

Statement by Rafael F. Leonardo
Performing the Duties of the
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense
and Hemispheric Affairs Office of the Secretary of Defense

and

Robert G. Salesses
Senior Advisor to the Deputy Secretary of Defense

Before the 119th Congress
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
April 1, 2025

Introduction

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today about how the Department of Defense (DoD) defends America's homeland and America's interests in the Western Hemisphere. We are honored to be here in the company of General Gregory Guillot, the Commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), and Admiral Alvin Holsey, the Commander of U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM).

Mr. Leonardo is currently performing the duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs. In this capacity, he is the principal civilian policy advisor to the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy on a range of matters, including homeland defense, defense support of civil authorities, defense continuity, mission assurance, the Western Hemisphere, and the Arctic.

Mr. Salesses is currently serving as a senior advisor to the Deputy Secretary of Defense. However, having performed the duties of the Secretary of Defense from January 20, 2025, through January 24, 2025, and the duties of the Deputy Secretary of Defense from January 24, 2025, through March 24, 2025, he has been at the forefront of the new Trump Administration's policies, including those regarding the integral role of the U.S. Armed Forces in protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the United States.

Today, after summarizing the array of national security challenges to the homeland, we will highlight how we are putting America's homeland first. In Secretary Hegseth's March 2025 *Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance* this effort is front and center, as we work to defend the homeland, including by sealing our borders, repelling forms of invasion including illegal immigration and narcotics trafficking, advancing America's interests in the Western Hemisphere, and defending the American people.

Threats to the U.S. Homeland

President Trump and Secretary Hegseth are clear that DoD will defend the U.S. homeland with strong actions, not just words. President Trump has said that "as Commander in Chief, [he has]

no higher responsibility than to defend our country from threats and invasions.”¹ The President’s charge to DoD is clear: Achieve Peace through Strength. By displaying strength within and at our Nation’s borders and rebuilding our military as the strongest and most lethal fighting force the world has ever known, the President is reestablishing deterrence.

The security environment has grown increasingly complex, placing the American people and our way of life at greater risk. Our core mission at the DoD is to defend the homeland and deter, and if necessary, defeat our adversaries. However, our competitors are actively developing new methods to challenge our military strength and its ability to project power globally.

The range and variety of threats facing the United States today is considerable. The threat from drug cartels, criminal gangs, and unauthorized migration at the southern border is a national security threat and poses a risk to our sovereignty. Transnational criminal organizations, including recently designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) cartels, traffic humans and drugs, including fentanyl, resulting in tens of thousands of American deaths annually. The fentanyl economy is further exacerbated by precursors predominantly originating from China, leaving a trail of violence in its wake. As cartels strengthen their grip on both licit and illicit markets, they become an increasingly significant threat to Americans.

Looking further abroad, our adversaries, primarily among them China, Iran, and North Korea, are increasingly employing asymmetric tactics to undermine our warfighting advantages. Malign cyber activity poses a significant threat, targeting critical infrastructure to disrupt our military response and sow chaos in American society. The Department of Defense is working diligently with interagency, state, and local partners to harden our defenses, enhance the resilience of our critical infrastructure, and ensure continuity of operations. We recognize that these threats are not static and will continue to evolve beyond the cyber domain, potentially including asymmetric kinetic attacks. We will not allow that strategy to succeed.

The core task of the Department of Defense is to stand ready to fight and win our nation’s wars; and in demonstrating that ability, deny the perception that any attack on the U.S. homeland will succeed in advancing competitor objectives. We should expect that this threat will only become

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/01/the-inaugural-address/>

more acute, to include expanding from a cyber focus to other asymmetric or even direct kinetic attacks. As the threat to American infrastructure grows, we must in turn increase our focus on protecting all facets of the Homeland.

We must acknowledge the range of attack options available to our competitors and the expanding range of systems they can use to advance their aims through force. As stated in Executive Order 14186, “The Iron Dome for America,” now known as Golden Dome, “the threat of attack by ballistic, hypersonic, cruise missiles, and other advanced aerial attacks - remains the most catastrophic threat facing the United States.” Rapidly advancing missile systems, primarily from China and Russia, increase kinetic strike options against the U.S. homeland while reducing the time U.S. decision makers will have to assess and respond to potential attacks. The threat posed by small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) continues to grow and proliferate, increasing the threat to both the safety and security of our assets, operations, and personnel in the U.S. homeland. In addition, advanced UAS pose novel risks to extant and future U.S. military advantage by enabling new opportunities for competitors to conduct surveillance and collect data against DoD targets. In sum, through innovations in new systems, our competitors are acquiring new options to target DoD’s ability to respond to aggression in forward theaters by delaying, degrading, or disrupting our command and control and mobilization in the U.S. homeland. In aggregate, by collecting against, targeting, and in crisis attacking these targets, our competitors seek to gain operational advantages in regional campaigns that matter most to them. To counter these options, we will employ a denial-focused approach integrating our defense of the homeland with our in-theater defense operations.

Defense of the Homeland

Missile Defense/Golden Dome: President Trump’s Executive Order 14186, “The Iron Dome for America,” states that “[t]o further the goal of peace through strength, it is the policy of the United States that: (a) the United States will provide for the common defense of its citizens and the Nation by deploying and maintaining a next-generation missile defense shield; (b) the United States will deter – and defend its citizens and critical infrastructure against – any foreign aerial attack on the Homeland; and (c) the United States will guarantee its secure second-strike capability.” We are advancing defenses against a range of conventional and nuclear missile

threats that place the burden of escalation on our adversaries; while also mitigating damage, providing commanders with credible response options, and affording leadership more decision time - should deterrence fail. The Department is actively reviewing options for a next-generation missile defense shield – Golden Dome – to protect the U.S. homeland. DoD is on track to provide the President with options for his consideration as directed by Executive Order 14186. Characterizing threats and increasing decision time and space for U.S. leadership begins with domain awareness – which includes prioritizing sensors for aerospace, space-based, and maritime domains. Domain awareness will be the backbone of any architecture or concept for the defense of the homeland. We cannot defeat what we cannot see. The Department will also focus on cutting edge kinetic and non-kinetic integrated air and missile defense capabilities that create dilemmas for our adversaries. We also must work to create favorable cost exchanges. DoD will not be able to fight for long if we are using exquisite, expensive weapons to destroy inexpensive adversary systems. We will continue to build upon existing capabilities to provide a comprehensive, layered homeland defense. Ultimately, missile defenses for the U.S. homeland must challenge the perceptions and goals of our adversaries, and thereby providing greater security for the American people.

Ensuring Mission Resilience: Adversaries should know that DoD is redoubling its efforts on mission resilience - the ability to withstand, fight through, and recover quickly from disruption to achieve national strategic and operational objectives. This includes identifying and strengthening the people, processes, capabilities, installations, infrastructure, and networks that underpin our ability to fight and win our nations wars.

A critical aspect of deterrence is ensuring our adversaries know that we are prepared to engage at the time and place of our choosing, and that their plans to undermine our warfighting capability through traditional and non-traditional attacks will fail. Under the leadership of Secretary Hegseth, the entire Department is engaged on these efforts, refocusing to a warfighter-centric approach.

In support of President Trump’s Executive Order 14239, Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness, the Department is working with the National Security Council and our interagency partners to create a new National Resilience Strategy, which will update the complex

and layered policies of national critical infrastructure, national continuity, preparedness, and response. DoD has an important role in each, and we will build on our previous successes to advance America's resilience. We would like to highlight some of the work the DoD team is leading below:

DoD's Mission Resilience to an attack: Defense continuity emphasizes the uninterrupted performance of our most essential missions to defend the nation and support our national strategy objectives. We are increasingly postured and prepared to fight through any disruption and ensure effective command and control of U.S. capabilities, providing the President and the Secretary of Defense assured response capabilities.

We will continue to support a formal, DoD-wide Mission Assurance Process to identify, assess, risk manage, and monitor potential single points of failure to our critical warfighting capabilities. We will add redundancy where possible and ensure that DoD can withstand potential disruption through a constantly evolving array of risks and hazards. As required by Section 1517 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, we are pleased to report that DoD has established a pilot program, integrating cross-government planning, to assure critical infrastructure support for military contingencies. Our second tabletop exercise took place last week and early indications reflect that we are making significant progress towards this end.

Just last week, Secretary Hegseth and Mr. Leonardo were in Guam to see first-hand where the Department, and indeed the interagency, is focusing risk-mitigation efforts, including DoD's response Typhoon Mawar which hit Guam in 2023 and DoD's buildup on Guam to bolster military capabilities in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR). The Secretary also engaged with the Governors of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI), bolstering the strong and mutually supportive relationships between DoD and these strategically located U.S. territories. The Secretary reiterated that Guam and CNMI are critical to U.S. deterrence strategy in USINDOPACOM AOR and will be defended as parts of the U.S. homeland.

Non-DoD Owned Defense Critical Infrastructure (DCI) Resilience: As noted, adversaries, especially China, are prepositioned to disrupt DoD operations by targeting not only DoD-assets,

but also the civilian infrastructure that we rely upon to operate—including energy, water, communications, and transportation infrastructure that we need to succeed. We will continue to leverage and mature our data-driven approach to mitigating these threats. DoD’s Critical Infrastructure Defense Analysis Center (CIDAC) provides the Department with a deep understanding of our dependence on and exposure to risk related to civilian infrastructure. The work of this center is revolutionary and is now driving many of our risk management efforts.

Collaborating with Federal, State, Local, Tribal and Territorial (FSLTT) stakeholders require DoD to innovate new processes and develop information sharing guidance to strengthen domestic resilience without revealing sensitive operational priorities to our adversaries. New processes have included inter- and intra-DoD working groups to prioritize and drive action, including incorporating civilian infrastructure risks into existing DoD risk management structures. We are working with DHS and other Sector Risk Management Agencies to leverage their regional relationships to assess and assist key critical infrastructure owners and operators in mitigating vulnerabilities that put both the local communities and DoD operations at risk. We are also engaging Intelligence Community partners to better inform collection and production requirements to prioritize counterintelligence for DCI sites.

We are making tremendous progress in building our understanding of our interdependencies, and the inherent risks to our missions as a result. However, delivering risk management will also require directly enabling infrastructure owners and operators to mitigate risk, and leveraging the wide array of tools available. We intend to increase engagement with state and local counterparts in key areas, informed by the analysis and threat information that we have at the Federal level. We will pursue this both directly and in collaboration with interagency partners with expertise in these areas. We are working to leverage our tools, approaches, and authorities, to be responsive to the highest-order risk we can identify. We will continue to partner with interagency partners at the FSLTT-level to steer available funding and investments to infrastructure resilience requirements of greatest need.

DoD is also broadening existing public-private partnerships to more closely align DoD priorities with our Defense Industrial Base (DIB) industry partners. Areas for partnership include threat information sharing, cyber security, supply chain, workforce and more. We will work within the

administration to take a fresh look at how we manage risk to all sectors, including the DIB, and to consider how we might increase cross-sector collaboration to address shared concerns.

Counter Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (sUAS): Acknowledging the increasing use of UAS for commercial and other legitimate uses, unauthorized sUAS operations within the homeland present unique challenges, including, detection, tracking, and mitigation. This is particularly true for DoD. The Department needs to balance defense of critical facilities and assets with ensuring the safety of the communities and commercial airspace that surround them. Over the past few years, DoD’s understanding of the threat and the unique mitigation dynamics in the homeland have greatly improved.

To help meet this threat, the Department will continue to conduct counter-small UAS operations, improve incident response mechanisms, and deliver new technological solutions to this rapidly evolving threat. DoD is implementing process changes and improving training to make full use of our current authorities. USNORTHCOM and USINDOPACOM have recently been given new responsibilities as C-UAS operations synchronizers in the homeland to improve the effectiveness and speed of DoD’s response when incursions do occur. Pursuant to section 925 of the FY2025 NDAA, we are also conducting a comprehensive review of C-UAS related guidance, and where necessary, we are consolidating and updating DoD policy. The Department is also working to acquire not only hardware that addresses the threat posed by the UAS we see today, but also capabilities that anticipate how the threat will evolve over time. Once fielded, this hardware and software will give commanders better tools to characterize their environment coupled with the ability to effectively mitigate these threats – with low-risk of collateral effects. This effort is in its relatively early stages, but it is a critical part of our approach to address this threat. Finally, we are seeking modest yet important refinements to DoD’s C-UAS authorities under section 130i. These refinements will allow the Department to 1) protect additional locations and missions; 2) add greater stability for long-term planning and resource allocation; and 3) facilitate improved understanding and cooperation among the U.S. interagency. Ultimately, we need to address the threat to DoD forces based on the objectives of our adversaries, and with the “end user” or U.S. security force personnel in mind.

NORAD Modernization: While defense of the United States is DoD’s priority mission, we cannot mount this defense alone. Our approach to homeland defense involves ally and partner contributions, within key theaters of operation and within North America. As the world’s only bi-national command, the North American Aerospace Defense Command or “NORAD” is a critical operational partnership for defense of the U.S. and Canadian homelands. We remain committed to modernizing our joint continental defense architecture with Canada. Canada recently committed to acquire Over the Horizon Radar, and we are considering matching this commitment by pursuing complementary U.S. capabilities. Additionally, we hope to explore opportunities to partner with Canada on domain awareness in the space and maritime domains.

Homeland Defense in the Arctic: Our primary defense interest in the Arctic is to secure the U.S. homeland. The region has transformed into an arena for strategic competition, with adversaries demonstrating increased appetite to challenge the United States in ways that could hold our homeland at risk. China—despite being 900 miles from the Arctic Circle—has made increasing attempts to bolster its influence in the region. While limited in its ability to project military power in the Arctic, China seeks to bolster its operational expertise and has invested in scientific research with likely civil-military applications. Russia has enabled China’s access, providing a pathway for China to increase its Arctic presence. Access to the Russian Arctic has come with an uptick in China-Russia cooperation, including four combined air or maritime operations in the Arctic over the last two years. Many of these combined operations have taken place in the vicinity of Alaska.

Alaska is the state that makes the United States an Arctic nation, creating a nexus between the security of the Arctic region and homeland defense. As a northern approach to the continental United States, Alaska is vital for missile warning and air operations in defense of the U.S. homeland. The Department’s footprint in Alaska includes bases and radar sites that bolster our Arctic domain awareness; the world's largest concentration of fifth-generation fighter aircraft; and the Army’s 11th Airborne “Arctic Angels.” The strategic location of and capabilities resident in our 49th state also make it important for power projection into the Indo-Pacific, as the most direct route for flowing troops through the U.S. homeland to the first island chain.

In the Arctic, we train and exercise both independently and with our allies and partners. We do so at different scales—from executing unit tactics, to large-scale combined activities. Doing so improves the Joint Force’s Arctic readiness and enhances deterrence by demonstrating combat-credible capabilities. Effectively messaging and coordinating these activities across combatant commands signals our resolve and commitment to achieving peace through strength.

Our aim remains to preserve the Arctic as a stable and secure region where the U.S. homeland is defended, and our national security interests are safeguarded. The Department’s enduring interests in the Arctic make this region integral to Secretary Hegseth’s mission to reestablish deterrence and defend our homeland.

Defense Support of Civil Authorities: Defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) is not a homeland defense mission or activity, it is a process. DoD provides support to Federal partners, in response to requests for assistance through DSCA. Civil authorities may seek assistance for domestic emergencies, law enforcement activities, and homeland security missions. DSCA activities may support the security, safety, health, and welfare of the American people against the threats and consequences of man-made and natural disasters; terrorism; violent extremist organizations; cyber incidents; public health emergencies (including epidemics and pandemics); chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents; and the direct physical effects of a nation-state attack. In 2024, DoD provided support in response to more than 100 requests for assistance.

Border Activities: The President has been clear that we must stop the invasion of criminal illegal aliens and transnational criminal organizations – to do so he has directed that the Department of Defense with the Department of Homeland Security gain full operation control of our border. The threat from drug cartels, criminal gangs, and unauthorized migration at the southern border is a national security threat and a challenge to our territorial sovereignty. On January 20, 2025, the President declared a national emergency at the southern border of the United States (i.e., Proclamation 10886), proclaiming that “America’s sovereignty is under attack. Our southern border is overrun by cartels, criminal gangs, known terrorists, human traffickers, smugglers, unvetted military-age males from foreign adversaries, and illicit narcotics that harm” our nation and its citizens. In addition to Proclamation 10886, President Trump

issued several executive actions on January 20, 2025, to address this “grave threat to our Nation”:

- Executive Order 14165, "Securing our Borders"
- Executive Order 14167, "Clarifying the Military’s Role in Protecting the Territorial Integrity of the United States"
- Proclamation 10886, "Declaring a National Emergency at the Southern Border of the United States"
- Proclamation 10888, "Guaranteeing the States Protection Against Invasion"

The Department immediately worked with DHS to better secure the southern border. This included the Department deploying additional military personnel and resources in support of Customs and Border Protection (CBP), emplacing additional temporary physical barriers, and developing options to repel the invasion and seal the border.

The Department immediately established a Border Security Executive Order Task Force (TF) with leadership from across the Department to include USNORTHCOM, USSOUTHCOM, U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), and the National Guard Bureau allowing the Department to prioritize efforts to seal the border and prevent mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and other criminal activities, in coordination with DHS.

Southern Border Support: DoD is currently working across five major lines of effort to secure our borders. The first is increased resources employed at the southern land border. On January 22, DHS sent DoD a request for construction and engineering support for enhanced temporary barrier emplacement for approximately 75 miles in California. In response, Secretary Hegseth approved 500 Marines from two Combat Engineering Battalions to emplace of temporary barriers and refurbish existing barrier within the San Diego sector. On January 23, the Department received a “Request for Assistance (RFA) for Defending Against the Invasion Along the Borders and Approaches to the United States” from DHS. In response, the Department initially at the border by approximately 1,700 active-duty servicemembers, bringing the total to

approximately 4,200 service members, and provided 140 intelligence personnel to provide intelligence analysis and additional airborne detection and monitoring capabilities.

Since this initial action, the personnel numbers at the southern border have grown to more than 6,600 Title 10 service members. We have significantly expanded air and ground surveillance capabilities along the southwest border. This includes deploying additional surveillance aircraft and ground units to provide CBP with real-time detection and monitoring and enhance CBP's ability to detect and deter illegal crossings. Total encounters on the SWB reported on March 26 were 300. This is down 78 percent since January 20, 2025. Recognizing the critical role of intelligence in combating transnational criminal organizations, skilled intelligence analysts deployed to work directly with CBP to identify, track and disrupt threats to border security. Further, DoD has provided robust logistical capabilities and capacity along the border. This includes providing aerial reconnaissance and force protection, informational analysis, detection and monitor, intelligence support, transportation assets, vehicle maintenance, warehousing support, and engineering expertise to enhance CBP's ability to execute its mission. Recent additions to the border include a Stryker Brigade Combat Team, a U.S. Army Aviation Battalion, U.S. Army Grey Eagle unmanned aerial systems, additional Engineer Companies, additional intelligence analysts, a Division Headquarters from 10th Mountain Division, and multiple support and logistics personnel. The majority of this support is being provided using Section 1059 of the FY 2016 NDAA, which allows DoD to provide these capabilities support on a non-reimbursable basis.

Removal Flight Support: The second line of effort relates to support provided to both CBP and DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to support removal flight operations. On January 22, DHS sent, and DoD approved an RFA for the provision of airlift support to DHS for removal flights aboard military aircraft under sections § 272 and 274 of title 10, U.S. Code and waived reimbursement under section 277(c) of title 10, U.S. Code. USTRANSCOM, in direct support of DHS, has conducted multiple removal flights alongside of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)-contracted flights, to repatriate individuals to their countries of origin. For all flights, including those conducted using DoD military aircraft and those that are ICE-contracted, federal civilian law enforcement maintains custody of the persons being removed at all times. These efforts directly provide DHS with additional airlift capacity and

planning support to facilitate the removal of illegal aliens in DHS custody. It also supports the Administration goal of enforcing immigration laws and establishes a strong deterrent factor. As of March 26, DoD executed a total of 33 removal flights to 7 countries: Guatemala – 14, Honduras – 7, Ecuador – 3, India – 3, Panama – 3, Peru –2, and El Salvador –1.

ICE Operational Support: The third line of effort relates to supporting ICE operations. On January 27, 2025, DHS requested the use of available space on Buckley Space Force Base, Colorado, to support a large-scale Federal law enforcement operation targeting transnational criminal organizations and criminal aliens located in Aurora and Denver. The Department agreed to provide one facility to be used as an Operations Center for monitoring, communication, and direction of the Federal law enforcement operation, a separate facility to be used for the temporary reception, processing, and holding of illegal aliens under DHS custody, not to exceed 24 hours and an area for staging vehicles and aircraft. This support was approved through February 7.

ICE Holding Operations Support: The fourth line of effort supports ICE by providing support for holding operations through the provision of DoD land and/or existing facilities. In response to the President’s January 29, 2025, memorandum to the Secretaries of Homeland Security and Defense, Expanding Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay to Full Capacity, the Secretary of Defense directed USSOUTHCOM to prepare Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (NSGB) to facilitate support of ongoing DHS efforts to remove aliens unlawfully in the United States. On February 3, DHS sent a request for immediate access to and expansion of facilities on NSGB to hold illegal aliens. The Department identified up to 139 hard wall cells for high-threat illegal aliens and set up over 2,500 cots/tents for low-priority illegal aliens. To date, DHS has opted for the 50 beds at the Migrant Operations Center (MOC).

On March 7, the Deputy Secretaries of Defense and Homeland Security signed a “Memorandum of Understanding for DoD Support at NSGB to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for DHS/ICE Detention of Illegal Aliens Subject to Final Orders of Removal.” This MOU outlines roles and responsibilities for DHS and DoD for both the MOC and hard-wall cells at NSGB.

Some examples codified in this agreement include: DHS/ICE will maintain legal custody and ensure custody conditions are appropriate; DHS/ICE will provide an appropriate ratio of officers

to illegal aliens in accordance with DHS/ICE standard operating procedures; and DHS/ICE will maintain responsibility for medical, translation, legal, and other support functions for illegal aliens. Examples of DoD responsibilities in the MOU include providing facility and perimeter access and security, maintaining adequate facilities for clean, safe, and sanitary operations, and providing medical and support functions for DHS and ICE personnel.

DoD continues to consider DoD land and/or facilities, specifically in the continental United States (CONUS), for additional holding locations, as requested by ICE and DHS. By providing additional holding space, DoD can increase ICE's capacity enabling ICE to continue with enforcement activity as they work to execute removal flights. This support is being provided on a non-reimbursable basis, consistent with base of operations support for DHS under 10 U.S.C. § 284(b)(4). This authority, and funding from the counterdrug account, is specific to IAs with a nexus to transnational organized crime and/or human smuggling, as determined by DHS.

Border Barrier: The final line of effort involves the vital work underway to seal the U.S. border. While DHS has been working to identify priority areas for permanent border barrier construction in support of its border and immigration mission, the Department has also begun assessment of where it might build border barrier as a means to implement the military mission, assigned to DoD by the President in EO 14167, to seal and obtain operational control of the border.

Counter-drug Activities

DoD is a leading agency of the Federal Government for the detection and monitoring of the aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States which, as required by law, is carried out in support of the counter-drug activities of Federal, State, local, and foreign law enforcement agencies. DoD primarily carries out this mission through USSOUTHCOM and Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S). More than 40 percent of the counterdrug (CD) operational support budget is provided to USSOUTHCOM and JIATF-S for this mission, including the provision of radars, aircraft and the JIATF-S headquarters.

USNORTHCOM and the Joint Task Force-North (JTF-N) are the lead DoD components to support LEA efforts to disrupt the production, smuggling, and trafficking of fentanyl from

Mexico into the United States. Relevant to drugs entering along the southwest border, the JTF-N Information Analysis Center (IAC), located in the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, executes detection and monitoring efforts and information sharing of CD and counter-transnational organized crime activities. The IAC's detection and monitoring tipping and cueing information of suspect air and maritime activity informs Mexican, U.S., and other partner-nation interdictions.

DoD's primary effort to disrupt fentanyl trafficking is the provision of intelligence analysis to U.S. Federal LEAs. DoD analysts share their understanding of how global drug-trafficking networks operate, with a particular focus on how these global networks generate, move, store, and use their money and other resources. Six of the cartels recently designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) were already on DoD counterdrug transnational organized crime actor list. During calendar year 2024, DoD supported more than 1,000 requests for information/support from LEAs.

Mexico

Threats emanating from Mexico continue to be the most immediate threat to the homeland. Transnational criminal organizations, including recently designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) cartels, traffic humans and drugs, including fentanyl, resulting in tens of thousands of American deaths annually. The fentanyl economy is further exacerbated by precursors predominantly originating from China, leaving a trail of violence in its wake.

As cartels strengthen their grip on both licit and illicit markets, they become an increasingly significant threat to Americans. Therefore, it is imperative that the DoD continues to collaborate closely with interagency partners to develop comprehensive, whole-of-government approaches to address this challenge. The 78 percent drop in border encounters demonstrates the effectiveness of DoD support to the DHS in securing our southern border. By working with the Departments of Treasury and Justice, we can disrupt cartel access to financial markets and prosecute their members, hindering their ability to operate. Additionally, our partnership with the Department of State enables us to expand dialogue with Mexican partners, as evident in the February 27 high-level security delegation led by Secretary Rubio.

The DoD remains committed to working closely with Mexican partners to secure the border and directly confront the cartels. I commend General Guillot and USNORTHCOM for their efforts in strengthening cooperation with Mexico along the border, including working with U.S. Border Patrol on coordinated patrols following Mexican President Sheinbaum's deployment of 10,000 Mexican national guard members to the border. We are expanding information sharing and exploring opportunities to enhance Mexico's capabilities to combat the cartels, including providing additional training resources to advance their Tier 1 and Tier 2 special operations forces. Furthermore, we are working to provide necessary equipment, such as weapon systems, radars, and other essential tools, to respond to the cartel threat. Finally, advancing C-UAS is crucial to protect both U.S. and Mexican forces.

Threats and Challenges in the SOUTHCOM AOR

The Western Hemisphere is facing a range of threats. It is vulnerable to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) such as Tren de Aragua and Mexican cartels that President Trump has designated as FTOs. President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have made clear that the defense of the Western Hemisphere from all external and internal threats is an issue of national security. For the first time in years, we are prioritizing 100% operational control of our southern border with Mexico to stop illegal immigration, stop the flow of fentanyl, and prevent a range of other illegal activities.

We are also working to ensure unfettered access to the Panama Canal. We are working closely with Panama to secure the Canal areas and keep it free from foreign interference. President Trump has made clear that he views the Panama Canal as a critical and non-negotiable aspect of our national security, and we are following his orders closely. As China has gained influence in our hemisphere, DoD will prioritize the defense of U.S. interests.

Cooperation in the SOUTHCOM AOR

To further these objectives, we are prioritizing close, working relationships with our partners in the Western Hemisphere. advance Americans' interests. DoD wants partners who contribute. We are working with our partners to share the burden of the defense of our hemisphere from

detering China to countering terrorist cartels. Real threats require real action, and we are demanding effective and serious cooperation from our partners in the region.

Security Cooperation: In the USSOUTHCOM AOR, using Title 10 authorities, in collaboration with the Department of State, and under congressional review and approval, DoD has security assistance operations with partner nations planned for FY 2025. "Many of these initiatives are funded through congressionally approved DoD programs aimed at building partner capacity.

These initiatives include:

- Under section 333 of title 10, U.S. Code, Build Partner Nation Capacity: A \$35 million program to enhance maritime domain awareness in Peru to counter Chinese Communist influence and interdict illicit drugs bound for the American homeland by building capacity to receive the delivery of one of two maritime patrol aircraft in 2025.
- Also, under section 333 of title 10, U.S. Code, Title 10, Sec 333 Build Partner Nation Capacity. A \$16.5 million investment in coordination with the U.S. Interagency to train and equip the Costa Rica Ministry of Public Security with a critical shipping container scanner capability to counter illicit trafficking and to counter Chinese Communist influence to preempt a Chinese state-owned company's bid for the contract to provide port scanners.
- Through, partner nation Foreign Military Sales, and U.S. Excess Defense Article donations, we are better posturing our Partners to combat the malign activities of China.

Our efforts are building long-term capacity and interoperability. Section 333 activities across the region are complemented by Section 332 institutional capacity-building advising efforts designed to help partners and allies absorb, employ, and sustain new materiel solutions, enabling more effective burden-sharing in support of U.S. priorities.

In collaboration with our State Department, Title 22 Security Assistance played an important role in Argentina's acquisition of 24 F-16s from Denmark, with the approval of a \$941 million sustainment package from the United States. This investment ensures the procurement is properly maintained and equipped and prevents China from further embedding itself in the military apparatus of a key partner.

Similarly, in November 2024, Brazil announced the acquisition of 12 UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters. This \$950 million deal provides our Brazilian partners with a proven system to counter TCOs.

Joint Exercise Programs: Through USSOUTHCOM’s Joint Exercise Program, in FY24, the Department conducted eight joint exercises in seven different countries across the Southern Cone, Andean Ridge, Central America, and the Caribbean. With over 10,000 participants from 38 countries, these joint exercises demonstrated our resolve to counter malign influence and promote stability across all domains.

The \$54 million that support USSOUTHCOM’s Joint Exercise Program are critical to building our readiness and strengthening the partnerships that enable the Command to achieve Campaign Plan Objectives. In 2024, USSOUTHCOM executed four exercises in support of the United States European Command-led Large Scale Global Exercise. These events included:

- CENTAM GUARDIAN in Honduras and Costa Rica;
- TRADEWINDS in Barbados;
- RESOLUTE SENTINEL in Peru;
- FUERZAS COMANDO in Panama;

Our remaining exercises included:

- FUSED RESPONSE in Colombia;
- PANAMAX at the USSOUTHCOM headquarters;
- PANAMAX ALPHA Phase II in Panama; and,
- UNITAS hosted in Chile
 - 18 UNITAS enabled over 4,300 participants from 24 allied and partner nations to train in a complex multi-domain environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, in all domains, Homeland Defense and the Western Hemisphere are intertwined. The Department stands ready to ensure that our homeland

is fully defended. DoD is committed to achieving peace through strength. Our actions, both at home and abroad, demonstrate our resolve to defend the American homeland, protect our interests, and deter aggression. We appreciate the Committee's continued support for these critical missions. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished Members of the Committee: Thank you for your support and leadership and for the opportunity to testify before you today.