

STATEMENT

OF

**JOHN LEECH
ACTING DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF COUNTERNARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

BEFORE

**THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER, MARITIME, AND GLOBAL
COUNTERTERRORISM**

ON

MARCH 12, 2009

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Souder and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on our work on the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* and the Department's efforts to protect the United States against the growing threat of violence. It is an honor to testify as part of a discussion on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) strategies that could help address the violence along the U.S. southwest border. California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas are in a precarious situation. Tragically, just across our southern border, Mexico suffered over 6,000 narco-related murders last year as the drug trafficking organizations battled for control of drug trafficking routes to the United States. As violence south of the border continues to grow, we have begun to see disturbing increases in kidnappings, gang activity, illicit smuggling, and other drug-related crimes in U.S. communities and States on the northern side of the border. The violence has also prompted a rise in asylum requests from Mexican citizens. I welcome the Committee's attention to this homeland security threat. More importantly, I look forward to your thoughts and ideas as we work to seek a solution. Your input has already been helpful as we work to develop the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*.

As you know, DHS' Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement (CNE) is statutorily charged with coordinating the Department's policy and operations with respect to stopping the entry of illegal drugs into the United States. Mexico is the transit point for approximately 90 percent of all cocaine consumed in the United States and it is the largest foreign supplier of marijuana and methamphetamine to the United States. My staff works closely with the Department's components to strengthen the counternarcotics capabilities along the U.S. – Mexico border in order to improve our ability to stop the entry of illegal drugs into the United States.

One of CNE's most important objectives is to support policy and operations coordination and to ensure that DHS Components have the resources they need to support the Department's counternarcotics efforts along the southwest border. The vast geography and sparse population make this a difficult task for law enforcement and make the southwest border a prime environment that can be exploited for cross-border criminal activity. The drug trafficking organizations are extremely powerful. They are multi-faceted smuggling organizations involved in other criminal activities, among them human, bulk-cash, and arms smuggling. Drug trafficking organizations increasingly rely on violence and terrorist type tactics to conduct illegal activities. The confluence of these activities requires a strategic approach to best leverage U.S. law enforcement's efforts in order to dismantle drug trafficking organizations and their criminal networks.

Working closely with the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG), my office is currently leading interagency efforts to develop the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*. This effort is being conducted pursuant to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Reauthorization Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-469), mandating a biennial strategy update, and pursuant to ONDCP's request for DHS and DOJ to serve as the "Executive Agents" for this effort.

ONDCP announced the first iteration of the *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* in October 2007. The current update will provide a more comprehensive and coordinated approach for recommended actions. I'm very proud of the robust interagency effort involved in

developing the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*. We are relying on the subject matter experts to identify the best and most appropriate actions to support interagency agreed-upon objectives.

Currently, there are ten interagency groups carrying out a detailed evaluation of recommendations for improved counternarcotics capabilities. The current process also integrates increased consultation with State, local and tribal partners, and with the Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and Fusion Centers. Our consultations with Congress will result in the inclusion of a chapter in the *Strategy* to address southbound weapons smuggling. Another primary consideration is updating the Mexico chapter to ensure that the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* is aligned with the Merida Initiative and expands cooperation with Mexico; in line with our ongoing relationship and discussions.

The primary parameters of the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*, as provided in Public Law 109-469, are to:

- Set forth the U.S. Government's strategy for preventing the illegal trafficking of drugs across the international border between the United States and Mexico, including through ports of entry and between ports of entry on that border;
- State the specific roles and responsibilities of the relevant National Drug Control Program agencies for implementing the Strategy; and
- Identify the specific resources required to enable the National Drug Control Program agencies to implement the Strategy.

In accomplishing these objectives, we anticipate that the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* will provide recommendations for improvements in: intelligence and information sharing; interdiction at ports of entry; interdiction between ports of entry; air and marine operations; investigations and prosecutions; countering financial crime; combating southbound weapons smuggling, technology; and cooperation with Mexico. While tunnels are addressed throughout the document, we anticipate the document will include an appendix that provides: (1) a strategy to significantly reduce the construction and use of tunnels and subterranean passages that cross the international border between the United States and Mexico for the purpose of illegal trafficking of drugs across such border; and (2) recommendations for criminal penalties for persons who construct or use a tunnel or subterranean passage for such purpose.

The *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* will be focused on substantially reducing the flow of illicit drugs, drug proceeds, and associated instruments of violence across the U.S.-Mexico border. This broad strategic goal recognizes the interconnectedness of various threats and that the relationship between U.S. Government's counterdrug and other law enforcement missions range from complimentary to interdependent. Drug traffickers exploit the border in two directions, smuggling drugs from Mexico into the United States, and moving weapons and billions of dollars in illicit drug profits from the United States into Mexico.

To achieve the goal, we anticipate that the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* will include six cross-cutting strategic objectives. Those are:

1. Enhance intelligence capabilities associated with the southwest border;
2. Interdict drugs, drug proceeds, and associated instruments of violence in the air, at the ports-of-entry, and between the ports-of-entry along the southwest border;
3. Ensure the prosecution of all significant drug trafficking, money laundering, bulk currency smuggling and firearms and weapons cases;
4. Disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations;
5. Enhance counterdrug technologies for drug detection and interdiction along the southwest border; and
6. Enhance U.S. – Mexico cooperation regarding joint counterdrug efforts.

To get at the root of the problem causing the violence along the southwest border, it is imperative that we enhance our counternarcotics capabilities. The *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* will provide detailed interagency recommendations aimed at supporting its strategic objectives and overarching goal. The forward vision of the five-year planning period of the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* is one of document's key strengths.

During my recent visit to Mexico, I had the opportunity to meet with our various law enforcement attachés at our Embassy and with Mexican government officials. I was impressed first by Mexico's commitment to combat the drug cartels and root out corruption. I was greatly impressed by the strides made in Mexico's use of information technology to strategically attack the problems caused by organized crime and the drug trafficking organizations. DHS components have a long-standing history of cooperation with their Mexican counterparts. Advancing that relationship will be an important component on efforts to further strengthen U.S. border security. We hope to encourage increased cooperation with the Government of Mexico and we will ensure that the U.S. Government's activities in the *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* complement the coordination and information sharing facilitated through the Merida Initiative.

The current violence along our southwest border is only symptomatic of a highly sophisticated, multi-billion dollar, well-armed transnational criminal system built on around the production, transportation, and sale of dangerous illicit narcotics. Further, narcotics smuggling and related criminal activities are localized problems along the border. The damage to our Nation is tremendous. Illicit drugs are responsible for the death of more than 20,000 Americans each year. The social costs of the drug trade are well in excess of \$100 billion annually. And more than \$30 billion in illegal drug proceeds are estimated to exit this country to support drug trafficking and other illicit activities. The *2009 Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* will address immediate vulnerabilities along our border, but it will also address the threat to homeland security posed by the drug trade.

As the violence and instability created by the drug trade press ever harder at our southwest border, it is clear that national attention and a national response are required. We are fortunate to have the backing of our interagency partners, the support of Congress, and a willing partner in Mexico to fight this battle aggressively.

Thank you for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have