

STATEMENT OF

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HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY,
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I welcome the opportunity to discuss our interdiction program and the study being conducted by the Institute for Defense Analyses, entitled “An Empirical Examination of Counterdrug Interdiction Program Effectiveness.”

As U. S. Interdiction Coordinator, my responsibility is oversight and coordination of interdiction efforts in the Western Hemisphere. From that perspective, I am keenly interested in any analysis of the effectiveness of interdiction programs and will limit my comments to this area. I believe that our counterdrug program must be a balanced approach, including strong components of prevention, treatment, law enforcement, interdiction, and international programs. The loss of appropriate emphasis on any one of these components would seriously impact our overall effort. Our National Drug Control Strategy represents this kind of a comprehensive approach and interdiction is a single, vital component of the whole.

We have come a long way from the days of the mid-eighties when drug traffickers delivered their cargo directly to the beaches of Florida, and escalating drug-related violence forced the problem into national prominence. But there is still much ground to cover. I would like to briefly talk about how our approach to protecting our borders from the scourge of illegal drugs has evolved over the years and how it must continue to evolve to counter the ever-changing threat.

Interdiction successes have forced drug traffickers to change their routes and become more sophisticated in their operations, increasing both their transportation costs and their risk of apprehension. Traffickers once were able to fly their drugs directly from Colombia to small islands in the Bahamas and then on to air drop sites in Florida and our coastal waters. In response we developed interdiction capabilities in the Caribbean. Through the combined efforts of the Coast Guard, Customs, DEA, DOD, and cooperating governments in the Caribbean, we have forced narco-trafficking aircraft away from the direct Central Caribbean approach to the United States. As a result of this success we have seen a shift in trafficker patterns. The new challenge comes from traffickers who approach the United States indirectly through the Eastern Caribbean, the Mexico/Central America corridor, and the Eastern Pacific; or by hiding their drugs in commercial cargo shipments. Most recently we have even seen the desperate measure of an attempted non-stop drug flight from Colombia to Canada. Through the combined and coordinated efforts of U. S. and Canadian agencies that flight ended in the seizure of 510 kilos of cocaine, one aircraft, three vehicles, two boats, and the arrest of six drug smugglers.

We must maintain pressure on drug shipping routes to reduce the supply of drugs in our country and signal our political will. In 1994 we began a shift of emphasis among interdiction priorities from the transit zone to the source countries where drugs are produced. At this moment there are over 300 U. S. military and law enforcement personnel deployed to South America participating in Operation Laser Strike, supporting our allies with counterdrug training, intelligence collection, and sophisticated detection and monitoring equipment. The benefits of this presence can be seen in the destruction of

cocaine labs, the seizure of drugs ready for smuggling, as well as the chemicals used to produce them, the eradication of coca crops, and in the arrest of drug cartel leaders.

Our source country strategy is starting to work but it is not a panacea. We must and will maintain pressure on established transit routes and on new routes as they emerge. To increase the cost-effectiveness of transit zone interdiction we have increased our reliance on intelligence cueing. This allows us to conserve resources by focusing on known or probable smuggling events. The interdiction process is much more efficient when we can focus on a specific flight, a specific fishing boat, or a specific shipping container. As we apply pressure on established smuggling routes new routes will emerge and smugglers will attempt to reopen old routes. Here again, effective intelligence will help us to stay one step ahead of the challenge.

I must stress again that just as our source nation strategy is not the complete answer to interdiction, interdiction is not the complete answer to drug control. Our National Drug Control Strategy provides a multi-pronged, balanced approach that will reduce the demand for and supply of illegal drugs. When there is no longer a demand for illegal drugs it will no longer be profitable to smuggle them across our borders. The reduction of demand is a long term process that must be given time to become effective. While this process unfolds we must continue to shield our borders and send an unmistakable signal of our determination through a robust and flexible program of interdiction.

As the Interdiction Coordinator I am made cautiously optimistic by the preliminary findings of the IDA report which show that historically, specific major interdiction events have been closely correlated to shifts in domestic drug prices, diminished drug purity, and decreased drug use in the United States. At the same time, however, I feel we must subject IDA's findings to the same critical review that any other scientific report would receive prior to acceptance. My staff reviewed the first draft of this study in April. They identified some problem areas, and they communicated those to the contractor. Others have made similar comments, and, although I haven't seen them, I am told that IDA has produced additional drafts that have refined the research. I consider this to be a work in progress, and I look forward to seeing the results of the final product.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this distinguished committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.