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GAO

Report to the Honorable Jeff Sessions
U.S. Senate

January 2002

DRUG CONTROL

Difficulties in Measuring Costs and Results of Transit Zone Interdiction Efforts

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Contents

Figures

Abbreviations

AMICC	Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center
CCDB	Consolidated Counterdrug Data Base
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
EPIC	El Paso Intelligence Center
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDSS	Federal-wide Drug Seizure System
GAO	General Accounting Office
JIATF-East (-West)	Joint Interagency Task Force East (West)
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy
USIC	U.S. Interdiction Coordinator

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

January 25, 2002

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
United States Senate

Dear Senator Sessions:

Illegal drugs, primarily cocaine from countries in South America, continue to be a major threat to the health and well being of American citizens. One of the goals of the National Drug Control Strategy[1] is to protect America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat. To help achieve this goal, the United States has efforts under way to interdict illegal narcotics moving through the transit zone — a 6 million square mile area that includes the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, Central America, the northern coast of South America, Mexico, and the Eastern Pacific. Drug interdiction efforts consist of several phases, including the detection and monitoring of potential drug-smuggling aircraft and vessels, and the seizure of drugs and arrest of drug smugglers. Within the transit zone, the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard), and the U.S. Customs Service (Customs) play key roles in drug interdiction efforts.

You asked us to review the air and maritime drug interdiction activities of DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs in the transit zone. In response to your request, we reviewed and are reporting on (1) the roles of DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs in transit zone drug interdiction; (2) the extent to which we can identify funds obligated during fiscal years 1998 through 2000 for transit zone drug interdiction for DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs and what assets (flight hours and ship days) were used for this effort; (3) what results DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs track to demonstrate their effectiveness in transit zone drug interdiction; and (4) whether multiple agencies are reporting the same cocaine seizures and what procedures and data systems are in place to ensure the accuracy of cocaine seizure data when multiple agencies participate in seizures.

[1]In 1996, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) prepared a national drug control strategy that established five goals to reduce drug demand and supply. The strategy was updated annually until February 1999, when ONDCP prepared a 5-year strategy pursuant to 21 U.S.C. 1705(a). Under 21 U.S.C. 1705(b), ONDCP must prepare an annual report on the progress in implementing the strategy.

To address our review objectives, we interviewed officials from DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs, as well as from coordinating organizations such as ONDCP, the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC),[2] the Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATF-East), the Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-West), and Customs' Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center (AMICC). In addition, we requested from DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs agency data on budget obligations, flight hours, and ship days; obtained available agency results data; and reviewed annual agency performance reports for fiscal years 1998 through 2000.[3] We reviewed documentation for DOD's, the Coast Guard's, and Customs' drug seizure databases and for two interagency drug seizure databases, and attended a conference on cocaine seizure data. We further assessed the reliability of the cocaine seizure data in the drug seizure databases by comparing the records in the Coast Guard and Customs databases and the two interagency seizure databases for a sample of seizures that were reported in agency press releases in fiscal years 1998 through 2000.

Our review was limited to the activities of DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs in interdicting drugs smuggled by aircraft or maritime vessels from South America through the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean and did not examine the activities of the three agencies in detecting, monitoring, and apprehending drug smugglers on land in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean nations, or at the U.S. land border, or en route from Asia. In addition, our examination of whether multiple agencies counted the same cocaine seizures cannot be generalized to how agencies count other drugs that are seized in the transit zone. More detailed information about our scope and methodology appears in appendix I.

Results in Brief

The transit zone drug interdiction roles of DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs overlap. All three agencies participate in detection and monitoring activities, but DOD has the lead responsibility. Because DOD personnel may not directly participate in a search, seizure, or arrest, DOD relies on the Coast Guard and Customs for drug arrests and seizures in the transit zone. Within the transit zone, the Coast Guard is the lead agency for the apprehension of maritime drug-smuggling vessels, and Customs

[2]In this report, USIC refers to both the Interdiction Coordinator and the committee that supports that position.

[3]These reports are required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-62).

provides assistance as necessary. The Coast Guard and Customs share the lead for the apprehension of drug-smuggling aircraft. In addition, the three agencies receive guidance for their transit zone drug interdiction efforts from several coordinating organizations, such as ONDCP.

It was not possible to identify the funds obligated by these three agencies and the number of flight hours and ship days used for drug interdiction in the transit zone because the agencies do not routinely track this information for activities specifically in the transit zone. In response to our request, DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs attempted to estimate the funds they obligated and assets they used for transit zone drug interdiction for fiscal years 1998 through 2000. However, since the interdiction funding and assets of the agencies included activities in and out of the transit zone, among other things, the estimates were considered to be unreliable as precise estimates of transit-zone specific activities.

The results tracked by DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs to demonstrate their effectiveness in transit zone drug interdiction activities vary in terms of whether they focus on drug seizures or results of detection and monitoring activities and whether they are specific to the transit zone. DOD and Customs track the results of detection and monitoring. For example, DOD tracks the effectiveness of its ships and planes in detecting drug smugglers. The Coast Guard tracks the amount of drugs seized and the quantity of cocaine seized out of the estimated flow of cocaine to the United States. However, not all of these measures of results are specific to the transit zone.

DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs have reported the same cocaine seizures in their individual agency reports when more than one of them participated in the interdiction effort. Agency officials told us that they believe that this practice is appropriate, as, in their view, many cocaine seizures, as well as other drug seizures, would not have occurred without the involvement and cooperation of all the agencies that participated. Agencies reported cocaine seizures in which they played a role in their annual measures of results and in press releases. In the press releases we reviewed, we found that agencies gave credit to one another when they made cocaine seizures as a result of joint efforts. There are a number of controls that agencies use to ensure the accuracy of their own cocaine seizure data, such as assigning unique identification numbers to each seizure and headquarters review of data input by field units. There are also two interagency data systems established to ensure the accuracy of cocaine seizure data governmentwide when multiple agencies participate in a seizure. For example, the Federal-wide Drug Seizure System (FDSS)

was developed to prevent multiple counting of drugs seized by participating federal law enforcement agencies. The two interagency data systems are not designed to prevent individual agencies from each counting cocaine seizures in their own databases and annual counts when more than one agency participates in the seizure.

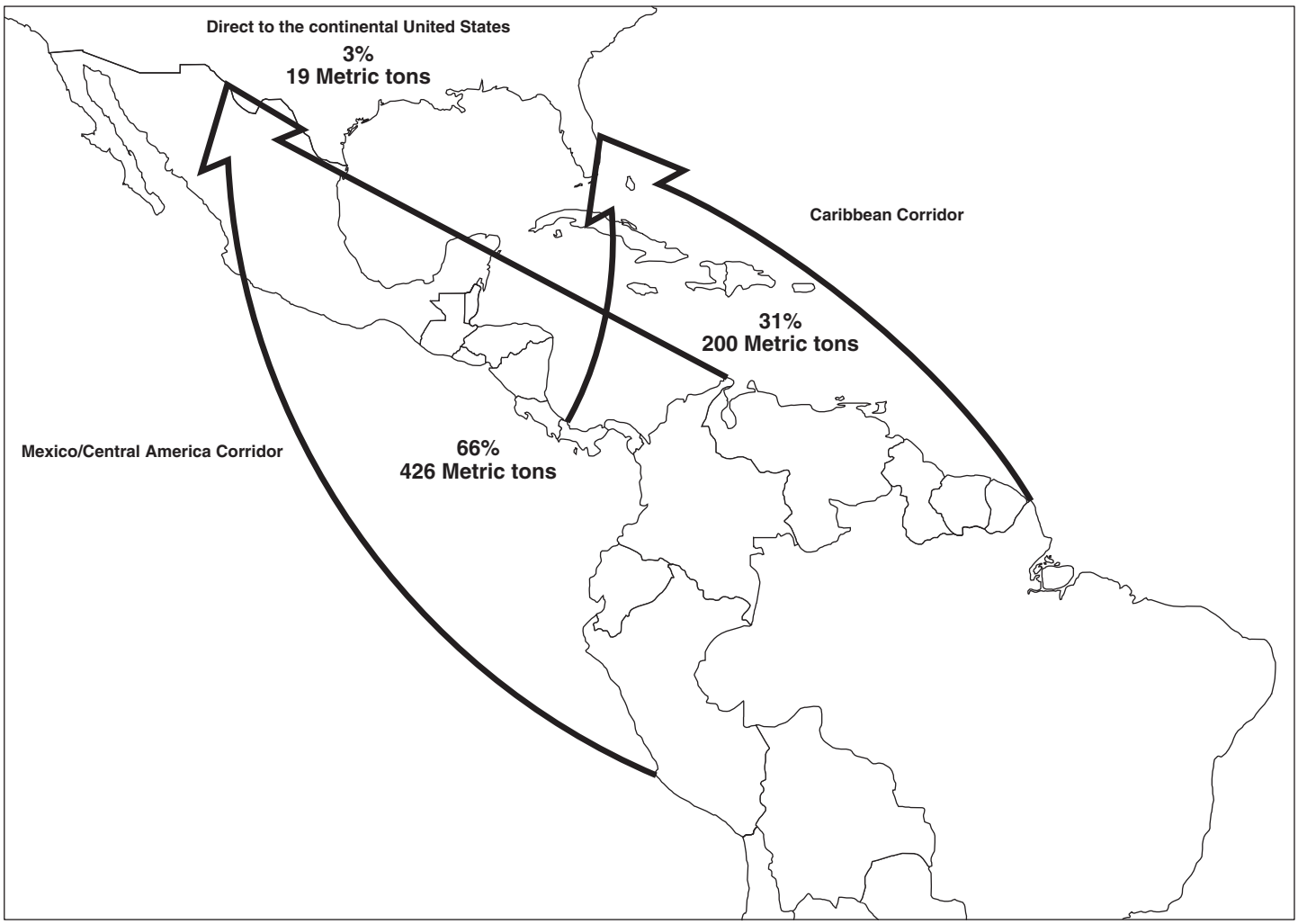
We requested comments on a draft of this report from the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation; the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service; the Administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); and the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The agencies concurred with the report. They also provided technical comments, which have been incorporated in this report where appropriate.

Background

A primary goal of the National Drug Control Strategy is to reduce the amount of illegal drugs entering the United States. South America is a major source of drugs, particularly cocaine, shipped through the transit zone to the United States. In 2000, ONDCP estimated that 31 percent of cocaine shipped from South America to the United States transited the Caribbean Corridor, and 66 percent came through the Mexico-Central America Corridor (which includes the Eastern Pacific).[4] The remaining 3 percent went directly from South America to the continental United States (see fig. 1).

[4]ONDCP, *2000 Annual Assessment of Cocaine Movement* (Washington, D.C.: ONDCP), February 2001, p. 2.

Figure 1: Transit Zone Cocaine Flow Map



Source: Prepared by GAO based on ONDCP's *2000 Annual Assessment of Cocaine Movement.*

According to the National Drug Control Strategy 2000 Annual Report, drug interdiction in the transit zone is intended to disrupt the flow of drugs, increase risks to traffickers, force traffickers to use less efficient routes and methods of delivery, and prevent significant quantities of drugs from reaching the United States. Drug interdiction operations may also produce information that can be used by domestic law enforcement agencies against trafficking organizations.

According to the 1999 National Interdiction Command and Control Plan,[5] a completed drug interdiction normally consists of six phases, some of which may occur simultaneously. (1) Provision of intelligence information to drug interdiction agencies indicating that a drug-smuggling activity is planned or underway. (2) Initial detection of a potential smuggling aircraft or vessel. (3) Monitoring, which consists of tracking a target aircraft or vessel (maintaining information on its position, course, and speed) and moving to intercept it. (4) Identifying drug-smuggling traffic from legitimate traffic. (5) Handoff, or shifting of primary responsibility between forces, such as from DOD to the Coast Guard. (6) Apprehending (detaining, arresting, or seizing) suspects, drugs, or vehicles or causing the suspects to jettison their drugs or to turn back from their mission. In this report, we use the term "drug interdiction" to refer to activities in any or all of these six phases.

In a hypothetical example, drug interdiction agencies receive intelligence that a drug-smuggling aircraft will be leaving South America en route to the United States in the next few days. A DOD radar facility subsequently detects a small, low-flying plane on a known trafficking route. Alerted by this information and other intelligence, a military aircraft uses its radar system to track the plane. A Customs aircraft then approaches the suspect plane to make a visual identification. The Customs pilot observes the suspect plane dropping what appears to be a load of drugs to a waiting smuggling vessel in the waters below. The location of the vessel is given to the Coast Guard so that it can apprehend the drug-smuggling suspects and seize the drugs. The plane is tracked by the Customs pilot, and foreign law enforcement forces are alerted so that they can apprehend the drug-smuggling suspects when the plane lands at a foreign airfield.

[5]The National Interdiction Command and Control Plan was published to define, among other things, the relationships between the drug interdiction agencies, the interagency drug interdiction task forces, and USIC. The most recent plan was approved in 1999 by the Director of ONDCP, the DOD Drug Coordinator, the Commandant of the Coast Guard, the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service, and the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator.

Interdiction Roles of DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs Overlap

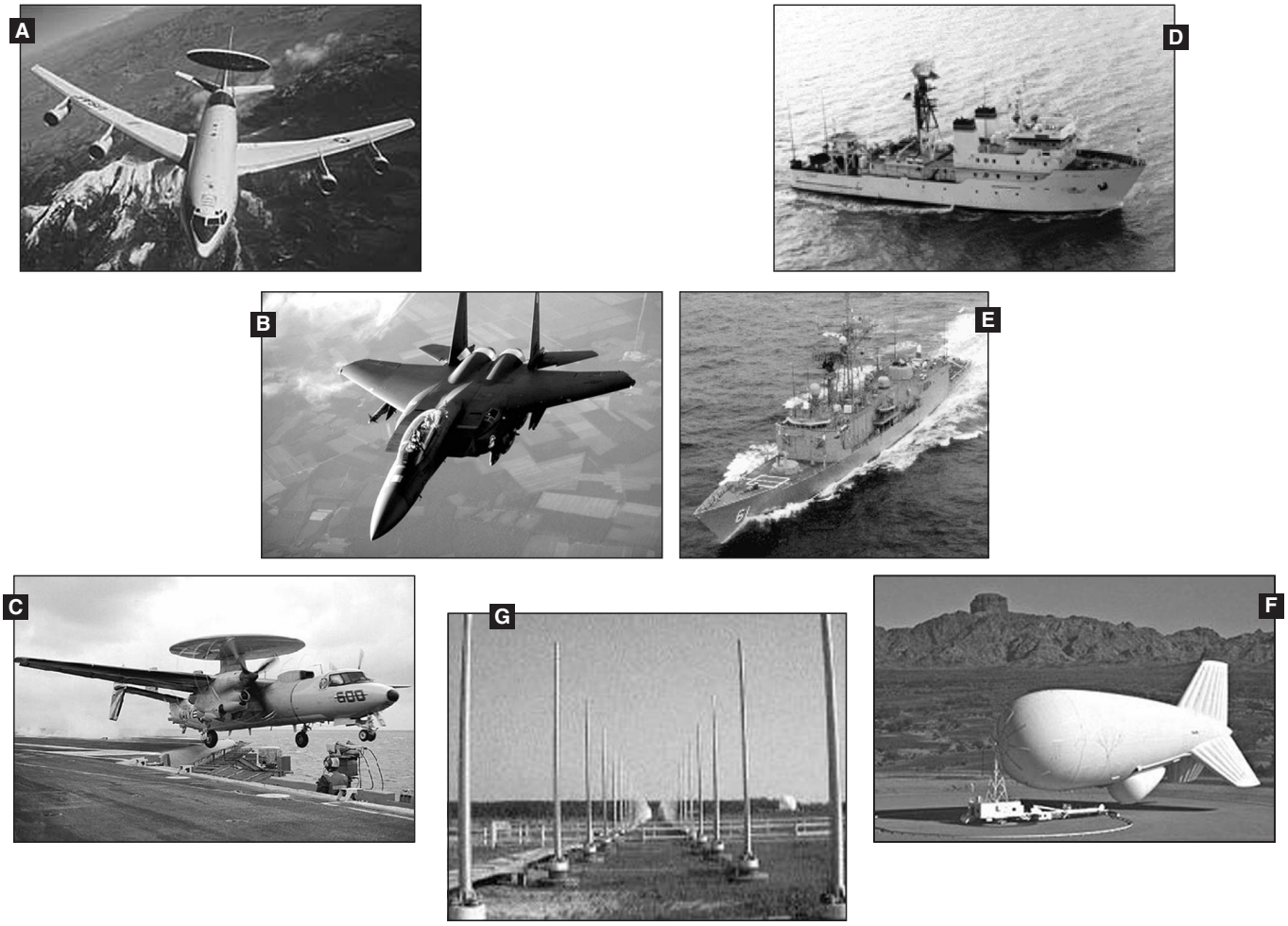
The interdiction roles of DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs overlap regarding the types of activities they perform and the geographic areas they cover. Because of this, the agencies must cooperate and work together in order for interdiction to be successful. Five coordinating organizations also guide and support their activities.

DOD serves as the lead federal agency for detecting and monitoring air and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States.[6] DOD uses equipment such as Navy ships and aircraft, Air Force aircraft, and radar for this purpose (see fig. 2). The Coast Guard and Customs also provide aircraft and ships for detection and monitoring, but DOD coordinates and integrates their efforts. By statute, DOD personnel may not directly participate in a search, seizure, arrest, or other similar activity, unless authorized by law.[7] As a result, DOD relies on U.S. or foreign law enforcement agencies to exercise civilian law enforcement powers to carry out that part of the interdiction effort.

[6]10 U.S.C. 124.

[7]10 U.S.C. 375.

Figure 2: Examples of DOD Assets



A. Air Force E-3 Sentry (Airborne Warning and Control Systems aircraft): Provides air and maritime radar surveillance, detection, and tracking of suspect targets.

B. Air Force F-15: Has air-to-air search and tracking radar and is used as an interceptor aircraft.

C. Navy E-2C Hawkeye: Provides air and maritime radar detection, search, and surveillance.

D. Navy Tactical-Auxiliary General Ocean Surveillance Support Ship: Provides air search radar capability and extensive communications equipment.

E. Frigate: Used as radar ships for air and maritime search and surveillance to support detection and monitoring. Also capable of supporting a helicopter. When law enforcement detachment is embarked, ships can support maritime interception and apprehension.

F. Tethered Aerostat Radar: Static, tethered balloons that carry radar sets to an altitude of 10,000-15,000 feet.

G. Relocatable Over-the-Horizon Radar: Provides wide-area detection and surveillance of air targets.

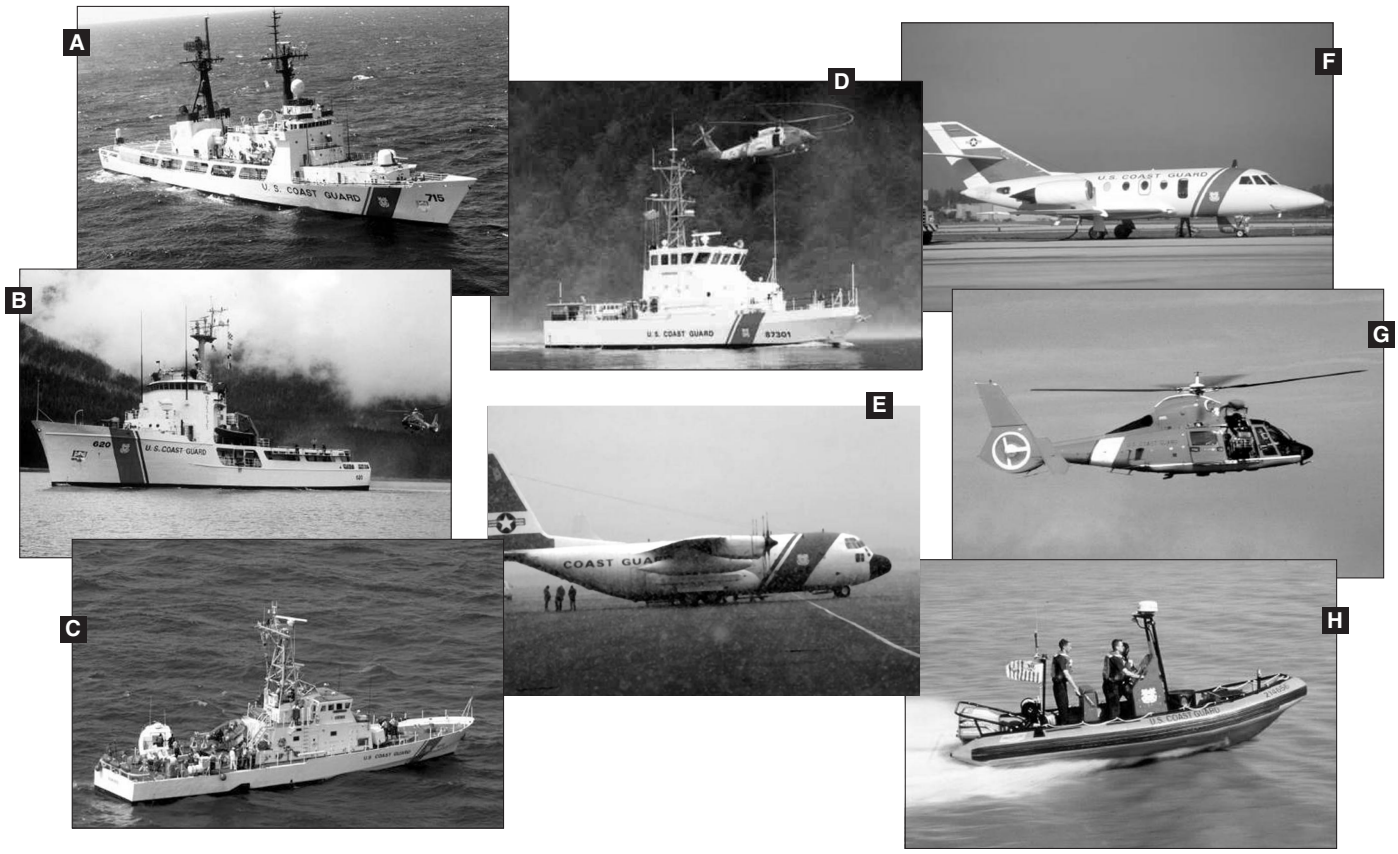
Sources: U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy.

Within the transit zone, the Coast Guard is the lead agency for the apprehension of maritime drug traffickers. In addition, Coast Guard law enforcement detachments are required by statute to travel on board designated Navy ships for drug interdiction missions to perform law enforcement functions.[8] During boarding operations, the Navy ships come under the operational control of the Coast Guard detachments. These detachments perform the actual search and seizure of a suspect vessel, and make any arrests, since the U.S. military is prohibited from doing so.[9] (See fig. 3 for examples of Coast Guard assets.)

[8]10 U.S.C. 379.

[9]Also, the U.S. government has signed memorandums of understanding with allied foreign nations (Great Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands) performing counterdrug missions in the transit zone, so that Coast Guard personnel can be deployed on board these nations' ships to assist in drug interdiction.

Figure 3: Examples of Coast Guard Assets



A. 378-Foot High Endurance Cutter: Used for detection and monitoring and as a platform for intercepting and boarding suspect vessels. Can support helicopter operations.

B. 210-Foot Medium Endurance Cutter: Used for detection and monitoring and as a platform for intercepting and boarding suspect vessels. Can support helicopter operations.

C. 110-Foot Patrol Boat: Used as a platform for intercepting and boarding suspect vessels. Can support operations of short-range recovery helicopters.

D. 87-Foot Coastal Patrol Boat: Used as a platform for intercepting and boarding suspect vessels. Can support operations of short-range recovery helicopters.

E. HC-130 "Hercules" Surveillance Aircraft: Used for detection and monitoring of suspect targets.

F. HU-25 "Guardian" Medium Range Surveillance Aircraft: Used for intercepting and tracking suspect aircraft.

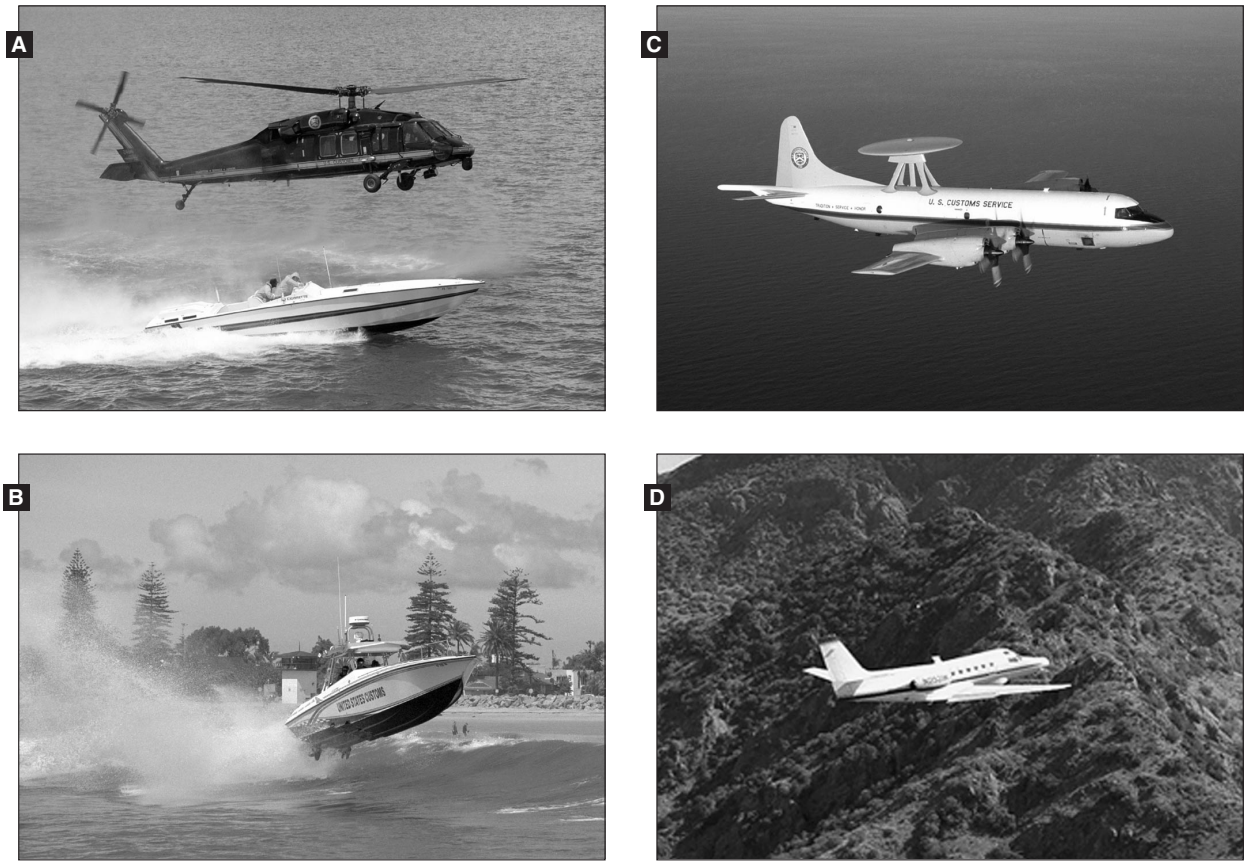
G. HH-65A "Dolphin" Short Range Recovery Helicopter: Used for detection and monitoring of suspect targets.

H. Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat: Carried on board cutters. Can be used to intercept fast-moving suspect boats.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

Within the transit zone, Customs is co-lead with the Coast Guard for the apprehension of drug trafficking aircraft. The agency also assists the Coast Guard with apprehension of maritime drug traffickers. For example, a Customs aircraft equipped with surface search radar can detect and track a maritime vessel, then work with Customs boats and Coast Guard ships to apprehend the suspect drug traffickers. (See fig. 4 for examples of Customs assets.)

Figure 4: Examples of Customs Assets



A. Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk Helicopter: Acquire and apprehend aircraft, vessels, and vehicles involved in smuggling.

B. "Go-fast" Pursuit Boat: Work in conjunction with marine surveillance aircraft and boats to intercept, board, and search suspect vessels.

C. P-3 Orion: Monitor shipping lanes and air routes in search of smuggling activities.

D. Citation: Equipped with intercept radar, used for short-range tracking and interception of air targets.

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

Coordinating organizations help guide and support the three agencies' drug interdiction efforts in the transit zone. Their transit zone roles are briefly discussed in table 1. Representatives from DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs advise the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, and staff JIATF-East, JIATF-West, and AMICC. Appendix II contains more detailed information on these organizations.

Table 1: The Transit Zone Roles of Drug Interdiction Coordinating Organizations

Coordinating organization	Transit zone role
ONDCP	Develops and coordinates the implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy, which includes the goal of shielding America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat.
USIC	Coordinates efforts of U.S. departments and agencies in the conduct and support of international drug interdiction.
JIATF-East	Coordinates the detection, monitoring, identification, and handoff of suspect air and maritime drug trafficking events in part of the Pacific Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea, Mexico, Central America, and the Atlantic.
JIATF-West	Coordinates the detection, monitoring, and identification of suspect drug targets in part of the Pacific Ocean.
AMICC	Identifies suspect aircraft coming within 100 nautical miles of the U.S. border and coordinates their interception and apprehension.

Sources: National Drug Control Strategy 2000 Annual Report and the 1999 National Interdiction Command and Control Plan.

Agencies Do Not Track Funds Obligated and Assets Used for Transit Zone Interdiction

DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs do not track data on funds obligated and assets used specifically for transit zone drug interdiction. For the purposes of this review, we asked agency officials to attempt to isolate funds they obligated and assets they used for drug interdiction in the transit zone. DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs attempted to produce such estimates, but because of substantial differences among the agencies' methods and other limitations, these estimates were not reliable, and will not be presented in this report.

Agency Estimates of Funds Obligated for Transit Zone Interdiction Had Limitations

DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs do not track the funds they obligate specifically for transit zone drug interdiction. The three agencies provided us with estimates of those funds, but these estimates had a number of limitations. In the case of DOD, the agency could not isolate its funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction for several reasons. First, DOD could not always distinguish funds obligated for detection and monitoring from those used for noninterdiction counterdrug activities.[10] DOD

[10]Examples of noninterdiction counterdrug activities include the transportation of personnel of the United States and foreign countries to facilitate counterdrug activities; counterdrug related training of law enforcement personnel of federal, state, and local governments and of foreign countries; and intelligence analysis services.

provided us with a list of funds obligated for individual DOD programs[11] for fiscal years 1998 through 2000, broken out by country or geographic area and by type of counterdrug activity (such as detection and monitoring). However, there were instances where the individual funded program had multiple purposes. For example, funds DOD obligated to several programs in the Caribbean were used for both detection and monitoring and for noninterdiction counterdrug activities. Including such cases resulted in an overestimate of the funds obligated exclusively for detection and monitoring, and thus for transit zone drug interdiction. Second, the funds obligated did not include active-duty personnel costs,[12] resulting in an underestimate of total funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction.[13] Third, funds obligated for detection and monitoring in the Eastern Pacific area could not be included in our analysis because DOD did not track funds obligated specifically for that area,[14] resulting in an underestimate of total funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction.

As with DOD, the Coast Guard could not identify funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction. The agency's estimate did not cover the entire time period requested and was not specific to the transit zone. The Coast Guard provided us with estimates of funds obligated for fiscal years 1999 and 2000. According to Coast Guard budget officials, data were unavailable for 1998 because ONDCP did not require agencies to report their funds obligated for drug interdiction until 1999.[15] In addition, the Coast Guard's estimates of funds it obligated for drug interdiction were based on the hours spent on drug interdiction missions combined with a cost factor. Because the agency's tracking system does not distinguish

[11]Examples of such programs include fleet support and maritime patrol craft upgrades.

[12]The data do include procurement, operations and maintenance, personnel costs of the reserve component, and research and development costs.

[13]According to a study commissioned by ONDCP, the constant rotation of personnel to and from the counterdrug mission makes it extremely difficult under the current DOD budgeting system to capture the costs associated with active-duty personnel involved in counterdrug operations. This has the effect of underestimating the overall amount in the funding for counterdrug activities in the DOD budget. (P. Murphy, L. Davis, T. Liston, D. Thaler, and K. Webb, *Improving Anti-Drug Budgeting* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), 2000, p. 38.)

[14]Instead, DOD listed funds obligated for programs in countries such as Mexico and Thailand, which could include activities outside the transit zone.

[15]Coast Guard budget officials said that the agency changed its budget methodology in 1999, and retroactively applying the new methodology to data from 1998 would result in inaccurate information.

hours spent in the transit zone from hours spent in U.S. territorial waters, the data the Coast Guard provided to us included funds obligated for drug interdiction activities in both areas.

Likewise, Customs could not isolate funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction, in this case resulting in an underestimate of these funds. Three factors contributed to this underestimation. First, the data were not representative of all of Customs' transit zone air interdiction efforts. Customs' estimates of funds it obligated for transit zone interdiction were based on the recorded hours each aircraft spent on interdiction activities in the transit zone, multiplied by the average hourly operating cost for that type of aircraft. Customs provided data for specific flights made during fiscal years 1998 through 2000 where pilots indicated that their mission was in the transit zone. However, pilots were not required to record that information in Customs' data system. For example, a Customs aircraft could take off from Miami and fly to a drug interdiction mission in the transit zone. Unless the pilot specified the location of the plane, those hours would be logged to the Miami Air Branch rather than to any specific geographic area.[16] Customs was not able to estimate, for those flights in which the geographic area had not been recorded, the amount of time those pilots spent in the transit zone. Second, as with DOD, the Customs data did not include personnel costs because Customs does not track personnel costs by mission type.[17] Third, Customs did not provide data on funds obligated for its marine unit's transit zone drug interdiction activities because, according to a Customs official, marine unit data were unreliable prior to October 2000. The marine unit did not have a centralized reporting system before its merger with the air unit in 1999, and the agency's data collection system was not modified to incorporate data from its marine assets until October 2000.

Agency budget officials told us that although they do not track funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction, they track funds obligated for drug interdiction in other ways that are more consistent with their responsibilities in the transit zone and elsewhere. For example, ONDCP requires that DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs estimate funds obligated

[16]A Customs official told us that the agency intends to change its data collection system. One change will be to make it mandatory for crews to fill in the geographic field in the data system.

[17]However, the data included such costs as maintenance, fuel, radar, and repairs for communications systems.

for each goal of the National Drug Control Strategy, including the goal of protecting America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat. Budget officials from the Coast Guard and Customs told us that, in pursuit of this goal of the Strategy, their drug interdiction missions often involved activities that took place in both the transit zone and in U.S. territory or U.S. territorial waters. Because of this, these agencies focus on tracking budget data that are not specific to the transit zone. Coast Guard and Customs officials told us that tracking budget data specifically by transit zone would not enhance their capabilities to manage their overall drug interdiction responsibilities.

Agency Estimates of Asset Use Had Limitations

Because DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs do not track data on assets used (flight hours and ship days) explicitly for transit zone drug interdiction, the three agencies attempted to estimate this information in response to our request. As with their estimates of funds obligated, the asset estimates also had a number of limitations. Specifically, DOD provided data for fiscal year 2000, collected from JIATF-East and JIATF-West, on the amount of time DOD assets spent on detection and monitoring activities in the transit zone. We requested data for fiscal years 1998 and 1999 on DOD's flight hours and ship days directly from JIATF-East and -West. In May 1999, JIATF-East changed the way it collected information on flight hours and ship days, when it began differentiating between total time spent on detection and monitoring missions (including time en route to the mission area) and the amount of time the asset was actually on-site. This change limits direct comparison of asset use data across the 3 fiscal years.

The Coast Guard's difficulties in estimating asset time used for drug interdiction in the transit zone were similar to its difficulties for estimating funds obligated. The agency provided us with asset data for fiscal years 1998 through 2000 but could not isolate its transit zone drug interdiction time because plane and ship crews do not track their time that way. The Coast Guard records flight and ship hours by type of mission (such as drug interdiction, migrant interdiction, or fisheries enforcement), but not by zone.

As with its data on funds obligated, the asset data provided by Customs underestimates the time it used for transit zone drug interdiction. We received flight hour data from Customs for fiscal years 1998 through 2000. According to Customs officials, the asset data represent a substantial undercount of actual drug interdiction time in the transit zone for two reasons. First, pilots are not required to record the location of their

missions in Customs' data system. Customs, therefore, only provided us with flight hour data in which that data field was filled in. As a result, one Customs official estimated that the data we received were missing "well over" 25 percent of the agency's transit zone flight hours. Second, Customs could not provide us with reliable data on its transit zone drug interdiction ship days. Before the merger of the air and marine units in 1999 and modifications to the agency's data collection system in October 2000, the marine unit did not have a centralized reporting system.

The Results Agencies Track to Demonstrate Effectiveness Vary

The measures of results which DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs track to demonstrate their effectiveness in transit zone drug interdiction varied during fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000. Each agency collected different kinds of measures, which varied in terms of whether they focused on detection and monitoring or on drug seizures and whether or not they focused specifically on the agency's activities in the transit zone. DOD is developing measures of results that focus on its role in the detection and monitoring of drug trafficking, and are specific to the transit zone. The Coast Guard tracks the amount of drugs seized, as well as the cocaine seizure rate, although neither measure is specific to the transit zone. Customs tracked transit-zone specific measures, including drugs seized as a result of Customs assistance, up until fiscal year 1999, and then began to track results of its detection and monitoring efforts more generally, not just in the transit zone.

DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs Track Different Results

DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs tracked different measures of results to assess their effectiveness in transit zone drug interdiction efforts. DOD and Customs focused on the results of detection and monitoring efforts and the Coast Guard focused more on seizure-based information, which is consistent with their roles. Table 2 presents examples of DOD's, the Coast Guard's, and Customs' measures of results during fiscal years 1998 through 2000.

Table 2: Examples of Measures of Results Tracked by DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs During Fiscal Years 1998 Through 2000

Agency	Measures of results	Transit-zone specific	Fiscal years	Brief description
DOD	Number of Cocaine-Smuggling Events Detected	Yes	2000	Cocaine-smuggling events initially detected by assets under DOD control, whether or not these events were disrupted.
	Percent of Cocaine-Smuggling Events Detected out of Total Cocaine-Smuggling Events	Yes	2000	Number of cocaine-smuggling events detected/Estimated total number of cocaine-smuggling events. Total number of cocaine-smuggling events estimated from the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB).
	Number of Successful Disruptions of Cocaine-Smuggling Activity	Yes	2000	Successfully disrupting (seizures and dumping of cocaine) cocaine smugglers initially detected by assets under DOD control.
	Percent of Successful Disruptions out of Total Events Detected	Yes	2000	Number of successful disruptions of cocaine-smuggling activity/Total number of cocaine-smuggling events detected.
	Number of Cocaine-Smuggling Aircraft/Boats Seized or Destroyed	Yes	2000	Aircraft/boat seized or destroyed when cocaine trafficking aircraft/boat was initially detected by assets under DOD control.
	Amount of Cocaine Seized	Yes	2000	Cocaine seized when cocaine trafficking aircraft/boat was initially detected by assets under DOD control.
	Percent of Cocaine Flow Seized	Yes	2000	Amount of cocaine seized/Total flow of cocaine. Cocaine flow estimate derived from Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement
Coast Guard[a]	Annual Amount of Cocaine Seized	No	1998 1999 2000	Total amount of cocaine seized each fiscal year.
	Annual Amount of Marijuana Seized	No	1998 1999 2000	Total amount of marijuana seized each fiscal year.
	Annual Cocaine Seizure Rates	No	1998 1999 2000	Total amount of cocaine seized each fiscal year divided by the estimated noncommercial maritime flow of cocaine for the corresponding calendar year, derived from the Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement.[b]
Customs	Pounds of Cocaine Seized from Customs Efforts in the Transit Zone	Yes	1998 1999	Total amount of cocaine seized by foreign law enforcement with the assistance of Customs air and maritime assets.
	Pounds of Marijuana Seized from Customs Efforts in the Transit Zone	Yes	1998 1999	Total amount of marijuana seized by foreign law enforcement with the assistance of Customs air and maritime assets.
	Success in Tracking Drug-Smuggling Aircraft	Yes	1998	The percentage of successful tracks of drug trafficking aircraft in which Customs participates. A successful track indicates that a foreign government law enforcement agency intercepted the aircraft when it landed.

[a]In fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000, the Coast Guard also kept track of a measure called smuggler success rate. Smuggler success rate is a Coast Guard measure that is used for internal management purposes to estimate the impact that law enforcement has on smuggler behavior. It is the estimated amount of cocaine entering the United States expressed as a percentage of the estimated total amount of cocaine that would be transported if the Coast Guard were not present to deter or seize it.

[b]Although the numerator for this measure (total cocaine seized) is measured for the fiscal year and the denominator (estimated noncommercial maritime flow of cocaine) is measured for the associated calendar year, the Coast Guard has determined that substituting the total amount of cocaine seized during the calendar year rather than the fiscal year in the numerator does not have a statistically significant effect.

Sources: DOD, Coast Guard, and Customs documents and interviews with agency officials.

DOD Measures of Results Focus on Detection and Monitoring Role

DOD began tracking measures of results in fiscal year 2000, as a step towards developing formal measures of effectiveness. DOD is not allowed to make drug seizures, and thus has begun to develop measures of results that focus on its role in detection and monitoring. DOD's measures of results are specific to the transit zone, and include, among other things, the amount of cocaine seized in the transit zone where ships, planes, or radar under DOD's control were the initial detection assets, as well as the proportion of cocaine seized out of the total estimated amount of cocaine flow in the transit zone where ships, planes, or radar under DOD's control were the initial detection assets. DOD also collected more detailed information on these results, broken down by specific types of ships, planes, and radar under the control of JIATF-East and JIATF-West, in order to examine the effectiveness of each type of asset. All results data are classified.

The Coast Guard Tracks Drugs Seized and Cocaine Seizure Rate

During fiscal years 1998 through 2000, the Coast Guard tracked: (1) the amount of cocaine seized, (2) the amount of marijuana seized, and (3) the cocaine seizure rate. The amount of cocaine or marijuana seized is not isolated to the transit zone.[18] Tracking the amount of drugs seized alone as a measure of effectiveness has limited utility. That is because increased seizures may be a function of either the increased effectiveness of interdiction agencies or increased drug flow into the United States. The Coast Guard has attempted to address this issue by tracking the cocaine seizure rate. The cocaine seizure rate is the amount of cocaine seized as a

[18]The Secretary of Transportation is required by section 103 of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-324) to submit to the Congress on a quarterly basis a report on all expenditures related to drug interdiction activities of the Coast Guard during the previous quarter. Annual drug seizure amounts are included in these reports.

percentage of the total estimated cocaine flow into the United States.[19] None of these measures are specific to the transit zone.

Customs Has Discontinued Tracking Transit-Zone Specific Measures of Results

In fiscal year 1998, Customs kept track of three transit-zone specific measures of results, including the amount of cocaine and marijuana seized in the transit zone and the track rate (whether suspect air targets were successfully tracked). According to agency officials and Customs reports, transit zone cocaine and marijuana seizures were those made by foreign law enforcement agencies with assistance from Customs air or marine assets. In fiscal year 1999, Customs dropped the track rate but continued to track transit zone cocaine and marijuana seizures. As of fiscal year 2000, Customs no longer tracked measures of results specific to the transit zone.

Customs officials said that the agency's primary responsibility in the transit zone is to provide detection and monitoring and support to agencies, such as the Coast Guard and foreign law enforcement, that are charged with apprehending drug smugglers. Customs officials also said that its air and marine assets travel across the source, transit, and arrival zones and are not isolated to the transit zone.[20] Due to these factors, Customs has discontinued reporting transit-zone specific measures, including seizures, and is developing new measures of effectiveness of its air and marine assets in detecting drug smugglers. The new measures include the number of incidents in which cocaine that was intended to enter the borders of the United States is dropped by smuggler aircraft before entering the country and the number of times drug-smuggling aircraft enter the United States from outside of its borders.[21] These measures are reported in Customs' reports as baselines for future data collection. None of the new measures isolates the results of Customs' activities in the transit zone.

[19]Cocaine seizure rates appear in annual U.S. Department of Transportation reports.

[20]The source zone is the geographic area that is the original source of the illicit drugs (e.g., South America). The arrival zone includes the land, air, and maritime entry points along the borders of and within the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

[21]Other new Customs measures include the number of landings where suspect aircraft stop short of the U.S. border and the number of incidents in which Customs' officers cannot launch their vessels in support of a mission/request.

Multiple Agencies Report the Same Cocaine Seizures in Their Individual Agency Databases and Reports

Both the Coast Guard and Customs have counted the same cocaine seizures in their individual agency databases and subsequently reported the same seizures as contributing to the measures of results used to track their effectiveness in drug interdiction. And although DOD does not seize drugs, it has begun to track whether DOD ships, planes, and radar participated in detection and monitoring activities that resulted in cocaine seizures in the transit zone, and many of these cocaine seizures are the same ones reported by the Coast Guard or Customs. Agency officials we spoke with told us that they believe it is appropriate for each agency to get credit for its involvement in seizing cocaine, since without the participation of any one agency, the seizure may not have occurred. Agencies have also established mechanisms designed to ensure that the seizures in which they participate are being reported accurately. We identified two interagency databases—the FDSS, and the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB)—which were designed, among other things, to improve the accuracy of cocaine seizure data when multiple agencies participate in the seizures. While designed to improve accuracy, neither the agencies' database controls nor the two interagency databases were designed to prevent multiple agencies from each counting the same seizure in their specific agency databases.

When Multiple Agencies Participate in a Cocaine Seizure, More than One Agency May Take Credit

In fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000, both the Coast Guard and Customs counted in their agency annual cocaine seizure statistics some of the same transit zone seizures. These seizures ultimately contributed to the totals reported by the two agencies as measures of their effectiveness in drug interdiction.

The Coast Guard counted towards its overall agency cocaine seizure totals cocaine seizures made by Coast Guard personnel, or those made by Coast Guard personnel working with Customs, other federal law enforcement agencies, or foreign law enforcement agencies. Coast Guard officials told us that the Coast Guard only claims credit for participating in seizures made by other agencies (including foreign law enforcement agencies) when the Coast Guard was the lead agency in the drug interdiction operation, or when its participation was "substantial." In fiscal year 2000, the Coast Guard's database shows that it made 58 cocaine seizures, totaling 132,000 pounds. Of the 58 cocaine seizures, the Coast Guard data show that in 38 instances multiple agencies participated in the seizure. Of these 38, 13 instances involved Customs, 16 instances involved DOD

(through the use of Coast Guard law enforcement detachments working on board U.S. Navy ships), and 9 instances involved local, other federal or foreign agencies, but not Customs or DOD.[22] In reporting overall agency cocaine seizures, the Coast Guard included all 58 seizures as part of the total the agency seized during fiscal year 2000 (and thus contributing to the Coast Guard's seizure rate during that year), but the reports did not indicate whether or not the seizures were made with the assistance of other agencies.

Customs reported transit zone cocaine seizures in which it participated in two ways. First, in fiscal years 1998 and 1999, it reported the amount of cocaine seized by foreign law enforcement agencies as a result of Customs assistance in the transit zone. In fiscal years 1998 and 1999, Customs data showed that it assisted in 20 transit zone cocaine seizures, totaling about 19,000 pounds of cocaine. These totals included 6 cocaine seizures (totaling about 8,000 pounds) that were also included in the Coast Guard's statistics because the Coast Guard had also participated in the seizure. As discussed in the previous section of this report, Customs discontinued reporting transit zone seizures as a measure of effectiveness after fiscal year 1999.

Second, Customs also reported the overall amount of cocaine seized by the agency in fiscal years 1998 through 2000. This measure includes instances where Customs participated in transit zone seizures with other federal agencies.[23] According to Customs officials and our review of Customs seizure data, Customs personnel participated in transit zone cocaine seizures in different ways, including (1) working on multiagency drug-smuggling investigations which produced intelligence that resulted in cocaine seizures by other federal agencies; (2) detecting, monitoring, or tracking suspect drug-smuggling aircraft or vessels that were ultimately apprehended by other federal agencies; or (3) discovering cocaine during

[22]The Coast Guard records in its seizure database whether other agencies participated in the actual seizure of cocaine, but not necessarily whether other agencies contributed intelligence or detection and monitoring information that led to the seizure. For example, the database notes that the U.S. Navy was part of the "seizing unit" in those instances where a Coast Guard law enforcement detachment on board a Navy ship conducted the actual boarding of a smuggler's vessel and the seizure of cocaine. But the database does not show Customs as part of the seizing unit if a Customs surveillance plane detected the smuggling vessel and tracked it to the point where the Coast Guard boarded the vessel.

[23]Customs officials told us that this measure does not include those instances where Customs assisted foreign law enforcement agencies to seize cocaine in the transit zone, discussed above.

searches of vessels seized by other federal agencies and escorted to U.S. ports. In reporting overall cocaine seizures in fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000, Customs did not report separately the number of seizures resulting from these different types of participation.

Our review of 26 transit zone cocaine seizures that were described in federal government press releases during fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000 showed that both the Coast Guard and Customs counted the same 16 of the 26 seizures in their respective seizure databases and both subsequently reported these 16 seizures as contributing to each agency's measure of results used to track effectiveness in drug interdiction.[24] A review of the Coast Guard's and Customs' seizure databases, and two interagency seizure databases, showed that both agencies participated in some capacity in each of these 16 seizures. The Coast Guard's role in these seizures included seizing cocaine after pursuing, apprehending, and boarding drug-smuggling vessels and locating and retrieving bales of cocaine jettisoned by smugglers during a pursuit. Customs' role in these seizures included participating in drug-smuggling investigations that resulted in a number of the seizures; detecting, monitoring, and tracking drug-smuggling aircraft or vessels; and searching vessels that had been apprehended by the Coast Guard.

Although DOD is not authorized to seize drugs, it had begun to track in fiscal year 2000 the amount of cocaine seized as a result of detection and monitoring by its ships, planes, and radar under the control of JIATF-East or JIATF-West, in an attempt to determine how well DOD detection and monitoring assets contributed to the drug interdiction effort. These totals include only those cocaine seizures where JIATF-East or JIATF-West assets were determined to be the first assets to detect the drug-smuggling aircraft or vessel. If the actual cocaine seizures were made by the Coast Guard, Customs, or other U.S. or foreign law enforcement agencies, these seizures would also be counted in those agencies' statistics.

Agency officials with whom we spoke recognized that a number of agencies may be reporting the same cocaine seizures. They told us that it

[24]We identified and reviewed 21 press releases describing transit zone cocaine seizures on Coast Guard, Customs, and DOD Internet web sites in fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000. Some of the press releases contained information on more than one seizure. The cocaine seizures described in the press releases are not necessarily representative of all cocaine seizures made by these agencies during these 3 fiscal years. See app. I for more information on our methodology.

was appropriate for each agency to count a seizure in which it participated, for a number of reasons. First, agency time and effort had been expended on the seizure. Second, there was a central clearinghouse—the FDSS—where federal agencies were to report cocaine seizure data. Those data, rather than individual agency data, could be used to determine the overall amount of cocaine seized by federal agencies in the United States. Third, interagency cooperation would be hindered if only one agency could receive "credit" for a specific seizure that involved several participating agencies. In many cases, the seizure would not have occurred if any one of the participating agencies had been absent.

Cocaine Seizures May be Counted by Multiple Agencies, but Press Releases Emphasize Interagency Efforts

DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs publicized cocaine seizures made during fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000 in 21 press releases that were available on the agencies' web sites,[25] and in all but 1 of the press releases, multiple agencies were credited as having participated in the seizures. A review of the Coast Guard's and Customs' seizure databases, and two interagency seizure databases, showed that there was general consistency between what was stated in the press releases and what was reported in the seizure databases, in terms of the size of the seizures, and the agencies listed as participating in the seizures. Also, in more than two-thirds of the press releases, the seizure was highlighted as an example of successful interagency cooperation.

Seizure Database Controls Designed to Address Accuracy but Do Not Address Multiple Counting

The Coast Guard and Customs appeared to have established controls in their agency seizure databases with the goal of recording accurately the size of the cocaine seizures that were made and preventing multiple counting of cocaine seizures within the same agency. Both the Coast Guard's and Customs' controls included the assignment of unique case identification numbers to seizures, supervisory or headquarters review of seizure amounts, and reconciliation of agency data with interagency drug seizure databases. DOD, in tracking cocaine seizures that resulted from detection and monitoring by assets under the control of JIATF-East and JIATF-West, had also established a number of controls designed to ensure accurate reporting. DOD's controls included tracking assets that were involved in cocaine seizures by a unique case identification number and reconciling data with an interagency database. These procedures have been designed so that each agency has an accurate count of the cocaine

[25]Some of the 21 press releases contained information on more than one seizure.

seizures in which it participated. More information about agency database controls appears in appendix IV.

FDSS Established to Prevent Multiple Counting of Drugs in Overall Total Seized by Federal Agencies

The FDSS was established in 1989 with the goal of eliminating the multiple counting of drug seizures, so that policymakers could determine the overall amount of drugs seized by federal agencies. The database is managed by DEA. Prior to the establishment of the system, there was no central clearinghouse for seizure reporting, and the only way to obtain a total for the amount of drugs seized by federal agencies was to add up the amount of drugs reported as seized by each agency. Because of the overlap between various agencies' records, this resulted in an overstated amount. Although the FDSS has controls to prevent the same seizures from being counted more than once, FDSS was not designed to prevent individual agencies from reporting the same seizures in their own databases.

The El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC)[26] serves as the central clearinghouse for the reporting of drug seizure data to the FDSS. Five federal agencies, including the Coast Guard and Customs, currently report drug seizures to the FDSS.[27] When a representative from one of these five agencies calls in to report a seizure, EPIC issues a unique identification number,[28] and various information on the seizure—such as weight and type of drug, date and time of the seizure, location of the seizure, reporting agency, and participating agencies—is recorded in a computerized log.

[26]EPIC is a multiagency clearinghouse for tactical intelligence and the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information related to worldwide drug movement. It is managed by DEA.

[27]The three other agencies are the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (which includes the U.S. Border Patrol), and DEA. Drug seizures made by other federal agencies, such as the Forest Service, are included in the FDSS database to the extent that custody of the drug evidence was transferred to one of the five agencies.

[28]Only seizure amounts above a certain threshold weight (1 pound, for cocaine, for example) are issued an identification number. According to FDSS officials, if every seizure was issued an identification number, regardless of weight, the system would be overwhelmed. That is because federal agencies make many more small seizures than large seizures. FDSS officials try to capture in a computerized log the bulk of seizures, in terms of weight, rather than number. These officials set the thresholds so that about 95 percent of the total weight of all federal seizures have an associated identification number.

EPIC has instituted a number of procedures to prevent the same seizure from being reported to FDSS more than once by the same, or different, agencies. These include automated and manual checking of records to identify potential multiple reports, requirements that changes to seizure information be made by the same agency official who made the first report, and automated tracking of changes made by EPIC personnel to the automated log.

FDSS officials told us that FDSS procedures are not designed to prevent more than one agency from reporting any one seizure in its own database. Likewise, our review of a nonrepresentative sample of cocaine seizures made by the Coast Guard and Customs showed that when both agencies participated in a seizure, some seizures that were reported to EPIC were also counted in each agency's individual reports.

Quarterly CCDB Meetings May Help Verify the Details of Transit Zone Cocaine Seizures

The CCDB contains information on nearly all air and maritime cocaine seizures made in the transit zone and is used by DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs as a check on the accuracy of their agencies' cocaine seizure data.[29] Unlike the FDSS, the CCDB database includes information on transit zone cocaine seizures made by foreign law enforcement agencies, as well as by U.S. law enforcement agencies. The CCDB also includes information on cocaine-smuggling events that were observed by drug interdiction agencies, but did not result in seizures (such as suspected drug-smuggling vessels that were pursued, but got away), and other cocaine-smuggling events that were believed to have occurred based on reliable intelligence reports but where no confirmation of their occurrence was received. The CCDB data are used as a source for estimates of cocaine flow through the transit zone.[30] The CCDB database manager said that the accuracy of the database comes in large part from the opportunity for interagency discussion and review of information in the database. The CCDB, like the FDSS, is not designed to prevent individual agencies from each counting a specific seizure as its own.

[29]Because of national security issues having to do with the kinds of detection assets used in certain locations, information on some cocaine seizures made in the transit zone may not be entered into the database.

[30]CCDB serves as the foundation for the Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement, which analyzes the illegal flow of cocaine from South America and assesses drug-smuggling patterns. Results are published twice a year by ONDCP.

The CCDB is managed by USIC. DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs, as well as other agencies, submit to the CCDB database manager information on cocaine seizures. Representatives from agencies involved in transit zone interdiction, including DOD, Customs, and the Coast Guard, meet quarterly to discuss each seizure that has been made in the previous quarter. Topics discussed include which agency and which asset first detected the drug-smuggling aircraft or vessel, the location of the seizure, and other participating agencies and assets. When discrepancies exist in the information that has been reported to the CCDB manager on the size of cocaine seizures, or regarding the agencies and assets that participated in the seizure, the agency representatives discuss the discrepancies and, if needed, vote on what information they believe is most accurate. Following the meeting, the CCDB database manager sends the revised data back to the agency for an additional review.

Representatives from ONDCP and DOD charged with preparing semiannual cocaine flow estimates regularly attend the conference. In April 2001, we attended a quarterly CCDB meeting and observed that these representatives were concerned with maintaining the standards for entering data into the database, and thus appear to serve as an additional check on the overall accuracy of the data.

Although the CCDB may be used by individual agencies to validate information in an agency's database, the database is not designed to prevent multiple agencies from counting the same seizure in their own databases. Our review of a nonrepresentative sample of cocaine seizures made by the Coast Guard and Customs showed that when both agencies participated in a seizure, and information about the seizure appeared in the CCDB, some seizures continued to be counted in each agency's individual reports.

Conclusions

DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs each play a role in interdicting drugs in the transit zone. It is difficult to determine the funds obligated and the flight hours and ship days used by the agencies for this effort, and the results of these efforts, because the agencies tend not to track data specifically by the transit zone. Instead, agency officials said they track data in ways that are consistent with their more general responsibilities in the transit zone and elsewhere and indicated that tracking data specifically by the transit zone would not enhance their capabilities to manage their drug interdiction responsibilities.

It is not uncommon for cocaine seizures to involve the efforts of more than one of these agencies. In an effort to ensure the accuracy of seizure data collected, agencies we reviewed had established controls in their own seizure databases, reported seizures to a central clearinghouse—the FDSS—and participated in quarterly CCDB meetings where they discussed the details of specific transit zone seizures. Managers of the FDSS and CCDB had also established controls to ensure the accuracy of the data reported to them by the agencies. We believe that the interagency databases can provide policymakers with useful information about the results of the overall effort by U.S. and foreign agencies to interdict cocaine in the transit zone. However, the agency database controls and the interagency databases are not designed to prevent the same cocaine seizures from being reported by more than one agency.

Agency Comments

We requested comments on a draft of this report from the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation; the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service; the Administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration; and the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The agencies concurred with the report. They also provided technical comments, which have been incorporated in this report where appropriate.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 10 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies of the report to the Senate and House Judiciary Committees, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation, the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service, the Administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

We will also make copies available to others upon request. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix V. If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me on (202) 512-8777.

Sincerely yours,

Laurie E. Ekstrand
Director, Justice Issues

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To describe the roles of the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard), and the U.S. Customs Service (Customs) in transit zone drug interdiction, we interviewed officials of those three agencies and officials at selected counterdrug coordinating organizations, including the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), and the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC). We also visited the Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATF-East), the Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-West), Customs' Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center (AMICC), and Coast Guard and Customs field offices in the Miami, Florida, area. We reviewed documents guiding the transit zone interdiction effort, such as the 1999 National Interdiction Command and Control Plan, the National Drug Control Strategy 2000 Annual Report, and agency authorizing legislation. We also reviewed our published reports and testimonies (see Related GAO Products).

To determine the extent to which we could identify the funds obligated and assets used for transit zone drug interdiction activities of DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs, we interviewed agency and ONDCP budget officials, reviewed agency budget documents, and reviewed data on flight hours and ship days from agency data systems. To obtain data on funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction, we requested these data for fiscal years 1998 through 2000 from agency budget officials using a structured interview format. The officials told us that they do not track data on funds obligated specifically for transit zone drug interdiction. We then asked these officials to attempt to estimate the transit-zone specific obligation data, which the officials did. We also requested data on flight hours and ship days used for transit zone drug interdiction activities in fiscal years 1998 through 2000 from officials at DOD, the Coast Guard, Customs, JIATF-East, and JIATF-West. We reviewed the resulting agency data on funds obligated, and the data on flight hours and ship days from agency data systems for fiscal years 1998 through 2000 (1998 data on funds obligated were not available for the Coast Guard), and identified several limitations. We interviewed budget officials from DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs regarding the limitations of their estimates of funds obligated for transit zone drug interdiction. We also interviewed officials from DOD, the Coast Guard, Customs, JIATF-East, and JIATF-West regarding the limitations of their data on flight hours and ship days. In addition, we interviewed ONDCP budget officials, reviewed a study commissioned by ONDCP on agency methods for calculating their counterdrug budgets, and interviewed the study's authors.

To identify what results DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs track to demonstrate their effectiveness in transit zone drug interdiction, we interviewed agency headquarters officials and obtained available results data for fiscal years 1998 through 2000. Along with the information provided by agency officials, we also reviewed annual performance reports required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 for DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs, for fiscal years 1998 through 2000.[1]

To determine whether multiple agencies are reporting the same cocaine seizures, we interviewed managers of agency seizure databases at DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs to identify how agencies record and report cocaine seizures in which they participate. We reviewed user's guides, training manuals, and written policies and guidance for the agency seizure databases (these documents are listed in app. III). We also obtained cocaine seizure data for fiscal years 1998 through 2000 from the Coast Guard and Customs and cocaine seizure data for fiscal year 2000 from DOD. To identify procedures and data systems in place to ensure the accuracy and completeness of cocaine seizure data when multiple agencies participate in seizures, we identified two interagency data systems where such seizures are recorded—the Federal-wide Drug Seizure System (FDSS) and the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB). We interviewed managers of the two systems and reviewed user's guides, training manuals, and written policies and guidance (these documents are also listed in app. III). We also attended one of the quarterly CCDB conferences, at which representatives of the agencies involved in transit zone interdiction meet for 5 days to discuss the accuracy and completeness of data provided by the agencies to the CCDB manager during the previous quarter.

[1]The Coast Guard's performance report was part of the Department of Transportation's report, and Customs' performance report was part of the Department of Treasury's report.

In addition to reviewing related documentation and reports and interviewing agency officials (as discussed above), we further assessed the reliability of the data in the agency and interagency databases by comparing the records in the Coast Guard and Customs databases and the FDSS and CCDB for a nonrepresentative sample of seizures that were reported in agency press releases. We selected the universe of publicly available agency press releases in fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000 and compared the information in them with information in agency and interagency seizure databases. We located the press releases through an Internet search of DOD's (headquarters, Air Force, Navy, Southern and Pacific Commands,[2] and JIATF-East and JIATF-West), the Coast Guard's (headquarters and districts), and Customs' (headquarters) web sites. We found 21 press releases referring to 27 cocaine seizures made during fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000. We requested from the database managers for the Coast Guard, Customs, the FDSS, and the CCDB available information on 26 of these seizures[3] from their respective databases and any other supporting information that the managers may have maintained. Information was available on 25 of the 26 seizures from the Coast Guard database,[4] 18 of the 26 seizures from the Customs database,[5] 25 of the 26 seizures from the FDSS,[6] and all 26 seizures from the CCDB. We compared the press releases with information provided by the agencies from their databases, in terms of the reported amount of cocaine seized, and the agencies listed as participating in the seizure. While we determined that

[2]JIATF-East and JIATF-West come under the authority of DOD's Southern and Pacific Unified Commands, respectively.

[3]Initially, we identified 26 seizures and requested information about them from the agency and interagency database managers. Later, we identified a 27th seizure mentioned in the press releases, but we did not make a second information request to the agencies. We did not request additional information because that information was not required to address our objective.

[4]The Coast Guard was mentioned in a Southern Command press release as having participated in the one seizure for which there was no information in the Coast Guard database. According to the Coast Guard database manager, the Coast Guard did not take credit for participation in that particular seizure.

[5]Customs database managers were unable to locate records pertaining to 8 of the 26 seizures. We do not know whether the lack of records indicates that Customs did not participate in the seizure or whether the searches performed by the managers were unable to locate records that existed. However, neither the Coast Guard database nor the FDSS and CCDB note Customs' participation in any of the 8 seizures; thus, we believe it is likely that Customs did not participate in the seizures.

[6]An FDSS database manager was unable to locate any records on 1 of the 26 seizures. This seizure was the same one for which there was no information in the Coast Guard database.

the data were reliable enough for our purposes, our ability to generalize from our review of agency cocaine seizure press releases is limited by the fact that the seizures described in the press releases do not constitute a representative sample of all agency cocaine seizures.

We conducted our work from January through October 2001 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix II: Interdiction Coordinating Organizations

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) was established by the Congress to set policies, goals, priorities, and objectives for national drug control; develop a national drug control strategy; and coordinate and oversee the implementation of the strategy, among other things.[1] ONDCP is the President's primary policy office for drug issues. ONDCP oversees and coordinates the drug control efforts of U.S. federal agencies engaged in implementing the strategy and managing programs, but does not manage drug control programs itself. ONDCP also has authority to review various agencies' drug control budget requests, including the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard), and the U.S. Customs Service (Customs), to ensure they are sufficient to implement the objectives of the national strategy,[2] but it has no direct control over how agency budgetary resources are used.

The U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) provides strategic advice and oversight for international interdiction efforts in the source and transit zones. The USIC is designated by the director of ONDCP. The current USIC is the Commandant of the Coast Guard,[3] who is advised by representatives from DOD, the Coast Guard, Customs, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Central Intelligence Agency. The State Department position was vacant at the time of our review. The USIC reports to the Director of ONDCP regarding two areas: (1) what resources are needed to achieve the objectives of the National Drug Control Strategy in the future and (2) how interdiction assets are performing. However, the USIC does not possess authority to exercise operational control of employed assets or field operations. USIC also organizes conferences three or four times a year, attended by organizations that are involved with international interdiction, to discuss interdiction issues and the status of interdiction efforts. The conferences allow principal players from various parts of the drug interdiction effort (law enforcement, intelligence, and the military) to discuss drug interdiction issues.

The Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATF-East) is the primary center for detection, monitoring, identification, and handoff of suspect air and maritime drug trafficking events in part of the Pacific Ocean; the Gulf of

[1]21 U.S.C. 1703(b).

[2]21 U.S.C. 1703(c)(3).

[3]USIC is a rotating position.

Mexico, Caribbean Sea, Mexico, Central America and surrounding seas; the Atlantic Ocean; and the continental landmass extending to the southern end of South America. JIATF-East also focuses on support to foreign nations' counterdrug initiatives and the detection, monitoring, and handoff of suspect drug targets to foreign law enforcement agencies. JIATF-East hands off control of operations to law enforcement agencies (such as the Coast Guard) at the arrest stage of an event. Detection and monitoring responsibilities within this area of responsibility extend to within 100 nautical miles from the continental United States for air targets, to continental U.S. territorial seas for maritime targets, and to the U.S. territorial seas of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands for both air and maritime targets, and the Bahamas. JIATF-East is under the command of DOD's Southern Command and is staffed by representatives from DOD, the Coast Guard, Customs, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and DEA.

The Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-West) focuses primarily on illegal drugs originating in southeast and southwest Asia, support of foreign nations' and U.S. country teams' counterdrug initiatives, and the detection, monitoring, and identification of suspect drug targets in their area of responsibility for subsequent handoff to U.S. or foreign law enforcement authorities. Its area of responsibility includes part of the Pacific Ocean. Detection and monitoring responsibilities within this area extend to the U.S. territorial seas for maritime targets and up to 100 nautical miles from the continental United States for air targets. Additionally, JIATF-West may provide counterdrug support outside of its area of responsibility for foreign nations (such as Mexico). JIATF-West is under the command of DOD's Pacific Command and is also staffed by representatives from DOD, the Coast Guard, Customs, the FBI, and DEA.

Customs' Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center (AMICC) identifies aircraft coming to the U.S. border and coordinates the interception and apprehension of suspects. Its area of responsibility extends 100 nautical miles from the U.S. landmass (except for the territory of the Bahamas, which is within the area of responsibility assigned to JIATF-East). AMICC is the primary center responsible for the identification of aircraft tracked within the JIATF-West area of responsibility and the transit zone portion of the JIATF-East area of responsibility. AMICC uses the Federal Aviation Administration's flight system and more than 70 radar to identify and track aircraft. In addition,

AMICC supports U.S. drug interdiction operations from airfields in Mexico and Aruba and assists the Mexican government's law enforcement.[4] AMICC also provides support for drug interdiction activities in the Caribbean. AMICC is staffed by detection systems specialists from DOD, the Coast Guard, and Customs; intelligence research specialists; and communications specialists.

[4]According to AMICC officials, Customs has stationed two Cessna Citations in Mexico with a Mexican law enforcement agent on board so that Customs can quickly apprehend planes landing just short of the U.S. border.

Appendix III: Agency and Interagency Drug Seizure Database Documentation

Department of Defense

Counterdrug Performance Results. Memorandum from the Office of the Department of Defense Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support, October 10, 2000.

Data Definitions and Sources: Project Level Performance Results. Office of the Department of Defense Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support.

U.S. Customs Service

Aviation Marine Operations Reporting System, Student Guide. U.S. Customs Service Air and Marine Interdiction Division.

Air and Marine Operations Reporting System Users Guide. U.S. Customs Service Air and Marine Interdiction Division.

SEACATS[1] *Search/Arrest/Seizure Procedures*. U.S. Customs Service Office of Information and Technology and Office of Field Operations, March 2001.

SEACATS Air/Marine/Foreign Incident Report (AMFIR) Short Form Seizure Case Initiation. U.S. Customs Service Office of Information and Technology and Office of Field Operations, February 2001.

Federal-Wide Drug Seizure System

EPIC Procedures for Issuing Federal Drug Identification Numbers, from EPIC Watch Operations Training Book, El Paso Intelligence Center, Drug Enforcement Administration.

Federal-wide Drug Seizure System Automated FDIN Log User Guide. Drug Enforcement Administration, May 1991.

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Appendix IV: Agency Drug Seizure Database Controls

This appendix contains additional information on the controls in the U.S. Coast Guard's (Coast Guard) and U.S. Customs Service's (Customs) seizure databases designed to ensure the accuracy of cocaine seizures reported by these agencies. The appendix also contains additional information on the databases that the Department of Defense (DOD) uses to track cocaine seized in the transit zone as a result of detection and monitoring by ships, planes, and radar under the control of the Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATF-East) or the Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-West).

The Coast Guard

The Coast Guard had instituted the following controls to ensure that it was reporting an accurate total for the cocaine seizures that it made. These included: (1) tracking cocaine seized in the transit zone by a unique case identification number, (2) reviewing each seizure at several levels of the Coast Guard command structure, and (3) reconciling the Coast Guard data with data reported to two interagency databases.

Coast Guard cocaine seizures are to be reported by the Coast Guard district in which the seizure occurs. If the seizure is above a specified weight threshold, the district reports the approximate amount, the location of the seizure, and which Coast Guard unit made the seizure to the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC),[1] which serves as the central clearinghouse for reporting of drug seizure information to the Federal-wide Drug Seizure System (FDSS). EPIC assigns a unique identification number that the Coast Guard uses to track the seizure.[2] The weight of drugs seized will be an approximate number until the drugs arrive on shore and are turned over to Customs or, in some cases, to DEA or a foreign law enforcement agency. Coast Guard district staff contact the agency with control of the drugs to find out the final weight of the seizure and report any revisions to EPIC using the already assigned identification number.

In addition to reporting to EPIC, Coast Guard districts report cocaine seizures up the chain of command to a Coast Guard headquarters database manager. The manager receives information from a variety of sources

[1]EPIC is a multiagency clearinghouse for tactical intelligence and the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information related to worldwide drug movement. It is managed by DEA.

[2]Only cocaine seizures above 1 pound are issued an identification number by EPIC.

(e.g., electronic mail message traffic from Coast Guard ships, district reports, and area reports). When discrepancies exist between the various sources, the manager checks with each source to determine the most accurate information on the seizure.

The database manager also checks Coast Guard cocaine seizure data against two interagency databases. Each quarter the manager receives a list of the Coast Guard seizures that were reported to EPIC. The weight of cocaine seizures listed by EPIC may vary from the weight reported by the districts to Coast Guard headquarters, because a final weighing of the drugs after the cocaine was turned over to Customs may have resulted in a different amount. The manager, as well as personnel from Coast Guard's field units, also attends the quarterly Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB) conference[3] in which all seizures in the transit zone are discussed. He said that there was an instance when he had received information from EPIC about a number of seizures made by the Coast Guard that did not appear in the Coast Guard's database. At the CCDB conference, representatives from the Coast Guard's field units had further information on the seizures that helped clarify whether they should or should not be included in the Coast Guard's seizure database.

The Coast Guard cocaine seizure data was stored in spreadsheet format at Coast Guard headquarters. The spreadsheet was linked, electronically, to written documentation that supported each seizure, such as electronic mail messages from Coast Guard ships and daily operational summaries from Coast Guard districts, so that a paper trail existed to support changes made to seizure information in the database. According to the Coast Guard database manager, this information, as well as the hardcopies supporting any changes made to the information in the database, were deleted about 6 months after it was received.

Customs

Customs had instituted the following controls in its seizure database: (1) assignment of a unique agency case identification number to each seizure where Customs assisted with the seizure, seized drugs, or took custody of drugs seized by other agencies; (2) reconciliation with the CCDB; (3) supervisory review of seizure reports, and periodic review of

[3]The CCDB is an interagency database with information on transit zone drug-smuggling events and is managed by the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator. Interagency representatives meet on a quarterly basis to review data reported to the CCDB during the prior quarter.

seizure information by headquarters personnel; and (4) automated tracking of any changes made to the seizure database.

Customs' transit zone cocaine seizures were recorded in two different ways. First, if Customs assisted a foreign agency with a cocaine seizure, Customs air or marine enforcement officers were to report information about their participation in the seizure to a Customs database. Customs field and headquarters personnel subsequently obtained information on the seizure from the seizing agency, and input the information into the database, with a special code signifying that Customs was an assisting agency, rather than a seizing agency. Reported seizure amounts are reconciled with the CCDB data at the quarterly CCDB conferences. Second, if Customs took custody of a cocaine seizure turned over to it by another agency, Customs personnel tracked the seizure in its tracking system. In both cases, a unique identification number would be associated with the seizure, so that all information on the seizure that resided in separate Customs' data systems (such as the flight hours spent tracking a suspect aircraft) would be linked to the seizure record.

Customs required review of each seizure report by a supervisor. In addition, headquarters personnel periodically review seizure reports and check for duplicate records and seizure amounts that appear to be peculiar. Customs officials told us they believed these controls had prevented instances of multiple counting of seizures by two separate branches of the agency.

Customs' seizure data system is constructed so that updates, deletions, and revisions of seizure records are automatically tracked. Thus, deleted records do not disappear from the system.

DOD

In fiscal year 2000, DOD began to collect data from JIATF-East and JIATF-West on the amount of cocaine seized in the transit zone as a result of detection and monitoring by ships, planes, and radar under the control of the JIATFs. The JIATFs are each required to provide to DOD a report on how much cocaine was seized as the result of detection by assets under their control, broken out by type of asset (e.g., detection by DOD ground-based radar, Customs surveillance aircraft, or Coast Guard helicopters). The JIATFs had each instituted the following controls to ensure that the data they reported on cocaine seizures were accurate: (1) the tracking of assets and drug-smuggling events by specific identification numbers and (2) reconciling the internal JIATF data with data in the CCDB. Although these controls may help ensure more accurate reporting, there remains the

potential for multiple counting of seizures in those instances where a drug-smuggling aircraft or vessel crosses over both the JIATFs' areas of responsibility. In those cases, both JIATFs may report that an asset under their control was the initial detection asset for a particular cocaine seizure, thus potentially inflating the overall amount of cocaine seized that is reported to DOD.

A DOD official informed us that DOD has provided guidance to the two JIATFs that the CCDB is to be used as one source for the report. However, DOD has left it up to each JIATF to determine how the CCDB will be used, and what other specific data sources and calculations will be used to provide data for the report. Analysts for JIATF-East and JIATF-West informed us that the data they report to DOD on cocaine seizures are derived from a combination of two sources: (1) data maintained internally by each JIATF on the activity of each asset under its control and (2) data from the CCDB regarding the type of aircraft, ship, or radar that was the initial detection asset for each seizure.

Each JIATF maintains its own data on the activity of the assets under its control. The data come from such sources as daily planning documents, watch logs, and daily operational briefing documents. Each suspect cocaine-smuggling event that takes place within each JIATF's area of responsibility (whether or not the event resulted in a cocaine seizure) is identified by a unique JIATF-East or JIATF-West case identification number and each asset involved in the incident is identified by a specific call sign. The JIATF analysts examine the various data sources and determine which asset first detected the smuggling aircraft or vessel.

It is up to the JIATF-East and JIATF-West analysts to reconcile their asset data with data from the CCDB in order to determine whether a specific ship, plane, or radar was the initial detection asset for a specific cocaine seizure. The CCDB contains a field for the detection asset that initially reported the drug-smuggling target. Data are entered into this field after the quarterly CCDB meeting, where each seizure (and other drug-smuggling events that did not result in seizures) is discussed in detail by representatives from the agencies involved in drug interdiction in the transit zone. The representatives must agree on which asset was the initial detection asset.

The CCDB database manager informed us that this specific field only describes the type of asset that made the initial detection (e.g., a Coast Guard ship or a Customs surveillance aircraft), but not whether the asset was under the command of either JIATF-East or JIATF-West. Thus, it is up

to the judgment of the JIATF analysts how to report the incident. A JIATF-West analyst told us that there might be situations where both JIATF-East and JIATF-West could each claim that an asset under its command made the initial detection that resulted in a subsequent cocaine seizure. According to the analyst, this could happen because some cocaine-smuggling events in the Eastern Pacific, particularly those involving maritime vessels, take place over a series of days or weeks, and may cross over the areas of responsibility of the two JIATFs. JIATF-East may make the initial detection, but then lose the target. JIATF-West may re-acquire the target a few days later, leading to the seizure of a load of cocaine. According to the analyst, it is unclear which command should be credited with the initial detection (and the subsequent seizure), and both JIATF-East and JIATF-West may report the detection (and the seizure) to DOD. Thus, both JIATFs would be reporting the same seizure to DOD, and DOD seizure totals would be inflated. The JIATF-West analyst did not provide evidence that such reporting had occurred. However, a DOD official agreed that, given the nature of the DOD reporting requirements, such multiple reporting could take place.

Appendix V: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

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