



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
Washington, D.C. 20503

**“Western Hemisphere Drug Interdiction: Why
Maintaining Coast Guard Operations Matter”**

Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives

Tuesday, June 4, 2019
10:00 a.m.
2167 Rayburn House Office Building

Statement of
Thomas W. Padden
United States Interdiction Coordinator
Office of National Drug Control Policy

Introduction

Chairman Maloney, Ranking Member Gibbs, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the U.S. Coast Guard's significant role in drug interdiction in the Western Hemisphere. As the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) at the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), it is my privilege and honor to work with our interdiction and law enforcement communities to reduce the availability of dangerous and illicit drugs in the United States under the leadership of our U.S. Drug Czar, James W. Carroll. Our U.S. Coast Guard plays a primary role in the interdiction of drugs shipped by maritime means, and it is an integral part of the layered interdiction strategy aimed at intercepting drug shipments outside our borders, at our borders, and inside our borders.

The U.S. Interdiction Coordinator

Protecting our citizens from the threat of dangerous and addictive drugs is a mission to which I have dedicated much of my professional career. Seven weeks ago, I was privileged to begin serving as the USIC. In this role, I coordinate the drug interdiction mission as a part of the *National Drug Control Strategy (Strategy)*, and I bring experience from 37 years of combined military and civilian Federal service. As a career prosecutor for the past 25 years, my civilian service has been primarily focused upon the counter-narcotics and organized crime mission.

The USIC's responsibilities, established by 21 U.S.C. 1710(a), include: coordinating the interdiction activities of the National Drug Control Program (NDCP) agencies; developing the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (Plan) in coordination with The Interdiction Committee (TIC); assessing the sufficiency of assets committed to the drug interdiction mission

by the NDCP agencies; and advising the ONDCP Director on the relevant agencies' efforts to implement the Plan.

As I begin my tenure asUSIC, I understand the critical importance of working with the Interagency, including the U.S. Coast Guard and TIC, to coordinate the evolution of our interdiction planning and operations. We must ensure that we are fully reducing the availability of illicit drugs of all types and from all sources. The U.S. Coast Guard's maritime interdiction mission remains a principal means of intercepting drug shipments within the Western Hemisphere and is an integral part of the overall drug interdiction effort.

The *National Drug Control Strategy*

The Trump Administration's *National Drug Control Strategy* that ONDCP issued in January 2019 focuses on saving American lives and protecting our citizens from the threat of dangerous, addictive, and potentially lethal illicit drugs by reducing both the demand for, and availability of, these substances. The *Strategy* presents clear strategic guidance to our 16 NDCP agencies by focusing on President Trump's drug control priorities. These priorities are: (1) preventing drug abuse before it starts; (2) providing treatment that leads to long-term recovery for people with substance use disorders; and (3) reducing the availability of dangerous and addictive illicit drugs in the United States.

Under the *Strategy*, reducing the availability of illicit drugs plays an important role in supporting the prevention of drug abuse and the treatment of drug addiction. Reducing the availability of illicit drugs enables public health efforts to take hold and thereby increase the potential for successful prevention and treatment efforts. If it is easier to get drugs than it is to get treatment, our public health efforts become additionally challenged. Accordingly, our

availability reduction efforts directly facilitate our prevention and treatment programs. The *Strategy* emphasizes that drug availability is reduced through eradication, interdiction, and the dismantlement of the criminal networks that traffic these illicit drugs.

The *Strategy* is structured to maximize our reduction efforts across the spectrum of drug threats. It maintains a continued focus on drug interdiction at our borders where drug cartels attempt to smuggle marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine, opioids, and other drugs every day. Additionally, strategic emphasis is maintained on U.S. Coast Guard and partner nations' efforts to interdict multi-ton quantities of cocaine and other illicit drugs and precursor chemicals used to produce illicit drugs, as well as drug profits being returned to the drug producing countries, that are shipped via maritime and other means from South America and intended for the illicit drug market in the United States.

The National Interdiction Command and Control Plan

In accordance with 21 U.S.C. 1710, as amended, a responsibility of the USIC is to develop a plan for coordinating the interdiction activities of the NDCP agencies, the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (Plan). The existing Plan emphasizes that our interdiction lines of effort span three broad geographic zones: (1) Beyond the Border; (2) the Border Region; and (3) Within the Border. The Plan's emphasis on information sharing between agencies recognizes the importance of fused intelligence to guide our interdiction efforts, and its emphasis on dismantling and disrupting drug trafficking organizations. The Plan also recognizes the importance of coordinated, multi-agency investigations and prosecutions. Given the changes in the drug interdiction environment since we last issued the Plan in 2015, we believe it is essential to update this Plan, which we are developing.

The U.S. Coast Guard's maritime interdiction mission is a primary element of the Plan's Beyond the Border line of effort. Within the Western Hemisphere, U.S. Coast Guard maritime interdictions in the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and eastern Pacific Ocean are responsible for keeping multi-ton quantities of cocaine and other illicit drugs from reaching our borders. In Fiscal Year 2017, the Coast Guard removed over 223 metric tons of cocaine, and apprehended over 700 smugglers and referred them to prosecution. As the President has also stated, we need to continue working with our partners in the region to ensure they are increasing their interdiction efforts. The United States is not the only one affected by the surge of illicit drugs. It also affects transit countries as well. The United States and partner nations must work hand-in-hand to meet the magnitude of the threat we face.

It is important to note that maritime interdictions significantly reduce the volume of drugs that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers must interdict at our borders and ports of entry. Furthermore, these maritime interdictions reduce the volume of drugs that other Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies must seize inside the United States.

Consistent with the *Strategy's* approach to drug availability reduction, the existing Plan includes emphasis on dismantlement and disruption of drug trafficking criminal networks. U.S. Coast Guard maritime interdictions provide actionable investigative information and evidence to support Federal and state conspiracy prosecutions that more fully disrupt and dismantle these transnational drug trafficking organizations. The Plan's Within the Border line of effort emphasizes the importance of participation in the multi-agency task forces charged with attacking criminal organizations. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard and its Coast Guard Investigative Service are active and significant partners in ONDCP's High Intensity Drug

Trafficking Areas program and the Department of Justice's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces program and its Maritime Strike Forces.

As we update the Plan, we must ensure that it includes and emphasizes interdiction of illicit opioids and other drugs at postal and express consignment ports of entry and at domestic facilities, and that it provides guidance to NDCP agencies to adapt our interdiction efforts to address the evolving methods that transnational criminal organizations use. These organizations use the dark web, cryptocurrency, and other technologically advanced means to traffic drugs and hide illicit profits. Given this increasing level of technological sophistication, it is important we include our domestic interdiction agencies as part of our Within the Border line of effort in order to attack the availability of illicit drugs at every point along the smuggling routes.

Conclusion

The maritime drug threat within the Western Hemisphere continues to evolve, as drug trafficking organizations travel farther out to sea to avoid U.S. Coast Guard and partner nation interdictions. Transnational criminal organizations employ semi-submersible and low profile vessels, as well as encrypted communications technologies, to avoid detection. Additionally, the increased use of containerized shipping to smuggle large quantities of drugs must also be addressed in our planning.

Shared information and intelligence between our law enforcement, defense, and intelligence agencies will continue to drive effective interdiction and the dismantlement of criminal organizations. Our interdiction planning must be guided by the need to continually advance our ability to effectively share relevant information to better coordinate multi-agency efforts.

In my role as USIC, it is an honor to support the dedicated and courageous men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard who expertly execute the maritime interdiction mission in support of the *Strategy*. U.S. Coast Guard efforts prevent multi-ton quantities of illicit drugs from reaching the U.S. user population, and produce the evidence necessary to dismantle and disrupt criminal organizations that threaten our citizens. I appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to the importance of the U.S. Coast Guard's drug interdiction mission.