



## HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

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

“Defeating a Sophisticated and Dangerous Adversary:  
Are the New Border Security Task Forces the Right Approach?”

*April 4, 2017*

Remarks as Prepared

At the Subcommittee’s first hearing this Congress, we examined the advanced techniques and tactics utilized by our adversary to evade or circumvent our border security efforts. Obscene profit margins power the cartels’ ability to be creative, nimble and entrepreneurial as they smuggle vast quantities of illicit drugs across the border. Threats posed to the nation by transnational criminal organizations whose influence extends beyond the immediate border zone and into the major metropolitan areas of the nation is a national security challenge.

Now that we better understand the lengths to which the cartels will go to make the billions of dollars that they net every year, I want to shift our focus to the Department of Homeland Security’s collective response and potential solutions for this immense task.

I believe we should begin with the development of a counter-network approach that looks at disrupting every level of cartel operations. From the low-level scout on an Arizona hill-top guiding drug loads away from Border Patrol agents, to the local plaza boss taxing the movement of drugs and people through his area, to the cartel kingpins at the very top of the Sinaloa cartel.

Gen. Stanley McChrystal is famous for the phrase, “It takes a network to defeat a network,” and that thinking can and should be applied to the problem set of trying to defeat an insidious adversary that brings death and ruin to so many. Does DHS have a “friendly” network to defeat the cartel’s network? Do we have a coherent transnational criminal organization strategy and more importantly is the Department of Homeland Security organized in a way that sets us up for success?

I look forward to discussing those questions in greater detail with the witnesses today.

As part of the executive order on transnational crime recently signed by the President, the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Director of National Intelligence, are all asked to improve the coordination of federal agencies' efforts to identify, interdict, investigate, prosecute, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations. I will be interested in learning what role DHS will play in this Administration’s increased focus on transnational criminal organizations.

Beyond our strategic approach to counter the cartels, we need to be properly organized to fight them as well.

In 2003, The Department of Homeland Security was created from 22 disparate agencies. It should not be surprising that there would be significant growing pains before that agency would function as a truly unified department. Each component of the Department, be it CBP, ICE, or the Coast Guard, has a tendency to operate in its own silo, without the coordination required to make border and maritime security efforts successful, not to mention reducing redundancy and overlap.

This can have negative effect on logistics, communications, and most importantly, operations.

Several years ago, then Secretary Johnson took a page from the Department of Defense playbook and created three joint task forces in an attempt to eliminate stovepipes and foster unity of effort along the border. Two of these task forces, JTF East and West, are geographically based, while one, JTF Investigations, is a functional task force. The goal was simple: establish a streamlined, and unified structure that prioritizes border security operations and investigations against the most meaningful cartel actors.

This Committee, working with our Senate counterparts, provided a temporary 6 year authorization for the joint task forces which was included in last year's National Defense Authorization Act. The intent was to allow the concept to mature, and provide ample opportunity for the Department to demonstrate to this Committee that organizational structure has measurably contributed to border security that would not have happened in the absence of a task force.

In drafting the authorization, we expressly borrowed several concepts from the Department of Defense including joint duty training, and joint duty assignments to foster a culture and operational mindset that, we hope, will transform the way that DHS conducts border security operations.

Today, is the very first time Congress has held a hearing on the new border security joint task forces, so I look forward to hearing from the Commanders as we discuss how best to counter the growing sophistication of the Mexican cartels and the serious national security threat they pose.

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