



**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Martha McSally (R-AZ)
Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee
House Homeland Security Committee**

*Transparency, Trust and Verification: Measuring Effectiveness and Situational Awareness along the Border
March 1, 2016*

Remarks as Prepared

Securing the border is ultimately one of the most important responsibilities of the Federal government. The instability and chaos that the drug cartels foster pose national security problems and public safety threats that endanger border communities.

In fact, later this month marks the sixth anniversary of the death of Robert Krentz, a Cochise County resident slain on his ranch roughly 30 miles north of the border.

In Southern Arizona, we are impacted by border insecurity every day – property destroyed, militarized-like checkpoints on our roads, and fear of violence from transnational criminal organizations (or TCOs) running drug loads through our communities. The reality and perception of the insecurity near the border also has negative impacts for businesses and tourism in border regions, suppressing an already struggling economy.

And the very same pathways and smuggling routes that facilitate the illicit flow of people and drugs could also potentially be used for terror, making it critical that we quickly gain control of the situation along the border.

While progress has been made on the border over the last 25 years, there is much more work to be done.

There is a reason that many Americans do not trust the Department when it comes to border security. They rightly worry that the Department will twist the numbers to give a false sense of security. Border security measures recently put out by the Department will do little to overcome this deficit of trust.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reported that it was 81% effective on the southwest border last year. This sounds impressive, especially when compared to the previous measure that indicated around 44% of the border was under operation control.

These new effectiveness numbers are hard to believe, and I believe are inaccurate measures of the state of security on the border.

The new interdiction effectiveness rate includes unaccompanied children and families from countries other than Mexico, who turn themselves in, inflating the number. It also fails to take into account the number the Border Patrol never sees, or the denominator, which also inflates the effectiveness. The best analytical research, using all available data, on interdiction effectiveness puts the true probability of apprehension much closer to 50 percent.

Finally, the numbers don't tell us where the illicit activity was intercepted, which can sometimes be 100 miles or deeper into the U.S., putting border communities in danger as traffickers transit our communities before they are caught.

There are probably no better indicators of effectiveness than the price and availability of illicit drugs. We have an alarming drug addiction epidemic in the country that is only getting worse, impacting communities and families across the nation.

Families grappling with tragedy tell heartbreaking stories of how their loved ones fell into addiction and how cheap and easy it was for them to get these illicit drugs. The price and availability of these drugs across the country demonstrate that they still move across the border with relative ease.

We must move beyond the political rhetoric that on one hand says that the border is out of control, while the other says it is more secure than ever and everything is fine. But the only way to do that is by being transparent when it comes to security on the border.

The truth is we have been given an incomplete picture as it relates to the situation on the border, and we cannot verifiably say where, between those two ends of the spectrum, we actually are – and that's the heart of the problem.

For too long, the U.S. Government has pushed the narrative that because we catch a lot of people, or in some cases not many at all, or have doubled the number of agents, or built miles of fence that the border must be secure.

That is just activity masquerading as effectiveness and lacks an important denominator. The Border Patrol cannot determine how many people we are not catching, or detecting.

Assessing if the billions of tax payer dollars spent every year are actually effective at securing the border is a more productive and transparent way to look at border security.

Can we stop drug cartels from moving their poison freely across the border?

Is CBP catching the overwhelming number of people who cross the border illegally? And not just the ones they see.

Of the illegal activity detected by CBP, how many were never caught?

Of those apprehended how many were within .5 miles of the border and how many caught between half a mile and 5 miles, 5 to 25 miles, 25-100 miles, or over 100 miles inland?

What about the flow of weapons and money that goes south across the border to fuel TCO's illicit and dangerous activities?

Do the people who live along the border feel safe?

How much illegal activity is detected and caught by state and local law enforcement vs CBP? Do border state and local first responders assess the border as secure?

What is the actual effectiveness of the checkpoints placed well inside our country?

What percent of the 1954 miles of southern land border does CBP have 100% situational awareness of, where if something or someone approaches or moves across the border, they see it? And what percentage of those miles do they have operational control where Agents can successfully interdict the activity once it is detected?

And are the sensors, towers, checkpoints, unmanned aerial vehicles and manned aircraft adequately assisting our Agents to further those goals?

Those are real measures of effectiveness the American people can understand, and need to know.

I believe today's hearing is a first step we must take to develop a complete understanding of what is actually happening at the border – commonly known as situational awareness.

Achieving situational awareness will require the extensive use of technology – the border is just too long, and the terrain too rough and inaccessible to be everywhere at once.

But it will also take concentrating agents closer to the border and a rapid reaction force to quickly move Agents to intercept activity before anyone becomes a public safety threat to our communities.

It boils down to this: do we know where the drug cartels are beating us, so we can adjust the deployment of our technology and agents to meet the threat. If the answer is no, then we don't have situational awareness along the border.

Once we fully understand the threat and gaps in our awareness and capabilities then we can move quickly to address them.

Without situational awareness we are essentially flying blind, and that cannot continue.

The time has come to measure situational awareness and effectiveness, so we know where we are, and more importantly where we need to go.

I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how CBP plans to achieve situational awareness on the border and provide Congress with suitable metrics.

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