Statement of Subcommittee Chairwoman Martha McSally (R-AZ)
Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee

"Border Security Gadgets, Gizmos, and Information:
Using Technology to Increase Situational Awareness and Operational Control"
May 24, 2016

Remarks as Prepared

The southwest border of the United States is home to nearly 2,000 miles of majestic, yet rugged and often treacherous terrain. Terrain that makes Border Patrol access, in some remote areas a near impossible proposition.

Manpower alone, while essential, will never be enough to secure the border. In order to enhance situational awareness, we need to leverage technological force multipliers that provide persistent surveillance across wide swaths of remote areas along the border.

Technologies such as cameras, night vision devices, motion sensors, and surveillance equipment, have become critical elements of our border security operations. These technologies have enhanced agent safety, provided constant monitoring of difficult to access areas, and extended situational awareness and the ability to interdict criminal activity.

Aviation assets, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, equipped with advanced radar capabilities, have also refined our understanding of the significant threat that exists along the border and has helped reposition and redeploy assets as flow and vulnerabilities shift.

But technology cannot do any of those things if CBP's acquisition and procurement process cannot get these tools and the latest cutting edge technology in the hands of the men and women on the ground in a timely fashion.

Situational awareness is contingent on feeding information from centralized operations centers, far from the border, down to the individual agent level, so they can respond accordingly. Technology has to be focused on meeting the immediate needs of the agent and not stove piped in a command center.

CBP's border technology procurement efforts, to put it mildly, have a checkered history of not delivering timely acquisitions that include more failures than successes, including the Secure Border Initiative, Coastal Interceptor Vessel, Ultralight Aircraft Detection, and the Mobile Surveillance Capability, which have all become synonymous with a deeply troubled acquisition process.

These procurements have run over budget, behind schedule, been subject to litigation, and wasted a good deal of taxpayer dollars to boot. In this time of limited budgets, we cannot afford to waste a billion dollars on a failed system to learn what not to do.

Border security cannot continue to be held back by a system that has an astonishing lack of urgency in getting it done for people on the ground.

Our agents and officers in the field desperately need the capabilities they have asked for to do the job, but on the whole, I do not believe that CBP's Office of Technology and Acquisition or (O-T-I-A) has delivered.

OTIA's mission is to identify and acquire products and services to improve CBP's performance in securing the borders. OTIA has been the lead agency responsible for acquiring technologies associated with the Arizona Technology Plan.

But as far as I can tell, the only procurement that is working well and on budget is the Integrated Fixed Tower program, located principally in my district, however, this comes after chronic delays and the cancellation of SBInet. Now on track, Chief Vitiello recently certified to Congress that the program meets its operational requirements.

With the exception of that outlier, industry officials we have spoken to tell us over and over again that CBP's requirements are often poorly drafted, ill-defined and, perhaps most alarming, not stable.

Transparency is also a challenge, as is CBP's ability to forecast their needs so industry can spend the Research and Development dollars to mature technology for use in border security applications.

The Government Accountability Office has, on several occasions, criticized CBP for not following aspects of DHS's acquisition management guidance with the Arizona Border Technology plan, and the lack of performance metrics to determine if the cost is worth the border security improvement.

As a result of CBP's troubling procurement record, I authored the Border Security Technology Accountability Act that ensures border security programs are meeting cost, schedule, and performance thresholds and that technology is subjected to a rigorous independent verification and validation process.

This legislation is vital to restore accountability but is being held up, for reasons unknown, in the Senate.

I am interested to hear from our witnesses how CBP conducts market research, forages for emerging technology, repurposes excess Department of Defense equipment, and collaborates with DHS's office of Science and Technology to mature technology not quite ready for field deployment.

Congress repeatedly asks a very simple question when it comes to border security: what will it take to gain operational control and situational awareness of the southern border?

Up until now, the answer we received was limited, or not backed by a requirements process similar to what the Defense Department uses. In short, it was a guess.

The Border Patrol and Air and Marine Operations are involved in an effort called the Capability Gap Analysis Process, or C-GAP, a scenario- based exercise designed to ferret out tactical weaknesses in our border security defenses and hopefully inform the technological budget process.

Congress expects the Border Patrol and Air and Marine to be able to quickly identify, and justify the resource needs required to secure the border. I am optimistic that the CGAP process is a much needed step in that direction.

Finding solutions to CBP's procurement woes and quickly meeting the technological requirements of the men and women charged with securing the border is the reason I am holding this hearing today.
I look forward to the witness's testimony.

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