

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. It is good to be back in the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Across the world, firearms are used to kill people in a range of settings—the armed conflict in Syria; turf battles between drug cartels in Mexico; the repression of public protest in Venezuela; a terrorist attack in a mosque in New Zealand.

Whatever our views on firearms policy, we should all be able to agree that putting more firearms in the wrong hands would make the world a more dangerous place. Some of the most urgent challenges facing this committee—addressing the root causes of migration from Central America; defeating ISIS; ending the scourge of human trafficking—are more difficult because dangerous people have firearms. Failure to address these challenges will not only pose risks to the safety of U.S. service members and citizens abroad, but will also impact our homeland in the form of increased migration, terrorism, and crime.

That's why I'm so concerned about the Trump administration's plan to change our firearms export licensing system. Under the status quo, if a U.S. company wants to export firearms, the company needs to apply for a license from the State Department, which will weigh the risks of that sale before granting a license. If the sale is over one million dollars, the appropriate congressional committees, including this committee, receive a notification and can review the sale before it moves forward.

The system is not perfect. For example, the State Department should have more resources to track where firearms are used, and to carry out due diligence on recipients before the sales are approved.

Sadly, the Trump administration is taking the opposite approach: proposing to move licensing authority from the State Department to the Commerce Department.

This is a bad idea for several reasons. I will describe just a few of them here.

First, the Commerce Department has different priorities than the State Department. If Commerce is making the final decision on firearm exports, I worry that they will do what is best for firearm manufacturers, even if it puts our national security at risk. When it comes to keeping firearms out of the hands of terrorists and drug cartels, we should err on the side of caution. That means keeping the State Department in charge.

Second, the Commerce Department is not required to notify Congress before a sale proceeds. That means this committee would lose the ability to object to sales that raise national security or human rights concerns. It also means that Congress would be in the dark about where guns are going. This would be very dangerous, as it would undermine Congress' ability to conduct effective oversight.

Third, taking on this new responsibility would require significant additional staff time and expertise at the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security, but the administration has not provided Congress with a plan for increasing this Bureau's capacity.

For these and other reasons, many experts and Members of Congress have expressed their deep concerns about this change, and I am glad that Senator Menendez has placed a hold on the rule.

To permanently block the administration's dangerous proposal from moving forward, I urge this Committee to consider a markup of my legislation, the Prevent Crime and Terrorism Act. It is a very simple bill that prevents the President from removing firearms, flame throwers, ammunition, and other items that are listed in Categories One, Two, and Three of the United States Munitions List. The bill does not prevent the export of firearms, and it does not create any new restrictions. It simply keeps the status quo in place, so we can focus our efforts on strengthening the current system.

Again, I thank the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony.