

July 1988

DRUG INTERDICTION

Should the Customs Command and Control Program Be Continued as Currently Evolving?



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The Honorable Lawton Chiles
Chairman, Committee on the Budget
United States Senate

The Honorable Sam Nunn
Chairman, Permanent Subcommittee
on Investigations
Committee on Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

This report responds to your request that we review the Customs Service's development of a command, control, communications, and intelligence center program. Specifically, you asked us to (1) determine whether coordination among federal drug interdiction agencies existed during the development of the Customs Service's program as required by a provision of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986; (2) identify changes in the program that resulted from agency coordination; and (3) determine whether the program will result in a unified federal effort for commanding, controlling, and communicating with interdiction forces.

The report discusses changes that have been made to the program as a result of coordination among federal agencies involved in drug interdiction. It also discusses the need for congressional review of the program in view of these changes and recent legislative changes giving the Department of Defense a greater role in drug interdiction.

As arranged with the Committee and the Subcommittee, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of the report until 30 days after the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Transportation, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Defense, and other interested parties.

Richard L. Fogel
Assistant Comptroller General

Executive Summary

Purpose

For fiscal year 1987, Customs budgeted about \$42 million to develop a command, control, communications, and intelligence center program to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of federal drug interdiction efforts.

At the request of the Chairman, Senate Committee on the Budget, and the Chairman, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, GAO reviewed the program to (1) determine whether coordination among federal drug interdiction agencies existed during the development of the program as required by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986; (2) identify changes in the program that resulted from agency coordination; and (3) determine whether the program will result in a unified federal effort for commanding, controlling, and communicating with interdiction forces.

Background

The primary objective of drug interdiction is to reduce the amount of illegal drugs that enters the United States. The Customs Service, the Coast Guard, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service share the major responsibility for drug interdiction. The Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Department of Defense also have a role in drug interdiction.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 contains many provisions for enhancing federal efforts to combat drug abuse in the United States. Among the provisions is authorization for Customs to develop a command, control, communications, and intelligence center program. The act requires that the program be coordinated among the heads of Customs, the Coast Guard, the Department of Justice, and the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System.

Results in Brief

The development of the command, control, communications, and intelligence center program was coordinated among federal agencies (with Customs as the lead agency) as required by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. The coordination activities, together with the developmental process, resulted in many changes to the program, including (1) limiting the role of the national command and control center to only commanding and controlling Customs' air interdiction resources, (2) scaling down the intelligence function of the centers, (3) sharing the command responsibilities at one of the centers with the Coast Guard, (4) excluding direct input of military detection capabilities at one of the centers, and (5) dropping plans for a center in Houston, Texas. GAO believes these five

changes represent significant differences from how Customs envisioned the program would work when Customs requested an appropriation.

The program being developed should enhance Customs' command and control capabilities and may lead to better utilization of the resources involved in drug interdiction because of better communications between agencies. But the federal government's command and control activities will remain fragmented, and the overall effectiveness of the program remains to be seen.

In view of the changes made to the program and changes by Congress giving the Department of Defense a greater role in drug interdiction, GAO believes that Congress should review the program's direction before additional upgrades are approved.

GAO's Analysis

Program Development

In 1986, Customs began developing the command, control, communications, and intelligence center program because of shortcomings in the command and control of its interdiction assets. Customs has constructed a center near Miami, Florida, and one at March Air Force Base, California. Customs also plans to construct a Customs national center near Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. It expects the centers to aid in (1) detecting and identifying suspected smugglers, (2) controlling and coordinating intercept operations, (3) communicating among drug law enforcement agencies, and (4) developing anti-drug smuggling intelligence. As of March 21, 1988, Customs anticipated the three centers would cost \$50 million.

Program Has Been Coordinated

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 required Customs to coordinate the development of the program with other federal agencies involved in drug interdiction. Customs has coordinated with agencies involved in drug interdiction primarily through meetings and working groups. Agencies represented at development meetings include Customs, the Coast Guard, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Department of Defense, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Federal Aviation Administration. In addition, both the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System and the National Drug Policy Board participated at these meetings.

Command and Control Efforts Remain Fragmented

Coordination among federal agencies has not resulted in a centralized federal program for commanding and controlling interdiction activities. It appears that federal control of drug interdiction assets will continue to be fragmented as agencies seek to fulfill their respective responsibilities. Customs and the Coast Guard will continue to command and control their respective resources. Although the Coast Guard will be represented at the command and control center near Miami, it will continue to have a separate operations center. The national command center will control only Customs' assets and provide administrative support to the regional centers. The Drug Enforcement Administration will continue to maintain drug interdiction intelligence. The agency disagreed with the strong intelligence role proposed for the program because it believed that Customs would be duplicating Drug Enforcement Administration activities.

Program Upgrades Should Be Reviewed

Customs anticipates future upgrades and additional funding requirements for the program. But the program is not being developed as Customs envisioned it when Customs requested an appropriation. In addition, the language in the Defense authorization legislation for fiscal year 1989, which Congress has passed and which is awaiting the President's signature, provides authority for the Department of Defense to serve as the single lead agency for detecting and monitoring aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. The legislation further directs the Secretary of Defense to integrate the command, control, communications, and technical intelligence assets of the United States that are dedicated to the interdiction of illegal drugs into an effective communications network.

Recommendation

In view of the changes made to the program by Customs and the recent passage by Congress of the Defense authorization legislation, GAO believes Congress should review the program's direction before additional upgrades are approved.

Agency Comments

GAO did not obtain official agency comments on this report. However, GAO discussed the information it contains with Customs officials, who generally agreed with the facts as presented.

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Abbreviations

AFB	Air Force Base
BLOC	Blue Lightning Operations Center
CNAC	Customs National Aviation Center
C3I	Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
NCC	National Command Center
NNBIS	National Narcotics Border Interdiction System
OTA	Office of Technology Assessment
SOCC	Sectoral Operations Control Center
TECS	Treasury Enforcement Communication System
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USCS	United States Customs Service

Introduction

Millions of Americans abuse illicit drugs, which are readily available throughout the Nation. Cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and hashish, four widely abused illegal drugs produced primarily in foreign countries, are smuggled into the United States. The Department of the Treasury's U.S. Customs Service estimated that 136 tons of cocaine, 11 thousand tons of marijuana, 7 tons of heroin, and 165 tons of hashish were smuggled into the United States in 1986. Drug abuse affects every segment of our society. Drug abuse is estimated to cost the Nation billions of dollars each year in health care and reduced productivity, in addition to the direct costs of money diverted to purchase drugs and the public funds devoted to combating the problem.

Drug interdiction is a key part of the federal effort to reduce drug abuse. The objective of drug interdiction is to reduce the availability of drugs by seizing illegal drug shipments in transit to the United States. According to the National Drug Policy Board, a successful interdiction program reduces illegal drug supplies and increases the costs and risks associated with drug trafficking. The Board maintains that such a program deters some potential traffickers from entering the drug trade, disrupts the flow of illegal drugs to the United States, forces drug traffickers to develop more expensive and sophisticated methods to avoid detection, and forces them to use longer and more difficult smuggling routes.

Drug Interdiction Responsibilities

Drug interdiction by the federal government focuses on the detection, identification, interception, and apprehension of shipments of illegal drugs as they move from departure points in source countries to the United States. The National Drug Policy Board has assigned responsibility for the federal drug interdiction efforts to the Treasury Department's Customs Service and the Department of Transportation's U.S. Coast Guard. Customs shares responsibility with the Coast Guard for detecting smugglers using airplanes. Customs also has primary responsibility for interdiction efforts directed at drugs smuggled in cargo or by passengers through ports of entry and across the land borders between the ports. The Coast Guard shares marine interdiction responsibilities with Customs in coastal waters (waters within 12 miles of the U.S. coastline) and is the primary interdiction agency on the high seas. The Immigration and Naturalization Service's Border Patrol has responsibility for controlling the entry of illegal immigrants and assists in the drug interdiction effort by apprehending smugglers between ports of entry and at traffic checkpoints at the U.S.- Mexico border. The Border Patrol

was granted increased interdiction authority along the Mexican border as part of an enforcement initiative known as Operation Alliance.¹

Other agencies involved in the interdiction effort are the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which provides information on aircraft movement; the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which provides intelligence; and the Department of Defense (DOD), which loans equipment and provides surveillance information.

The mission of the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS), which is headed by the Vice President of the United States, is to coordinate the work of federal agencies that have responsibilities and capabilities for interdicting seaborne, airborne, and other cross-border importation of narcotics. NNBIS does not actually interdict drugs.

Gaps in Federal Efforts to Interdict Drugs

We have issued a number of reports addressing drug interdiction and coordination. Our report entitled Drug Smuggling: Large Amounts of Illegal Drugs Not Seized by Federal Authorities (GAO/GGD-87-91, June 12, 1987) concluded that relatively small proportions of the cocaine, marijuana, and other illegal drugs smuggled into the United States are seized by drug interdiction agencies. As a result cocaine, marijuana, and other illegal drugs remain widely available in this country. Similar conditions were reported by the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) in its March 1987 report entitled The Border War on Drugs.

There are several reasons for the federal government's inability to stop illegal drug smuggling. An insufficient amount of equipment and number of staff members devoted to interdiction leaves large gaps in the interdiction system's coverage of the lengthy southern coastal and land borders of the United States. As a result, the system is unable to detect or respond to all illegal border crossings 24 hours a day. Interdiction agencies also are hindered by the lack of timely and accurate tactical intelligence.² Finally, the demand for illegal drugs makes smuggling highly profitable, which encourages smugglers to continue their activities.

¹Operation Alliance is a multiagency effort that began in August 1986 to improve interdiction capabilities along the southwest border of the United States.

²Tactical intelligence includes information about the identity, type, location, timing, and method of potential smuggling operations.

The increased resources for drug interdiction authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 should fill in some of the gaps of the present interdiction system by providing more equipment and additional staff. However, according to the OEA report, there is no clear correlation between the level of expenditures or effort devoted to interdiction and the long-term availability of illegally imported drugs in the domestic market. Smugglers can bypass the interdiction system and may continue to do so.

Command and Control Center Program

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 contains many provisions for enhancing the federal efforts to combat drug abuse in the United States. Among the provisions is authorization for Customs to develop a command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) center program. The act required, among other things, that the C3I center program be coordinated among federal agencies involved in drug interdiction. Customs budgeted \$42 million from its lump sum air interdiction account for FY 1987 for the development of the center program. The Senate Appropriations Committee explained that the C3I center program would enhance drug interdiction efforts by centralizing federal air command, control, communications, and intelligence activities. The Committee also specified that the command and control centers be integrated with all appropriate military detection capabilities. A detailed description of the C3I center program and how it differs from the present system for commanding and controlling interdiction resources is included in chapter 2.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The Chairman, Senate Committee on the Budget and the Chairman, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, asked us to examine Customs' development of the C3I center program. On March 18, 1987, we testified before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations on the preliminary results of our work.

Following the hearings we were asked to: (1) determine whether coordination among federal drug interdiction agencies existed during the development of the program as specified in a provision of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986; (2) identify changes in the program that resulted from the coordination; and (3) determine whether the C3I center program will result in a unified federal effort for commanding, controlling, and communicating with interdiction forces.

To accomplish our first and third objectives we interviewed representatives from Customs, the Coast Guard, DEA, DOD, NNBIS, and the Policy

Board who attended the C3I coordination meetings. We also reviewed the minutes of the C3I meetings, the C3I master plan, the Policy Board minutes, and other C3I development documents from the federal drug interdiction agencies.

To identify changes in the C3I program, our second objective, we compared the original C3I development documents containing information Customs used to brief the other interdiction agencies on the proposed program with documents prepared while the program was being developed. We also interviewed officials involved in drug interdiction and C3I coordination meetings representatives from Customs, the Coast Guard, DEA, and DOD.

We did our fieldwork in south Florida, the area where Customs and the Coast Guard currently have command and control facilities and where the majority of their drug seizures occur. We interviewed officials, observed operations, and examined interdiction documents in Miami at the Customs air facility, the Customs-managed Blue Lightning Operation Center (BLOC), and the Coast Guard's Seventh District headquarters.

We also interviewed the Director of Operations and the Chief of Maintenance at the Tyndall Air Force Base (AFB) Sectoral Operations Control Center (SOCC) in Florida and the Deputy Director of the March AFB SOCC in California. The SOCCs are part of our Nation's North American Air Defense Command System and are the focal point for obtaining the radar information for defensive purposes. We discussed with these officials the feasibility of collocating C3I centers at Tyndall AFB and March AFB to take advantage of the military's communication system already in place.

Our work was done from January 1987 to January 1988 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Field visits to the operations centers in Miami and to Tyndall AFB were made from April 1987 to August 1987. As requested by the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and the Committee on the Budget, we did not obtain official comments on this report. However, we discussed the contents of this report with Customs officials, who generally agreed with the facts as presented.

Commanding and Controlling Drug Interdiction Operations

Customs and the Coast Guard operate separate facilities along the southern U.S. border for commanding and controlling air and marine drug interdiction resources. In 1986, Customs began developing a C3I center program to upgrade its command and control capabilities for its air interdiction resources. Congress authorized funding for the program in 1986, but it required Customs to coordinate the development of the C3I center program with the Coast Guard, the Department of Justice, and NNBS. During the development of the C3I center program, changes were made as a result of coordination among these federal agencies. We believe that these changes will leave federal efforts to command and control drug interdiction assets fragmented. The program that resulted from the interagency coordination will be different from how Customs envisioned the program when it requested an appropriation.

In May 1987, contracts for the technical part of the C3I centers were awarded. As of July 19, 1988, construction at the C3I center in Richmond Heights, Florida, was scheduled to become operational in October 1988. The C3I center in Riverside, California, was expected to become operational in August 1988. The Customs' National Aviation Center (CNAC) was planned for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, though the choice of a site had not been finalized.

Present System for Commanding and Controlling Interdiction Operations

Customs and Coast Guard facilities along the southern border process information about suspected shipments of illegal drugs destined to the United States. The information includes radar feeds and visual sightings of possible smuggling activities, the location and operational status of drug interdiction resources, and intelligence from investigative activities or the intelligence community.

Customs' Command and Control of Air Interdiction Assets

Customs has four command and control facilities for air interdiction located along the southern border. Three of the facilities are located at FAA's air traffic control centers in Miami, Florida; Houston, Texas; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. The other facility is located at the Air Force's Sectoral Operations Control Center (SOCC) at March AFB in Riverside, California.

At these facilities, personnel monitor air traffic using radar from FAA and DOD, as well as from Customs sources. The personnel access FAA data bases that contain flight information, as well as drug law enforcement

data bases, such as the Treasury Enforcement Communication System (TECS).¹ According to Customs officials, aircraft potentially involved in drug smuggling are identified in part on the basis of flight path, altitude, origin, and time of day. By telephone and radio links to a Customs air branch, an interceptor plane is dispatched to the selected target, where visual identification of the suspect aircraft can be made. The aircraft registration number and other identifiers are radioed to the facility by the interceptor and are checked to determine if the aircraft has previously been involved in smuggling or reported stolen, appears on a "look-out" list, or is owned or leased by individuals connected with drug trafficking. Throughout intercept and pursuit, personnel monitor the situation; coordinate the operation; and arrange for needed support from other federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies.

Customs' Command and Control of Marine Interdiction Assets

Customs has three marine interdiction command and control centers located along the southern border. In February 1986, Customs began operating a command and control center in Miami, Florida, known as the Blue Lightning Operations Center (BLOC). Staffed by personnel from Customs, the Coast Guard, and state and local law enforcement officials, BLOC monitors, by radar, vessel movements in the coastal areas off south Florida. It also recommends action to federal, state, and local marine law enforcement organizations to deal with suspects detected by radar or from drug interdiction intelligence.

BLOC is equipped with radar monitors and computers that display target tracking data on wall-sized screens. Tracking data in south Florida are received from 3 aerostat mounted radars and 11 land-based radars strategically located along the Florida coast. A BLOC-type facility was established in Gulfport, Mississippi, in October 1987 and in Houston in February 1987 to function similarly to the Miami BLOC using tower- and building-mounted radars along the Gulf Coast. According to the CSI project director, the Houston BLOC will serve as the CSI's link to Operation Alliance, the multiagency effort to improve interdiction capabilities along the southwest border.

According to Customs officials, before establishing the BLOC facilities, Customs' command and control functions were carried out on a much smaller scale by Customs' 60 marine stations located primarily along the southern U.S. coast. Each marine station had three or more interdiction

¹TECS includes information that may link aircraft or vessels to drug crimes.

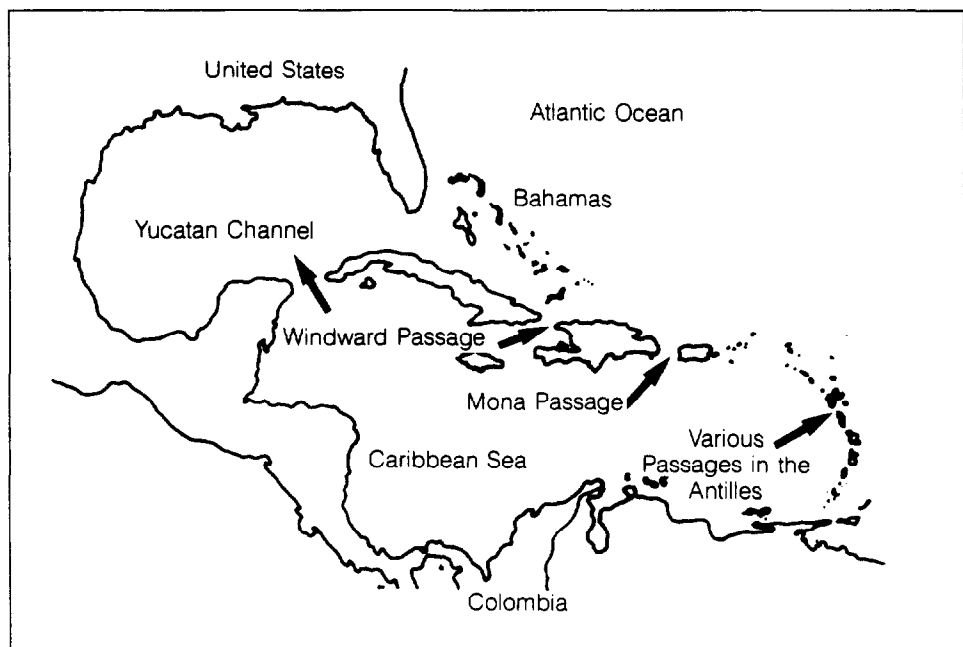
vessels assigned to it. Marine stations continue to be the method of operation for resources on the West Coast.

Coast Guard Command and Control Operations

The Coast Guard does not have a dedicated shore-based command and control center for drug law enforcement operations. Instead, the Coast Guard has operations centers located in each of its 10 district and 2 regional offices and at its Washington headquarters. These operations centers coordinate and respond to search and rescue and to law enforcement requirements, with priority given to search and rescue operations.

Some Coast Guard resources are committed to patrol “chokepoints” in the Caribbean to detect drug smugglers. For the most part, the resources operate on their own once in their assigned chokepoint, but they regularly communicate with the district or regional offices. Figure 2.1 depicts these chokepoints, as well as the routes normally used by smugglers.

Figure 2.1: Coast Guard Chokepoints in the Caribbean



Note: Arrows indicate routes normally used by smugglers.
Source: Based on data provided by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Coast Guard district offices also have aircraft assigned to assist marine interdictions as well as to carry out air interdiction responsibilities.

Limitations of the Present Command and Control System

In the past Customs and OIA have identified several limitations in the present command and control system involving communications, the command structure, and the handling of intelligence. Customs identified specific limitations which included:

- Current command capabilities have been outstripped by increased drug interdiction assets and an increasing drug smuggling threat. (Customs has identified this as the primary reason for the need to develop the C3I center program.)
- Customs and the Coast Guard do not have the ability to communicate directly with each other. For example, direct contact between Customs and Coast Guard vessels does not exist.
- Radio communications among drug interdiction personnel are not always secure, which allows smugglers to monitor drug interdiction activities.
- Tactical intelligence to detect and intercept drug shipments is lacking. Also, real-time tactical intelligence from various sources, such as the El Paso Intelligence Center and TECS, is limited.

OIA reviewed the command and control operations and identified the following limitations in its report entitled The Border War on Drugs dated March 1987:

- In south Florida, three separate command and control facilities (Customs air, Customs marine, and the Coast Guard) generally operate independently.
- Little commonality in technology in the command and control facilities exists, which according to OIA gives rise to "fundamental incompatibility that precludes cooperation and coordination."
- Standardized radio equipment and operating frequencies are not used by Customs and the Coast Guard. For example, the BLOC in Miami cannot communicate directly with Coast Guard vessels in the same area.
- Established procedural agreements and protocol that would allow tactical cooperation among the Coast Guard, Customs, and DEA does not exist.

C3I Center Program Development

Beginning in 1986, Customs started developing the C3I center program to support its air interdiction activities. In general terms, the C3I center program was and still is being designed to enable integration of multiple sensor and other data sources into centralized facilities to (1) promote detection and identification of suspected smugglers, (2) control and

coordinate intercept operations, (3) establish intra-systems communications, and (4) enhance anti-drug smuggling intelligence.

Customs planned to establish two sector centers (one for the Southeast and one for the Southwest). According to an October 1985 Mitre Corporation report aimed at assisting in the development of an air interdiction system, the Commissioner of Customs decided on July 3, 1985, to locate the western center at March AFB in Riverside, California, near the southwest SOCC. According to the report, the eastern site determination had not been made but the site mentioned was Tyndall AFB, which is the site of the eastern SOCC located in Panama City, Florida.

In June 1986 Customs held a C3I systems workshop. Those present identified a need for a national command center to fill several gaps in the planned C3I centers. These gaps included (1) how the two centers would control and assign Customs' national assets; (2) how classified intelligence would be accepted, sanitized, and distributed in a timely manner; and (3) how national special interdiction operations would be planned, directed, and monitored.

As of March 21, 1988, Customs' plans included two sector centers (one in the East for both air and marine interdiction activities and one in the West for air interdiction). Customs also plans to have a national aviation center that replaces the national command center and is involved in only Customs air interdiction activities. Customs Director of Air Operations Center East estimates that the C3I East will require 84 employees, the C3I West 56 employees, and the Customs National Aviation Center 29. Approximately 47 of the positions will be filled with Coast Guard personnel. Figure 2.2 shows the planned locations of the C3I facilities. Figure 2.3 illustrates the console that C3I center personnel will use to monitor air and marine traffic and communicate with drug interdiction resources.

Customs has not determined what impact the C3I center program will have on preventing illegal drugs from being smuggled into the United States. Customs officials told us that the justifications for the C3I centers were the 1983 Siler study² and two 1985 Mitre Corporation studies.³

²Report on the U.S. Customs Service Air Program Assessment, Blue Ribbon Panel, Sept. 11, 1983.

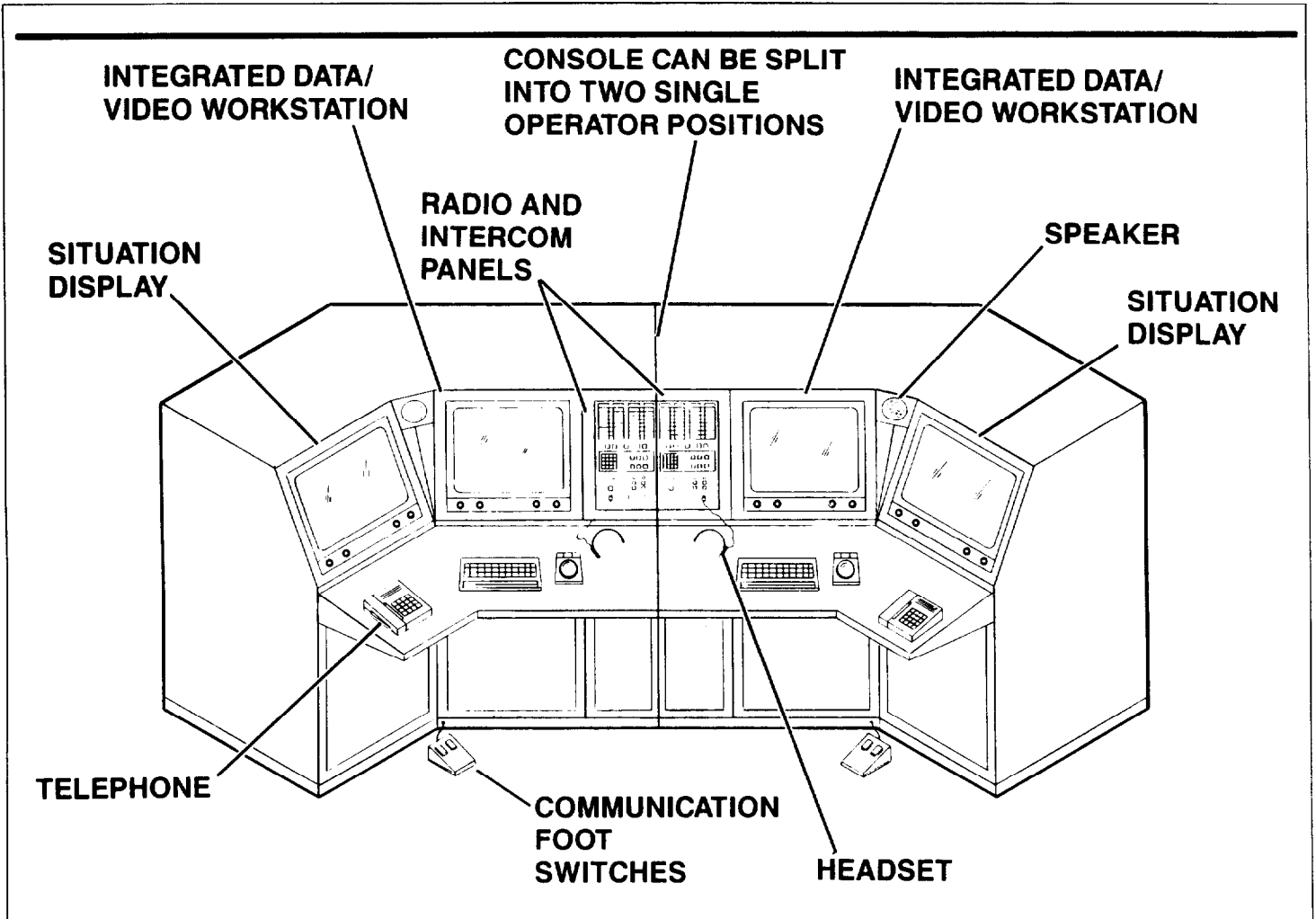
³U.S. Customs Service C3I Alternative Study Report, Mitre Corporation, May 1985; and System Operational Concept for the C3I Segment of the Air Interdiction System, Mitre Corporation, Jan. 1985.

Figure 2.2: Location of C3I Centers



The Siler study concluded that the interdiction of airborne drug trafficking must be a unified and coordinated national effort. The January 1985 Mitre Corporation study outlined the operational concepts and performance requirements of a C3I system needed as part of Customs' overall air interdiction efforts. The Mitre report did not discuss possible locations for the centers. A May 1985 Mitre Corporation report identified design alternatives for C3I centers to be used in Customs' air interdiction program. This Mitre study described configurations for a C3I center program. The study estimated costs for the alternatives depending on their equipment, location, and overall capabilities at between \$52.3 million and \$94.1 million. These studies do not address the impact the C3I center program will have on drug interdiction activities. Table 2.1 shows the chronology of major events in the C3I development process.

Figure 2.3: Console for Monitoring Air and Marine Traffic



Source: U.S. Customs Service.

**Chapter 2
Commanding and Controlling Drug
Interdiction Operations**

**Table 2.1: Chronology of Events During
the C3I Development Process**

September 1983	—Siler study concluded that drug air interdiction must be a unified and coordinated national effort.
September 1984	—Customs liaison officer assigned to Tyndall AFB SOCC for the purpose of drug interdiction.
January 1985	—Mitre study identified system operational concept for the C3I segment of the air interdiction system.
December 1985	—Official from Customs' tactical operations division visited the Tyndall SOCC to address possible need for a C3I if the center should locate there.
February 1986	—Miami Blue Lightning Operations Center established for marine drug interdiction.
June 1986	—Customs initiated its C3I acquisition.
June 1986	—Customs held C3I systems workshop—need for national center identified.
September 1986	—Customs awarded three contracts for approximately \$500,000 each for the initial phase of the C3I system design.
October 1986	—Anti-Drug Abuse Act passed—\$25 million authorized to establish C3I centers (\$25 million of total \$42 million).
October 1986	—Congress appropriated about \$42 million for the establishment of C3I centers.
November 1986	—First interagency C3I principals working group.
December 1986	—Coast Guard C3I interdiction requirements defined.
December 1986	—National Drug Policy Board recommended that Customs not establish the national C3I center in Oklahoma.
February 1987	—Customs and the Coast Guard agreed to locate the southeastern C3I center at Richmond Heights.
March 1987	—Customs and the Coast Guard agreed on joint command/staffing of the southeast C3I center.
March 1987	—Customs and the Coast Guard decided there would be a National Center and agreed that the center would be a National Command Center for Customs Aviation only.
May 1987	—Construction began on C3I West.
June 1987	—Customs awarded a \$24.7 million contract to the Eaton Corporation for the design, development, acquisition, installation, and testing of technical aspects of the core and first upgrade at the C3I centers.
October 1987	—Construction began on C3I East.
August 1988	—C3I West scheduled to become operational.
August 1988	—CNAC construction scheduled to begin.
October 1988	—C3I East scheduled to become operational.
March 1989	—CNAC scheduled to become operational.

Fundamental Changes in C3I Centers Were Made by Federal Agencies During Development

As mentioned earlier, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 required that Customs coordinate the development of the C3I centers with the heads of the Coast Guard, the Department of Justice, and NNBS. Customs has coordinated the development of the C3I centers through meetings and various working-level groups. Agencies represented in these groups include Customs, the Coast Guard, DEA, DOD, and FAA. Both NNBS and the National Drug Policy Board also participated. As a result of coordination with other agencies, Customs made significant changes to its original program design.

Changes in C3I Center Program

Changes in the C3I center program involve (1) the role of the national command center, (2) the level of intelligence activities in the C3I centers, (3) the configuration of the eastern C3I center, (4) the involvement of the military in the C3I centers, and (5) elimination of a C3I center in Houston, Texas. Table 3.1 summarizes the changes, and details of these changes are described below.

Table 3.1: Fundamental Changes Have Occurred in the C3I Concept

Factor	Prior C3I Plan	Status as of April 1, 1988
1. Role of National Center	National Command Center (NCC) Command and control of USCS and USCG air interdiction assets Possess sensor and interdiction assets	Customs National Aviation Center Command and control USCS air assets No sensors and will allocate air assets out of Corpus Christi, Texas
2. Level of intelligence activities	NCC Depository for all types of classified intelligence Analysis of all types of intelligence C3I East and West Depository for all types of classified intelligence Automatic on-line access to El Paso Intelligence Center	CNAC No depository No analysis of El Paso Intelligence Center intelligence C3I East and West No depository On-line access to El Paso Intelligence Center with human interface
3. Configuration of C3I East	Located at Tyndall AFB (Panama City, Florida) Managed by Customs	Located at Richmond Heights, Florida Managed by Customs and Coast Guard
4. Involvement of military	DOD radar feeds from SOCC (Tyndall AFB, Panama City, Florida)	Limited DOD radar feeds from SOCC (Tyndall AFB, Panama City, Florida)
5. Houston C3I	A C3I center located at Houston, Texas	No C3I center

Role of National Command Center Has Changed

Neither the Siler nor the Mitre studies, which led the way to the development of the C3I centers program, mentioned the need for a national command center. In June 1986, Customs determined that it needed a national command center. Further, in the 1987 Senate Appropriations

**Chapter 3
Fundamental Changes in C3I Centers Were
Made by Federal Agencies
During Development**

Committee report covering Customs' activities, the Committee directed that a national command and control center be established in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The report specified that this command and control system will be responsible for the direction of all federal air drug interdiction efforts.

Originally the proposed national command center operations included (1) long-range detection capabilities; (2) tactical intelligence analysis, sanitization, and dissemination; (3) direction of surveillance aircraft; (4) liaison with other agencies; and (5) special operations plans. According to the Assistant to the Policy Board Chairman, the Coast Guard questioned the need for the national command center. The National Drug Policy Board decided on December 18, 1986, that a national C3I center in Oklahoma would not be established.

NNBIS officials also questioned the need for an Oklahoma City national command center. According to the NNBIS staff director, no resources exist in Oklahoma City that would justify locating a center there, and a substantial amount of money would be needed to build it.

Nevertheless, Customs and the Coast Guard decided in March 1987 that there would be a national center and agreed on the role of the center in the C3I program. Customs officials told us that a national center was necessary because it was required by Congress. They decided that the center would be a national command center for Customs aviation only, in order to provide control of Customs' assets and provide administrative support to the regional centers. In the summer of 1987, the national center's name was changed to Customs National Aviation Center.

**Proposed Intelligence
Activities at C3I Centers
Have Changed**

Customs' initial description of the intelligence concept in the C3I stated that "a strong intelligence component will be an integral part of the U.S. Customs Service National C3I Program." The C3I intelligence staff was to provide information on smugglers and analyze smuggling activities related to both air and marine smuggling. Intelligence specialists were also to be responsible for preparing national assessments/estimates of both air and marine narcotics smuggling. The C3I intelligence function was to be directed from the national command center in Oklahoma City with subordinate elements stationed in the centers in Miami and March AFB.

DEA disagreed with the intelligence role proposed by Customs in the C3I center program because it believed that Customs would be duplicating

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DEA El Paso Intelligence Center activities. Customs was seeking direct access to the data files at the El Paso Intelligence Center and intended to develop its own data bases at the two c3i sector centers and the national command center. The intelligence information in the El Paso Intelligence Center is accessed by Customs via telephone. Both Customs and the Coast Guard found that this type of access has not produced timely information for the purposes of drug interdiction.

During the development phase, Customs de-emphasized the role intelligence would play in the c3i center program. Customs and DEA agreed that the c3i centers would have on-line access to the El Paso Intelligence Center. DEA personnel would have the authority to review the incoming queries for required data elements and to screen outgoing responses for compliance with existing procedures. Customs agreed that the c3i centers would not re-create files already existing in the El Paso Intelligence Center, since this would be redundant and inefficient. Also, the c3i centers would not duplicate the analytical efforts of the El Paso Intelligence Center.

Configuration of the
Eastern C3I Center Has
Changed

In the original concept for the c3i center program, c3i centers were to be located at the Air Force's Sectoral Operation Control Centers (SOCC) at Tyndall and March Air Force Bases. The move away from the SOCCs began when Customs officials decided in November 1985 that the eastern c3i center should include both air and marine interdiction activities. They decided in the summer of 1986 that the center should be located in or near Miami, Florida. While there is no formal study that considered these decisions in view of other alternatives, the Director of Customs' Office of Enforcement Support told us that by locating near Miami, Customs could take advantage of the strong working relationships Customs had developed with state and local law enforcement agencies involved in marine drug interdiction.

At the same time that the location issue was decided, the Coast Guard initiated efforts to become directly involved in air interdiction activities in the Southeast and sought direct involvement in the development of the eastern c3i center. In addition, because both air and marine activities would be involved, the question arose as to whether the Coast Guard's marine activities would be part of the c3i center.

A March 1987 agreement between Customs and the Coast Guard states that the Coast Guard will provide 50 percent of the personnel at the

eastern C3I center in order to share command and management responsibilities. Also, Customs and the Coast Guard will designate air interdiction assets to be controlled by the eastern C3I center. By locating the eastern center on Coast Guard property in Richmond Heights, Customs will take advantage of the Coast Guard's physical security at this location.

As of March 1988, the Coast Guard Seventh District Operations Center located in Miami would not be a part of the eastern C3I center. However, the Coast Guard proposed that Customs place monitors at the operations center so the Coast Guard could access selected information from the C3I center to assist in its drug interdiction effort. Customs' officials believed these monitors were not necessary since the operations center is not part of the C3I program.

DOD's Involvement in the C3I Center Program

Over the past several years the Air Force has provided assistance to Customs by allowing Customs personnel to monitor air traffic at the SOCCs located at Tyndall and March Air Force Bases. As mentioned earlier, in the original concept for the C3I center program, C3I centers were to be located at the SOCCs at Tyndall and March Air Force Bases. The SOCCs are part of our Nation's North American Air Defense Command System and are the focal point for obtaining extensive radar information for defensive purposes.

The primary reasons given for locating C3I centers at the SOCCs were the ease of obtaining radar information and the ease of communicating with DOD information sources and surveillance personnel. The advantage to the Air Force was that the air defense surveillance for low altitude, slow-flying aircraft and cruise missiles would be enhanced by Customs' detection capabilities.

The 1987 Senate Appropriations Committee report covering Customs' activities says that the command, control, communications, and intelligence centers should be integrated with all appropriate military detection capabilities. The conference report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act of 1987 states that maximum use be made of existing DOD and Coast Guard command and control networks for drug interdiction purposes. The National Drug Policy Board also pointed out the need for maximum integration of appropriate existing resources.

By January 1987, Customs decided to locate the eastern C3I center at Richmond Heights to be near state and local law enforcement agencies

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that provide resources (i.e., personnel and boats) to their marine interdiction effort. Customs is locating its western C3I at March AFB adjacent to the SOCC, rather than collocating with the military. Customs officials told us that the ability to get direct radar input from the SOCC at Tyndall AFB will be limited.

DOD's involvement in drug interdiction activities appears to be changing. Language in the Defense authorization legislation for fiscal year 1989 (awaiting the President's signature) provides authority for the Department of Defense to serve as the single lead agency for detecting and monitoring aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. The legislation further directs the Secretary of Defense to integrate the command, control, communications, and technical intelligence assets of the United States that are dedicated to the interdiction of illegal drugs into an effective communications network. The legislation does not discuss how these new initiatives are to be integrated with the C3I program being developed by Customs.

**C3I Center in Houston,
Texas, Not Established**

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 contained authorization for the Customs Service to establish C3I centers, including regional operations centers and a national center. The Senate Appropriations Committee report supporting Customs' 1987 appropriation stated that three regional command and control centers should be located in Miami, Florida; Houston, Texas; and March AFB, Riverside, California.

During the development of the C3I program Customs decided not to locate a C3I center in Houston because of insufficient funds. However, in February 1987 Customs established the Blue Fire Operation Center in Houston, primarily for marine interdiction.

**C3I Design and Cost Is
Open-Ended**

According to the C3I Project Director, Customs has been proceeding cautiously in developing the C3I center program due to the lack of technical expertise within Customs. Customs is following an evolutionary acquisition¹ strategy to acquire the C3I systems design. Although a number of advantages to the strategy exist, the final design and cost are open-ended.

¹Evolutionary acquisition is acquisition over an extended period of time to accommodate change and growth.

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According to the Customs officials, the evolutionary acquisitions strategy is being used because (1) officials want to further educate themselves with the latest technology available to meet C3I requirements, (2) the technology available today may be improved substantially in the near future, and (3) Customs wants to ensure C3I user participation and feedback during the system design to help ensure that the system's capability meets mission needs.

According to the C3I Project Director, Customs' aim was to develop a core system (which will be an immediate improvement over its current capability) with the first incremental upgrade representing a substantial improvement over the core system. Once the core system and the first upgrade become operational, the system should provide the feedback on which all future enhancements to the system are based. According to the C3I Project Director, Customs anticipates enhancing the C3I program once the core and first upgrade become operational.

In March 1986, Customs estimated a cost of \$40 million for the establishment of two C3I centers. This included the design, installation, and integration of the equipment for two C3I centers (East and West). A national command center or Customs National Aviation Center (CNAC) was not included in this \$40 million estimate. In October 1986, Customs estimated a cost of \$40 million for the establishment of three C3I centers: C3I East, C3I West, and the National Command Center.

In September 1986, Customs awarded contracts for approximately \$500,000 each to Hughes Aircraft Company, Eaton Corporation, and the Planning Research Corporation for the initial phase of the C3I system design for three centers. In June 1987, Customs awarded about a \$24.7 million contract to the Eaton Corporation for the design, development, acquisition, installation, and testing of the core and first incremental upgrade to the three C3I centers. As of March 21, 1988, the Eaton Corporation estimated an \$8 million cost overrun.

As of March 21, 1988, Customs anticipated establishing three centers, including the CNAC, for approximately \$50 million, which includes about \$14 million for construction. Disbursements of about \$34 million had been made to develop the C3I centers. According to the C3I Project Director, depending on the nature of the future upgrades the final cost of the program could exceed \$50 million.

Conclusions

The C3I center program should enhance Customs' current command and control capabilities, and it should correct some shortcomings in the federal government's overall command and control of its air and marine interdiction resources. The federal government's command and control of its drug interdiction resources remains fragmented under the C3I center program.

During the C3I development phase, a number of changes occurred that we believe will leave the program as primarily a Customs' command, control, communications, and intelligence system. The national command center will serve primarily as a national aviation center for Customs' air activities only. Part of the C3I centers' drug interdiction intelligence function will continue to be maintained by DEA at its El Paso Intelligence Center. The Coast Guard plans to command and control its air interdiction efforts from the southeast center only. The Coast Guard will maintain a separate operations center for commanding and controlling its marine interdiction forces. Finally, there will be limited DOD radar input at one of the C3I centers. However, the military's total involvement may change as Congress seeks to have the military play a larger role in drug interdiction as evidenced by the National Defense Authorization Act, fiscal year 1989 (awaiting the President's signature), which directs that command, control, communications, and technical intelligence assets of the United States aimed at drug interdiction be integrated by DOD.

Recommendation

In view of the changes made to the program by Customs and the recent passage by Congress of the Defense authorization legislation, we believe Congress should review the C3I program's direction before additional upgrades are approved.

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