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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Raskin, Chairman Van Drew, Ranking Member Crockett, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

At the end of last September, I retired from federal service after 47 years of combined military and federal civilian service when the Administration eliminated the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces component of the Department of Justice. I first took the oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States when I entered the U.S. Naval Academy in the Carter Administration. Upon graduation from the Naval Academy, I was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, and deployed with infantry battalions to Beirut, Lebanon, and to the Western Pacific. While on active duty, I graduated from law school and served one tour as a Judge Advocate at Marine Corps Base, Quantico. During my tour as a Judge Advocate, in addition to serving as the Military Justice Officer, I served as a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia prosecuting federal cases in U.S. District Court.

As a career federal prosecutor for over 30 years, I served under five presidents in nine administrations, and ten attorneys general. It was a privilege to work with agents, analysts, paralegals and other staff throughout the Executive Branch to keep Americans safe from the threats posed by international criminal enterprises. It takes an effective and organized network of multi-disciplined professionals to expose and defeat these large, complex criminal organizations. Over more than five decades, each Administration, both Republican and Democrat, made improvements to our ability to focus and coordinate our efforts and resources against the threats posed by criminal network threats. The counter-drug mission is non-partisan, and Administrations from both parties were dedicated to increasing the depth and breadth of our Nation's capabilities.

Unfortunately, that is not the case today. Over the past 15 months, this Administration eliminated organizations and capabilities integral to the counter-drug mission, and it reduced or diverted mission-focused staffing and resources in this critically important space. This Administration replaced lawful investigations with extrajudicial military targeting of suspected drug traffickers, and pardoned at least one convicted drug trafficker who was also a corrupt foreign leader.

Rebuilding the capabilities that have been lost will take time, and that process should begin now. Until we do so, Americans are measurably less safe from these threats today than we were 15 months ago.

BACKGROUND

My comments based upon 33 years of experience as a federal prosecutor serving the counter-drug and counter transnational organized crime missions. After serving as a line prosecutor in two U.S. Attorney's offices and the Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section (NDDS), my career focused upon the coordination of multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction drug trafficking investigations and the development and sharing of intelligence among and between federal law enforcement agencies and other agencies within the Executive Branch.

I served as a prosecutor-coordinator and Deputy Chief at the multi-agency Special Operations Division (SOD) and, later, as the Deputy Chief for Litigation at NDDS leading the Bilateral Case Initiative that targeted elements of major South American and Mexican drug cartels. Before leaving NDDS, I was elevated to the Senior Executive Service (SES) serving as the Section's Principal Deputy Chief and Acting Chief. In leadership at NDDS, I oversaw litigating prosecutors conducting complex investigations of priority drug trafficking organizations, coordinating attorneys at SOD, attorneys who represented the Department in the Maritime Operational Threat Response process when drugs were interdicted on the high seas, attorneys who crafted policy documents and draft legislation, and attorneys working on classified programs to develop and share information and to properly support drug investigations.

Following my service at NDDS, I was assigned to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), where I served as the Assistant Director leading the Intelligence Division and as the Deputy Director of NDIC. From 1992 to 2012, NDIC was the nation's strategic drug intelligence center working with the Intelligence Community, regulatory agencies, and federal and state law enforcement to develop national and regional drug threat assessments. NDIC also provided tactical level intelligence support to drug investigations and task forces through its Document and Media Exploitation (DOMEX) Teams. During my time at NDIC, we expanded the DOMEX Program to provide dedicated teams at prosecutor-led, multi-agency strike forces under the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Tasks Forces (OCDETF) Program.

ORGANIZED CRIME DRUG ENFORCEMENT TASK FORCES (OCDETF)

My final 17 years of federal service were as the Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF). Established in 1982, OCDETF was the largest and most successful anti-crime task force in the nation. It served as the centerpiece of the Attorney General's strategy to reduce the supply of illicit and dangerous drugs, receiving bipartisan support for over four decades. OCDETF's mission was to dismantle and disrupt organized crime and drug trafficking networks by conducting complete criminal enterprise investigations that included focus on illicit financial activities. As a component head within the DOJ, the OCDETF Director reported directly to the Deputy Attorney General. Before it was eliminated by this Administration at the end of last year, OCDETF had national reach with thousands of prosecutor-led, case-specific, multi-agency task forces operating across the nation in every federal judicial district. It was the only task force of its kind, merging state and federal

investigators with prosecutors expert in targeting complex international conspiracies, and bringing the strengths of the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, Treasury, State, Labor, and Defense together under a single joint governance system.

In addition to the 5,000 case-specific task forces, and in partnership with U.S. Attorneys' offices, OCDETF built Strike Forces in nineteen locations that were brick-and-mortar organizations with assigned agency personnel and Assistant United States Attorneys working together on a daily basis. These Strike Forces targeted drug cartel leadership, violent gangs, human smuggling and human trafficking networks, and maritime drug smuggling organizations. The OCDETF Strike Forces in Tampa, Florida, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and in San Diego, California provided significant support in building effective cases against transnational criminal organizations involved in maritime smuggling.

At OCDETF, I led a team of senior prosecutors, agents, and other multi-disciplinary professionals in coordinating and resourcing nation-wide efforts targeting drug and organized crime networks. As OCDETF Director, I led the Attorney General's Consolidate Priority Organization Target (CPOT) process, a multi-department, multi-agency priority targeting process that designated those criminal organizations presenting the most significant drug and organized crime threats to our nation. Examples of CPOT-listed organizations include those led by Joaquin Guzman (aka El Chapo) and Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes (aka, El Mencho).

My OCDETF responsibilities also included oversight of our intelligence and information sharing efforts. The prosecutor-led governance of OCDETF served as the foundation for the establishment of the OCDETF Fusion Center (OFC), an operational intelligence center that brought together case information and intelligence from a wide range of agencies. With more than 670 million records at the time of OCDETF's termination, the Fusion Center's holdings represented the nation's largest repository of federal law enforcement and foreign investigative reporting, including financial data and Bank Secrecy Act information. The OFC was a unique capability that helped task forces in the field identify and illuminate criminal networks and better coordinate their efforts to dismantle them. In the year prior to OCDETF's dismantling, the Fusion Center produced over 40,000 investigative leads to the field. The future of this capability is uncertain, and it is threatened by the elimination of the foundational role of prosecutorial oversight of the sharing process – a process that was endorsed by all OCDETF partner agencies and Attorneys General of both parties over two decades.

In its 43-year history, OCDETF task forces conducted more than 37,200 investigations of criminal networks, and dismantled or significantly disrupted over 21,100 of them. OCDETF investigations led to the conviction of over 321,000 defendants, the seizure of \$13.4 billion in cash and property, and the seizure of over 870,000 weapons. It was the largest and most successful law enforcement task force in the nation. Despite this success, this Administration eliminated OCDETF and dismantled it in less than a year.

MARITIME INTERDICTIONS

My service in senior leadership of OCDETF was interrupted from April 2019 through March 2020, when I was called by the first Trump Administration to serve on detail to the Executive Office of the President, Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), as the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC). The USIC serves as the senior advisor to the Drug Czar on all drug interdiction matters, including maritime interdictions. During my time as USIC, I worked closely with all of our interdiction agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard.

In drafting of the Congressionally mandated National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (NICCP) and the various border interdiction strategies, the sharing the evidence developed from investigations of maritime interdictions was a key element. While seizing drugs is important, drug seizures are not the only tool in dismantling trafficking networks. Interdictions play an important role in supporting and developing additional evidence that is vital to feeding a comprehensive, nation-wide, counter-drug strategy.

The Administration's current posture on maritime drug smuggling fails to serve the mission to eliminate, defeat, and degrade maritime smuggling organizations. Preemptively sinking boats, killing the crews, and sending the evidence to the bottom of the sea is far less effective in the attack on drug cartels than is the seizure of evidence and the arrest of conspirators who invariably have important evidence to be exploited by the United States. Arrested mariners can be interviewed for further information, and their electronic devices can be searched and exploited. Put simply, ZERO additional knowledge can be gleaned if the crewmen are dead and physical evidence is lost to the ocean.

The Administration claims to have taken these kinetic actions on the high-seas to stem the flow of fentanyl to the United States. However, there is no evidence that any maritime interdictions have resulted in fentanyl seizures, or that the kinetic military strikes have stopped fentanyl shipments. Fentanyl arrives in the U.S. predominantly from Mexico, and almost exclusively across the U.S. – Mexico land border. Maritime drug shipments from South America are dominated by cocaine. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of drug boats departing the north coast of Venezuela are headed to cocaine markets in North Africa and Europe. There is absolutely no evidence indicating that sinking suspected drug boats have prevented more cocaine or fentanyl from reaching the United States than the traditional interdiction, arrest, and seizure process employed historically. What is clear is that by killing the mariners on the delivery boats, we lose any opportunity to exploit them, their boats, and their electronics for more information to tackle trafficking groups.

Most importantly, the extrajudicial, preemptive killing of mariners – even those suspected of smuggling drugs, is a violation of international and U.S. law.

PROSECUTORIAL COORDINATION AND OVERSIGHT OF THE MISSION

I believe that coordinating supporting efforts between the law enforcement, military, and intelligence communities is appropriate and necessary. The military and intelligence communities play an important, but supporting, role in the enforcement of criminal law. Military strikes are not an effective first solution to drug enforcement.

Federal law enforcement's mission must be coordinated and led by the Attorney General, the nation's chief law enforcement officer. After OCDETF was terminated, the Administration established the Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF) under the umbrella of DHS to focus effort upon immigration enforcement and, in part, to attempt to service the OCDETF mission. However, the requirements for conducting joint criminal enterprise investigations was removed and the mandate that prosecutors serve as coordinators and integrators was eliminated. Without prosecutorial oversight, information sharing between law enforcement, the Intelligence Community, and the military is unclear and the potential for mismanagement of the process is increased.

The Reagan Administration understood the importance of the Attorney General's role as the chief federal law enforcement officer, and it established OCDETF to overcome the stovepipes that exist between federal law enforcement and Executive Branch agencies. Combatting drug trafficking and transnational organized crime networks is a joint mission that requires the coordination of the efforts and authorities of dozens of law enforcement agencies. No single federal law enforcement agency has the authority to investigate the entire Criminal Code. However, federal prosecutors do have the authority to investigate and prosecute all federal criminal offenses. Accordingly, law enforcement agencies regularly share information with prosecutors that they do not necessarily share with each other. Thus, the importance of the role of the prosecutor as coordinator.

The OCDETF strategy, developed over four decades, empowered prosecutors, under the authority of the Attorney General, to coordinate the efforts of the dozens of federal law enforcement agencies involved in the organized crime, counter-drug mission. The OCDETF strategy was resourced through its stand-alone appropriations and was empowered to direct those resources across departments and agencies to address gaps and ensure a better-resourced, nationally-focused, mission.

President Reagan also authorized the inclusion of Department of Defense (DOD) capabilities as part of the OCDETF mission. For years, this construct was successfully employed by OCDETF through the multi-agency partnership at OCDETF's Panama Express (PANEX) Strike Force in Tampa, Florida.

UNDERMINING THE MISSION

Since Inauguration Day last year, the Administration has consistently undermined its stated goal of eliminating drug cartels. In addition to removing and diverting resources from the counter-drug mission, it is sending the message that convicted drug traffickers may be rewarded with a presidential pardon. The Administration now employs less-effective methods to defeat criminal organizations, and it is sending the message that even convicted drug traffickers will go free in the end.

The recent presidential pardon of Juan Orlando Hernandez, the former corrupt President of Honduras who was extradited to the United States and convicted of drug trafficking and weapons offenses exemplifies this contradiction. The pardon released Hernandez from prison and sent a morale-crushing message to the agents, prosecutors, analysts, paralegals, and other staff who tirelessly worked to gather the evidence and charge, extradite, and prosecute him.

CONCLUSION

Americans are less safe today than we were 15 months ago. Despite the Administration's rhetoric that the elimination of drug cartels is a national priority, its actions indicate that the opposite is true. They eliminate the largest, most successful joint task force in the nation. Simultaneously, the counter-drug mission is under-resourced and many of the long-standing law enforcement capabilities have been terminated. Military actions against suspected drug boats are unlawful and do not further the collection of evidence or assist in the exploitation and investigation of criminal networks that threaten the U.S. Of concern, drug prosecutions dropped significantly in 2025.

The Administration can change direction and reestablish the capabilities, staffing, resources, coordination, and oversight necessary to effectively combat drug cartels and transnational criminal networks. It can allow convicted drug traffickers to serve their full sentences. It can be more effective without violating the law. Until it does, Americans will be less safe.