



Prepared Statement of:

Ambassador Luis E. Arreaga

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for
International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

Hearing before the:

**House Committee on Homeland Security
Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee**

**“A Dangerous and Sophisticated Adversary:
The Threat to the Homeland Posed by Cartel Operations”**

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Chairwoman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the work of the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) to combat transnational organized crime and drug cartels in the Western Hemisphere. As this Subcommittee knows well, the United States is deeply affected by crime and violence perpetuated by transnational criminal organizations, including drug cartels, whose smuggling networks undermine our border security, inflict harm in our communities, and threatens the stability of our allies in the region. Today, the trafficking by drug cartels of illicit fentanyl, heroin, and other opioids into this country is fueling a national epidemic with fatal consequences. The CDC reports between 2000 and 2015, the rate of heroin-related overdose deaths in the United States more than quadrupled. The impact of transnational crime is felt, too, by American businesses and financial institutions who suffer when crime disrupts legitimate commercial sectors, depriving workers of a level playing field to compete globally. The cartels that operate today are more fluid, more nimble, more diverse than ever before and effectively combatting them requires a comprehensive, committed, and well-coordinated approach.

INL leads the Department's efforts to combat transnational organized crime by strengthening the capacity of foreign governments' law enforcement and criminal justice systems, combatting narcotics production and trafficking, and fighting corruption. Our efforts abroad complement those of, and are closely coordinated with, the efforts of our U.S. interagency colleagues, including those represented here today from the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

INL does not approach today's challenges at point zero. Decades of experience and lessons learned teach us that eradicating drug crops in Latin America, in and of itself, is not sufficient; it must be coupled with robust alternative development efforts in order to take hold over the long term. In addition, the growing threat of synthetic drugs like fentanyl—which are not produced from illicit crops—limits the effectiveness of eradication on today's drug threat. Interdiction is critical to reducing the flow of drugs to our communities, but traffickers adapt quickly and shift their routes and methods. Taking down the leadership of cartels and other criminal organizations disrupts drug flows in the short-term, but also often exacerbates violence and leaves room for criminals to vie for power. To address these challenges, INL executes two mutually supportive lines of effort—building cross-border law enforcement cooperation and building stronger, more transparent criminal justice systems. To deny safe havens to

criminal networks, INL assistance strengthens governments' ability to enforce their laws and to serve as reliable, trusted partners to U.S. law enforcement. INL programming throughout the hemisphere, including in Mexico, Colombia, Central America, and the Caribbean, is guided by this two pronged approach, coupling law enforcement efforts to deny transnational criminal organizations the ability to operate, with building stronger, more accountable institutions that reduce corruption and bring criminals to justice. Building strong, effective institutions capable of confronting and stopping transnational organized crime before it reaches U.S. borders is a long-term endeavor that requires a sustained commitment. Cartel operations today present a complex set of national security challenges that do not lend themselves to simple solutions but the strategic approach we have put in place provides a solid foundation for strengthening security over time.

Mexico

The flow of illicit narcotics across our shared border with Mexico threatens citizen security in both countries. Mexico is the primary source country for heroin and methamphetamine consumed in the United States and a key transit country for cocaine from South America. Since 2008, under the Merida Initiative, the \$1.9 billion appropriated for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funding has provided training, equipment, and technical assistance to complement Mexico's much larger investment in building the capacity of Mexican institutions to counter organized crime, uphold the rule of law, and protect our shared border from the movement of illicit drugs, money, and goods. This includes more than \$130 million in fixed and mobile non-intrusive inspection equipment and related detection devices provided at Mexico's border crossings, checkpoints, and ports-of-entry, and for which CBP, USCG, and ICE provided training and technical assistance. INL provided over 500 canines to Mexican law enforcement and military units – many of which CBP helped to train – to ensure they have a vital, sustainable capability to detect, interdict, and deter the illicit movement of illegal drugs, cash, and other contraband headed for the United States. Under Merida, INL works closely with ICE, CBP, the USCG, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to train and equip Mexican law enforcement officials to identify and safely dismantle clandestine drug laboratories used to produce methamphetamine, heroin, and synthetic drugs and to better track and prevent the shipping of precursor chemicals used to manufacture these drugs. From April 2014 to September 2015, Mexico seized over 1,346 metric tons (MT) of marijuana (a 45 percent increase from this period 2013 to 2014), two MT of opium gum (a 43 percent increase), 26.5 MT of methamphetamine (a 74 percent

increase), 10.2 MT of cocaine (a 183 percent increase) and 653 kg of heroin and closed 272 clandestine laboratories (a 90 percent increase). Included in these statistics is 238.9 MT of illicit drugs Mexico seized using equipment and resources provided through the Merida Initiative. Mexican security forces have also carried out a series of successful raids of methamphetamine laboratories in recent months and made significant arrests in confrontations with drug trafficking organizations.

Our programs also strengthen the intelligence analysis and investigative capabilities of Mexican law enforcement agencies to carry out complex investigations against organized crime. Merida provides equipment and training to Mexico's specialized law enforcement units that combat kidnapping, money laundering, human trafficking, and narcotics trafficking. Strengthening these units diminishes drug trafficking organizations' funding sources. Over \$300 million of targeted assistance via Merida supported Mexico's reforms to its justice system across every facet of the criminal justice system, including police, prosecutors, judges, and corrections. When fully implemented, Mexico's reformed accusatory justice system will more effectively reduce corruption and impunity and bring transnational criminals to justice. In coordination with Mexican authorities, Merida programming continues to expand to address shared challenges. Our U.S. investment has fostered unprecedented collaboration with Mexico's national security actors to address irregular migration and stem the flow of illegal drugs. In partnership with DHS, we are currently contributing \$78 million to the development of a communications network and \$75 million to a national biometric system to enhance the ability of Mexican officials to apprehend criminals and share critical information with U.S. law enforcement before a threat reaches the United States. We also partner with ICE and CBP to train and mentor Mexican migration and customs officials. Under Merida, the United States is an essential partner in Mexico's reform efforts to address criminal organizations and insecurity that affect Mexico and the United States.

Central America

In Central America, gangs perpetuate violence and foster conditions that drive people to leave their homes in search of safety, opportunity, and family abroad, often travelling through Mexico in an attempt to reach the United States. Under the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) as part of our overall Central America Strategy, INL programs assist governments in their fight against narco-traffickers, transnational gangs, and human smugglers by assisting Central American nations in improving investigative and border security capacity. The result is a more stable and prosperous Central America. We are helping

Central American governments seize record levels of narcotics and build justice institutions throughout the region which are strong enough to prosecute, convict, and imprison criminals. An estimated 90 percent of documented northbound cocaine movements transit the Central America and Mexico corridor before reaching the United States. To target this threat, INL works with U.S. interagency and international partners to train, advise, and equip police task forces, vetted units, and maritime law enforcement. In 2016, Central American governments seized over 116 metric tons of cocaine. Many of the seizures were conducted by police units and security forces vetted or supported by INL, working in coordination with CBP, ICE, the DEA, and FBI. INL is also increasing its partnership with the USCG to more effectively interdict maritime routes often used to transport illicit goods. Corruption and limited partner government resources and capacity continue to pose challenges in the fight against narcotics trafficking and other forms of transnational crime, but we are seeing positive developments. In Honduras, an INL-supported police vetting program dismissed 1,946 corrupt officers, and is continuing to conduct investigations. In Guatemala, the Attorney General is bringing corruption charges against former and current high-level government officials.

This is a unique moment in our relationship with these countries. Governments in Central America are increasingly willing to work with the United States to arrest and extradite drug traffickers. INL will continue to leverage this strong political will to effectively target the most at-risk people and places, and to help the governments extend their presence and services. Drug trafficking is a major source of revenue for organized crime groups in Central America and irregular migration is again on the rise. INL is addressing the underlying conditions driving irregular migration through crime prevention and community policing programs, while strengthening border security, and disrupting human smuggling and trafficking networks to minimize the impact on the U.S. government and Americans.

Caribbean

Approximately ten percent of documented cocaine movements from the source zone to the United States transit the Caribbean. Through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), INL supports countries with the training and equipping of vetted maritime law enforcement interdiction units. These efforts contribute to increased drug interdictions, particularly in the waters surrounding the Dominican Republic, helping to stop the flow of drugs before they reach the

United States. Cocaine seizures in all CBSI countries increased 152 percent, from 9.6 metric tons in 2014 to 24.3 metric tons in 2015.

Colombia

Colombia is the world's largest producer of cocaine and is the origin of approximately 90 percent of the cocaine seized in the United States. As cocaine makes the long journey from Colombia to the United States, it fuels violence and instability as it passes through the transit zones of Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Between 2013 and 2015, we witnessed a troubling increase in the amount of coca cultivated in Colombia – an increase of nearly 100 percent. Unfortunately, we expect this upward trend to continue. Working hand-in-hand with our Colombian partners, INL assistance supports the Government of Colombia in its robust interdiction efforts against trafficking organizations and criminal networks on land and at sea; last year alone, the Colombian government reported seizing 421 metric tons of cocaine and cocaine base, a 42 percent increase over 2015, and the destruction of more than 4,800 drug labs.

However, we must do more to combat the tremendous growth of coca cultivation in Colombia. Together with our Colombian partners, we must increase forced eradication and provide for crop substitution and robust rural development. Now, at a time the Colombian government is implementing a peace accord with the FARC, we have an important opportunity to work with the Colombian government on focused counternarcotics support. We understand they are reassigning police and military units to increase eradication of coca. To restrict the ability of transnational criminal organizations, narcotics producers and traffickers from continuing to operate in the rural regions of the country, we must also continue our long-term efforts to support the expansion of Colombia's rule of law. The Colombian government has been our steadfast partner in the fight against crime and narcotics since before the start of Plan Colombia in 1999. We are confident that we will continue to effectively work together to tackle the considerable challenges before us.

Conclusion

Achieving lasting change is not easy, nor quick, but INL has programs and partnerships that, over time and with concerted effort, work to keep us safer by strengthening the capacity of our foreign partners to combat transnational organized crime before it reaches U.S. borders.