



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

STATEMENT

OF

LEV J. KUBIAK

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS
HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS
U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

REGARDING A HEARING ON

*“Potential Terrorists Threats: Border Security
Challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean”*

BEFORE THE

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE**

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Introduction

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the international engagement efforts of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). I am honored to provide an overview of our international operations and highlight some successes and challenges I believe we currently face.

I would like to briefly outline the structure of ICE to help you understand our mission and responsibilities. ICE is divided into three operational components: Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and the Office of the Principal Legal Adviser (OPLA). The role of ERO is to identify, apprehend, and ultimately remove individuals who are unlawfully in the United States in accordance with law and policy. HSI investigates transnational crime and conducts a wide range of domestic and international criminal investigations arising from the illegal movement of people and merchandise into, within, and out of the United States, often in coordination with other federal agencies. OPLA provides specialized legal advice within ICE and is the exclusive legal representative for the United States in exclusion, deportation, and removal proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review at the U.S. Department of Justice.

ICE enforces an extremely broad set of federal laws and regulations with jurisdiction over the investigation of crimes with a nexus to U.S. borders and ports of entry. We focus our broad investigative authority on three operational priorities – border security, public safety, and counterterrorism/national security. ICE investigates offenses that stem from its traditional customs and immigration authorities; weapons smuggling and illegal exports of defense-related materiel and technology; war crimes and human rights violations; drug and contraband

smuggling; financial crimes; cybercrimes and child exploitation; human trafficking and human smuggling; commercial fraud and intellectual property violations; transnational gangs; and document and benefit fraud, to name a few.

I would like to broadly discuss ICE's international operations and note some successes we recently achieved with our foreign partners. ICE's international operations serve two very important functions. First, our overseas agents and officers further the domestic law enforcement operations of our field offices in the United States. Second, they work to build capacity and share information with our foreign partners to stop threats before they reach our nation's borders. ICE deploys approximately 250 Special Agents, 11 Deportation Officers, and 176 support staff to 62 offices in 46 countries. The agency works with foreign counterparts to mitigate threats to public safety and national security through investigative activity.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, ICE collaborated with international counterparts to arrest over 2,400 suspects abroad, and to seize \$21 million in criminal proceeds, 400 firearms, 193,000 pounds of drugs, and \$37 million worth of counterfeit merchandise. These statistics demonstrate ICE's efforts to attack foreign transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) at their root.

Transnational Criminal Investigative Units

The effectiveness of ICE overseas stems from the quality relationships we have with our foreign law enforcement counterparts. The relationships we build with foreign authorities are fundamental to attacking TCOs. ICE is particularly proud of the formalized relationships it has established with numerous foreign law enforcement partners through its Transnational Criminal Investigative Units (TCIUs).

ICE established TCIUs and International Task Forces to enhance transnational efforts against all forms of illicit trafficking with a particular focus on human smuggling. TCIUs are comprised of foreign law enforcement officials, customs officers, immigration officers, and prosecutors who undergo a strict vetting process and complete a prerequisite three-week International Task Force Agent Training (ITAT) course at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). Upon completion of training, TCIU members work together with ICE to investigate significant threats.

TCIUs facilitate seamless information exchanges between ICE special agents and their host nation partners. These units provide a mutual benefit to the United States and the host nation. The Attachés ICE has deployed worldwide – including 23 locations in the Western Hemisphere – share intelligence, conduct joint operations, and assist in prosecutions of transnational criminal organizations both in-country and through the U.S. judicial system. TCIUs also enhance the host country's independent ability to target criminal activities that threaten the stability and national security of the region and pose continuing threats to the security of the United States.

Currently, there are nine units in the TCIU program with more than 250 foreign law enforcement officers. During FY 2015, our TCIUs arrested approximately 694 suspects, seized nearly 17,000 pounds of cocaine, more than \$6.7 million in cash, nearly \$13 million worth of counterfeit merchandise, and numerous firearms, vehicles, and vessels from TCOs.

With additional funding provided by Congress in 2015, ICE expanded TCIUs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia, and reestablished an additional TCIU in Mexico. The 2015 expansion included the graduation of 120 personnel at the three-week ITAT training course.

Human Smuggling Investigations

Investigating human smuggling and human trafficking organizations are two of ICE's highest priorities. As part of our overarching efforts to combat human smuggling, ICE leads two interagency initiatives: the Human Smuggling Cell and Operation Citadel. The Human Smuggling Cell (HSC) created an innovative model that synthesizes the four pillar disciplines of Investigation, Interdiction, Intelligence, and International engagement from DHS component agencies in investigations involving criminal networks. The HSC harnesses DHS's unique access to immigration, border, and financial data to develop information on individuals or organizations involved in human smuggling. It also serves as the coordination center for all ICE investigative operations to combat human smuggling organizations, and develops and distributes intelligence products.

In summer 2015, ICE led an interagency effort focused on human smuggling in Colombia, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador under Operation Citadel. This operation, coordinated with TCIUs in the region, focused on partner nation capacity building and training with real-time intelligence, interdiction, and investigative operations at international seaports, airports, land borders, and other locations. Furthermore, Operation Citadel's operational and intelligence efforts supported our domestic investigations and the dismantlement of several large-scale transnational criminal organizations involved in human smuggling.

In 2015, Operation Citadel investigative efforts resulted in 210 criminal arrests, the recovery of 51 unaccompanied minors, \$2,078,988 in seized currency, 2,133 biometric enrollments, and the initiation of 68 additional investigations. In addition to the ICE personnel, the 90-day investigative operation included U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S.

Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of State playing a pivotal role to bolster host nation law enforcement, customs, and immigration enforcement capabilities.

Operation Lucero, another initiative under Operation Citadel, was a multinational investigation involving the unified efforts of four countries targeting a prolific TCO operating in Central America. Through the dismantlement of this TCO, 14 separate human smuggling routes were disrupted. Some of these human smugglers were responsible for moving third-country nationals from the Eastern Hemisphere through South and Central America to the Southwest Border. Therefore, ICE is leveraging increased information sharing and coordination to connect nodes of transnational crime through the DHS Human Smuggling Cell, as well as other international information hubs for intelligence and investigations such as EUROPOL and INTERPOL.

Counterterrorism and Counter-Proliferation Investigations

One of Secretary Johnson's top priorities is counterterrorism. At ICE, we seek to leverage our expertise and investigative methodologies to counter criminal and terrorist organizations. Both sets of bad actors seek to exploit legitimate U.S. trade, travel, and financial systems in furtherance of their financial or ideological objectives.

Within ICE, our goal is to prevent terrorist attacks against the United States before they materialize by ensuring that our various investigative programs, and domestic and international field offices, collaborate with the Intelligence Community and with federal, state, local, tribal, and international law enforcement partners. ICE is the second-largest contributor of federal task force agents to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Joint Terrorism Task Forces (second only to the FBI itself), which rely on our investigative expertise and broad enforcement authorities.

Repatriation Efforts, Fugitives and Transiting Criminals, and Human Rights Violators

In addition to Special Agents overseas, ICE deploys Deportation Liaison Officers (DLOs) assigned to ICE Attaché offices who provide the necessary expertise to ensure the expeditious removal of aliens ordered removed from the United States. In addition, these officers conduct a significant level of foreign government liaison, assist in negotiating bilateral agreements on repatriation, and facilitate the issuance of identity documents in order to obtain the travel documents required to remove aliens from the United States. These officers liaise with foreign agencies and INTERPOL, and help obtain country clearances for ICE officers escorting aliens during removal missions. These officers also provide additional subject matter expertise to U.S. Mission personnel in the region concerning ICE's immigration and removal policies.

To enhance this mission, ICE is in the process of expanding its DLO footprint in ICE Attaché offices. Currently, officers are assigned to Thailand, China, Germany, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, South Africa, Italy, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Morocco, Brazil, the Netherlands, and EUROPOL. ICE will soon have personnel assigned in Austria, Egypt, and India.

ICE also works to locate foreign fugitives within the United States who are wanted for serious crimes committed abroad. ICE's DLOs are embedded both at INTERPOL and EUROPOL to identify criminals who have entered or are seeking to enter the United States or those who pose a public safety threat. Through ICE's Fugitive Alien Removal Initiative, we arrested an agency record – 345 foreign fugitives – within the United States in 2015. Partnering with INTERPOL and the U.S. Marshals Service, ICE conducted Project Red last year, which resulted in the arrest of 27 foreign fugitives wanted for various crimes including murder, kidnaping, and rape.

Finally, ICE personnel seek to locate, investigate, and remove human rights violators wanted for war crimes in their home countries. During Operation No Safe Haven I in 2014, ICE arrested 21 human rights violators. In Operation No Safe Haven II in 2015, ICE arrested 50 human rights violators. These at-large immigration enforcement efforts are directed by ICE's National Fugitive Operations Program, in coordination with HSI's Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Unit and the Human Rights Law Section of ICE's Office of the Principal Legal Advisor. Planning these operations also includes close coordination with our foreign government counterparts directly, including both INTERPOL and EUROPOL.

Conclusion

I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of ICE and its law enforcement mission. I am confident that we will continue to build upon the momentum we have generated as a result of our considerable operational achievements around the world. ICE remains committed to working with this subcommittee to forge a strong and productive relationship going forward to help prevent and combat threats to our nation.

I would be pleased to answer any questions.