

Testimony of Amb. Michael Kozak
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Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee Western Hemisphere Subcommittee
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“The National Security Strategy and the Western Hemisphere”

Chairman Curtis, Ranking Member Kaine, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on how we are advancing America’s interests through our engagement in the Western Hemisphere.

President Trump’s National Security Strategy affirms the critical importance of the Western Hemisphere to our national interests and outlines an ambitious agenda that includes securing our borders, defeating narco-terrorist groups, and expanding economic opportunities for Americans. The NSS also underscores the importance of countering propaganda and eliminating the influence of global adversaries and malign actors in the Western Hemisphere. We have seen tremendous success over the last 17 months.

Our first objective has been eliminating illegal immigration. President Trump’s comprehensive approach to border security working with partners throughout the region has achieved unprecedented results: daily illegal immigrant encounters at the U.S. southwest border are down 92 percent. We have facilitated the highest number of deportations in history to remove aliens with no right to remain in the United States, reducing the burden on our immigration system. Our leadership has enabled partners across the region to enhance control of their own borders. Foreign leaders have expressed how they now realize the societal ills their countries suffered because of human trafficking from and through them. And our efforts to end illegal immigration have also contributed substantially to our objective of defeating the cartels. A very significant amount of their overall revenue came from moving illegal immigrants to the United States from countries throughout the world. That source of income is now severely diminished

Our second objective has been to make Americans and populations in the region safer by disrupting the flow of illicit narcotics. We have designated as terrorist groups 18 transnational criminal organizations and gangs throughout the

Hemisphere for what they are: terrorist groups which not only commit crimes but threaten the control of governments over their own territories. This designation has enabled us to use additional law enforcement tools against these organizations. In March, President Trump expanded our efforts through the Shield of the Americas Summit and the Americas Counter Cartel Coalition. Leaders who share our resolve to defeat cartels and foreign terrorist groups operating in the Western Hemisphere are engaged as never before. We are committed to ending the scourge of narcotrafficking and ensuring no safe haven for traffickers and their enablers.

Our resolve to defeat narco-terrorists is most evident in Venezuela. The January 3rd U.S. law enforcement operation in Venezuela removed the top narcotrafficker and sent a strong signal to others that collaboration with traffickers has consequences. The officials of the Venezuelan interim government now comply with our requests, and we are now able to operate against gangs and cartels there.

Our third objective has been to end the influence of malign foreign actors who have sought to use presence in the region to undermine the sovereignty of states in the region and to control critical minerals and other resources vital to the economy and security of the United States and its allies. The Department of State announced this April a visa restriction policy that targets those working on behalf of U.S. adversaries to undermine our national interests in the Western Hemisphere. We have leveraged this tool against individuals who have engaged in these activities in our hemisphere and have already seen a deterrent effect.

We also support partners who stand up to the influence of extra-hemispheric competitors. The sovereignty of our hemisphere is non-negotiable. We, along with others in the region, support Panama as China conducts economic retaliation and seeks to undermine the rule of law in Panama following the decision by Panama's independent Supreme Court regarding the Balboa and Cristóbal ports.

A related objective has been to advance the involvement of U.S. and allied firms in the construction of and investment in critical infrastructure. Across the hemisphere, we are also strengthening our supply chains. On critical minerals, we have signed seven cooperative MOUs that will speed up resource development. The linkages created between America and our partners in key strategic sectors will benefit both sides and push our competitors out of the region.

President Trump is clear on the critical importance of American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere. We are now building the partnerships necessary throughout the Americas to ensure our safety and expand our prosperity.

As we pursue these overarching objectives, we are also addressing natural and man-made disasters in the region.

Our partnership with the people of the region is reflected in our rapid and robust response to the devastation caused by twin earthquakes in Venezuela on June 24. We have mobilized an unprecedented effort to support Venezuela, including more than \$386 million in assistance, the deployment of USAR teams from Los Angeles, Fairfax County, Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami to save individuals trapped in the rubble. Our colleagues at the Department of War repaired damaged runways and assisted with logistics and support of emergency personnel in country. We are now working to help the interim government acquire housing for those who lost their homes. America stands with the Venezuelan people during this difficult time.

But Venezuela also continues to suffer from the man-made tragedies caused by the Maduro regime. To this end, we will continue to implement our three-phased approach of stabilization, economic recovery and political reconciliation, and then transition to a democratically elected government. We were seeing substantial progress prior to the earthquake, including legislative reforms and an agenda for the interim government and members of the 2015 Legislative National Assembly to work together to put in place the machinery necessary to conduct elections.

As the Secretary has said, there will have to be elections in Venezuela. We must be patient but never complacent. As the recovery and reconciliation process plays out in Venezuela, the benefits extend beyond its borders.

Speaking of even graver man-made disasters, with Maduro's arrest, the Cuban communist regime lost its last benefactor. The end of massive subsidies at the expense of the Venezuelan people exposed the Cuban communist regime's economic incompetence. As the Secretary said, we have 90 miles from our shores a failed state that is friendly territory for some of our adversaries. President Trump has made clear that we will not tolerate this threat at our doorstep any longer.

The President issued an Executive Order on May 1 addressing the national security threat and targeting the Cuban regime, its security apparatus, and its grip on the economy.

On May 20, Raul Castro was indicted for his role in the 1996 shoot-down of two Brothers to the Rescue planes and murder of three U.S. citizens and one lawful permanent resident.

July 11 marked the five-year anniversary of historic, widespread protests in Cuba, where tens of thousands of Cubans took to the streets demanding food, medicine, electricity, and greater freedoms. The regime responded with brutal repression. Several hundred peaceful protestors remain in Cuban jails, five years later. We continue to demand that the regime release all political prisoners.

As Secretary Rubio has said, the status quo is no longer tenable. Cuba must make immediate economic and political reforms that will allow it to re-emerge as a productive and responsible member of the Western Hemisphere.

Nicaragua suffers from a brutal, kleptocratic dictatorial dynasty that represses all facets of the Catholic Church as well as its regular citizens, and hosts security adversaries of the United States. The status quo in Nicaragua is intolerable for the United States and its neighbors as well as for the Nicaraguan people. It must change and soon.

We aren't just concerned about instability and malign actors in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

In May 2025, the Trump Administration designated Haitian gangs Viv Ansa and Gran Grif as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists. These terrorist gangs threaten the Haitian people and our own national security interests in the region. The Trump Administration supports the swift mobilization of the Gang Suppression Force to help restore Haiti's baseline stability, prevent state collapse, and deter mass illegal immigration to the United States.

We have already seen some progress with strategically important patrols in Port au Prince. We expect to see greater gains as the GSF fully deploys and as the Haitian Police increase their numbers thanks to a program developed by our colleagues in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.