



TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

ON

“Defeating a Sophisticated and Dangerous Adversary:
Are the New Border Security Task Forces the Right Approach”

April 4, 2017
Washington, DC

Introduction

Good morning Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Vela, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here today on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to discuss how Joint Task Force-East (JTF-E) – one of three Joint Task Forces established under the DHS Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan (SBACP) – is working to address the threats posed by Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) to the safety and security of the United States.

I assumed the duties as Director of Joint Task Force-East in August 2016 and look forward to continued strong partnership and collaboration with my counterparts, U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) Chief Paul Beeson, Director of the Joint Task Force-West; and Janice Ayala, Director of the Joint Task Force-Investigations, from U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

JTF-East Background

Before the creation of the DHS Joint Task Forces (JTFs), DHS agencies in the field regularly worked together to achieve significant enforcement results; however, these results frequently relied upon a network of informal personal relationships and overlapping agency priorities, versus a clear framework that directed regional efforts. The JTF construct formalizes operational processes between regional and national level DHS components, and establishes enduring functional relationships between DHS agencies. JTF-E's organization provides a platform for operational continuity at the national level and optimizes a complex network of relationships with other non-DHS law enforcement and inter-agency partners.

Joint Task Forces were established to enhance unity of effort, build regional cooperation, and define operational priorities. The SBACP gave the JTFs a wide mandate to achieve effective enforcement and interdiction across land, sea and air domains; and to degrade TCOs while facilitating the flow of lawful trade, travel and commerce across borders. As the JTF-E Director, I thank the Committee for its role supporting the authorization that enabled the DHS Secretary to formally establish JTFs.

Today I am pleased to report, under the JTF construct, DHS components in the field are working in close collaboration to develop standard operational plans supporting regional operations to defeat these criminal networks. We leverage existing DHS facilities and capabilities to stand-up Joint Information Operations Centers to best coordinate information sharing and asset utilization. The enhanced coordination and sharing of resources and information is improving our ability to more comprehensively target and dismantle TCOs through a “whole of department/unity of effort” approach. While still nascent in our development at JTF-E, the benefits to DHS mission accomplishment are very promising.

JTF-E's geographic responsibility includes the international waters of the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific Ocean – southward to the north coast

of South America, the airspace spanning U.S. territorial lands and waters; also, the international airspace in the approaches to Central America is shared with JTF-West.

My dual-hatted status as a member of the Armed Forces responsible for Coast Guard operations east of the Rocky Mountains, and as the JTF-E Director, positions me well to coordinate and collaborate across DHS agencies and with Department of Defense (DoD) Geographic Combatant Commands, including U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM). This positioning enhances information sharing and assists in identifying DoD resources that could be requested to support DHS Component-led operations. JTF-E's two Deputy Directors are Senior Executive Service (SES) representatives from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) - Air and Marine Operations; and ICE-HSI, with additional members from CBP's Office of Field Operations and the USBP. The JTF-E staff of just over 40 detailees provide key touch points and experience essential to building relationships and processes crucial to JTF-E's performance.

Current Status of JTF-East

JTF-E's task is to lead the coordination of DHS component enforcement efforts to plan and implement enhanced counter-network operations directed at disrupting TCOs across its Joint Operating Area (JOA). Secretary Kelly has directed the JTFs to target individuals and organizations whose criminal conduct undermines border security or the integrity of the immigration system, including alien smuggling or trafficking, drug trafficking, illegal entry and reentry, visa fraud, identity theft, unlawful possession or use of official documents, and acts of violence committed against persons or property at or near the border. These broad responsibilities make the JTFs distinct from other DHS task forces which have more specific functional roles.

Given the geographic size and complexity of our JOA, coordinating efforts among the hundreds of individual component operational entities with distinct missions, chains of command, responsibilities, and operating areas remains a challenge. JTF-E has focused its efforts on coordinating operations within our newly created Regional Integrating Groups (RIGs), beginning with the Eastern Caribbean RIG. JTF-E has also conducted initial planning meetings with the Central Caribbean and Gulf Coast RIGs.

The JTFs seek to harmonize DHS-wide operational priorities with the priorities of local front line component offices working at the tactical level. Through a repeatable, deliberate planning process that best aligns available resources against both regional and national department-level threats, JTF-E enhances enforcement at the field level.

For example, from November 10 to November 22, 2016, JTF-E, partnering with the Eastern Caribbean RIG, coordinated a push of resources to Puerto Rico in support of the Caribbean Border Interagency Group's (CBIG) operation "Caribbean Guard," a standing joint operation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that seeks to deter, disrupt, and dismantle TCOs.

JTF-E and regional DHS leadership received and validated resource requests from ICE, CBP, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and other partners, and developed a consolidated, interagency resource request in order to reallocate resources stationed outside of Puerto Rico to meet the joint operational requirements. These resources included additional CBP aircraft, DoD linguist support, and a USCG Maritime Safety and Security Team operating out of the Virgin Islands. Additionally, JTF-E leveraged refined intelligence support from Joint Inter-Agency Task Force-South (JIATF-S). The collaborative effort enabled by JTF-E yielded 13 arrests, 70 migrants intercepted ashore and 18 migrants interdicted at sea, the seizure of more than 500 kilograms of cocaine and 28 kilograms of marijuana, over \$77,000 in bulk cash, and two vessels. These actions also disrupted a nationally identified priority TCO. However, these numbers only partially capture the results of the integrated field operations.

Enhancing unity of effort in the pursuit of joint operational priorities is also a key goal of the JTF concept. JTF-E improves synchronization of cross-component capabilities that provide timely, actionable, fused “all-source” intelligence. Additionally, JTF-E intelligence efforts fill in the intelligence gaps between the maritime and land domains, while also leveraging cross-component personnel to cultivate a comprehensive perspective on emerging threats. Our most recent example includes JTF-E compiling and coordinating existing intelligence prepared by CBP, ICE, USCG, USSOUTHCOM, JIATF-S, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and others, in order to produce an all-inclusive threat overview, termed a Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operating Environment (JIPOE).

To thwart illegal maritime migration, the recently developed DHS Maritime Migration Contingency Plan identifies JTF-E as the Secretary’s single touch-point in the event of increased or mass maritime migration. JTF-E’s recently clarified roles will enable the Secretary to receive consolidated information and make validated requests for assistance to DoD, thus allowing for more rapid decision making and analysis. JTF-E recently exercised this role in a large scale multi-week USSOUTHCOM exercise and implemented it during the recent termination of the wet-foot/dry-foot policy affecting Cuban maritime migration.

Future JTF-East Engagements

In addition to our responsibility to coordinate within our department, JTF-E supports DHS’s aggressive efforts to counter TCOs at the earliest possible points in their supply chains via increased collaboration with our partners in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. JTF-E leads the Western Hemisphere Illicit Pathways Initiative (WHIP), promoting information sharing and collaboration with our partner nations to fight against TCOs in Central America and Special Interest Aliens transiting through Central America and the Caribbean. Through collaboration with DoD’s Combating Terrorism and Technical Support Office, JTF-E continues to explore technology solutions that enable the law enforcement missions of U.S. and international partners, while illuminating illicit pathways throughout the Western Hemisphere.

JTF-E is actively working with the Eastern Caribbean RIG, the Central Caribbean RIG and the Gulf Coast RIG to facilitate additional near term joint operations. These efforts will build upon the lessons learned from prior joint operations supporting regional DHS components, as well as enhanced collaboration across departmental and interagency lines. Enhanced intelligence sharing and informational analysis will also be incorporated as interagency law enforcement coordination is improved and future operational processes are further refined.

Conclusion

The JTFs are new and reside in a department with a short fourteen-year history that is responsible for the critical and complex task of securing our homeland and our borders. JTF-East, JTF-West, and JTF-Investigations operate collaboratively to unify operations on a daily basis to achieve the objective of the Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan. All three Task Forces are enhancing unity of effort, building regional cooperation, and are more clearly defining operational priorities. Continued progress on these fronts is instrumental to defeating TCOs and making America safer. TCOs are adaptive and resilient, investing a significant amount of resources and time in adjusting tactics to subvert our efforts. Combating TCOs will continue to be a priority for the JTFs, as they play a key role in our layered border security strategy. As JTFs mature, they will continue to strengthen cooperation within DHS and improve coordination both internationally and across the whole of government enterprise.