

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

JOSEPH M. HUMIRE

**PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR
FOR
HOMELAND DEFENSE AND AMERICAS SECURITY AFFAIRS**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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**U.S. MILITARY POSTURE & NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE
WESTERN HEMISPHERE**

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Committee on Armed Services
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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today performing the duties of the Assistant Secretary of War for Homeland Defense and Americas Security Affairs (HD&ASA).

I am here to outline the Department of War's (DoW) strategy and policy for defending the U.S. Homeland and securing American interests in the Western Hemisphere. Our efforts are a cornerstone of President Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) and 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS), which mandates that we prioritize the nation's security by putting the American homeland and hemisphere first.

The 2026 NDS structurally redefines U.S. defense priorities around the security of American territory and people. To that end, the Department has made several major achievements over the last year in support of this objective, including: sealing the U.S. southern border to stop illegal mass migration and drug trafficking; repelling drone incursions on the homeland; deterring designated terrorist organizations and cartels from trafficking deadly drugs into America through the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific; and advancing U.S. interests in key hemispheric terrain, to include the Panama Canal, the Gulf of America, and the Arctic. These achievements are detailed in this written statement, and I look forward to discussing DoW's vital mission with the Committee.

Sealing the U.S. Southern Border

The United States faces a persistent and complex threat along its southern border, characterized by the unprecedented flow of unlawful migration, sophisticated narcotics and human trafficking operations, and the corrosive influence of transnational criminal organizations. These activities not only undermine U.S. sovereignty but also fuel a humanitarian crisis and risks public safety while also straining national resources and directly endangering American communities. As

directed in the 2026 NDS the Department has prioritized sealing U.S. borders and repel any form of invasion.

Transnational criminal organizations exploit specific, high-traffic corridors along the border where rugged terrain and vast distances stretch civilian law enforcement assets to their limits. To secure our borders, DoW has established targeted and effective tools for securing the most vulnerable sectors of our border, permitting our troops to apprehend trespassers on our military installations. These trespassers are then handed over to appropriate law enforcement personnel for potential prosecution, adding another layer of consequence for those who violate our borders.

The Department maintains Service members postured along the southern land border to provide critical support, guard static observation posts, conduct ground and aerial patrols, and perform real-time detection and monitoring analysis. This presence furthers DoW's mission to ensure territorial integrity, while also enabling our partners at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to interdict threats to border security more effectively. In addition, the Department supports DHS operations using DoW's unique surveillance and patrol capabilities to ensure DHS maintains full awareness of activities along the border. Such support has helped DHS disrupt established trafficking routes and funnel illicit activity into areas where law enforcement can more effectively interdict it.

January 2026 marked the fourth consecutive month of decline in Border Patrol apprehensions, with figures 93% below the historic average. Critically, this also marks the ninth straight month with zero administrative releases of apprehended individuals into the country's interior. Furthermore, the DoW is actively hardening our physical defenses through the construction of 15 miles of border barrier at the Barry M. Goldwater Range in Arizona.

However, it is not just about DoW personnel patrolling the borders. DoW modernizing the border security mission rapidly. DoW is investing more than \$150M in affordable and effective test beds to evaluate means to transform how we secure the border. DoW is investing in several cutting-edge technologies to extend and augment the reach of manned waterborne patrols, counter-unmanned aerial systems to deny cartels the ability to threaten Service members on patrol, and airborne platforms to understand cartel and illegal alien habits to increase the likelihood of detection. Each of these missions offers powerful lessons for DoW in other theaters.

Sealing the U.S. southwest border is a critical mission to defend the U.S. Homeland. As President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have stated, "border security is national security." Under their leadership, the Department leaned into our mission and, in concert with our federal law enforcement partners, have achieved unprecedented success. As the U.S. southern land border has become increasingly secure, the Department added an additional focus on the

maritime environment and the flow of illicit narcotics from South America to the United States through the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America.

Making America's Cities Safer Through Support to Law Enforcement

The Department's success in securing the U.S. Homeland by minimizing threats originating in the Western Hemisphere is coupled with significant reduction in violent crime in America's major cities by supporting federal law enforcement partners.

Violent crime and the proliferation of organized criminal networks in major U.S. cities represent a significant threat to domestic stability and the safety of the American people. Local and federal law enforcement agencies often lack the personnel and logistical capacity to effectively track and apprehend the sheer volume of violent fugitives, gang members, and arms traffickers operating within their jurisdictions. This resource gap allows criminal elements to flourish, eroding public safety.

The 2026 NDS emphasizes the imperative to build a resilient and ready Joint Force capable of responding to crises both abroad and at home. The National Guard is the cornerstone of domestic operations, providing a flexible and scalable force that can surge to support civilian authorities. By ensuring National Guard capabilities are available when needed to support law enforcement, the Department provides an enduring advantage that underwrites domestic security and reinforces stability.

The DoW's model is one of support, not supplementation. Local and federal law enforcement partners handle all traditional policing functions: they conduct the patrols, they make the arrests, and they engage with the community. DoW and National Guard forces enable law enforcement to do their job by establishing joint command posts and providing critical analytical, logistical, and personnel support. The success of this force-multiplier effect is quantifiable: the deployments of National Guard members and U.S. Marshals to major U.S. cities in support of law enforcement has resulted in the arrest of 37 known gang members and more than 6,150 violent fugitives, including 16 for homicide, 958 for narcotics, 461 for weapons offenses, and 28 for sex offenses, and the seizure of 600 illegally possessed firearms. Credit for the success of this model is also due to U.S. Northern Command, which has adapted to this mission in a professional and efficient manner. The ability to rapidly mobilize and integrate these highly disciplined units provides a critical backstop for our law enforcement partners that cannot be replicated.

Degrading Narco-terrorists through Decisive Action

Building on successes on the U.S. southern border, Secretary Hegseth announced Operation Southern Spear (OSS) in November 2025 as a key DoW effort to defend the homeland from within the Western Hemisphere. The primary focus of OSS is to restore deterrence against the narco-terrorist cartels that profit from poisoning Americans and destabilizing our neighbors. OSS's maritime interdiction operations, conducted with interagency partners, send a clear message that the Western Hemisphere is not a permissive environment for illicit actors. This posture was solidified in September 2025 when, at the President's direction, the Department conducted its first lethal kinetic strike in international waters against a narco-trafficking vessel tied to the Designated Terrorist Organization, Tren de Aragua. As of March 10, 2026, the Department has carried out 45 total kinetic strikes, which killed 157 members or affiliates of those narco-terrorist organizations, destroying 47 narco-trafficking vessels and placing all narco-terrorists in the Western Hemisphere on notice.

The effects have been significant and profound. Since the first September strike, there has been a 20% reduction of movements of drug vessels in the Caribbean and an additional 25% reduction in the Eastern Pacific. These two maritime corridors are the origin source for follow-on flow into the U.S. Homeland. In January 2026, DoW went 23 days without a significant strike against a narco-trafficking vessel in the Eastern Caribbean, primarily because movements shifted eastward through Venezuela and Guyana into Suriname. The balloon effect has raised the costs to narco-terrorist organizations in the Eastern Caribbean, in both blood and treasure.

The success of OSS combined with our National Defense Areas on the U.S. southern border has diminished the flow of fentanyl—a weapon of mass destruction—down 56% since the same period last year. As early as September 2025, the Administration had also achieved a nearly 20% drop in deadly drug overdoses in the United States compared to the previous year. We have successfully deterred cartels from exploiting key maritime routes, leading to a more than 20 percent reduction in cocaine flow. This proactive and aggressive stance under OSS has degraded adversary capabilities and created new opportunities for decisive action by partner nations throughout the Americas.

Bolstering Partnerships to Secure the Americas

In early March 2026, Secretary Hegseth hosted the inaugural Americas Counter-Cartel Conference at U.S. Southern Command Headquarters in Doral, Florida. During and after the conference, 17 partner-nations from the Western Hemisphere signed a Joint Security Declaration signaling their intent to combine efforts to deter, degrade, and destroy cartel operations while strengthening border security. Select partner nations pledged to enhance their defense posture toward partner-led, deterrence-focused bi-lateral and multi-lateral operations against cartels and

terrorist organizations in the region. This commitment marks the establishment of a first-of-its-kind hemispheric counter-cartel coalition and will increase partner burden sharing in this hemisphere.

President Trump formally announced this coalition at the Shield of the Americas Summit on March 7, 2026, launching the Americas Counter-Cartel Coalition, a combined military and law enforcement approach to deter, degrade, and ultimately destroy narcotics and terrorist-related threats in the hemisphere, including those that threaten the U.S. Homeland. On March 3, the DoW supported, at the request of Ecuador, bilateral kinetic actions against cartel targets along the Colombia-Ecuador border. The joint effort, named “Operation Total Extermination,” is the start of a military offensive by Ecuador against transnational criminal organizations with the support of the U.S., setting the pace for regional, deterrence-focused operations against cartel infrastructure throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

As these conferences and Ecuador’s leadership in land-based strikes against cartels demonstrate, our partners across Latin America are inspired by the bold and decisive action by President Trump and Secretary Hegseth, who have renewed use of military and law enforcement action to complement interdiction as a prominent counternarcotics tool. This new focus translates into strengthening security cooperation partnerships, increasing engagements and intelligence sharing, and enhancing maritime and border security, all of which deepen defense ties and increase U.S. influence throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Operation Absolute Resolve: Resetting the Region

The United States’ strategic pressure, enhanced access and placement in the Caribbean, and intelligence dominance established under OSS paved the way for the January 2026 Operation Absolute Resolve (OAR) in Venezuela. In support of the Department of Justice’s indictment of Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, the DoW conducted OAR to support the Department of Justice secure the arrest of these indicted individuals and fugitives of U.S. law. A culmination of months of planning, OAR was a discreet and precise law enforcement support operation conducted by the DoW during the darkest hours on January 3, 2026, with significant aerial superiority and support from the intelligence community. Thanks to our brave warfighters and precise military planners of the Joint Force, OAR was a resounding success that sent a strong signal of America’s military superiority around the world.

Following OAR, DoW is supporting the State Department-led three phase approach in Venezuela: Stabilization, Recovery, and Transition, with a DoW focus on the first phase. Stabilization is centered on not allowing an economic or societal collapse of Venezuela, while ensuring there are still pressure mechanisms in place and providing augmented security to the Department of State as it considers how best to resurrect the U.S. Embassy in Caracas. DoW

supports the U.S. Government policy on Venezuela to leverage the private sector, which minimizes risk to U.S. forces, while DoW is establishing persistent military-to-military engagement to improve security and stability.

OAR's success has had multiple reciprocal effects in the region, including U.S. high-level talks with Cuba, gaining compliance from Nicaragua, and shifting the Caribbean in a favorable direction toward U.S. interests.

Advancing Enduring Presence on the Panama Canal

President Trump has rightly identified the United States' immediate security perimeter and a new strategic map, from Greenland to the Gulf of America to the Panama Canal and surrounding countries. Our hemispheric approach will reflect that geographic prioritization to secure key hemispheric terrain and infrastructure, which are critical for the security, sovereignty, and prosperity of all Americans.

As outlined in the 2025 NSS and 2026 NDS, ensuring unrestricted U.S. access to the Panama Canal is vital for protecting the homeland against actors who seek to do us harm. Previous administrations neglected this critical chokepoint, allowing it to become a playground for U.S. competitors, particularly China. President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have been clear-eyed in the U.S. government's pursuit of curbing Chinese influence from the Canal Area.

Enabled by a Memorandum of Understanding concerning Cooperative Security Activities in Panama, signed by Secretary Hegseth last April, the United States is working by, with, and through the Government of Panama to enhance U.S. military presence and harden the Canal's security against the most likely threats. On the Pacific side, the Department has established a Joint Security Cooperation Group (JSCG) to improve interoperability with Panamanian security forces to combat shared threats. On the Atlantic side, the Department established a Jungle Operations Training Course (JOTC), bringing together U.S. Service members and Panamanian forces to train side-by-side in jungle environments. These initiatives, like others in Panama, aim to accomplish one goal: to fully secure the Canal and guarantee U.S. access to this strategic chokepoint and vital national asset.

In addition to advancing these security initiatives, Secretary Hegseth secured priority access to the Panama Canal through the Joint Declaration Concerning Security and Operation of the Panama Canal, which provides cost-neutral transit for U.S. war and auxiliary vessels.

Over the last year, Panama has withdrawn from China's Belt and Road Initiative, diversified away from Chinese contractors, and expelled the China-based CK Hutchison from the ports at the Pacific and Atlantic openings of the Canal. Today, U.S. subsidiaries operate these ports,

representing a major victory for unfettered U.S. commerce and a strategic win for the United States.

Hardening U.S. Homeland Defense Through the Arctic

In the same way the Panama Canal enables U.S. power projection and Naval force flows to the Indo-Pacific region, use of Greenland and Alaska are essential for U.S. power projection through the Arctic. U.S. adversaries are increasingly active in the Arctic to signal their ability to hold the U.S. Homeland at risk. Receding ice and technological innovations are enabling greater maritime access to the region, which provides increasing commercial opportunities but also poses significant risks, threats, and challenges to U.S. trade and national security interests.

Alaska makes the United States an Arctic nation. The 2026 NDS directs the Department to ensure access to key terrain, and Alaska is critical to homeland defense. Additionally, the state is vital for ensuring the flow of forces to the Indo-Pacific and other regions in times of crisis and conflict. The Department has placed and invested considerable resources in Alaska, including infrastructure, fifth-generation fighters, and the 11th Airborne “Arctic Angels.” Going forward, DoW will continue to ensure we have the force posture, infrastructure, and readiness in Alaska to carry out NDS objectives.

Similarly, Greenland is key terrain for the defense of our nation and hemisphere. The island’s location on the eastern side of the North American continent is strategically vital for air defense, strategic waterways, domain awareness, and power projection, particularly as it hosts our Pituffik Space Base. Overall, Greenland’s strategic geography is critical to fulfilling the homeland missile defense mission and securing northern approaches to the United States. DoW is working with the Kingdom of Denmark and the other NATO Allies to ensure that our interests are protected and that they step up in terms of defense contributions.

Aerospace Missile Defense and Counter-UAS Advancements

Potential U.S. adversaries are pouring resources into rapidly advancing their long-range military capabilities and delivery platforms. Simultaneously, they increase their own air and missile defense capabilities. Their intent is clear, to hold the U.S. Homeland increasingly at risk while advancing their own security agenda at the expense of American interests.

Aerospace and maritime early warning and control against all manner of threats remain critical elements of safeguarding the homeland. The first critical element of safeguarding the American people is the ability to detect threats by land, sea, and air from traditional and emerging approaches. In this vein, NORAD remains a critical facet of North American defense. DoW must continue driving modernization of the assets tasked with the defense of our skies.

Relatedly, the 2026 NDS emphasizes that “the Department will prioritize efforts to develop President Trump’s Golden Dome for America, with a specific focus on options to cost-effectively defeat large missile barrages and other advanced aerial attacks.” DoW is moving swiftly to bolster our missile defenses and ensure the safety and security of the American people from missile threats. The Department continues to refine the array of sensors, command and control systems, and effectors that we will deploy as key elements of Golden Dome for America. Missile defense is a necessary component of deterrence as it complicates our adversaries’ attack planning by increasing uncertainty as to whether a missile attack will achieve the intended effects. Effective, layered and defense-in-depth missile defenses complement the Joint Force by maintaining the burden of escalation on our adversaries so that if deterrence fails, the Joint Force can sufficiently safeguard the American people while providing leadership time and capability to respond appropriately.

DoW is acting decisively, as the 2026 NDS states, “defend our nation’s skies through a renewed focus on countering unmanned aerial threats.” We have repeatedly seen how these systems threaten our security and degrade the safety of the American people. As these technologies proliferate among foreign terrorist organizations and transnational criminal organizations that attempt to bring illicit material into the Homeland, the DoW continues to act decisively to counter this threat. In response to the Administration’s actions to secure our land borders, unmanned aerial systems have increasingly become a critical vector for these organizations to bring illicit goods across our borders. Furthermore, the use of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) in the Russia–Ukraine conflict demonstrates how UAS have revolutionized the modern battlefield. We can ill afford to leave ourselves vulnerable to something like Operation Spider-Web occurring on American Soil.

As a result, the Department has driven significant investments in capabilities and systems to defend against unmanned aerial threats, especially along the Southern land border. The Department has also implemented policy and process changes to make full use of the authorities we have. The Secretary is prioritizing counter-UAS (C-UAS), particularly in the U.S. homeland. Mid-last year, we streamlined the process for obtaining the coordination required under section 130i of title 10 of the U.S. Code (“section 130i”), reducing the administrative burden to the Department by over 80%. Recently, the Department consolidated and updated guidance for C-UAS detection and mitigation in the Homeland. The Department is actively implementing this guidance to ensure the Department, and most importantly commanders, understand their authority and ability to act.

DoW has taken steps to extend section 130i coverage to the NDAs along the southern border, and we have extended coverage to cover nearly 100 additional critical sites across the U.S. homeland in just the last year. We have established a first of its kind C-UAS Joint Task Force in

JIATF-401 and are also implementing the designation of USNORTHCOM and USINDOPACOM as the C-UAS operations synchronizers in the Homeland. In parallel, the Department is leveraging all agencies and agile acquisition authorities at our disposal, to include efforts from the Defense Innovation Unit, to develop and deploy effective, low-cost C-UAS systems. Following implementation and education, we still face capability gaps. While we have dedicated more money than ever before to C-UAS critical site defense, we need Congress' continued support to ensure the development and deployment of capable systems across the U.S. homeland and to meet the policy goals of this Administration.

President Trump and Secretary Hegseth understand and recognize today's threats and the need to protect the Homeland while balancing the need to defend our ability to project forward. Golden Dome for America is a next-generation defensive shield that will afford America with that protection. Its purpose, paired with Departments historical investments in C-UAS capabilities and NORAD's modernization efforts, will deter attacks and defend the American people against the full spectrum of modern missile threats, to include aerial systems. As we move with urgency to build this, the threat demands we move quicker.

Improving Burden Sharing Throughout the Americas

As touched upon earlier regarding partner-led efforts to counter cartels in Latin America, effective burden-sharing is a crucial element of the NDS for safeguarding the U.S. Homeland and the Western Hemisphere. When allies and partners invest properly in their own defense, they create a strong defensive perimeter in key geographic regions. This forward-deployed strength deters potential adversaries from initiating conflicts that could otherwise escalate and threaten the United States directly. By having capable partners manage regional security, the United States can better preserve its own military resources and strategic focus for the direct defense of the Homeland and U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere, our neighborhood.

Canada and NATO: The United States has achieved significant success in encouraging Canada to shoulder its fair share as a security provider in the Western Hemisphere and Euro-Atlantic theaters. In June 2025, Canada announced that it would reach 2% of GDP in defense spending that fiscal year, a dramatic shift after lagging behind most NATO allies. Canada subsequently committed to reach President Trump's proposal at the NATO Hague summit to spend 5% of GDP on defense and security, including 3.5% on core defense spending. If fulfilled, these pledges will begin to address decades of underinvestment and create new opportunities for defense partnership in the alliance on NORAD modernization and Arctic security.

Argentina: Our success in fostering security partnerships extends far beyond the Arctic, reaching deep into South America as well. For instance, Argentina's acquisition of 24 F-16 aircraft, with Department of State approval of a third party-transfer from Denmark, not only

signals Buenos Aires's close defense policy alignment with the United States but enhances burden-sharing in the defense of the Southern Cone. By generating greater interoperability with U.S. forces and enhancing its own training, maintenance, and doctrine, Argentina can improve its air domain awareness and border security. We have also been working closely with Peru on its potential acquisition of F-16s, which would replace its aged fixed-wing fleet and demonstrate its strong commitment to partnering with the United States.

Increasing Regional Access in Latin America and the Caribbean: Underpinning these strategic partnerships is a broader effort to formalize and expand our security cooperation with our partners throughout the Western Hemisphere. Since November 2025, the Department of War has obtained bilateral commitments from Argentina, the Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago expressing our shared intent to cooperate regarding border security, countering narco-terrorism, and securing critical infrastructure and assets from malign control. Consistent with these efforts, the Department signed a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Paraguay in December 2025 (that's recently been ratified by Paraguay's Congress), and DoW is actively engaging these and other regional partners to identify opportunities to expand our access, basing, and overflight.

Conclusion

From the Arctic to the southernmost tip of the Americas, the defense of the U.S. Homeland and the security of the Western Hemisphere are one and the same. In every domain, the DoW stands ready to ensure our nation is defended, operating on the principle of peace through strength. Our actions demonstrate a clear resolve to protect American interests and enforce the modern application of the NSS "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine.

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished Members of the Committee:
Thank you for your continued support and leadership and for the opportunity to testify before you today.