four-point scale ranging from "Low, Moderate, Significant, and High," Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) present only a moderate threat of violence to persons on the U.S. side of the border.

Based on Search and Rescue (SAR) efforts and migrant and drug threats, the current mix of Coast Guard assets and personnel operating along the Rio Grande is sufficient.

This is especially useful in order to assess Coast Guard technology requirements and requests for assets pursuant to evolving border threats.

I will also be providing a copy of this "For Official Use Only" report to Members of this subcommittee.

As a strong supporter of maximizing efficiency in government and making the most of taxpayer dollars, I believe DHS should take advantage of dual-use technologies and surplus equipment where possible.

Particularly in these tough budgetary times, we simply cannot afford not to.

That being said, it is important to remember that all DoD technologies may not be well-suited for border security purposes.

DHS's border security mission is different from DoD's mission, and we must be careful not to militarize our borders.

Also, DHS is dealing with a far smaller budget than DoD, so some of the technology used by the Defense Department will not be cost-effective for homeland security purposes.

It is up to DHS to examine those technologies and prioritize what will work best to meet its mission.

And it is up to DoD to ensure that there is an efficient process for transferring applicable technologies to DHS and other appropriate Federal agencies.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how what efforts are currently underway, as well as how the process might be improved.