



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY

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**“Interdicting Illicit Drug Trafficking: A View
from the Front Lines”**

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Statement of

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Good morning, **Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell**, and members of this committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about the challenges and opportunities facing our law enforcement partners with respect to illicit drug trafficking.

I'm here today representing the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

ONDCP leads and coordinates the national drug control policy to address drug trafficking, save lives, and improve the health and safety of the American people.

We oversee the National Drug Control Program Budget, which encompasses 19 federal agencies and coordinates the federal government's efforts to address the illicit drug threat, which is significant and growing.

I am here today as both the United States Interdiction Coordinator and the Director of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas, or HIDTA, Program. It is a privilege to serve in both roles.

USIC

As the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, or USIC, I provide the ONDCP Director advice regarding policy and coordination of interdiction activities to reduce the flow of illicit drugs into the United States, and integration with domestic efforts to prevent illicit drugs from crossing our borders and entering our communities. With coordination among the 28 senior leaders from across the government who are members of The Interdiction Committee, I am responsible for overseeing the interdiction activities of the National Drug Control Program agencies to ensure consistency with Presidential policy priorities.

The USIC's coordination function is vital to ensuring a comprehensive, cogent approach to securing the nation's borders, in direct support of President Trump's Executive Orders on ensuring the territorial integrity of the United States and addressing the national emergency at the Southern and Northern Borders. To ensure this direction is efficient and effective, I draft and issue the applicable portions of the National Drug Control Strategy; the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan; and border interdiction strategies for the southern, northern, and Caribbean borders each year.

These documents focus on coordinated interdiction efforts by federal, state, local, Tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies, and promote strengthened collaboration with our international partners to maximize the impact of each interdiction event. Drug interdictions are vital not only for removing dangerous drugs immediately from the illicit supply chain, but also for providing cooperating witnesses, physical and digital evidence, and intelligence. These contributions are the foundation that the interagency community builds on to dismantle transnational criminal networks (TCNs). This coordination is becoming even more vital as we implement a strong response to President Trump's executive order designating of international cartels and other transnational criminal organizations, as foreign terrorist organizations, and

organize the interdiction community to fully support national efforts to totally eliminate these organizations.

HIDTA

The centerpiece of my team's work is the HIDTA Program, which provides federal grant funds to areas determined to be critical drug trafficking regions of the United States.

HIDTA allocates nearly \$300 million in federal funding to support the strategies developed and implemented by coalitions of federal, state, local, Tribal, and territorial partners.

I greatly appreciate Congress's strong bipartisan support of the HIDTA Program, and I want to personally thank you, **Chairman Cruz** and **Ranking Member Cantwell**, for your support to the HIDTA program over the years.

Through its 33 regional programs, HIDTA brings together more than twenty thousand individual participants from 500 law enforcement agencies, focusing and integrating their efforts against the drug trafficking organizations that pose the greatest threat to our Nation. Through HIDTA collaboration, we are able to fully engage partners from across all levels of government to prioritize their investigations to fully align with the President's designated list of the most dangerous cartels.

To these ends, HIDTA-supported task forces annually disrupt or dismantle more than three thousand drug trafficking or money laundering organizations, and seize billions of dollars of illicit drugs.

Illicit Drug Threats

As we speak, America is facing the deadliest drug threat in its history.

Over the past 25 years, the number of drug overdose deaths in the United States involving synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, have increased nearly 100 times.

During the same timeframe, the rate of fatal overdoses involving other drugs, including cocaine and methamphetamine, also rose. Since 1999, the number of drug overdose deaths involving cocaine and methamphetamine have increased nearly eight and 64 times, respectively.

While far too many lives are currently being lost due to drug overdose, we are starting to see signs that progress is being made to combat this crisis. The latest CDC provisional data predicts a 23.7% decreaseⁱ in drug overdose deaths for the 12-month period ending in September 2024, compared to the same time period a year prior. This is the largest recorded reduction in drug overdose deaths, and these reductions are being observed across all major drug classes.

While this is important progress, we must recognize that the illicit drug threat will continue to transform. This is not a challenge for the United States alone. Illicit drugs are a global problem, and the criminals who produce and traffic these drugs are determined and resilient, driven by

increased profits and an increased global customer base. Illicit drugs produced outside the United States make their way across our borders and into our communities by a variety of means. Illicit fentanyl and methamphetamine often enter the United States through ports of entry. On occasion, cocaine is loaded onto semisubmersibles and go-fast boats that traverse the maritime approaches to the United States.

We recognize that the illicit drug supply chain is a multinational, complex network that spans public and private entities, utilizes legitimate commerce pipelines to move raw materials and finished drugs, and exploits our financial and banking systems to obtain profits and fund illicit activity.

Addressing this crisis calls for decisive, coordinated action.

We must dismantle the supply chains for illicit drugs and their raw materials, and attack the global criminal networks fueling American deaths, including the drug cartels that have inundated the United States with deadly drugs, violent criminals, and vicious gangs.

Seizing Drugs

While we face substantial challenges in keeping these drugs from entering the United States, our federal interdiction and law enforcement have achieved some noteworthy success.

In fiscal year 2024, HIDTA-supported task forces seized more than 20,000 pounds of illicit fentanyl, more than 277,000 pounds of methamphetamine, nearly 317,000 pounds of cocaine, and over 4,100 pounds of heroin.

My colleague from Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will provide more details on its work, but I want to highlight that in FY 2024, CBP seized almost 575,000 pounds of illicit drugs, approximately half of which was seized at Southwest Land Border ports of entry. That number includes nearly 22,000 pounds of fentanyl. There was also a nearly 25 percent increase in methamphetamine seizures in FY 2024 from the previous fiscal year, with nearly 175,000 pounds seized, primarily at the Southwest Border.

As we'll hear from the Coast Guard, maritime cocaine interdictions are vital inroads to dismantling criminal networks, particularly those in Mexico that both receive multi-ton loads of cocaine from South America, and at the same time produce fentanyl for distribution in U.S. markets. The Coast Guard has re-oriented its focus to lean in on drug interdiction, and those efforts continue to be a vital tool for removing drugs and illuminating high-level criminal networks.

It's impossible to overstate the impact of seizing drugs before they slip across international borders, are broken down into smaller loads, and make their way along our highways and through our mail and package systems, and into our communities and homes.

Seized drugs represent lives saved – they are fatal overdoses that never happened, and profits that drug traffickers never received. Seizing dangerous and addictive substances, like fentanyl, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin, also is a critical component of preventing illicit drug use and substance use disorder in American citizens.

Disrupting Criminal Networks

The integration of federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial efforts through task forces is critical to disrupting and dismantling criminal networks. To meet this need, HIDTA and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) play complementary roles. This partnership enhances intelligence sharing, investigative capabilities, and operational effectiveness, enabling task forces to dismantle entire trafficking networks rather than just interdict individual shipments, creating a sustained impact.

Additionally, our partners at the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) have led government-wide efforts to map the cartels responsible for distributing deadly drugs like fentanyl. This entails combining DEA data with external data, and employing innovative analytic techniques to map and strategically target priority threat networks throughout the cartels' supply chain. The network illumination will provide the knowledge to develop cohesive and coordinated operations within DEA and across government agencies to most effectively dismantle, degrade, and defeat transnational drug cartels. These operations will target every stage of the cartels' business cycle, support structure, and facilitators.

Those teams are composed of special agents, intelligence analysts, targeters, program analysts, data scientists, and digital specialists.

DEA's Special Operation Division (SOD), is home to over 30 federal and international partners, including Internal Revenue Service- Criminal Investigations (IRS-CI), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), FBI, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Australian Federal Police, and members of the Intelligence Community. SOD allows for the sharing, support, and coordination of work across the government and the globe, to identify and target drug trafficking networks. This includes the networks responsible for the chemicals and pre-cursor chemicals shipped to Mexico, the cartels who use those chemicals to produce fentanyl and other deadly synthetic drugs, the networks who smuggle the drugs into the United States, the local street distributors, and the global money laundering networks who repatriate the illicit proceeds back to the cartels.

Similarly, the HSI Innovation Lab is constantly developing new ways to combat transnational criminal networks more effectively. The HSI Innovation Lab brings together HSI investigators with data engineers and scientists to develop and utilize new technology for cross-referencing, analyzing, and triaging information to support some of the most complex cases. This team provides technical solutions, rapidly advanced analytical support, and priority access to HSI specialized resources.

The HSI-led DHS Cyber Crimes Center (C3) supports HSI's mission by providing investigative and operational support for complex transnational cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent investigations that have the highest potential impact against TCNs. C3's advanced support to combat TCNs includes applying the necessary technical solutions, advanced data and cryptocurrency analytical support, and priority access to HSI specialized resources.

C3 is also at the forefront of interagency collaboration and is a longstanding member of the FBI's Joint Criminal Opioid and Darknet Enforcement (JCODE) Team, which is a DOJ-sponsored initiative established in 2018, to combat the proliferation and distribution of fentanyl and other opioids via illicit darknet marketplaces. C3 actively collaborates with JCODE members to develop and distribute high-impact target packages to HSI and other JCODE member agency field offices. C3's expertise and efforts significantly contribute to HSI's seizure of \$190 million in cryptocurrency from transnational criminal organizations, many of which were associated with narcotics investigations.

Also, HSI's Cross-Border Financial Crime Center (CBFCC) has been designed to identify, target, and dismantle the financial networks that are utilized by transnational criminal networks that seek to launder their illicit proceeds from inside and outside of the United States. The CBFCC employs a strategy of utilizing the expertise of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and their analytical capabilities to infiltrate and dismantle these financial networks. The CBFCC includes elements of HSI, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigations (IRS-CI). Also included is the support from the HSI-led El Dorado Task Forces around the country which include HSI, DEA, United States Secret Service, IRS-CI, and state/local law enforcement.

This effort is a concerted, HSI-wide response to combat the transnational criminal networks that pose the greatest threats to the security of the United States, particularly those engaged in the production and distribution of illicit drugs like fentanyl.

Although DOD does not interdict or arrest drug traffickers, I would be remiss to not mention the valuable enabling role DOD plays in this area. In addition to leading the air and maritime detection and monitoring of drug trafficking, the DoD Counterdrug program provides the bulk of the US government's intelligence collection and analysis on foreign transnational criminal networks.

Protecting Mail and Package Systems

Drug traffickers exploit the mail and express consignment service industry to obtain precursor chemicals and manufacturing equipment, and ship illicit drugs to their customers.

To combat this activity, CBP officers and HSI Special Agents assigned to Border Enforcement Security Task Forces (BESTs) have increased their presence, coordination, and inspections at international express consignment carrier (ECC) processing centers operated by United Parcel Service (UPS), Federal Express (FedEx), Dalsey, Hillblom, and Lynn (DHL), and others.

From 2021-2023, domestic task forces at ECC hubs seized nearly 59,000 pounds of illicit drugs from small parcels, including nearly 840 pounds of illicit fentanyl.

Also, the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) seized over 3,800 pounds of fentanyl and 7,700 pounds of methamphetamine from the domestic mail system in FY 2024, mostly originating from states surrounding the Southwest Border. The Postal Inspection Service continues to see a significant increase from FY 2023 in cocaine seizures, with over 6,000 pounds in FY 2024.

Targeting Illicit Proceeds

Narcotics traffickers operating on a global scale require an extensive support network, including procurement, logistics, transportation, communications, security, money laundering, and other facilitation.

Major drug operations create, corrupt, and misuse supposedly legitimate enterprises to conduct criminal activity and launder vast profits on an international scale.

These illicitly-funded “corporate empires” can be extensive, complex, and can undermine the integrity of financial systems.

They are also one of transnational criminal organizations’ greatest vulnerabilities.

As a result, disrupting this illicit financial network is a national priority to help disrupt the flow of illicit fentanyl, its precursors, and related production equipment, such as pill presses.

In recent years, the Department of the Treasury received a new sanctions authority for combating the illicit drug trade.

Specifically, it received authorization to target any foreign person engaged in drug trafficking activities, regardless of whether they are linked to a specific kingpin or cartel, which further enables Treasury to sanction foreign persons who knowingly receive property that constitutes, or is derived from, proceeds of illicit drug trafficking activities.

Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has since designated 233 individuals and 167 entities under this new authority.

When OFAC designates an individual or entity, any assets within the United States or the possession or control of a United States person anywhere in the world must be frozen. Additionally, any money being transferred through the United States financial system may be seized, even if neither the sending nor receiving accounts are within the system. Since the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (or SWIFT) network is based in the United States, this limits any transfers within that network.

An OFAC designation also means trade with or through the United States is cut off. Often, businesses and banks not based in the United States voluntarily sever ties with individuals and entities that OFAC has listed.

As a result, designated persons may lose access to their bank accounts outside the United States, disrupting their operations and freedom of access.

In addition, in many cases, partner nation authorities have taken law enforcement actions against designated companies or properties after OFAC has listed them.

In addition to sanctions, since 2021, the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs has made public up to \$410 million in reward offers for information leading to the arrest or conviction of 80 different wanted individuals. Some of these, from both China and Mexico, are involved in the fentanyl supply chain and have been captured through the Narcotics and Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Programs.

As a result of the recent Executive Order Designating Cartels and other organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and specially designated Global Terrorists, we expect to see additional tools and authorities for our law enforcement officers to investigate and dismantle these organizations, placing new pressure and threat of prosecution on entities that support and enable the cartels.

Protecting Investigative Tools

Directly or indirectly, a number of the approaches I've noted so far depend upon the widespread availability of key investigative tools.

Law enforcement working to disrupt drug trafficking networks need access to telecommunications, automated license plate readers, financial transactions, and crime gun tracking data.

Developing and deploying these technologies is critical to investigative success, but it is equally important that these tools are used to maximize investigative efficacy while minimizing any risks to the privacy of innocent Americans.

This is increasingly important as we contemplate the use of groundbreaking technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

Trust is a pillar of law enforcement. It's integral to the multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional efforts that have yielded great successes.

It's also critical to the relationships that all law enforcement agencies maintain with the citizens they protect.

I'm grateful to all our law enforcement partners for their forward-looking approach to the use of new technologies, and their commitment to use these tools effectively and responsibly.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning and to share the perspective from the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Protecting Americans from illicit drugs and the traffickers who harm them is a key mission for the federal government. Our strong interagency partnerships are working tirelessly to disrupt and dismantle criminal trafficking organizations and it's leading to real progress under President Trump's leadership. With your support, I am confident we will continue to stop traffickers and save lives.

I am happy to respond to any questions you have.

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ⁱ Per CDC data, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>. Accessed 21 Feb 2025.