



TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

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Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

ON

“Boots at the Border: Examining the National Guard Deployment to the Southwest Border”

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## **Introduction**

Chairwoman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

As the Chief Patrol Agent of U.S. Border Patrol's Tucson Sector, I have seen the consequences of unsecured borders firsthand. I have seen the inhumane results of human smuggling and human trafficking. I have seen the flood of narcotics coming across our border. I have seen dangerous criminals attempting to infiltrate our communities. I know that an unsecured border threatens our country and our communities—and that operational control of the border is a matter of national security.

After a 45-year low in the number of apprehensions at the border, we have seen an alarming increase in apprehensions over the past year, and a shift in the demographics of those attempting illegal entry. In support of CBP's efforts to attain operational control of our borders, on April 4, 2018, President Trump directed the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to expand its existing support of CBP's border security mission.

DOD is supporting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with National Guard personnel. These National Guard personnel are operating in support of DHS pursuant to the authorization of the President. With this authorization, National Guard personnel volunteer and are then ordered to duty by their respective state governors and remain under the command and control of the state governors. I would like to thank the governors who have deployed National Guard personnel in support of this critical security mission.

## **CBP and the DOD**

At CBP, we are committed to building and strengthening partnerships across the government—it is one of Commissioner McAleenan's strategic priorities. As such, we are committed to working closely with our partners at DOD, united by the common purpose of keeping the United States and its people safe and secure.

This working relationship between CBP and DOD—and with the National Guard—is not new. DOD's U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Southern Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command already support our border security missions. National Guard personnel have provided support—such as counternarcotic operations and training mission sets—in areas including Tucson, Yuma, and West Texas for decades. These operations—which are *not* a part of the effort announced in April—have specific objectives, scope, and areas of focus, and will proceed as planned. While these efforts are valuable to our overarching mission, they are *not* of the capability or duration that CBP requires to achieve operational control of the border.

Previous Administrations also directed DOD to authorize the use of National Guard personnel to temporarily support CBP. National Guard personnel have assisted CBP by providing aviation, operational, logistical, and administrative support in *Operation Jump Start* from 2006 to 2008, and again in *Operation Phalanx* from 2010 to 2016.

Specifically, during *Operation Jump Start*, National Guard personnel provided interim surveillance and reconnaissance (air, ground, satellite imagery), linguist; air and ground transportation, engineering (fences and roads), and logistics (medical, temporary shelters, and food service) support to CBP while CBP recruited, trained, and deployed additional agents. This interim support increased situational awareness that led CBP to more than 173,000 arrests, the rescue of 100 people, and the seizure of more than 300,000 pounds of drugs. National Guard units built more than 37 miles of pedestrian fence, more than 85 miles of vehicle fence, and more than 18 miles of new all-weather roads. In addition, National Guard units repaired nearly 700 miles of roads. But most importantly, *Operation Jump Start* contributed to a significant decrease in illicit trafficking activity in many areas of the border.

### **Operation Guardian Support**

CBP is making significant efforts to attain operational control, including taking decisive action to meet our hiring goals and improve our recruitment and hiring processes. Border security is a complex mission, with infrastructure, personnel, and technology components. It is more than patrolling. For example, there are surveillance systems to monitor, fences to repair, and intelligence reports to analyze—to name just a few.

In *Operation Guardian Support*, National Guard personnel are providing temporary air support in the form of light and medium lift helicopters; infrastructure support, such as road maintenance and vegetation clearing; operational support, such as fleet maintenance and repair and law enforcement communications assistance; and surveillance support as surveillance camera operators.

To be clear, National Guard personnel do *not* conduct law enforcement activities and do *not* have direct contact with migrants. However, they are providing tremendous assistance to CBP. National Guard support accelerates improvements to border security while CBP hires, trains, and equips additional personnel. By taking on these important supporting tasks, such as infrastructure repair or surveillance assistance, these National Guard personnel enable Border Patrol Agents to focus on law enforcement activities at the border.

In addition to supporting Border Patrol personnel, National Guard personnel also support CBP's Office of Field Operations personnel by providing surveillance and operational support at ports of entry, including support in cargo inspections and non-intrusive inspections. Simply put, having National Guard personnel assist CBP at our ports of entry expands our labor pool and, as a result, increases our ability to detect, deter, and respond to threats of all kinds, including drugs, weapons, illegal aliens, and possible terrorists, while helping CBP facilitate legitimate trade and travel.

National Guard personnel also support Air and Marine Operations, the CBP component that conducts tactical aviation and maritime operations to strengthen overall security along the southwest border. National Guard support helps augment these operations by providing more aircraft and performing operational support functions. This puts more pilots, aircrew, and aircraft into the field to support our security mission.

Additional aerial surveillance resources also increase the security of our front-line agents and officers. As Laredo Sector Assistant Chief Patrol Agent Gabriel Acosta noted, “Agents are often forced to work alone and in remote areas. The aerial surveillance [the National Guard] provide[s] allows us to have more awareness along the border and keep the agents on the ground safe.”

## **Making a Difference**

Since *Operation Guardian Support* began in April, CBP has carried out thousands of apprehensions, seized thousands of pounds of dangerous drugs, and performed multiple rescues.<sup>1</sup>

In May, Border Patrol Agents in the San Diego Sector arrested a 31-year-old woman on Interstate 15 for transporting 51 bundles of methamphetamine inside her vehicle. After the woman’s vehicle was seized and transported to a secure facility, the vehicle underwent a routine post-seizure inventory procedure. Under the oversight of Border Patrol, a National Guardsman performing paralegal administrative duties—who had recently come on duty as part of *Operation Guardian Support*—noticed an anomaly in a door panel that led to the discovery of 11 additional bundles of methamphetamine deeply concealed in the vehicle. The bundles added more than 13 pounds of methamphetamine to the seizure, which totaled more than 68 pounds with an estimated street value of \$206,000.

In June, Border Patrol Agents from the McAllen Station in Texas received information from Mexico’s emergency call center regarding a lost Mexican national in distress. Border Patrol Agents operating an aerostat camera located the lost migrant, who was suffering from dehydration. The Border Patrol Agents provided coordinates to a nearby Texas Army National Guard helicopter pilot who was working under *Operation Guardian Support*. Minutes later, the National Guard pilot located the subject and quickly guided Border Patrol Agents to the location. There, a Border Patrol Agent who is a certified Emergency Medical Technician treated the lost Mexican national for dehydration.

In my home sector of Tucson, National Guard personnel attached to the Ajo Border Patrol Station provided vehicle mechanics to help complete an inspection of the station’s fleet. During the inspection, the National Guard mechanics identified and repaired more than 80 vehicles with suspension issues that could have led to significant safety hazards for Border Patrol Agents patrolling in isolated areas. As the Ajo Station Fleet Garage Supervisor Rich Barton said, “Logistically speaking, an issue like this could have caused a major nightmare for our garage staff. But with National Guard members helping, it did not affect our fleet readiness. National Guard personnel helped us complete the inspections and repairs within two days. Without the Guard, it would have taken weeks to resolve the problems.”

While there are many other examples of the outstanding work enabled by the National Guard’s assistance, I have one more to share from Eagle Pass, Texas, where a National Guardsman was instrumental in the safe return of a three-year-old child after a parental abduction. Shortly before

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<sup>1</sup> Effective July 4, 2018, approximately: 9,546 apprehensions; 2,915 turn-backs; 11,531 lbs. marijuana seized; 17 lbs. cocaine seized; .05 oz. heroin seized; 7 lbs. methamphetamine seized; 48 Conveyances Seized; \$288 USD Currency Seized.

8:00 a.m. on May 31, Border Patrol Agents at the Eagle Pass Station received an Amber Alert issued by the state of Coahuila, Mexico. The Amber Alert noted that the three-year-old boy had been taken by his non-custodial father and was possibly in danger. Approximately two hours later, a member of the Texas National Guard was monitoring transmissions from camera towers near the Eagle Pass port of entry when he spotted a man and a child who had crossed the Rio Grande River. Border Patrol Agents took both into custody and, after processing, determined that the boy was the child identified in the Amber Alert. The boy was turned over to the Mexican Consulate and reunited with his mother.

As each of these examples illustrate, CBP and National Guard personnel continue to work together to align resources that best fit the needs of each sector, further enhancing the security and safety of our nation.

### **Conclusion**

Border security is national security—there is no difference. CBP’s decades-long partnership with the DOD and the National Guard allows us to execute our mission to protect the United States from the ever-evolving threats we face, including drugs, weapons, illegal aliens, and terrorists. As CBP continues to surge hire more frontline CBP agents and officers, acquire new technology, and develop the border wall system, the National Guard is helping us close security gaps and improve our national security. Operation Guardian Support makes our communities safer, and our country more secure—and I see the impact of these efforts every day.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.