



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS
AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS

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Hearing Before the:

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

Regional Security Cooperation:
An Examination of the Central America Regional Security Initiative and the
Caribbean Basin Security Initiative”

Wednesday, June 19, 2013

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sires, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. Recent travel by the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of State to Central America and the Caribbean demonstrates the United States' commitment to the Western Hemisphere and the common goal we share of advancing citizen security. As economies in the region become increasingly integrated, opportunities for criminal networks to take advantage of illicit markets multiply. This threat is particularly acute in Central America, where criminal enterprises engaged in the trafficking of anything that can turn a profit, from drugs, to guns, to persons, have firmly established themselves, in many cases after being confronted by government capacity in Colombia and in Mexico.

The Caribbean faces a complex set of challenges to citizen security too, exacerbated by drug traffickers who will increasingly turn to the region as pressure is applied in Central America. We recognize this shift and are ahead of the curve. We are implementing two coordinated, regional initiatives that build upon host nation efforts to disrupt criminal safe havens and strengthen the rule of law: the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI).

CARSI and CBSI, together with the Merida Initiative in Mexico, our efforts in the Andes, and complementary U.S. government security and rule of law programming, represent a holistic approach to citizen security in the hemisphere. We aim to build the criminal justice and law enforcement capacity of governments in the region, and promote the rule of law and human rights, while simultaneously addressing the root causes of crime and insecurity.

Central America Regional Security Initiative

CARSI responds to the region's threats by working to produce a safer and more secure region where criminal organizations no longer wield the power to destabilize governments or challenge national and regional security and public safety. Deepening the skills and capacity to prevent the entry and spread of illicit drugs, violence, and both domestic and transnational crimes to countries throughout the region and to the United States is the primary objective. As a partnership of seven sovereign nations in Central America, CARSI was founded upon five pillars: 1) Create safe streets for the citizens in the region; 2) Disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband within and between the nations of Central America; 3) Support the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments; 4) Re-establish effective state presence and security in

communities at risk; and 5) Foster enhanced levels of security and rule of law coordination and cooperation between the nations of the region. These goals underscore the comprehensive approach that the United States, Central American governments, and other international partners are taking to address the region's threats.

Facing the perfect storm of severe homicide rates, weak institutions, limited resources, and powerful transnational criminals, governments in Central America are demonstrating a remarkable will to take control back from drug traffickers and gangs, while building stronger and more resilient communities and institutions. For example, Panama has increased its national budget for citizen security. El Salvador and Costa Rica are working to improve the effectiveness of their tax collection systems, which should generate additional funding for citizen safety initiatives. Honduras developed an emergency "security tax" measure in June 2012 which uses levies on a range of financial transactions to provide funds for security sector needs including for police training and prosecutorial support. And in 2010, Guatemala enacted an asset forfeiture regime which is helping turn the tide on criminals – using their resources to fund police and justice sector actions against them.

Between 2008 - 2012, the United States government has obligated more than \$468 million worth of training, equipment and technical assistance to increase the capacity of law enforcement, strengthen institutions, promote the rule of law and human rights, and address the root causes of the crisis in Central America.

Recognizing that having trusted partners is vital to combating criminal groups in the region, INL has utilized CARSI assistance to support the establishment of over a dozen specially vetted police units and joint police-prosecutor task forces. These units are comprised of host-country law enforcement officers polygraphed and mentored by U.S. federal law enforcement advisors, who receive rule of law, human rights, and specialized police training. Many of them are taught in classrooms alongside prosecutors or judges who also receive assistance under CARSI. The United States is also providing support to improve security in local communities throughout Central America, including through a combination of Model Police Precincts (MPPs) that have received infusions of training and equipment, and alternative opportunities for at-risk youth. At the same time, citizens are now demanding transparent, accountable, and safe streets from their governments and demonstrating the will to realize those goals. Our efforts are coordinated with USAID, which is implementing complementary

violence reduction and at-risk youth programming throughout the region and frequently within or adjacent to our MPPs.

CARSI Case Example – Model Police Precincts:

CARSI programs support MPPs to provide intensive training and equipment to host nation law enforcement, mayors, and communities on the principles of community-based policing, while also leveraging violence prevention programs and outreach to youth-at-risk. Over the past four years in the MPP program, the Salvadoran community of Lourdes has experienced a 70 percent reduction in homicides and the Guatemalan municipalities of Villa Nueva and Mixco have experienced 14 percent and 27 percent reductions in homicides respectively. We are now planning to expand this successful model to other communities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

CARSI Case Example – Anti-gang Programs:

Under CARSI, the State Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) established transnational anti-gang units (TAGs) in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, which investigate groups like MS-13 and M-18 that span national borders in Central America and have a significant presence in U.S. cities. Since its inception in 2008, the El Salvador TAG has more than doubled its annual investigative leads, an essential component to building criminal cases against transnational gangs. Information and partnerships from existing TAGs have also led to arrests in criminal cases in the United States, including a homicide in Oklahoma City, felony extortions in Annapolis, and the arrest of an FBI top ten most wanted fugitive who surrendered to the FBI in Denver after being identified by the TAG unit in El Salvador in connection with criminal charges.

CARSI Case Example – International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA):

Increased training capacity for our partner law enforcement agencies in Central America is an important component of CARSI. Through ILEA in San Salvador, the United States trained approximately 900 Central Americans in calendar year 2012. Since 2005, ILEA San Salvador provided training and mentoring for thousands of participants on important topics

such as financial investigative techniques, anti-gang activities, human rights, basic crime scene investigations, gender violence, and community policing

These examples demonstrate that capacity building efforts, when combined with political will, can be successful in reducing crime and violence. However, to have a sustained impact, CARSI also focuses on reforming justice sector institutions that have long been plagued by corruption.

Our institution-building programs, which account for the vast majority of INL-administered CARSI programming, include providing training for thousands of police, prosecutors, and judges. The State Department, along with the Department of Treasury is working in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica to train prosecutors, investigators and judges on complex organized crime and money laundering cases, and with expert law enforcement advisors from the Department of Justice and U.S. state and local police detectives to reform the curriculum at police academies throughout Central America.

In Costa Rica and Panama, where capacity building efforts are farthest along, INL CARSI programming has delivered a key technological tool to map crime and identify problems. The Computerized Statistics (or COMPSTAT) system helps governments to understand the criminal terrain they must contend with and more strategically deploy personnel and resources to address those recognized trends. This is a similar technology to the one that the NYPD pioneered in the early 1990s, which drastically reduced crime and has since been adopted by major cities throughout the United States. More than 7,000 Panamanian and 2,200 Costa Rican law enforcement personnel now benefit from the crime analysis that the COMPSTAT system provides. This new system, along with new internal affairs procedures, is helping to build a more professional, more accountable, and more effective justice sector in Central America.

The Central American isthmus faces a serious, long-term security threat from gangs, a phenomenon exacerbated by international drug trafficking. INL's CARSI programming focuses on providing immediate assistance to trusted, vetted law enforcement to reduce crime, building accountable justice sector institutions, and collaborating with communities and groups at-risk. There is no silver bullet solution to these problems. INL is working to accelerate assistance programs, including standing up INL sections at our embassies in San Salvador and Tegucigalpa to increase our programming capacity and oversight. Nonetheless, we

are preparing for the tide of criminality to turn increasingly towards the Caribbean. Like CARSI, we are seeking to address both the short-term needs and the long-term requirements for sustaining citizen security through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI).

Caribbean Basin Security Initiative

CBSI is a partnership among the United States and 13 partner nations in the Caribbean to address threats to citizen security. CBSI takes a collaborative and holistic approach to addressing citizen safety and encouraging regional cooperation, by working together to 1) substantially reduce illicit trafficking, 2) increase public safety and security, and 3) promote social justice. As with CARSI, our efforts are coordinated with USAID, which is implementing crime prevention programs with at-risk youth, justice sector strengthening, and anticorruption activities.

Through CBSI, the United States is training thousands of Caribbean law enforcement officials on topics such as basic crime scene and homicide investigations. Within the Dominican National Police (DNP), CBSI programs are strengthening the institutional capacity of the DNP by supporting train-the-trainer activities within their mobile training units. In 2012, approximately 2,500 police officers throughout the country received training in basic police intervention techniques.

With U.S.-bound trafficking in cocaine through the Caribbean increasing from 5 percent of the total in 2011 to 9 percent in 2012, CBSI efforts to strengthen the capacity of partner nations to combat narcotics trafficking has become increasingly important. CBSI counternarcotics programs focus on support to vetted officers and units in countries like The Bahamas and the Dominican Republic, as well as training to enhance the capacity of law enforcement K-9s for the detection and interdiction of illicit goods. These targeted efforts are coupled with enhanced regional cooperation to combat the flow of illicit narcotics. For example, in May 2013, the State Department coordinated with the United States Coast Guard to launch a maritime exercise that trained Caribbean partners on appropriate law enforcement responses to illicit maritime trafficking.

CBSI programs are also building the capacity of Caribbean partners to investigate complex financial crimes, manage forfeited or seized assets, and prosecute criminals. For example, the State Department's Regional Legal Advisor in the Caribbean, a prosecutor from the U.S. Department of Justice, has mentored a

violent crimes task force in St. Kitts and Nevis, which helped contribute to a 41 percent reduction in homicides last year.

In a region dominated by vast maritime territories and small island states, regional cooperation is critical to combating shared security threats. CBSI has accordingly prioritized the regionalization of expertise. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, CBSI programs are working to expand the police academy into a regional training hub accessible to other Caribbean law enforcement officials. And in Grenada, police report clearing 50 percent of their cold cases through hits in the Automated Fingerprint Information Systems (AFIS) provided by the United States, which cross-checks data among Caribbean countries and becomes more effective as regional installation continues. This advancement in criminal investigations and prosecutions would not have been possible without U.S. training and technical assistance under CBSI.

Conclusion

To some, the situation Central America and the Caribbean is hopeless; the problems are too daunting. It is true that there are challenges facing the region and host governments and more work is ahead of us. Even so, whether measured by citizens demanding that their governments take action, numbers of law enforcement and prosecutors trained and deployed, drops in homicide rates, or youth enrolled in after-school programs, the United States and our partners in Central America and the Caribbean are making progress. There are no easy fixes to the challenges Central America and Caribbean nations face. We will continue to evaluate our efforts, strengthen our programs with the support of our partners in the region, and seek innovative solutions that lead to a sustainable, secure, and prosperous hemisphere.