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DRUG CONTROL

Update on U.S. Interdiction Efforts in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific



**National Security and
International Affairs Division**

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The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security,
International Affairs, and Criminal Justice
Committee on Government Reform and Oversight
House of Representatives

The Honorable Bill McCollum
Chairman, Subcommittee on Crime
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives

Drug traffickers use 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—commonly referred to as the “transit zone”—to move illegal drugs into the United States. In April 1996, we reported¹ that (1) the level of Caribbean illegal drug activities—especially maritime operations—had increased, (2) many Caribbean nations had limited resources and capabilities to conduct effective antidrug operations, (3) funding and capabilities for U.S. interdiction efforts had declined, and (4) the executive branch had not developed a plan of action to implement the U.S. strategy to counteract cocaine smuggling in the transit zone.

As you requested, we have reviewed what has happened in this area since our April 1996 report. Our specific objectives were to review changes in (1) the nature of current drug-trafficking activities through the transit zone; (2) host nation efforts, capabilities, and impediments to an effective counternarcotics program; (3) U.S. agencies’ capabilities, including funding, in interdicting drug-trafficking activities in the region; and (4) the status of U.S. agencies’ efforts to plan, coordinate, and implement U.S. interdiction activities.

Background

Under the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, the United States has established domestic and international efforts to reduce the supply and demand for illegal drugs. The strategy includes five goals intended to integrate the budgets and activities of all organizations involved in counterdrug efforts. The goals focus on education, law enforcement, and treatment in the United States and on eradication, alternative

¹Drug Control: U.S. Interdiction Efforts in the Caribbean Decline (GAO/NSIAD-96-119, Apr. 17, 1996).

development, interdiction, support for host nations, money laundering, and other issues outside the United States.² Goal four of the National Drug Control Strategy is “to shield America’s air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat.” In its efforts to achieve this goal, the United States has efforts underway to detect, monitor, and interdict illegal narcotics moving through the transit zone.

From 1986 to 1996, the United States spent about \$103 billion on efforts to reduce drug supply and demand. About \$20 billion of this amount was expended on international counternarcotics efforts, including \$4.1 billion to support crop eradication, alternative development, and increased foreign law enforcement capabilities and \$15.6 billion for interdiction activities. Funding for drug interdiction in the transit zone declined from about \$1 billion in 1992 to \$600 million in 1996.

In 1988, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) was established to set priorities and objectives for national drug control, develop an annual drug control strategy, and oversee the strategy’s implementation. The U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, who reports to ONDCP, is responsible for coordinating the efforts of all U.S. agencies involved in drug interdiction. The Department of State coordinates U.S. efforts in host countries, including training provided by U.S. agencies. The Department of Defense (DOD) supports U.S. law enforcement agencies by tracking and monitoring suspected drug-trafficking activities. Within the transit zone, the U.S. Coast Guard is the lead agency for maritime drug interdiction and co-lead with the U.S. Customs Service for air interdiction. They provide aircraft and ships to assist with detection and monitoring activities. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is responsible for coordinating drug enforcement intelligence gathering overseas and conducting law enforcement operations. DEA’s activities in the Caribbean are managed by its Puerto Rico-based field division and in the Bahamas by its Miami field division.

On September 17, 1997, the executive branch revised the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan that called for creating several joint interagency task forces that are intended to strengthen interagency coordination of U.S. drug control efforts. According to the revised plan, the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)-East, located in Key West, Florida, is responsible for detection, monitoring, sorting, and handoff of suspect air

²The international aspect of the strategy focuses on supply reduction and is guided by a presidential directive issued in November 1993 that called for a gradual shift in emphasis from the transit zone to the source countries. Funding for source country activities against drug trafficking increased from \$231.5 million in fiscal year 1996 to \$313.7 million in fiscal year 1997.

and maritime drug-trafficking events in the Pacific Ocean east of 92 west longitude, the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, Central America north of Panama, and surrounding seas and the Atlantic Ocean. JIATF-East is composed of personnel from various defense and civilian law enforcement agencies. JIATF-South, located in Panama, focuses on source country initiatives and the detection and monitoring of suspect drug targets for either subsequent handoff to participating national law enforcement agencies or to JIATF-East for further monitoring.

Results in Brief

Since our April 1996 report, the amount of drugs smuggled and the counternarcotics capabilities of host countries and the United States have remained largely unchanged. Cocaine trafficking through the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific regions continues, and drug traffickers are still relying heavily on maritime modes of transportation. Recent information shows that traffickers are using “go-fast” boats, fishing vessels, coastal freighters, and other vessels in the Caribbean and fishing and cargo vessels with multiton loads in the Eastern Pacific. Also, recent estimates indicate that, of all cocaine moving through the transit zone, 38 percent (234 metric tons) is being shipped through the Eastern Pacific.

Although the United States has continued to provide technical assistance and equipment to many Caribbean and other transit zone countries, the amount of cocaine seized by most of the countries is small relative to the estimated amounts flowing through the area. The counterdrug efforts of many transit zone countries continue to be hampered by limited resources and capabilities. Moreover, the United States does not have bilateral maritime agreements with 12 transit zone countries to facilitate interdiction activities.

Also since our prior report, the United States has increased funding but has had limited success in detecting, monitoring, and interdicting air and maritime trafficking in the transit zone. JIATF-East assets devoted to these efforts have stayed at almost the same level. However, drug-trafficking events are usually not detected and, when detected, often do not result in narcotics seizures. U.S. counternarcotics officials believe that the Eastern Pacific—a major drug-threat area—could benefit from greater attention. JIATF-East has requested additional resources from DOD to address Eastern Pacific drug trafficking, believing that cocaine seizures it supports could be doubled. DOD has not determined what, if any, additional support will be allocated to the Eastern Pacific above current force levels. In 1996, the U.S. Customs Service and U.S. Coast Guard initiated two intensive

operations in and around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that resulted in increased cocaine seizures and a disruption in drug-trafficking patterns.

In response to our recommendation in our earlier report that ONDCP develop a regional plan of action, ONDCP officials told us that it developed an overall strategy that identifies agency roles, missions, and tasks to execute the drug strategy and establish task priorities. However, the strategy does not include quantitative objectives for activities that would establish a defined baseline for developing operational plans and resource requirements. According to ONDCP, its performance measurement system remains incomplete, as of October 1, 1997, because proposed measurable targets, the core of ONDCP's system, are still under review. Until these measurable targets are developed, it will not be possible to hold agencies accountable for their performance. In addition, law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction in the Caribbean are in the process of developing a regional plan led by DEA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Customs Service. This plan is expected to be completed by January 1998.

Cocaine Flow Through the Transit Zone Continues to Threaten the United States

According to the Department of State's 1997 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, about 760 metric tons of cocaine were produced in South America in 1996.³ Of this amount, U.S. officials estimate that about 608 metric tons moved through the transit zone destined for U.S. markets and 40 metric tons transited to Europe. The officials acknowledge, however, that estimates of the amount of cocaine that enters the United States are based on limited intelligence and other information and may not reflect the actual cocaine flow.⁴ Maritime conveyances continue to be the predominant means for smuggling cocaine into the United States.

The Eastern Pacific and Western and Eastern Caribbean are the principal cocaine smuggling routes from South America to the United States. U.S. interagency 1996 estimates indicated that of the 608 metric tons of cocaine destined for the United States, 234 metric tons flowed through the Eastern

³According to the Department of State, estimated worldwide cocaine availability is based on potential production of crop harvest yield and the assumption that all coca leaf will be converted to cocaine.

⁴JlATF-East officials said factors such as seizure data, shipments to non-U.S. markets, and consumption in the source zone were not considered in cocaine flow assessments prior to 1997. However, the U.S. international counternarcotics policy interagency working group, responsible for generating cocaine flow estimates, plans to include these factors in preparing its estimate of the 1997 flow. The working group is composed of U.S. law enforcement and defense agencies involved in counternarcotics programs.

Pacific, 264 metric tons flowed through the Western Caribbean, and 110 metric tons flowed through the Eastern Caribbean. About 52 percent of the U.S.-bound cocaine transited Mexico and Central America. As shown in figure 1, the United States is the principal destination for cocaine smuggled in the transit zone.

Figure 1: 1996 Cocaine Flow in the Western Hemisphere



Source: U.S. Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement.

U.S. interagency estimates for the first 2 quarters of 1997 showed that cocaine continued to be moved mostly by maritime conveyances and Mexico was the principal destination. According to interagency estimates, Mexico and Central America received 59 percent of the cocaine during this period. The Caribbean countries accounted for 30 percent of the flow, and 11 percent was shipped directly to the United States from source countries. Also, U.S. law enforcement agencies noted some changes in trafficking patterns in and around Puerto Rico. They attributed this change to increased U.S. law enforcement efforts in this area.

According to the DEA Caribbean Field Division, the Eastern Caribbean corridor remains a prolific drug-trafficking route. South American traffickers continue to use the Bahamas and islands in the Leeward, Windward, and Hispaniola routes as staging and transshipment areas. Cocaine loads originate in Colombia or Venezuela and are moved by air or large motherships to smaller vessels in the Eastern Caribbean. The many unguarded airstrips and coastlines of the Caribbean islands make it easy for traffickers to refuel or store cocaine for further shipment directly to the United States or through Puerto Rico.

According to DEA, Puerto Rico is a popular gateway to the United States and a principal staging destination for South American drug traffickers. Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica have also experienced increased drug-smuggling activity. For example, DEA has indicated that, in the past, the role of Dominicans in the drug business was limited to “pick-up crews” and couriers who assisted Puerto Rican smugglers. Today, Dominicans have sophisticated drug-smuggling operations and use advanced security systems and telephone communications to move and sell cocaine in the Caribbean and the United States, according to DEA. Even with heightened enforcement, offshore airdrops along the southern coast of the Dominican Republic and in the Mona Passage between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic continue. In addition, the Department of State has reported that thousands of kilograms of cocaine have been smuggled over the border from Haiti into the Dominican Republic, whose army has had little success in stopping the flow of drugs.

Although the Eastern Caribbean remains a major route for illegal drug trafficking, the larger quantities of cocaine pass through Mexico via the Eastern Pacific and Western Caribbean corridors. U.S. interagency estimates show that, in 1996, 314 metric tons of cocaine reached Mexico for eventual movement to the United States through the Eastern Pacific and Western Caribbean channels. Of this amount, about 70 percent was

shipped through the Eastern Pacific. Multiton shipments of cocaine depart Colombia, Panama, or Ecuador predominantly by noncommercial maritime means and travel north via the Pacific Ocean. Shipments reach Mexico directly or are unloaded at sites along the Central American coast to smaller vessels. The U.S. interagency also estimates that about 30 percent of the cocaine entering Mexico passed through the Western Caribbean.

Cocaine Seizures in the Transit Zone

Overall cocaine seizures in the transit zone⁵ have increased from 61 metric tons in 1994 to 66 metric tons in 1995 and to 80 metric tons in 1996, according to JIATF-East. These amounts include seizures by U.S. agencies at sea and local law enforcement authorities in Mexico and Caribbean and Central American countries. Of the 1996 seizures, 53 metric tons were seized by transit zone countries and 27 metric tons were seized by the United States at sea. Seizures by Mexico and Central American countries accounted for about 40 of the 80 metric tons seized in 1996.

Maritime Smuggling Continues to Dominate Activity in the Transit Zone

Since 1993, cocaine traffickers have continued to increase their reliance on maritime vessels. According to JIATF-East, the number of known maritime drug-trafficking events has increased by 41 percent, from 174 events in 1993 to 246 in 1996. A “known event” is the confirmed movement of illegal drugs supported by seizure of drugs, observation of activities that can reasonably be attributed to drug smuggling, or reliable intelligence. Table 1 shows air and maritime known events for 1992-96.

⁵These seizures do not include those made in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which are considered arrival zone seizures.

Table 1: Air and Maritime Drug-Trafficking Events, 1992-96

Year	Air		Maritime	
	Events	Percent of total	Events	Percent of total
1992	344	Not applicable	^a	^a
1993	217	55	174	45
1994	154	41	223	59
1995	125	33	249	67
1996	86	26	246	74

Note: Events originating in Mexico and the Far East were excluded.

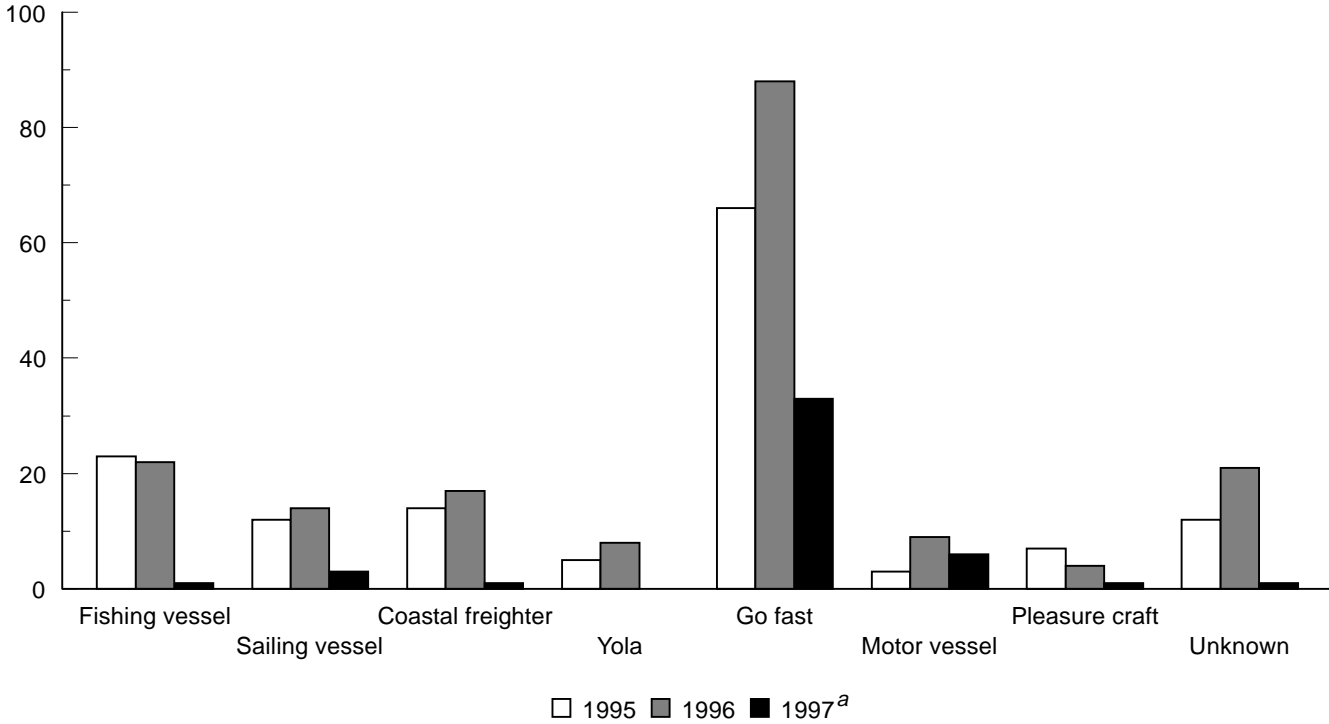
^aMaritime data for 1992 are not available.

Source: JIATF-East.

According to JIATF-East, the most significant maritime drug-smuggling modes of transportation involve “go-fast” boats in the Caribbean and fishing vessels in the Eastern Pacific. The “go-fast” boats are difficult to detect and interdict because they are small and capable of speeds that enable them to successfully evade law enforcement pursuits, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. The boats are between 25 and 45 feet in length, can routinely carry up to a ton of cocaine per trip, travel predominantly by night, and have refueling capability to complete cocaine runs in one day. In the first quarter of 1997, 38 of the 69 known maritime events, or 55 percent, in the transit zone involved “go-fast” boats. As illustrated in figure 2, maritime smuggling events by “go-fast” boats is on an upward trend.

Figure 2: Maritime Smuggling Events in the Caribbean, 1995-97 (first quarter)

Number of known events



^aData for 1997 are through March 31.

Source: JIATF-East.

DEA has also reported an increase in the use of canoes by Jamaican smugglers and “yolas” by Dominican smugglers. The yola is an open vessel with twin motors for propulsion and the ability to refuel rapidly. DEA reported that Bahamian and Jamaican transportation groups use yolas to smuggle cocaine loads into the Bahamas from either airdrops or boat-to-boat transfers off the coast of Jamaica. These groups then use the territorial waters of Cuba to shield their movements for eventual unloading to pleasure craft, which can easily blend in with inter-island boat traffic. A U.S. Customs Service official told us that “go-fast,”

recreational, and commercial fishing vessels move rapidly from the Bahamas to smuggle drugs into Florida.

In the Eastern Pacific, cocaine traffickers use large fishing vessels that have been retrofitted with hidden compartments and have been known to carry as much as 11 metric tons of cocaine. The largest amount of cocaine is smuggled through the Eastern Pacific, and the vast majority is delivered into Mexico, where it continues northbound over land. JIATF-East reported that, between May and December of 1996, there were 27 known or possible events in the Eastern Pacific. Figure 3 shows typical maritime vessels most commonly used by drug traffickers in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific corridors.

Figure 3: Typical Maritime Vessels Used by Drug Traffickers in the Transit Zone



Source: JIATF-East.

Host Nation Counterdrug Capabilities Remain Limited

As we reported in April 1996, host countries in the Caribbean continue to be hampered by inadequate counternarcotics capabilities. While the drug flow through the transit zone continues at about the same level, drug seizures by most countries in this region are minimal. During the last 2 years, the United States has continued its efforts to strengthen host countries' capabilities to complement and support U.S. interdiction efforts.

These efforts include commitments made at the May 1997 Caribbean/United States Summit in Barbados and new bilateral agreements that promote increased air and maritime cooperation with countries that have not yet signed agreements. The Department of State points out, however, that the best-trained, best-equipped antidrug units cannot succeed for long without the determined commitment of host government political authorities.

Capabilities in Transit Zone Countries

As we reported in April 1996, many host nations have weak economies and insufficient resources for conducting law enforcement activities in their coastal waters. In the Caribbean, St. Martin⁶ has the most assets for antidrug activities, with three cutters, eight patrol boats, and two fixed-wing aircraft, whereas other Caribbean countries have much less. Nevertheless, the United States depends on support from host nations and several European countries to help stop the drug flow through the transit zone.

In our 1996 report, we also noted that the need for law enforcement training for host governments had been evident for some time. In recognition of this need, the Department of State provided about \$7 million for training 6,700 persons throughout the world in fiscal year 1996. Other U.S. agencies also have funded and conducted training for some host nations. In addition, at the Barbados Summit, the United States committed to continuing to provide technical assistance in such areas as law enforcement, judicial systems, antimoney laundering, and other counterdrug activities. To further assist in implementation of U.S. commitments, the Director of ONDCP issued budget guidance that tasks departments and agencies to implement commitments made at the summit.

In March 1997, the Department of State reported corruption-related problems in various transit zone countries, including Antigua, Aruba, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, St. Kitts, St. Vincent, and others. Once the influence of drug trafficking becomes entrenched, corruption inevitably follows and democratic government may be placed in jeopardy. Even in countries where the political will to support antidrug activities exists, corruption can hinder counterdrug efforts. As we have previously reported, low salary levels for law enforcement officers and

⁶According to a Department of State official, St. Martin is not an independent nation and receives some support from France and the Netherlands.

other public servants throughout much of the transit zone make them susceptible to accepting bribes.⁷

As shown in table 2, the amount of cocaine seized in eight Caribbean countries rose from 6.79 metric tons in 1995 to 14.16 metric tons in 1996.⁸ The Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Cuba, Haiti, the Netherlands Antilles, and the United Kingdom Virgin Islands recorded some increase in 1996, while seizures in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica declined. Significantly, Cuba accounted for most of the 1996 increase, represented by one seizure of 6.2 metric tons from the disabled Honduran vessel *Limerick* that was boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard and later drifted into Cuban waters.

Table 2: Cocaine Seizures in Selected Caribbean Countries, 1992-96

In metric tons					
Country	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Bahamas	4.80	1.90	0.49	0.39	0.41
Cayman Islands	N/A	N/A	0.05	0.31	2.20
Cuba	0.31	0.24	0.24	0.16 ^a	6.30
Dominican Republic	2.36	1.07	2.80	3.60	1.20
Haiti	0.06	0.15	0.72	0.55	1.40
Jamaica	0.49	0.16	0.18	0.57	0.24
Netherlands Antilles	0.09	0.37	N/A	0.11	0.71
U.K. Virgin Islands	0.03	0.70	0.45	1.10	1.70
Total	8.14	4.59	4.93	6.79	14.16

^aData is January to August.

N/A = Not available.

Sources: Annual National Narcotics Intelligence and Consumers Committee Reports and International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports.

One of JIATF-East's goals for Caribbean countries is to increase their seizure rates to at least 15 percent of the cocaine estimated to be passing through their territories. In 1996, cocaine seizures in most Caribbean countries were much lower than 15 percent. In Jamaica, for example, the seizure rate was only 1.2 percent, while in Haiti it was 4.5 percent; the

⁷Drug War: Observations on the U.S. International Drug Control Strategy (GAO/T-NSIAD-95-182, June 27, 1995).

⁸JIATF-East identified these countries as important transit zone countries.

Dominican Republic, 3.6 percent; and Mexico, 7 percent.⁹ JIATF-East determined that, if these four countries had achieved a 15-percent seizure rate during 1996, seizures would have increased by 32 metric tons—from 26.12 metric tons to 58.65 metric tons.

United States Lacks Bilateral Maritime Agreements With 12 Nations

In its March 1997 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, the Department of State noted that, during 1996, the U. S. government had negotiated an assortment of treaties and agreements designated to serve as important new tools in fighting drug trafficking. One type of bilateral agreement is the maritime counterdrug agreement, generally consisting of six parts and granting the United States full or partial permission for shipboarding, shiprider, pursuit, entry to investigate, overflight, and order to land. There are 12 countries in the region with which the United States currently has no formal counterdrug agreements. These include Barbados, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, French West Indies, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Suriname. Department of State officials told us the U.S. government is undertaking efforts to obtain additional agreements but that progress has been impeded by host government concerns about sovereignty and legal issues. The United States currently has six-part agreements with 5—Antigua & Barbuda, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, and Trinidad & Tobago—of the 28 countries in the region and partial agreements (from one to four parts) with 11 other countries. See table 3 for information regarding U.S. bilateral counterdrug agreements with transit zone countries.

⁹Mexico is considered part of the transit zone and is where most cocaine seizures occur on land. In 1996, Mexican seizures were 23.6 metric tons.

Table 3: U.S. Bilateral Counterdrug Agreements, as of August 1997

	Shipboarding	Shiprider	Pursuit	Entry to investigate	Overflight	Order to land
Antigua & Barbuda	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bahamas		X			X	
Barbados ^a						
Belize	X	X	X	X		
Costa Rica						
Cuba						
Dominica	X	X	X	X		
Dominican Republic	X	X	X	X	^b	
Ecuador						
El Salvador						
French West Indies						
Grenada	X	X	X	X	X	X
Guatemala						
Haiti			X	X	X	
Honduras						
Jamaica ^a						
Mexico						
Netherlands Antilles		X	X	X	X	
Nicaragua						
Panama		X				
St. Kitts & Nevis	X	X	X	X	X	X
St. Lucia	X	X	X	X	X	X
St. Vincent/Grenadines	X	X	X	X		
Suriname						
Trinidad & Tobago	X	X	X	X	X	X
Turks & Caicos		X- air only				
U.K. West Indies	X	X				
Venezuela	X		X-air only			

(Table notes on next page)

Note: Empty cells indicate no agreement in this area.

^aAgreements with Barbados and Jamaica have been signed but implementation is pending ratification by host government parliaments and approval of implementation legislation.

^bThe Dominican Republic has granted temporary overflight authority over its territorial waters to dissuade and detect illegal migration and illegal drug trafficking through March 15, 1998.

Shipboarding: = Standing authority for the U.S. Coast Guard to stop, board, and search foreign vessels suspected of illicit traffic located seaward of the territorial sea of any nation.

Shiprider: = Standing authority to embark law enforcement officials on vessel platforms of the parties. These officials may then authorize certain law enforcement actions.

Pursuit: = Standing authority for U.S. law enforcement assets to pursue fleeing vessels or aircraft suspected of illicit drug traffic into foreign waters or airspace. May also include authority to stop, board, and search pursued vessels.

Entry to investigate: = Standing authority for U.S. law enforcement assets to enter foreign waters or airspace to investigate vessels or aircraft located therein suspected of illicit drug traffic. May also include authority to stop, board, and search such vessels.

Overflight: = Standing authority for U.S. law enforcement assets to fly in foreign airspace when in support of counterdrug operations.

Order to land: = Standing authority for U.S. law enforcement assets to order to land in the host nation aircraft suspected of illicit drug traffic.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

Bilateral agreements are not uniform and some provide very limited rights to U.S. law enforcement authorities. For example, a U.S.-Belize agreement allows U.S. Coast Guard personnel to board suspected Belizean-flagged vessels on the high seas without prior notification to the Government of Belize. Also, the U.S. shiprider agreement with Panama contains restrictions that require U.S. Coast Guard vessels operating in Panamanian territorial waters to be escorted by a Government of Panama ship. In contrast, other agreements do not include this restriction.

U.S. Funding and Efforts in the Transit Zone

Although budgets for most federal activities in the transit zone increased in fiscal year 1997, the number of JIATF-East maritime and air assets and resources for detection and monitoring have remained relatively unchanged since fiscal years 1995-96 (we have provided data through August 1997, however). Seizures of drugs supported by JIATF-East have dropped. In addition, JIATF-East believes the Eastern Pacific merits greater attention. Assets have been inadequate in this area, JIATF-East says. Although JIATF-East has asked for additional resources from DOD to support an 18-month operation in the Eastern Pacific, DOD has not decided whether to grant this request. In the Caribbean, two agencies—the U.S.

Coast Guard and the U.S. Customs Service—increased their counterdrug efforts, including conducting two “surge” operations to seize and disrupt cocaine smuggling activity in and around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in 1996. Furthermore, intelligence sharing among some U.S. agencies has been problematic.

U.S. Counternarcotics Funding Has Increased Since Fiscal Year 1995

U.S. counternarcotics funding in the transit zone increased by about \$33 million from fiscal year 1995 to fiscal year 1996 and is estimated to increase by an additional \$97 million in fiscal year 1997, as shown in table 4. Most of the fiscal year 1997 increase is due to a onetime allotment to DOD to modify a P3 aircraft for interdiction activities. According to JIATF-East officials, the modifications have not yet been completed. The officials also noted that, when the P3 becomes operational, it is likely to be used in the transit zone as well as in other areas as needed.

Table 4: U.S. Counternarcotics Funding in the Transit Zone, Fiscal Years 1991-98

Dollars in millions

Agency	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Estimate	Request
							1997	1998
DOD	\$407.1	\$504.5	\$426.0	\$220.4	\$214.7	\$228.9	\$304.6	\$238.1
USCG	565.2	443.9	310.5	234.1	301.2	323.2	335.7	388.7
USCS	^a	^a	16.2	12.5	10.1	4.5	6.2	6.6
DEA	26.2	28.8	29.1	28.7	29.6	34.0	31.7	36.7
State	35.9	36.2	14.0	7.9	10.6	8.5	18.4	18.5
Total	\$1,034.4	\$1,013.4	\$795.8	\$503.6	\$566.2	\$599.1	\$696.6	\$688.6

Legend

USCG = U.S. Coast Guard
 USCS = U.S. Customs Service

Note:

1. U.S. Coast Guard data for 1994 are different from the data presented in our April 1996 report because of updated information provided by the U.S. Coast Guard.

2. U.S. Customs Service data do not include funding for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These areas are territories of the United States, and funding is not included as part of the transit zone.

^aCustoms data for 1991-92 are not available.

Source: Indicated federal agencies.

JIATF-East Maritime and Air Assets Remain Unchanged

Between fiscal year 1995 and 1996, there was little change in JIATF-East maritime assets and flight hours devoted to interdiction in the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific (see tables 5 and 6). However, a significant decline in DOD funding began in fiscal years 1993 and 1994. These declines resulted in a 40-percent reduction in U.S. maritime assets by fiscal year 1994. As indicated in table 5, the number of shipdays in 1996 was 1,645 shipdays less than in 1993, when it was at its highest level. The reductions involved almost all classes of ships.

Table 5: JIATF-East Maritime Assets, 1992-97 (through July)

In number of shipdays

Ship type	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 (through July)
DOD						
Logistics	287	71	40	0	0	0
Cruiser	558	753	742	488	360	256
Destroyer	699	602	118	224	336	114
Frigate	2,008	1,441	785	727	509	333
Amphibious	87	188	9	0	0	0
Coast Guard	0	138	0	401	654	421
Other ^a	533	1,255	974	1,005	944	607
Total	4,172	4,448	2,668	2,845	2,803	1,731

Note: U.S. Coast Guard shipdays do not include all U.S. Coast Guard efforts in the transit zone. For example, in 1991, 1992, and 1994, the U.S. Coast Guard reported no shipdays devoted to JIATF-East, but spent 4,872, 3,395, and 1,659 shipdays, respectively, in its overall counterdrug activities. The decline in 1994 efforts was a direct result of extensive resources diverted from the counterdrug missions to support massive alien migration operations.

^aOther ship types include hydrofoils, patrol craft, and T-AGOS radar ships.

Source: JIATF-East.

Flight hours by JIATF-East air assets to support detection and monitoring declined by only 4 percent between 1995 and 1996. However, the drop between 1993 and 1994 was 27 percent, reflecting a decrease in DOD funding in fiscal year 1994. The flight hours for P3C, a maritime patrol aircraft, have continued to decline from 1992 through August 1997. JIATF-East stated that the maritime patrol aircraft are required for addressing both the “go-fast” boat threat in the Caribbean and fishing vessels in the Eastern Pacific.

Table 6: JIATF-East Air Assets, 1992-1997 (through August)

In number of flight hours

Aircraft type	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 (through August)
C130	417	97	0	0	0	0
C141	268	35	0	0	0	0
E2	4,547	3,608	4,098	3,501	3,618	2,288
E3	2,734	3,177	1,761	1,125	963	882
F15/F16	574	393	455	348	266	148
KC135	995	1,233	827	800	813	360
P3C	16,270	12,122	9,822	9,811	9,290	5,936
S3	1,644	311	228	0	12	0
SH2F	2,876	1,854	262	0	0	395
SH60B	4,611	3,710	1,980	2,930	2,751	1,361
C5	76	0	0	0	0	0
EC130	62	0	0	0	0	0
H46D	58	0	0	0	0	0
UH60	633	0	0	0	0	0
OV10	240	0	0	0	0	0
U2	512	0	0	0	0	0
Total	36,517	26,540	19,433	18,515	17,713	11,370

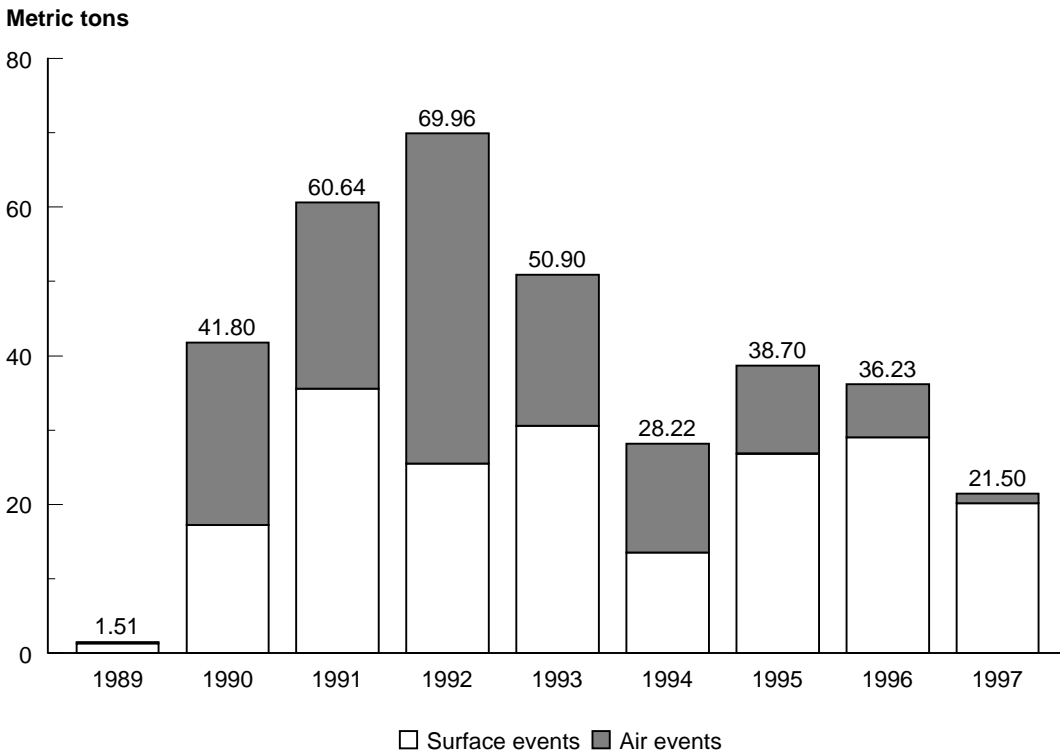
Note: Flight hours are not inclusive of all U.S. transit zone efforts.

Source: JIATF-East.

Seizures Supported by JIATF-East Have Declined

JIATF-East-supported seizures in 1996 were substantially less than its peak of nearly 70 metric tons seized in 1992 and slightly less than in 1995 (see fig. 4). Also, maritime seizures have continued to increase as a proportion of total seizures.

Figure 4: Interagency Cocaine Seizures Supported by JIATF-East, 1989-97 (first quarter)



Note: Data for 1997 are through March 31.

Source: JIATF-East.

Limited U.S. Success Against Maritime Drug Smuggling

JIATF-East believes its capabilities to detect and monitor maritime vessels in the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific are restricted. Even when a drug-smuggling event is detected, U.S. capability to interdict the smugglers is limited. For example, only about 52 percent of the 246 known maritime events detected in 1996 resulted in an apprehension, seizure, or jettison.

“Go-Fast” Boats

According to a JIATF-East official, detecting and monitoring “go-fast” boats is difficult because there is often little tactical intelligence on when these events will occur and limited marine patrol aircraft assets equipped with radar and night-vision capability to deal with this problem. For example,

during the first quarter of 1997, JIATF-East detected only 8 of 23 “go-fast” events that originated in South America. JIATF-East noted that U.S. law enforcement agencies detected six additional events without JIATF-East support. Of the eight detected events, six were detected by maritime patrol aircraft and resulted in three jettisons and three seizures. The remaining two events were detected by radar ships but escaped and presumably completed their delivery. In addition, U.S. Coast Guard officials told us that, other than visual identification of the wake of “go-fast” boats, detection is nearly impossible without more-advanced sensors, especially at night when most of these events occur.

Limited Coverage in the Eastern Pacific

According to U.S. officials, the small amount of aircraft and maritime assets hinders U.S. interdiction efforts in the Eastern Pacific. In that area, U.S. air and marine capability to interdict commercial and noncommercial fishing vessels is limited. In May 1996, JIATF-East initiated Operation Caper Focus to better define the nature of the cocaine smuggling threat in the Eastern Pacific. Before the operation began, JIATF-East had little intelligence on the smuggling methods used and quantities being transported in this area. JIATF-East estimated that, from May 1996 through June 1997, 43 known or possible maritime smuggling events occurred in the Eastern Pacific, and only 4 resulted in seizures. These events were detected from among hundreds of fishing vessels that routinely operate in the Eastern Pacific. JIATF-East officials indicated they have relatively little chance of detecting and monitoring these events because they currently have only 2 surface ships and about 200 flight hours of marine patrol aircraft per month dedicated to the area.

Air Events Detected but Few Seizures Made

In 1996, JIATF-East reported that of 86 known air events, 26 resulted in an apprehension, seizure, or jettison. According to JIATF-East, a successful interdiction generally involves a number of steps. It may start with an initial detection by Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar (ROTHR) systems or a radar ship, followed by a handoff to an asset equipped with an Airborne Early Warning (AEW) system. The aircraft will find the detected suspect and hand it off to an interceptor aircraft, which will monitor the suspect for ultimate handoff to a law enforcement agency. An analysis by JIATF-East showed that if any of the required assets, especially AEW-equipped assets, are not in place, the chances of a successful interdiction diminish.

A JIATF-East analysis of known air events from October 1996 to May 1997 showed that something usually went wrong that prevented a successful

interdiction. During this period, there were 27 known events in the Yucatan region. Of these, five were not known until after the drugs were delivered. In the remaining 22 detected events, only 4 resulted in a successful seizure. The main reasons for lack of success were limitations in ROTHr to handoff tracks, lack of AEW-equipped assets, and inadequate response and apprehension capabilities by host nation law enforcement agencies. For example, the analysis showed that without AEW-equipped assets, JIATF-East was able to track and hand off the suspect aircraft to law enforcement agencies only 18 percent of the time. Even when an AEW-equipped asset was available, JIATF-East analysis showed that it was able to track the suspect aircraft to the handoff point only 45 percent of the time because either the AEW-equipped asset or the interceptor failed to pick up the track from ROTHr. Finally, the lack of available local law enforcement support further reduced the results of adequate tracking. For example, JIATF-East reported that of the seven adequately monitored tracks, three did not result in a seizure because local law enforcement authorities in Guatemala did not have the assets to respond.

Radar Capability Limited

In 1994, the United States had 26 various radar assets that supported counterdrug efforts. Between 1994 and 1995, however, DOD deactivated nine radar assets. When this occurred, U.S. law enforcement officials told us that reductions in radar capability hampered their operations.¹⁰ However, during 1994 and 1995, the United States activated two ROTHr systems to cover the Caribbean. Although the ROTHr systems provide a larger area of coverage footprint than microwave radars, ROTHr has less probability to handoff (rather than detect) an air event to law enforcement agencies because it is not as accurate in vectoring in interceptions as microwave radars. (See app. I for an overview of radar coverage capability.)

JIATF-East acknowledged that reduced radar capability continues to limit operational successes today. According to JIATF-East, radar assets have not changed since our prior report and radar capabilities have further been exacerbated by a long term outage of the Guantanamo Bay radar because of no funding for operations and maintenance. In commenting on our draft report, U.S. Coast Guard officials told us the Guantanamo Bay radar is expected to be reactivated in the near future.

JIATF-East Has Requested Additional Resources

Although JIATF-East acknowledges that U.S. capabilities to detect and monitor “go-fast” boats in the Caribbean and aircraft throughout the

¹⁰Drug Control: U.S. Interdiction Efforts in the Caribbean Decline (GAO/NSIAD-96-119, Apr. 17, 1996).

transit zone are limited, it currently believes that targeting multiton cargo vessels in the Eastern Pacific provides the richest target of opportunity to seize large quantities of cocaine. Accordingly, JIATF-East has requested two additional ships and an additional 450 aircraft surveillance flight hours per month from DOD.¹¹ JIATF-East believes that with these assets the United States can increase annual cocaine seizures by an additional 40 metric tons. DOD, however, has indicated that it will not be able to fully support JIATF-East's request because of other priorities.

At present, two surface ships and about 200 flight hours are assigned to the Eastern Pacific per month. Most of the assigned U.S. air and marine assets support Caribbean interdiction efforts. JIATF-East officials told us that, although the United States could seize larger amounts of cocaine in the Eastern Pacific, JIATF-East is unwilling to transfer assets from the Caribbean. The Director of JIATF-East told us that the Caribbean counternarcotics programs have more "voice and visibility" in terms of political support from both the United States and island nations. He acknowledged that the United States has worked with Caribbean nations to build continued support for fighting the war on drugs and any movement of assets may have undesirable political consequences. Between May and December of 1996, JIATF-East temporarily shifted assets from the Caribbean to implement Operation Caper Focus in the Eastern Pacific. The temporary operation resulted in 27 metric tons of cocaine that were either seized or jettisoned, as well as improved intelligence on smuggling methods and routes in the region. Before this operation, few seizures had occurred in this region, and none took place during the first quarter of 1997—after the operation ended.

As previously discussed, JIATF-East has requested additional assets from DOD to support an 18-month Eastern Pacific operation.¹² JIATF-East estimated such assets would double the seizures it supports from the current level of 40 metric tons annually to 80 metric tons. In June 1997, ONDCP provided interagency budget guidance that directed the agencies to expand operational support to Operation Caper Focus. In July, ONDCP informed high-level DOD officials that interdiction resources were inadequate to support the national strategy and that the interdiction effectiveness of Operation Caper Focus was at risk. According to DOD

¹¹The JIATF-East request included additional P3 flight hours and additional ships (for example, a Navy frigate and oiler).

¹²JIATF-East estimates that \$24.4 million in incremental funding would be required. The funding includes \$12.6 million for forward deployment of aircraft to Panama and the increased intelligence cost at JIATF-East, and \$11.8 million for a U.S. Navy oiler.

officials, a decision is pending as to what, if any, additional support will be allocated to the Eastern Pacific above current force levels.

Increased Interdiction Efforts by U.S. Law Enforcement Agencies

Since 1995, the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Customs Service have reported some increases in interdiction activities in the transit zone. Both agencies conduct counterdrug activities that are in addition to the shipdays and flight hours provided in support of JIATF-East. For example, in 1996, the U.S. Customs Service and U.S. Coast Guard launched Operations Gateway and Frontier Shield, respectively, to disrupt cocaine trafficking in and around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. According to ONDCP officials, the operations have been successful, as indicated by increases in the street prices of cocaine in Puerto Rico. DEA officials noted that the wholesale price, considered a better indicator, doubled in San Juan, Puerto Rico, from April to late May 1997. As of September, prices had declined but were still higher than in April.

Seizures of cocaine during the first year of Operation Gateway increased by about 30 percent in comparison to seizures before the start of the operation. In the year prior to the operation, seizures were about 11 metric tons while seizures during the first year of the operation were about 14 metric tons. Actual fiscal year 1996 funding for Operation Gateway was \$2.4 million, and planned funding for fiscal year 1997 was \$30.1 million. In its One-Year Report on the Operation (covering the period ending February 28, 1997), the U.S. Customs Service noted a number of problems, including duplication and confusion in the procurement of equipment and services, a lack of public affairs coordination with other agencies, and lengthy delays in filling numerous authorized staff positions. The U.S. Customs Service noted, however, that some of these problems were not within its control and did not affect the overall performance of Operation Gateway.

The first 3 months of the U.S. Coast Guard's Operation Frontier Shield began with an initial "surge" of activity. Subsequently, operations were somewhat reduced but remained higher than before the operation began. According to the U.S. Coast Guard, shipdays and flight hours devoted to counterdrug missions increased to support the surge operation.¹³ During the first 10 months of the operation, cocaine seizures totaled 10.7 metric tons, an increase of 5.8 metric tons over the prior comparable 10-month

¹³According to the U.S. Coast Guard, shipdays increased from 2,481 in fiscal year 1995 to 3,421 in fiscal year 1997; flight hours increased from 9,405 in fiscal year 1995 to 14,500 in fiscal year 1997. The increase was generally attributed to operations around Puerto Rico. The U.S. Coast Guard shipdays and flight hours include counternarcotics activities in both the transit zone and the arrival zone.

period.¹⁴ In July 1997, the Secretary of Transportation reported that “assessments show a decisive shift in drug traffic away from the Frontier Shield area of operation” and that “drug runners are being forced to move their operations elsewhere.” U.S. Coast Guard officials stated that the shift in trafficking routes was anticipated in planning Operation Frontier Shield and that additional efforts are planned or underway to address this trafficking shift.

Intelligence Sharing Issues

In 1996, we reported that intelligence sharing was a contentious issue among various collectors and users of such data, including most federal counterdrug agencies. Since then, some initiatives to improve intelligence sharing have begun. For example, an interagency review, initiated by ONDCP on September 18, 1997, is underway to look at the national drug intelligence architecture. The review will assess the drug intelligence missions, functions, and resources of the major federal counterdrug agencies.¹⁵ According to ONDCP, coordination among the intelligence program and between intelligence producers and consumers will be a focus of the review.

In addition, the Federal Bureau of Investigation noted that other law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction in the Caribbean are developing a regional plan for law enforcement in the Caribbean that calls for expanding intelligence coordination. A draft of the regional plan is scheduled to be completed by January 1998.

JATF-East officials told us that there are inherent barriers in sharing information between and among federal counternarcotics agencies.¹⁶ Specifically, law enforcement agencies are mainly focused on individuals and drug organizations in the context of building cases for arresting and prosecuting criminals. In contrast, JATF-East is focused on tactical operations and obtaining information in support of detecting and monitoring suspects and making successful and timely law enforcement interdictions.

¹⁴According to a U.S. Coast Guard official, some of the increases may include seizures also reported by the U.S. Customs Service for Operation Gateway. The interagency process is expected to remove any duplication.

¹⁵The missions of the constituent centers, such as the National Drug Intelligence Center, the El Paso Intelligence Center, the Director of Central Intelligence Crime and Narcotics Center, and the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, will be reviewed.

¹⁶We are currently conducting a review of information sharing among federal counternarcotics agencies.

DEA officials referred to their comments in our prior report that noted that there are limitations on what intelligence DEA can legally provide other federal agencies developed from grand jury information, wiretaps, and court sealing orders. They also noted that some intelligence is not released to protect sources and the integrity of ongoing investigations. DEA officials also stated that the El Paso Intelligence Center¹⁷ provides JIATF-East with the necessary information to track suspect aircraft and vessels until the respective U.S. and foreign authorities can take appropriate law enforcement action.

U.S. Caribbean Counterdrug Action Plan Not Fully Developed

In April 1996, we recommended that the Director of ONDCP develop a Caribbean plan of action that should at a minimum determine resources and staffing needed and delineate a comprehensive strategy to improve host nation capabilities. In response to our recommendation, ONDCP told us it provided a framework for addressing strategic objectives in the transit zone in its classified annex to the National Drug Control Strategy issued in February 1997. ONDCP officials noted that the operational tasks for implementing the framework, including targets for measuring performance in that area, are still under development. They also noted that implementation of the strategy for the transit zone is the responsibility of other federal agencies such as the U.S. Coast Guard, DEA, and DOD.

According to ONDCP, its performance measurement system will provide policymakers with new insights about which programs are effective and which are not. The system is intended to help guide adjustments to the National Drug Control Strategy as conditions change, expectations are met, or failure is noted. The goals of the strategy form the foundation of a 10-year plan, supported by a 5-year budget. Each goal is to be related to a measurable objective, further defined by an outcome that the objective is to produce by 2002. Each outcome is to be quantified by performance targets that identify measurable attainments. ONDCP has instructed agencies to develop plans, without being constrained by budget considerations, identifying how they will make meaningful progress toward achieving a drug control mission. As of October 1, 1997, the performance measurement system remains incomplete because proposed measurable targets, the core of ONDCP's system, are still under review. Since these measurable targets have not yet been developed, agencies cannot be held accountable for their performance.

¹⁷The center is the national tactical drug intelligence center and provides actionable intelligence to JIATF-East.

Organizational Issues

In April 1994, ONDCP and the participating agencies approved the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan. This plan provided for establishing three geographically oriented counterdrug joint interagency task forces. The task forces were to be led and staffed by DOD, the U.S. Customs Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard. A major premise of the plan was that the full-time personnel assigned to the task forces would become stakeholders in their operations. It was anticipated that this would ensure close planning and operational coordination; the availability of federal assets; and a seamless handoff of suspected air, sea, or land targets. Other agencies that either had an interest in or were affected by the operation were to provide liaison personnel. Nevertheless, participating agencies have not provided the required staffing to JIATF-East and, thus, it has been dominated by DOD personnel and has not achieved the intended interagency composition. According to ONDCP, the revised September 17, 1997, plan places the task forces more under the control of DOD sponsorship rather than remaining an interagency center.

As of July 1997, little has changed since our last report; many of the key civilian positions have remained unfilled. Thus, JIATF-East is still predominately staffed by DOD personnel and has not achieved the interagency mix initially hoped for at its creation. Of the 184 authorized permanent positions, 132 were DOD, 21 were U.S. Coast Guard, and 31 were other agencies' position. Thirty-seven authorized positions were vacant. DOD had filled 117 of its 132 authorized positions and the U.S. Coast Guard had filled 17 of 21. However, various other agencies had assigned staff to only 13 of 31 authorized positions, compared to having assigned staff to 11 of 27 authorized positions as of November 1995. The U.S. Customs Service, for example, had filled only 7 of 22 positions, compared to 1995 when it had filled 8 positions; the 1 authorized Department of State position has never been filled. JIATF-East has periodically requested the civilian agencies to staff these positions, but the agencies have not done so.

Conclusion

Since our last report, JIATF-East has more clearly identified the problem of "go-fast" boats in the Caribbean and fishing vessels in the Eastern Pacific, identified shortcomings in its detection and monitoring capabilities, and requested additional resources to address the problem. Also, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Customs Service have launched two surge operations in and around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that have resulted in seizing additional quantities of cocaine and changing drug-trafficking patterns. By identifying the anticipated benefits from

providing additional resources to the transit zone, JIATF-East has taken an important step in adding accountability to the drug-interdiction effort. Notwithstanding these efforts, the overall amount of cocaine seized in the transit zone has not disrupted the flow and availability of cocaine in the United States.

We believe ONDCP has not fully addressed our prior recommendation to develop a regional plan. We continue to believe that a transit zone plan that includes quantitative goals and objectives that will allow policymakers to determine resource requirements and to evaluate the potential benefits of regional interdiction efforts is essential. An effective transit zone operation is an integral part of the U.S. strategy to limit drug availability in the United States. But it alone will not be the solution to the drug problem. A regional plan should be a subset to ONDCP's overall strategy. Therefore, it is important that ONDCP develop a comprehensive plan that provides a blueprint for how efforts in the transit zone countries are going to reduce the flow of cocaine. Without such a plan, it is not possible to judge the merits of individual activities in terms of what are the most cost-effective measures in the counterdrug effort.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

ONDCP in its written response (see app. II) stated that it is in general agreement with this report. It provided clarification and information on (1) its future plans, (2) the importance of source country efforts in complementing those in the transit zone, (3) activities of the U.S. Coast Guard, (4) results from the Bridgetown Summit, and (5) the changes to the revised National Interdiction Command and Control Plan. ONDCP recognized that current assets in the transit zone are inadequate to accomplish the strategy and identified recent initiatives to implement the strategy. These initiatives included a Caribbean action plan, a short-term enhancement to transit zone interdiction, a 5-year asset plan for the transit zone, intelligence sharing efforts, and a deterrence study. These initiatives are expected to provide linkage between planning, development of performance measures, and assets required to implement the strategy. However, ONDCP did not provide time frames for completing these initiatives.

We obtained oral comments on a draft of this report from the Department of State, DOD, DEA, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Customs Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. None of these agencies disagreed with our principal findings or our conclusions. However, several of these agencies indicated we had not provided enough information about U.S.

counterdrug activities in the transit zone other than those directed by JIATF-East. In response to their concerns, we have expanded our discussion of these other activities, particularly those of the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Customs Service, and have added data on overall drug seizures in the region. Each of the commenting agencies suggested points of clarification and we have incorporated them into the report where appropriate. In addition, we modified the report to include some updated information provided by DOD and the U.S. Coast Guard on operational capabilities in the transit zone.

Scope and Methodology

To determine the nature of drug-trafficking in the transit zone, we obtained reports from the U.S. Coast Guard, DEA, the U.S. Customs Service, JIATF-East, ONDCP, and interagency assessments on cocaine smuggling activities. We analyzed and compared the data from these reports with data from prior years to assess the degree of change in the cocaine flow to the United States and drug traffickers' methods, routes, and modes of transportation. We also obtained assessment briefings about the cocaine threat from DEA headquarters in Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Coast Guard Seventh District and U.S. Customs Service in Miami, Florida; and JIATF-East in Key West, Florida.

To obtain information on host nation capabilities and impediments to their counternarcotics efforts, we reviewed various Department of State cables and other relevant documents, including the annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports. We interviewed officials from DEA, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Customs Service, the Department of State, and JIATF-East and obtained information on (1) host nation counterdrug capabilities, (2) the amount of cooperation with the U.S. counterdrug activities, and (3) the extent of corruption in host nations. We also interviewed officials from the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of State, and JIATF-East for information on the status of U.S. bilateral maritime agreements with host countries.

To assess U.S. counterdrug capabilities, we reviewed program and budget documents and related information from numerous federal agencies, including ONDCP, the Departments of Defense and State, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Customs Service, and the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator. We obtained summary reports from the U.S. Customs Service on Operation Gateway and the U.S. Coast Guard on Frontier Shield to determine their impact on reducing the flow of cocaine to United States. We interviewed and obtained information from JIATF-East and other

federal agencies on the resources and capabilities of U.S. interdiction efforts in the transit zone. We also documented U.S. funding trends from 1991 to 1998 and assets devoted to detection and monitoring to 1996.

We interviewed key officials from DOD and U.S. law enforcement agencies to determine the extent of U.S. planning, coordination, and implementation of counterdrug programs in the transit zone. We met with ONDCP officials on the status of its implementation of our recommendation to develop a plan of action for the Caribbean and its efforts to develop performance measures for U.S. counternarcotics initiatives. To obtain information on interagency staffing at JIATF-East, we reviewed documents, obtained briefings, and interviewed cognizant JIATF-East officials.

We conducted our review between April and September 1997 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As arranged with you, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to other interested congressional committees, the Director of ONDCP, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the U.S. Attorney General, the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service, the Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, the Administrator of DEA, and the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. We will make copies of this report available to others upon request.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please call me at (202) 512-4268. The major contributors to this were Janice Villar Morrison, George Taylor, and Louis Zanardi.



Jess T. Ford, Associate Director
International Relations and Trade Issues

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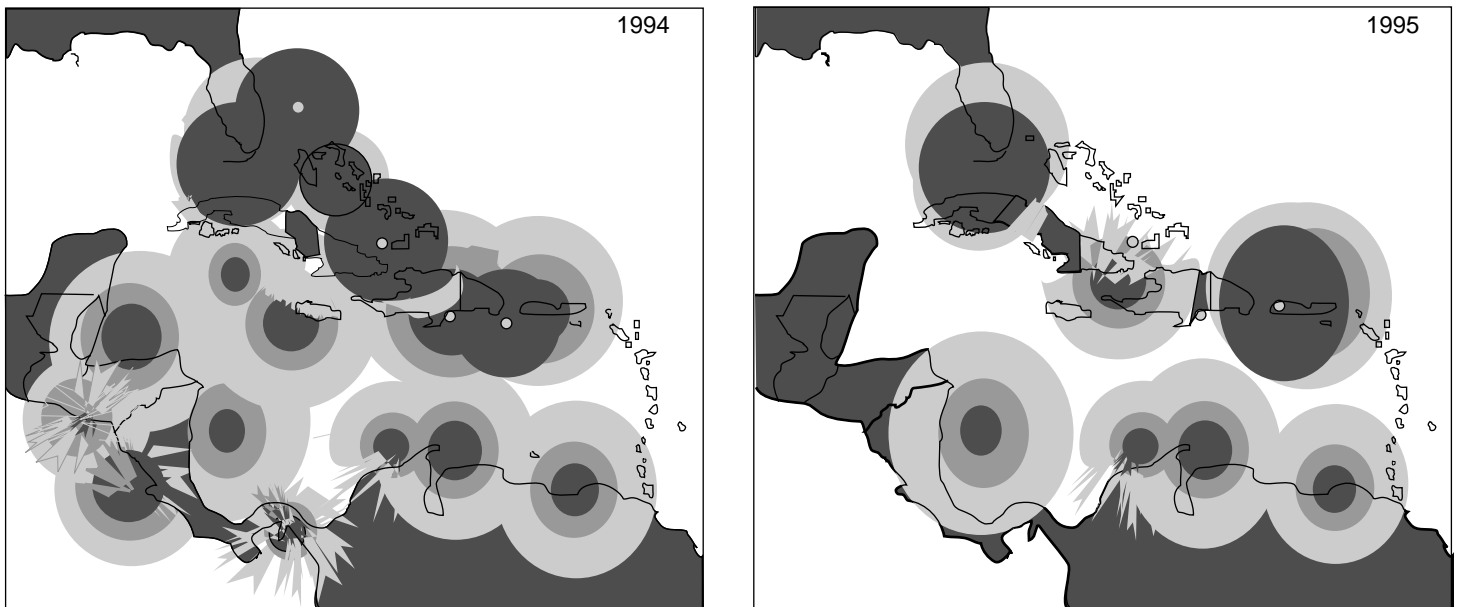
Abbreviations

AEW	Airborne Early Warning
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
JIATF	Joint Interagency Task Force
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy
ROTHR	Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar

Radar Surveillance Capabilities

In 1994, the United States had 26 various radar assets that supported counterdrug efforts in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific. Between 1994 and 1995, DOD deactivated nine radar assets. However, during 1994 and 1995, the United States activated two Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar (ROTHR) systems to cover the Caribbean, as shown in figure 1.1. According to the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)-East, radar surveillance capabilities illustrated for 1995 remained current as of September 1997.

Figure 1.1: Radar Surveillance



Source: Department of Defense.

Comments From the Office of National Drug Control Policy

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
Washington, D.C. 20503

October 3, 1997

Jess T. Ford, Associate Director
International Affairs and Trade Issues
U. S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Ford:

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has reviewed the draft GAO report; *Update on U.S. Interdiction Efforts in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific*. ONDCP is in general agreement on the report; however, several sections of the draft report require clarifying comments.

Performance Measurement System

ONDCP has, and will continue, to evaluate drug control programs through in-depth studies and program evaluations. The national Performance Measurement System being implemented by ONDCP will provide a more systematic and sophisticated assessment mechanism than GAO appears to appreciate. It is one that will enable ONDCP to assess linkages among various components of the Strategy.

This system was designed by ONDCP with input from departments and agencies with major responsibility for implementing antidrug programs (Justice, Health and Human Services, State, Defense, Education, and others) and includes a detailed set of draft performance targets and measures that address each Strategy Goal and Objective. The report describing the system is undergoing further review to resolve issues related to the target numbers, that is, the end states that the drug control community will seek to achieve by 2002 and 2007 (in accordance with the five-year budget and ten-year strategy). When this review is complete the report will be forwarded to Congress.

Meanwhile, ONDCP has begun preliminary steps to implement the national Performance Measurement System. The Information Management System is being designed and ONDCP plans to reconvene interagency working groups to address issues relating to data collection and the relative contribution of various agency programs to each performance target.

The new system will focus initially on the extent to which each Strategy Goal and Objective is met rather than on assessing individual programs. Program assessment will be undertaken when trend data indicate that the relevant target has not been met.

**Appendix II
Comments From the Office of National Drug
Control Policy**

2

Strategy

GAO accurately discusses the provisions of the *1997 National Drug Control Strategy* concerning interdiction but fails to present the overall strategic context within which interdiction operates. It is difficult to assess the successes and failures of U.S. interdiction efforts unless its role within the national strategy is properly understood.

The Classified Annex to the *National Drug Control Strategy* focuses U.S. action against illicit drug cultivation, production, and trafficking in cocaine source countries. International drug trafficking organizations and their production and trafficking infrastructures are most concentrated, detectable, and vulnerable to effective law enforcement action in source countries.

Transit zone interdiction plays a critical supporting role to source country programs. Transit zone interdiction programs accomplish the following:

- Removes a significant tonnage of cocaine from the pipeline each year that would otherwise reach the United States;
- Raises the costs and risks to traffickers of moving cocaine into the United States;
- Produces additional intelligence and law enforcement information that can be used to attack trafficking organizations, strengthening the overall U.S. law enforcement effort against international crime;
- Strengthens international bilateral and regional cooperation against the threat of illegal drugs; and
- Strengthen the capabilities of transit nation law enforcement institutions.

As the report points out, transit zone operations have not disrupted the overall flow and availability of cocaine in the United States. Traffickers have demonstrated that they can absorb interdiction losses as the cost of doing business while increasing source country cultivation and production to make up interdiction losses. In the transit zone, traffickers have the initiative and can choose when, where, and how to challenge interdiction forces. They are able to alter routes and methods, often at considerable cost, in response to effective law enforcement interdiction activity.

However, in the cocaine source countries, trafficker routes must link to relatively fixed growing areas. Law enforcement agencies can seize the initiative, break transportation links, and disrupt and dismantle trafficking organizations and infrastructure. Crop control programs can help reduce the amount of coca available for refinement into cocaine. Transit zone operations will be most effective once source country programs constrain drug production potential preventing trafficking organizations from making up interdiction losses.

See comment 1.

Threat Assessment

The GAO report accurately identifies the major trafficking routes used to smuggle cocaine into the United States. The report cites data produced by the ONDCP chartered Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement. GAO recognizes that this data is the intelligence and law enforcement communities' best assessment of the cocaine smuggling threat based on available information. We would note, however, that the interagency is working to improve this information and increase the precision of its flow assessments. During the latest conference of interdiction commanders, DIA unveiled new methods of accounting for the global flow of cocaine and for tracking movement in this hemisphere. In addition, ONDCP recently entered into an agreement with a contractor to provide greater precision in our flow estimates. With better understanding of cocaine and heroin flows, we are better able to allocate interdiction forces and resources and rapidly shift forces to meet emerging threats.

GAO assessments of the increasing maritime threat in the Eastern Pacific and increasing use of "go fast" boats are correct and identify important challenges currently being addressed by the interagency.

Policy and Programmatic Assessments

The following comments are intended to amplify GAO's assessments of current policies and programs.

Support to transit zone nations. In several instances, GAO presents facts and figures from the JIATF-East perspective and draws conclusions without reference to countervailing data or view points of other important members of the interdiction community. JIATF-East participates only in a portion of the interdiction process (detection and monitoring of drug smugglers - not in the apprehension phase), only a portion of the targets (non-commercial conveyances), and only a portion of the transit zone (primarily deep Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, near South America). GAO does mention that other agencies, such as US Customs and US Coast Guard conduct interdiction operations in the transit zone, however, other agency data is not reported in balance with JIATF-East statistics.

See comment 1.

Statistics on JIATF-East's interdiction operations are not balanced with the other agencies' participation. Table 5, for example, shows US Coast Guard maritime assets - but only in terms of support to JIATF-East. This distorted view shows that zero Coast Guard assets were under the tactical control of JIATF-East in 1991 and 1992, yet Coast Guard counterdrug funding for the transit zone was at all-time highs during these years (table 4). The Coast Guard conducted significant counterdrug operations in the transit zone during these years while JIATF-East did not yet exist.

See comment 2.

The report correctly points out that counterdrug efforts of many transit zone countries continue to be hampered by limited resources and capabilities. But the report inadequately discusses U.S. efforts to improve regional interdiction capabilities. Major U.S. initiatives in this area, stemming from the Bridgetown Summit are discussed in a single sentence.

**Appendix II
Comments From the Office of National Drug
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During the Caribbean/United States Summit in Bridgetown, Barbados in April 1997, participating nations committed to a plan of action that pledges our governments to collaborate in: modernizing crime control laws; strengthening law enforcement and judicial institutions; developing appropriate anti-corruption measures; strengthening regional action against money laundering; and strengthening regional security forces in cooperative interdiction efforts. The Summit also established the Joint Committee on Justice and Security to implement the action plan. The Joint Committee recently met in Barbados and made significant progress in following through on the commitments made during the summit. To further assist in implementation, Director ONDCP issued budget guidance June 30, 1997, that tasks departments and agencies to implement commitments made at the Bridgetown summit.

Our efforts to assist key transit nations to strengthen their own institutional capabilities are part of a process. Building skilled, professional cadres of drug control, law enforcement, and judicial officials requires time and resources -- a long-term commitment from the region and an investment of resources and technology into the region. The Bridgetown summit was a step in the right direction.

Plan of action. Current ONDCP strategic planning documents give guidance to inform interagency operational planning and establish resource requirements on a regional basis. For example, the Classified Annex directs the interdiction agencies to "maintain sufficient level of effort to be able to respond rapidly to intelligence-cued trafficking events throughout CENTAM/Caribbean/EPAC region." Against this standard, USIC has been directed to lead an interagency effort to develop a five-year plan that recommends agency assets committed to the transit zone. Also, against this standard, JIATF-E, USIC, and ONDCP believe that current interdiction forces are inadequate to accomplish the national strategy.

National Interdiction Command and Control Plan Revision (NICCP). The GAO report only briefly mentions the NICCP and omits any discussion of its recent revision, a potentially important step in improving interdiction command and control.

The new document represents evolutionary changes and further definition of roles and responsibilities in interdiction command and control. The revision accomplishes the following:

- Clarifies command relationships for JIATFs. DoD will be responsible for command, control, and tasking authority for the three JIATFs through the respective CINC.
- Establishes an interagency process to determine interdiction resource requirements. Interdiction centers will develop long-range asset requirements to be updated annually and forward them through parent agencies/departments to the USIC. USIC will review and forward them with a recommendation to the Director, ONDCP. For the first time, the role of JIATF directors in resource allocation has been clarified.
- Defines the interagency interdiction planning process at the strategic and operational level.

See comment 1.

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- Strategic. Guidance is provided by the National Drug Control Strategy and its Classified Annex, PDDs, etc. Strategy coordination and planning will occur at interagency fora such as the IWG, TIC, etc.
- Operational. Operational planning will be led by respective CINCs while regional planning will be hosted by interdiction centers.
- More clearly states the responsibilities of the USIC and his relationship to the interdiction departments, agencies, and centers.
- Clarifies operational coordination procedures including the roles, responsibilities and lines of coordination and communication in the Puerto Rico area.

Law enforcement surge operations vicinity of Puerto Rico and Intelligence architecture assessment. ONDCP agrees with GAO discussion of these initiatives.

The Road Ahead. The report does not mention the Administration's plans for transit zone interdiction. While these initiatives are under development, they do provide insight into future directions for transit zone interdiction. Some ongoing ONDCP initiatives in the region include the following:

Caribbean Action Plan. ONDCP, through the CN-IWG Caribbean Working Group, is leading an interagency effort to develop a comprehensive overarching counternarcotics strategy and interagency action plan for meeting the goals and objectives of the National Drug Control Strategy as they apply in the Caribbean Basin. This document supplements the Classified Annex and will be incorporated into the next revision of this document. The action plan will:

- Describe agency tasks in the Caribbean for the next 18-24 months.
- Provide vehicle for better coordination, synchronization, and de-confliction of agency operations.
- Ensure agency plans are adequately coordinated with European Union action plan, which the U.S. supports.

Intelligence and Law Enforcement Information Sharing in the Caribbean. As result of Barbados summit, ONDCP is leading an interagency effort to define the extent to which the U.S. can provide intelligence and law enforcement information to the Eastern Caribbean nations along with the appropriate sources and methods of transmission.

Five Year Asset Plan for Transit Zone. The *Classified Annex* to the *National Drug Control Strategy* tasked the United States Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) to "lead [an] interagency effort to develop a five-year plan that recommends agency assets committed to the transit zone." This paper is in draft.

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Short Term Enhancements to Transit Zone Interdiction. The NSC Deputies Committee asked the USIC to recommend modest enhancements to transit zone interdiction that could be accomplished in the short term. USIC recommendations have been submitted to Director ONDCP and vetted in the interagency. Recommendations will be forwarded for NSC consideration shortly.

The Deterrence Study. Recent source country interdiction operations indicate that interdiction can be effective enough to break transportation links through deterrence -- traffickers cease illegal operations due to their fear of effective law enforcement. The deterrence study will attempt to determine levels of effectiveness required to deter trafficker activity and then design a force structure and shape technology to achieve the required level of deterrence.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report and to provide formal comments.

Sincerely,



Janet Crist
Chief of Staff

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The following are GAO's comments on the Office of National Drug Control Policy's letter dated October 3, 1997.

GAO Comments

1. We provided additional information concerning this point in the report.
2. We recognize that the overall funding levels are not a reflection of the assets allocated to JIATF-East. Accordingly, we have added several footnotes to make this distinction in the report.

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