

**Statement of Todd D. Robinson**  
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**and Law Enforcement Affairs before the**  
**House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
**Hearing on Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere**  
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Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Department of State's engagement in this moment of great power competition. This includes our efforts in the Western Hemisphere to respond to global issues that no one country can address alone, such as corruption, transnational criminal networks, and drug trafficking, especially to keep illicit synthetic drugs out of the United States. Together with our interagency colleagues, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) works to combat international crime across the region by bolstering the rule of law, uprooting corruption, strengthening the capacity to confront transnational criminal organizations, and deterring the production and trafficking of illicit drugs and firearms, all in a concerted and whole of government approach to outcompete our strategic rivals.

**Understanding the Threat Posed by Competitors**

In this hemisphere, we are faced with inter-related challenges, that inhibit economic and investment opportunities and enable illegal activities to thrive. Criminal misuse of emerging information and communications technologies, like encrypted messaging applications or new financial tools like cryptocurrencies create new challenges for investigators, prosecutors, and judges.

The malign influence exerted by our competitors enables transnational crime, breeds corruption, and weakens democracy and the rule of law throughout the region. Malign actors and competitors seek to

exploit this vicious cycle to further entrench their illicit and dangerous activities across the region.

## **Countering PRC Influence in the Western Hemisphere**

Corruption, insecurity, mis- and disinformation, weak institutions, and lack of economic opportunities have dimmed the perception of democracy and the rule of law to many people in the region. This has enabled external actors with undemocratic interests and values to exploit these challenges for greater influence and acceptance. Particularly, the PRC and Russia seek to capitalize on these factors to increase their competitive presence in the hemisphere to compete against the United States. In response, INL works with partners in the region, including UN agencies such as UNODC and EU partners, to promote rules-based international policies and standards. This includes support to partner nations in the implementation of reforms in alignment with the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) through UNODC's Anti-Corruption Hubs project. The Hubs project works within regions and countries on specialized implementation of UNCAC to strengthen regulatory reforms, civil society, and governments against corrupt practices. Through this project, partners are made aware of the risks to partnering with the PRC and Russia and recognize good partners such as the United States as the partner of choice. INL is also the leading donor to the OAS's anti-corruption peer-review mechanism, which assesses almost every country in the region on their compliance with their anti-corruption treaty obligations under the Inter-American Convention against Corruption. These assessments have resulted in countless reforms strengthening anti-corruption frameworks.

The threat from malign external actors is constantly evolving and requires additional creative and innovative thinking. Working with our like-minded partners in the region, in the interagency, and in Congress will help us ensure we are combating this constantly evolving challenge.

## **Detering the Production and Trafficking of Illicit Drugs**

Non-state transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) also exploit weak rule of law, utilizing global networks and technology to diversify and grow their criminal activity. Out-competing TCOs, particularly those that produce, traffic, and profit from illicit synthetic drugs, is our top priority. Combating the production and trafficking of fentanyl and other drugs is critical to safeguard American lives and deprive TCOs of their profits from this illicit and dangerous business. The scourge of synthetic opioids alone took the lives of more than 70,000 Americans in 2023. By depriving TCOs of their ability to operate and expanding access to lifesaving treatment and overdose reversal medication, we can reverse this trend – and we are starting to see progress. Provisional data from the CDC shows the curve of all overdose deaths is bending and declined over the past year – the first decline in more than five years. We are still losing more Americans to drugs than we should be, but these are encouraging trends.

Countering the flow of illicit synthetic drugs and the precursor chemicals used to produce them is a top priority of this Administration. The Department is leading a global response to this challenge, including partners from the Western Hemisphere, to further our objectives. INL continues to employ a comprehensive counternarcotics approach, aiming to dismantle criminal networks profiting not only from synthetic drugs but also from trafficking cocaine, other illicit contraband, and precursor chemicals – as well as promoting adoption of evidence-based approaches to prevention, treatment, and other drug demand-related issues.

Through training, equipment, technical assistance, and bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, INL works to counter the flow of illicit drugs into the United States by building our partners' capacity to disrupt the ability of TCOs to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Enduring security cooperation with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis and the criminal networks that

profit from it. To assist with preventing the diversion of licit precursor chemicals for fentanyl production, INL facilitates engagement with the private sector and works with security partners to improve border and maritime port security to disrupt the transport of illicit precursor chemicals by transnational criminal networks. The United States, Mexico, and Canada, under the auspices of the Trilateral Fentanyl Committee (TFC), reviewed respective legal frameworks to identify gaps and recommendations for strengthening regulations. The TFC is exploring options to engage the private sector on voluntary standards to identify and report suspected diversion of licit precursor chemicals.

INL will capitalize on these initiatives and expand areas of cooperation with our Mexican counterparts, including working with Mexican regulators and public health agencies to tackle the challenge of illicit synthetic drugs from all angles. INL funds training for and has donated protective equipment to Mexican security and justice personnel to assist in identifying, safely dismantling, and investigating clandestine laboratories. INL has also provided more than 500 canines to multiple Mexican agencies to assist in seizures of fentanyl and other drugs and contraband. Since 2019, INL-donated canines have supported over 50 fentanyl seizures, and seized more than three million fentanyl pills, 240 kilograms of fentanyl powder, and 2,300 doses of liquid fentanyl.

Throughout Central America, INL supports specialized units and efforts to strengthen interdiction capacity, including by fostering interagency coordination through technical assistance, training and mentoring, and providing critical equipment. For example, the newly created, INL-supported, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-mentored and vetted unit in Costa Rica dismantled the first fentanyl trafficking ring identified in the country through a series of operations in November 2023.

In Argentina, one of the most forward-leaning partners on synthetic drugs in the hemisphere, INL-trained officials seized over 30 metric tons of precursor chemicals in 2023. Additionally, in June 2023, INL supported the

Argentine government in creating a code of conduct for its chemical industry to prevent the diversion of precursors to produce illicit drugs.

The United States also leads the global response to the public health and security threats posed by synthetic drugs. The Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, launched by Secretary Blinken in July 2023, convenes over 1,500 participants from 156 countries and 15 international organizations on this critical issue. Of those, 29 countries from the Western Hemisphere have been active participants, with Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago serving as Co-Chairs for the Coalition's Working and Sub-Working Groups. During monthly Sub-Working Group meetings, participants have identified challenges, shared best practices, and connected with international organizations on initiatives to prevent the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detect emerging threats, and promote public health interventions. INL also works closely with countries from the Western Hemisphere under the auspices of multilateral fora like the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States and the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs to drive regional and international cooperation to address synthetic drug threats.

While we direct our focus toward illicit fentanyl, we do not ignore the other counternarcotics challenges driving increased violence and instability in the hemisphere – primarily those related to cocaine and other plant-based narcotics. Colombia and Peru persist as the largest global suppliers of cocaine. INL's approach to cocaine in these countries has evolved to focus not just on drug supply reduction but on addressing the full spectrum of forces that enable cocaine production and trafficking. These include promoting rural security, and justice; addressing corruption; and preventing, detecting, and countering money laundering and other financial crimes to deprive TCOs of their profits.

Ecuador is a significant transit country for cocaine en route to the United States and Europe that has suffered from increased violence,

including political assassinations. INL partners with key institutions to build the capacity and ability to cooperate across agencies to monitor and interdict maritime and land-based drug trafficking. For example, this February, I inaugurated a joint Navy and Police task force, GOMAR, that integrates intelligence and operations to effectively respond to organized crime on Ecuador's waterways.

### **Strengthening Capacity to Combat Transnational Organized Crime**

Transnational organized crime remains a top concern for our partner governments in the Hemisphere and poses national security threats to the United States. Now more than ever, TCOs are utilizing global networks and technology in new ways to diversify and expand their activities. This so-called "criminal convergence" grows TCOs' profits and complicates efforts to disrupt criminal activity. INL, in support of the U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime, works to build the capacity of law enforcement and justice sector authorities throughout the Western Hemisphere to investigate and prosecute criminal networks involved in drug and arms trafficking, human smuggling, financial crimes, cybercrime, and nature crimes such as wildlife trafficking, illegal mining, and illegal logging.

I want to thank many members of the committee who have engaged on these issues over the years. We know that TCOs are profit-seeking organizations and there is significant demand for their services, especially from our global competitors. We have seen protected areas across Venezuela, Guyana, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil destroyed by criminal syndicates seeking gold, timber, and wildlife products to meet the demand of buyers around the world. The PRC's unwillingness to clamp down on this illicit activity poses immense challenges for our partners in the region on top of the assistance we give them to face other criminal threats.

A key element of INL efforts is the U.S. Transnational and High-Tech Crime Global Law Enforcement Network – or GLEN – which places Department of Justice prosecutors around the world to strengthen

international cooperation in combating cybercrime and intellectual property crime. These twelve International Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property Advisors, or ICHIPs, provide specialized technical engagement to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of these borderless crimes. Notable successes have included helping coordinate the takedown of the Lockbit ransomware group earlier this year, providing legislative advice to enable the Budapest Cybercrime Convention to grow to its current 72 states parties, and continuing to expand new regional law enforcement cryptocurrency working groups. The GLEN is adapting to address not only the demand of developing countries for basic assistance, but the specialized training needed to combat cyber-enabled facets of modern transnational crime threats including online child sexual exploitation and abuse and online trafficking of narcotics, including fentanyl.

In Haiti, the Department remains acutely focused on the violence and instability stemming from criminal gangs, which undermine regional security through transnational criminal activities and drive undocumented migration to the United States. We are working to support the Multinational Security Support Mission to Haiti, or MSS, in close consultation with this committee and other Congressional partners. Bipartisan Congressional support is critical to enable this multinational security mission to strengthen the Haitian National Police, or HNP, to reestablish security in Haiti and build security conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections. We are providing essential subject matter expertise and funded Kenya's predeployment training and personnel costs for the initial contingent, which is expected to deploy soon. We are working to provide critical equipment for the MSS. As we work to support MSS deployment, INL continues its partnership with the HNP to build their capacity to counter gang violence. INL vets, trains, equips, mentors, and provides logistical support to specialized HNP units who bravely serve the people of Haiti.

INL's strategic programming under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) seeks to reduce the flow of illicit narcotics and illicit firearms, disrupt organized crime, bolster citizen security and the rule of

law, and promote regional cooperation. Recently, Trinidad and Tobago authorities brought charges against three members of a Caribbean arms trafficking ring who unlawfully exported firearms from Florida to Trinidad and Tobago. This conviction highlights the value of U.S. interagency cooperation with Caribbean partners to address the illicit outflow of firearms from the U.S. to the Caribbean, as exhibited in the regional CARICOM Crime Gun Intelligence Unit based in Trinidad and Tobago.

INL support has yielded successes throughout the region in the fight against money laundering and financial crimes. In Colombia, where authorities estimate \$15 billion in illicit proceeds pass through the country annually, an INL-supported anti-money laundering task force closed 2023 with 24 arrests and 202 seized assets for the year. The multi-year bilateral effort received a boost after the Colombian National Police assigned it 20 investigators in 2023. In Panama, INL supports an FFBI- mentored Anti-Money Laundering/Anti-Corruption Task Force, which since its inception in May 2021 helped Panamanian authorities arrest over 140 suspects and helped Panama leave the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in October 2023.

INL advances the fight against transnational organized crime in close collaboration with U.S. and local law enforcement agencies. In Guatemala, for example, INL partners with the DEA, FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, to train, mentor, and advise vetted units to pursue counternarcotics, anti-human trafficking and smuggling, and anti-gang investigations with a U.S. nexus. This interagency coordination helped the United States secure the extradition of a record number of defendants from Guatemala to the United States for prosecution of narcotics trafficking and human smuggling related offenses during 2020-2024. In Honduras, INL sponsors and supports the Gang Resistance Education and Training program (known as "GREAT"), which trains Honduran National Police officers to work with at-risk youth in resisting gang influence. Since 2012, INL has certified 111 GREAT instructors



currently on active duty and graduated more than 880,000 at risk youth from the program.

## **Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption**

INL works tirelessly to bolster the rule of law and judicial capacities of our partners throughout the Western Hemisphere, as they often serve as the critical defenders of democracy and against malign actors. The U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption is a cornerstone of our foreign policy and a key part of INL's mission. In support of the strategy, INL delivers foreign assistance that prevents and addresses corruption; preserves, strengthens, and enforces the global anti-corruption architecture, including treaty obligations and international standards; and promotes accountability through sanctions and visa restriction authorities. In 2023, the Department issued public visa restrictions on more than 90 individuals for their involvement in significant corruption from all over the world. These designations have continued to prompt local investigations and create space for anti-corruption reformers to pursue accountability.

As a top priority, INL works to combat endemic corruption and impunity by strengthening institutions and the capacity of partner nations to better identify, dismantle, and prosecute the main drivers of corruption. We have seen the consequences when endemic corruption and impunity are allowed to run rampant, like what we have witnessed in Venezuela: organized crime grows stronger, public infrastructure and services crumble, and the country becomes inhospitable for the much of the population.

Further, corruption provides a foothold for the influence of malign actors. In strengthening our partnerships with our neighbors in the hemisphere, it is essential that we address how our adversaries weaponize corruption to drive a wedge between us. Corruption in the Western Hemisphere is not only a roadblock to equitable social and economic development, but also a key national security threat.

INL works diligently through programming with justice sector partners, including judges, police, and prosecutors, among others to aid our Western Hemisphere neighbors in protecting and serving their communities through the delivery of impartial and equitable administration of the law.

For example, INL's Transnational Anticorruption Partnership (TAP) program, implemented with the FBI's International Corruption Unit, has assisted counterparts with opening and effectively investigating transnational corruption and money laundering cases in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, among others. By building partners' capacity to collaborate with U.S. law enforcement, this program has facilitated coordination between regional partners and the United States on more than 30 new investigations with a nexus to the United States. This program has also demonstrably improved the number, efficiency, and effectiveness of corruption-related investigations and partners' use of human intelligence and sophisticated investigative techniques.

Through INL-funded programs like the Department of Justice's Judicial Studies Institute (JSI) in Puerto Rico, INL supports the professionalization of judiciaries throughout the hemisphere. JSI Alumni bring these lessons to the courtroom, exemplified by a Salvadoran alumna who used her training to convict fourteen members of a violent criminal organization, leading to its disbandment.

INL programming goes beyond solely supporting judges themselves and also works to reform the judicial institutions in which they serve. With technical assistance and advocacy from INL, Ecuador launched a specialized court with national jurisdiction over drug trafficking, corruption, crimes against humanity, human trafficking, illegal mining, kidnapping, fraud, money laundering, and TCO cases. In the year and a half since the court's inauguration, it successfully convicted 165 individuals in 59 cases, including members of high-profile TCOs such as Tren de Aragua and Los Choneros.

Similarly, INL is supporting partners in the region to implement their obligations under international standards, benchmarks, and treaties such as the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption, and Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD's) Anti-Bribery Convention. Through a partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and regional hubs based in Mexico City and Bogota, INL supports nearly two dozen countries in bringing regional experts together to develop regional anti-corruption roadmaps and operationalize targeted reforms through technical assistance. INL's ongoing support to the OECD's Latin America and Caribbean Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Network strengthens cooperation amongst law enforcement agencies throughout the region and bolsters compliance with the OECD's Anti-Bribery Convention and other treaties and integrity standards.

An additional way INL promotes anti-corruption priorities in the Western Hemisphere is through multilateral engagement. This engagement works to support, encourage, and where necessary, pressure, other countries into adopting and revising anti-corruption laws, improving policies and practices, setting up or reforming institutions, and ensuring authorities are better able to cope with corruption at all levels than ever before. For example, INL leads U.S. participation in the OAS' anti-corruption peer review mechanism, known by the acronym MESICIC (MESSY-SEEK). Here, member states evaluate one another in their compliance with their regional anti-corruption treaty obligations. This is a great tool to ensure countries across the hemisphere are taking positive steps to improve their domestic anti-corruption frameworks. Of the more than 650 total recommendations reviewed since 2015, MESICIC experts found that 67 percent of them were satisfactorily addressed.

The rule of law in Latin America and the Caribbean is under threat. INL has demonstrated the ability to rapidly respond to rule of law challenges as they arise and engage when opportunities to collaborate emerge. In Guatemala, we welcome the initial steps and clear political will

demonstrated by President Arevalo to make rooting out corruption a top priority of his administration. That is why the White House announced the *Guatemala se Transforma* initiative, through which INL will make an initial investment of \$50 million in programming to support the Arevalo administration's efforts to bring about transformational change to Guatemala's security and justice sector institutions. During the High-Level Economic Dialogue in Guatemala earlier this year, our delegations discussed the importance of good governance and combating corruption to create conditions for investment, job creation, and inclusive economic growth for the Guatemalan people.

In addition to our work with government partners, INL works increasingly with interagency partners to develop the capacity of local civil society, the private sector, and independent media actors to shed light on the corruption, crime, and impunity threatening communities throughout the hemisphere.

In Colombia, for example, INL has joined forces with the government and civil society to increase the focus on preventing and mitigating corruption. INL also partnered with Transparency International to host a large-scale conference on best practices in government procurements, whistleblower protection, and training.

Across the Western Hemisphere, INL has supported the Pan American Development Foundation to empower civil society organizations to vet judicial nominees and provide flexible, on-demand capacity building to public sector officials. The project exposed TCO-connections among several high-profile judicial candidates, resulting in the revocation of their nominations.

## **Conclusion**

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, transnational criminal organizations and corruption in the Western Hemisphere are deeply rooted

challenges that embolden and empower our global competitors. To outcompete these actors and counter their detrimental impact on citizen security, economic prosperity, and democracy in our region, we must continue to support our partners wherever possible and pursue innovative solutions through civil society in less receptive environments. While these issues pose a serious threat to regional stability and our own national security, INL is and will continue to be committed to advancing a just and secure future in our hemisphere.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and for your attention and leadership on these issues. I look forward to your questions.