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

"Deter, Detect and Interdict: Technology's Role in Securing the Border"

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Remarks as Prepared

Border security is a complicated endeavor because there is no one-size fits all solution. Thinking through what it will take to secure the border is primary responsibility of the three agencies represented by our witnesses today.

The Border Patrol is our operational force between the ports of entry. CBP's Office of Field Operations job is to facilitate legitimate trade and travel while keeping illicit drugs and people from entering our country illegally at the ports of entry. Air and Marine is a supporting element – which provides air and maritime interdiction support and situational awareness for critical operations on the ground.

All three of these critical border security components rely heavily on technology to accomplish their mission. Indeed, technology is a crucial force multiplier, and part of a multi-layered approach of the "right mix of infrastructure, personnel, and technology," that we have used for at least 20 years.

Instead of focusing solely on the gadgets and gizmos and the many repeated failures of the CBP procurement process, I think it is important to think strategically about the decision making process of those who aim to exploit our border for illicit purposes.

Disrupting that process by leveraging technology will help Customs and Border Protection better use the allocated funding to secure the border in the long-term.

So today, I want to take a hard look at the role that technology plays in helping to predict, deter, detect and finally to interdict the illicit activity so prevalent along the Southwest border.

Deterrence is the ideal goal of the nation's border security effort, yet is difficult to measure or accomplish. Discouraging bad actors from ever crossing the border is the best defense. If our security posture is robust, individuals may decide it's not worth the risk to smuggle a load of drugs across the Arizona desert or through a busy port of entry.

Essentially, deterrence is predicated on two things: first, the perception that illegal smuggling across the border is a costly endeavor; and second, that the likelihood of success is low.

If we cannot successfully deter illegal behavior by communicating the message that the border is an inhospitable place to conduct illicit cross-border activity, then we have to shift into detection, surveillance, and interdiction. That is where the role of technology becomes indispensable because of the rugged and remote nature of many parts of the border.

Terrain, the prevalence of roads and other infrastructure on both sides of the border, and CBP's security posture in any given area should inform the tools used to detect, monitor and surveil the border.

On a consistent basis, these tools are critical for what is commonly referred to as situational awareness – a basic requirement if the goal is to gain operational control of the border.

Cameras, night vision devices, motion sensors, radar, x-ray devices and other surveillance equipment, have become essential elements of our border security operations.

These technologies have enhanced agent and officer safety; provided constant monitoring of difficult-to-access areas, and enhanced agent and officer 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.

I understand that the Border Patrol and CBP Air and Marine continue to pilot tactical UAVs that have the potential to revolutionize the way we conduct border security operations at the field agent level. I look forward to a progress update in light of the additional funds Congress has provided for this effort.

A secure border is the outcome the American people demand – regardless of what steps we take to get there.

With this in mind, Congress has repeatedly asked one consequential question: what will it take to gain situational awareness and operational control of the southwest border?

Up until now, the answers we have received have been limited, or unsupported by a requirement process similar to that of the Defense Department. In short, they have been insufficient; at best, they have been guesses.

Congress expects the Border Patrol, the Office of Field Operations, and Air and Marine to be able to quickly identify, and justify the technological needs required to secure the border.

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

Putting more technology on the border will increase our chances of apprehending dangerous individuals and interdicting lethal drugs like heroin and fentanyl that cause so much death and pain for our fellow American citizens.

Thank you for being here to discuss the many ways in which we can be using technology to secure our nation's borders. I look forward to the witness's testimony.

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