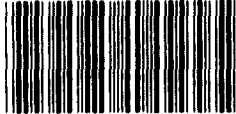


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STATEMENT OF  
ARNOLD P. JONES, SENIOR ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
GENERAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT INFORMATION, JUSTICE,  
AND AGRICULTURE  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ON  
THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL NARCOTICS BORDER INTERDICTION  
SYSTEM IN COORDINATING FEDERAL DRUG INTERDICTION EFFORTS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to be here to participate in hearings on the role of the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS) in coordinating federal drug interdiction efforts. Our testimony today will be based on work we have done in recent years on law enforcement efforts to combat drug smuggling, including some work we are presently doing for this subcommittee on the availability and use of tactical intelligence for drug interdiction. As agreed, our work focused on air interdictions. We are here today to report on the operations of the NNBIS regional centers in Miami, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; and El Paso, Texas, as part of our survey work for the subcommittee.

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Mr. Chairman, I would first like to summarize briefly the coordination problems among the federal drug interdiction agencies that led to the creation of the South Florida Task Force and then to an expansion of that concept under NNBIS. Second, as you requested, I would like to provide information on the mission and organization of NNBIS and the staffing and activities of the three NNBIS regional centers we visited.

INADEQUATE COORDINATION HAS BEEN A  
LONG-STANDING PROBLEM IN DRUG INTERDICTION

Our work in the drug enforcement area<sup>1</sup> over the years has shown that a lack of coordination among federal agencies has persistently hindered federal drug interdiction efforts. As we pointed out in our June 1983 report on drug interdiction, the authority and responsibility for federal drug interdiction efforts are split among three separate agencies in three executive departments. DEA has overall responsibility for drug law enforcement, including the primary responsibility for developing foreign tactical intelligence. Customs interdicts smugglers at the border, and the Coast Guard interdicts drugs on the high seas. Essentially, federal drug interdiction efforts have been an amalgamation of these individual agency programs, resulting in differing interdiction goals, priorities, and resource decisions.

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<sup>1</sup>Our reports in this area include Federal Drug Interdiction Efforts Need Strong Central Oversight, GAO/GGD-83-52, June 13, 1983; and Gains Made in Controlling Drugs, Yet the Drug Trade Flourishes, GGD-80-4, October 25, 1979.

We concluded in our June 1983 report that there is a clear need for drug program coordination with regard to drug interdiction. We also point out that special projects conducted jointly by several federal agencies have been a more successful means of attacking drug smuggling than a single agency effort. These joint operations resulted in increased drug seizures and the arrest of many major drug traffickers. The South Florida Task Force, which I will discuss next, was by far the largest of these special projects.

THE SOUTH FLORIDA TASK FORCE:  
A COHESIVE ATTACK ON DRUG SMUGGLERS

The South Florida Task Force, initiated in March 1982, brought a degree of cohesion to the federal effort to attack drug smugglers in South Florida. Although designed to be a broad, multifaceted anticrime program for South Florida, the bulk of the task force, both in terms of activities and resources, focused on drug interdiction. Under the direction of the Vice President, the task force was responsible for coordinating the increased resources of DEA, Customs, and the Coast Guard. In addition, resources of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines; the FBI; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and the U.S. Marshals Service were brought into the interdiction effort.

We have not evaluated the overall effectiveness of the South Florida Task Force. However, the general consensus of the participating agencies is that the Task Force has successfully

demonstrated the benefits of a cohesive attack on drug smuggling. According to the Vice President, the general principles and most successful interdiction techniques of the South Florida Task Force were to be utilized by the NNBIS regional centers across the country.

NNBIS CREATED AS AN EXPANSION  
OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA TASK  
FORCE CONCEPT

President Reagan announced the creation of NNBIS on March 23, 1983. The coordination and intelligence aspects of the South Florida Task Force evolved into a NNBIS regional center headquartered in Miami. On June 17th the Vice President announced the expanded geographic area to be covered by the Miami NNBIS Center and the creation of five additional regional centers in New Orleans, El Paso, Long Beach, Chicago, and New York. With the Vice President at its head, NNBIS was designed to (1) coordinate the work of those federal agencies with existing responsibilities and capabilities for interdiction of sea-borne, airborne, and cross-border smuggling of narcotics; (2) monitor suspected smuggling activity originating outside national borders and destined for the United States; and (3) coordinate agencies' seizure of contraband and arrests of persons involved in illegal drug importation. The Vice President emphasized that a concerted effort would be made to extensively utilize military resources in the battle against drug smugglers.

NNBIS officials at both the headquarters and regional levels informed us that they are actively seeking the cooperation and participation of the military as well as federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in the overall drug interdiction effort. They also told us, however, that they do not have a mission plan at either the headquarters or regional level, other than what was outlined in the President's and Vice President's announcements concerning the creation of NNBIS. Without such a plan, it is impossible to assess the effectiveness of NNBIS or the progress being made toward accomplishing its mission, especially since its role is evolving as time goes on. I would now like to describe NNBIS' organization and staffing.

#### Organization and staffing

NNBIS consists of six regions with regional boundaries fixed at various locations along the U.S. border. (An appendix to this statement describes the boundaries of the regional centers.) Each region is headed by a regional coordinator from either Customs or Coast Guard, but the coordinators do not devote their full time to NNBIS activities. They continue with their responsibilities designated by the parent organization. For example, Rear Admiral William H. Stewart is the NNBIS regional coordinator for the Gulf Region headquartered in New Orleans. He is also the Commander of the Coast Guard's 8th District. Deputy coordinators in Miami and New Orleans also shared their time between NNBIS and their normal duties. El Paso has no deputy coordinator.

NNBIS regions are staffed by permanently assigned personnel from Customs, Coast Guard, DEA, FBI, Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Federal Aviation Administration, and the intelligence community. The New Orleans and El Paso offices also have staff assigned from state and local law enforcement agencies. The staff, be it federal, state, or local, remain a part of and are paid by the sponsoring agency.

At the three regions we visited, 76 persons had been assigned as of March 1, 1984. Of these, 31 had been assigned to Miami, 25 to New Orleans, and 20 to El Paso. Staff was initially detailed on a temporary basis until permanent staff could be assigned.

Because NNBIS is not a separate and distinct agency, it has no budget, nor does it account for its costs. The up front costs for establishing the regions were generally borne by the agency which had the lead. For example, we were told that \$400,000 worth of equipment and facilities in New Orleans were paid for by Coast Guard. In El Paso, equipment and facilities costs are being borne by Customs. I might add that the El Paso operation has yet to locate its offices in a physically secure area. Obviously, this limits the center's capability for handling sensitive information. We were told that, hopefully, secure facilities will be acquired by June 1984.

Each NNBIS region we visited had an intelligence and an operations group. The intelligence group, known as the Intelligence Information Coordination Center, receives information from a variety of sources indicating possible smuggling activities and passes it on to the operations group. The operations group, known as the Interdiction Operations Information Center, receives information from the intelligence group, Customs, DEA, Coast Guard, and others and passes the information on to those agencies with capabilities and resources for interdiction. The operations group also monitors the location and status of resources available within the region that could be called upon to assist in an interdiction effort. My next topic will center on NNBIS' involvement in interdicting drugs smuggled by aircraft.

NNBIS participation in interdicting  
drugs smuggled by aircraft

Mr. Chairman, as part of our work for this subcommittee we visited the Miami, New Orleans, and El Paso NNBIS regional centers to determine the extent to which they were involved in air interdictions. Generally speaking, NNBIS regional centers are designed to coordinate the activities of those agencies that have drug interdiction resources and responsibilities. Actual seizure of drugs and the arrest of smugglers are the responsibilities of DEA, Customs, and the Coast Guard. We do, however, have information on air interdictions along the southern border where NNBIS was involved.

Smuggling by aircraft presents a special problem to interdicting agencies because of the short time available to detect and intercept the aircraft. We found that from October 1982 to February 9, 1984, the Southeast Region was involved in 129 seizures. Four of these involved aircraft and the remaining 125 involved vessels. Three of the four seizures took place prior to June 1983, when the NNBIS regions became operational. During the period June 1983 to February 9, 1984, the Gulf Region, headquartered in New Orleans, was involved in 22 seizures; 4 involved aircraft and 18 involved vessels. The Southwest Border Region was involved in a total of three seizures. All of the seizures involved aircraft. In total, the three NNBIS offices participated in 154 seizures, of which 11 involved aircraft.

During this period there were also other seizures in each region--both vessels and aircraft--that NNBIS was not involved in. We do not know precisely how many or why NNBIS was not involved.

We examined the 11 seizures reported by the NNBIS regions involving aircraft to identify the source of information that led to the seizures and to determine NNBIS involvement. We found that the sources of the information for the seizures were as follows:

- four from special operations involving radar,
- two from transponders/beepers placed on suspect aircraft,
- one from a confidential informant,



--two from cold hits, and

--two from other sources which we cannot discuss in open hearings.

It was difficult to determine what role NNBIS played in these seizures or whether the seizures would have been made without NNBIS involvement. NNBIS' records did not always show at what point NNBIS became aware of a seizure or the extent to which they coordinated the seizure. We were told, however, that in one seizure NNBIS was not involved until after the seizure had been made. We were told that NNBIS's involvement was to coordinate the transportation of the seized drugs to a DEA facility.

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In summary, Mr. Chairman, the concept upon which NNBIS was founded--the coordination of drug interdiction efforts--is sound. On the basis of our limited survey work at three NNBIS regions, which centered around air interdiction at your request, we found that NNBIS involvement has been limited. However, in all fairness, Mr. Chairman, NNBIS is still a young organization and we did not attempt to evaluate its overall performance or effectiveness.

This concludes my prepared statement, Mr. Chairman. We would be pleased to respond to any questions.

BOUNDARIES OF NNBIS REGIONAL CENTERSNortheast Region

Includes the boundary from Erie, Pennsylvania, around to the Delaware/Maryland border.

Southeast Region

Includes the boundary from the Delaware/Maryland border around the coast of Florida to Apalachicola on the Gulf Coast of Florida.

Gulf Region

Includes the boundary from Apalachicola, Florida, to Brownsville, Texas.

Southwest Border Region

Includes the boundary from Brownsville, Texas, to the Colorado River.

Pacific Region

Includes the boundary from the Colorado River to the Canadian border and includes Alaska and Hawaii.

Northern Border Region

Includes the boundary from the state of Washington to Erie, Pennsylvania.

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