



Testimony

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DRUG CONTROL

DOD Allocates Fewer Assets to Drug Control Efforts

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G A O

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our work on the Department of Defense's (DOD) contribution to reducing the supply of illegal drugs entering the United States. My statement is based on our December 1999 report requested by your Subcommittee and the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control.¹

My statement today covers three main points:

- First, I will discuss the decline in DOD's aerial and maritime support allocated to counterdrug activities from fiscal years 1992 through 1999 and some of the consequences and the reasons for the declines.
- Second, I will discuss the obstacles DOD faces in helping foreign governments counter illegal drug activities.
- Third, I will also talk briefly about DOD's counterdrug strategy and the need for performance measures to judge its counterdrug program effectiveness.

SUMMARY

The Department of Defense has lead responsibility for aerial and maritime detection and monitoring of illegal drug shipments to the United States. It also provides assistance and training to foreign governments to combat drug-trafficking activities. DOD supplies ships, aircraft, and radar to detect drug shipments; and training, equipment, and other

assistance to foreign governments. DOD's counterdrug activities support the efforts of U.S. law enforcement agencies, such as the Customs Service and Coast Guard, and foreign governments to stem the flow of illegal narcotics to the United States. In fiscal year 1998, DOD spent about \$635 million to support these supply reduction efforts.

Since 1992,² DOD's level of support to counter drug-trafficking in Central and South America and the Caribbean has significantly declined. For example, the number of flight hours devoted to counterdrug missions declined 68 percent from 1992 through 1999. Likewise, the number of ship days fell 62 percent over the same period.³ In fiscal year 1999, U.S. Southern Command reported that DOD was unable to meet 57 percent of the Command's requests for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance flights to support its detection and monitoring responsibilities. According to the Southern Command, the lack of assets hurts their ability to quickly respond to changing drug-trafficking patterns. As a result, coverage in key drug-trafficking routes to the United States is lower, leaving gaps in detection areas. For example, U.S. officials in Peru told us that, since 1997, there has been little to no aerial support to the air interdiction operation between Peru and Colombia. In the Eastern Pacific, a key threat area, DOD was unable to sustain its support in 1997 and 1998 to a successful interdiction operation due to a lack of available assets.

DOD acknowledges that its coverage of key drug-trafficking areas in South America and the Caribbean has gaps. DOD ascribes the decline in its support to the lower priority of

¹ Drug Control: Assets DOD Contributes to Reducing the Illegal Drug Supply Have Declined (GAO/NSIAD-00-9, Dec. 21, 1999).

the counterdrug mission as compared to others such as war, peacekeeping, and training, as well as decreases in its overall budget and force structure during the 1990s. DOD believes that, while the level of assets it provides has been reduced, its overall operations are more efficient. However, data is lacking to back up this position.

DOD faces obstacles in providing support to foreign government counterdrug efforts. Over the years, we have raised concerns about the limited capabilities of foreign military and law enforcement organizations to operate and repair the equipment and effectively use the training provided by DOD. For example, one concern we raised in our December 1999 report involved the capability of the Peruvian police to operate and maintain boats to be used for counterdrug river operations. Other concerns include human rights and intelligence sharing. DOD cannot give training support to some foreign military units nor can it share intelligence information with certain foreign counterdrug organizations because of their record on human rights abuses and evidence of corruption within these organizations.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, DOD has a set of plans and strategies that directly supports the goals of the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy to reduce the demand and supply of illegal drugs. For example, DOD has developed a 5-year counterdrug plan that broadly describes the military personnel and assets that it will provide to further the national goals. At the regional level, the U.S. Southern Command has a counterdrug campaign plan designed to execute its counterdrug mission in Central and South America and the

² Data prior to fiscal year 1992 was not available.

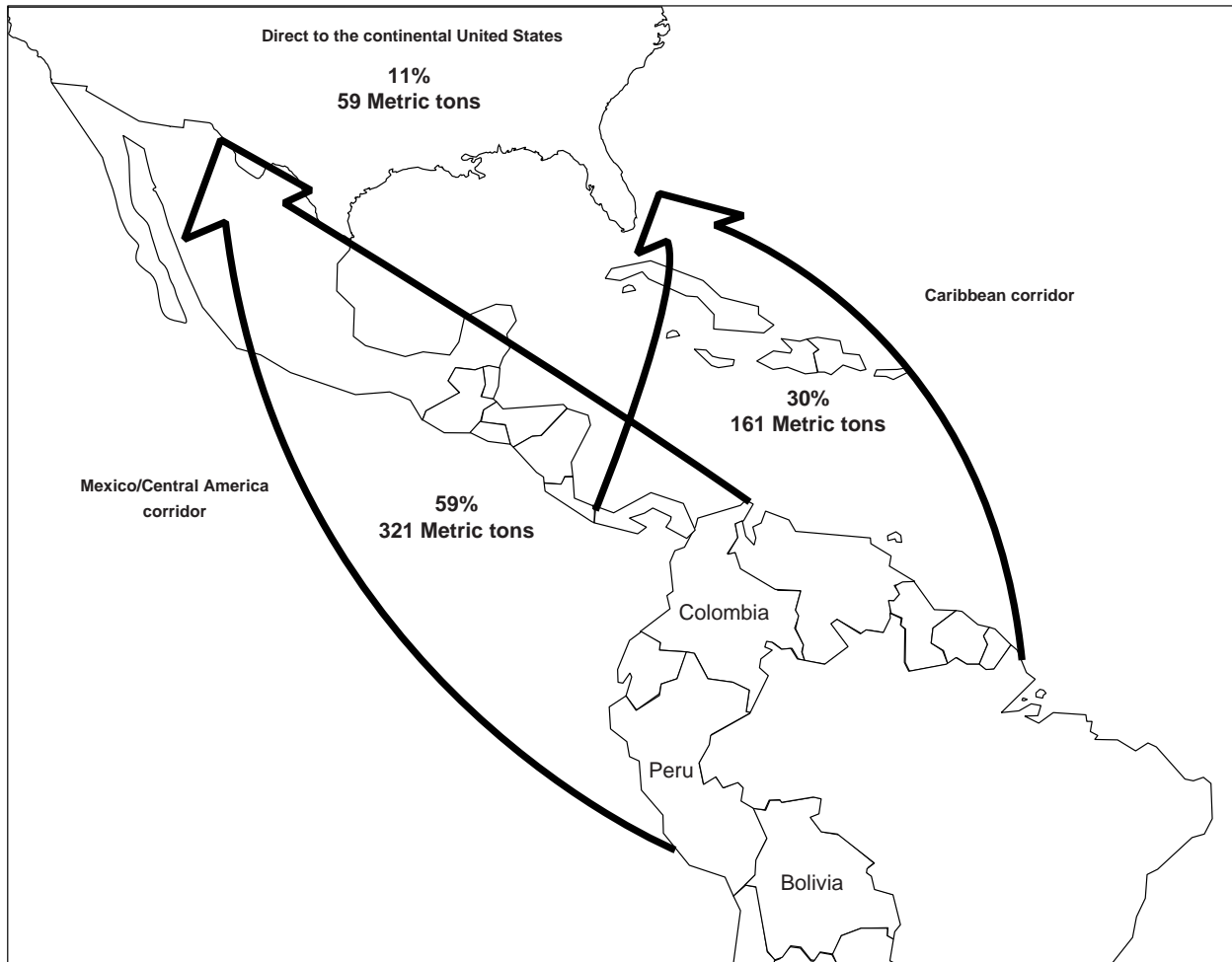
³ "Ship day" refers to each day a ship was working on counterdrug efforts.

Caribbean. However, DOD does not have a set of performance measures to evaluate its counterdrug activities. In our 1999 report, we recommended that DOD develop performance measures to determine the effectiveness of its counterdrug operations and make better use of its limited resources. DOD concurred with our recommendation and has initiated steps to develop performance measures.

BACKGROUND

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, almost 14 million Americans use illegal drugs regularly, and drug-related illness, death, and crime cost the nation approximately \$110 billion annually. The United States consumes over 300 metric tons of cocaine per year. Coca is grown for market distribution almost exclusively in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. In 1998, of the estimated cocaine flow to the United States, about 89 percent transited through the Caribbean corridor and the Mexico/Central America corridor. The remaining 11 percent flowed directly to the United States from Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: Estimated 1998 Cocaine Flow to the United States



Note: Percentage figures refer to total cocaine shipped through Central America, the Caribbean, or directly to the United States from Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru.

Source: Office of National Drug Control Policy.

To address this threat, the Office of National Drug Control Policy has established a national strategy with goals to reduce the demand and flow of drugs entering the United States. Since 1988, DOD has been tasked by Congress to lead the federal efforts to

detect and monitor aerial and maritime shipments of illegal drugs and provide support and training to foreign governments to combat drug-trafficking activities.⁴

DOD DEVOTED FEWER ASSETS
TO COUNTERDRUG ACTIVITIES

From fiscal years 1992 through 1999, there was a decline in the number of flight hours and ship days DOD devoted to detect and monitor transshipments of illegal drugs headed to the United States from Central and South America and the Caribbean. DOD officials have indicated that there are detection gaps in key drug-trafficking routes to the United States. DOD attributes the decline in its support to the lower priority of this mission as compared to others, such as war, peacekeeping, and training, as well as to decreases in its overall budget and force structure. DOD officials state that the greater efficiency of its operations and other efforts have made up for this decline. However, DOD has not presented data to confirm this claim.

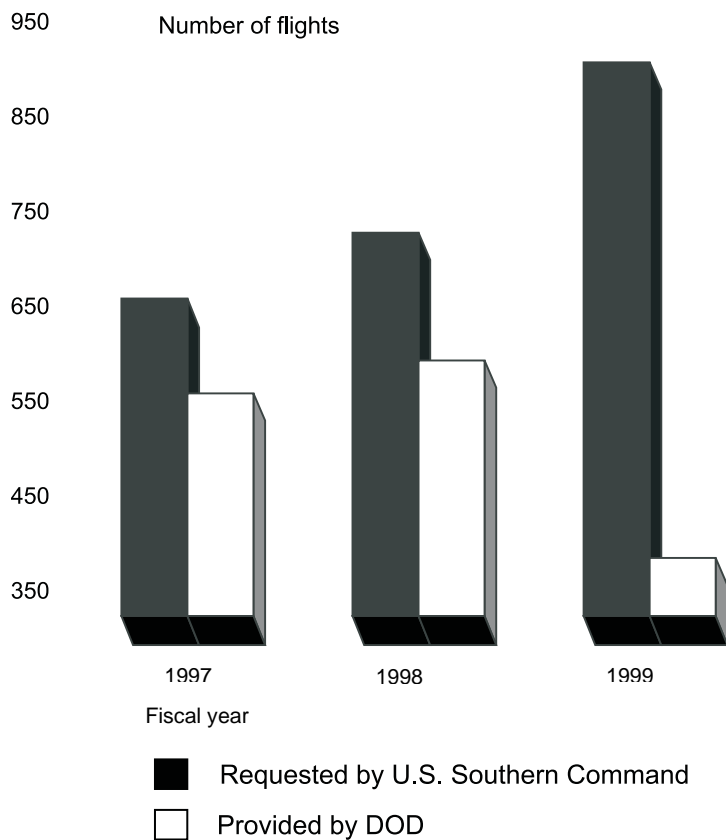
Flight Hours and Ship Days Have Declined

According to U.S. Southern Command data, the number of flights dedicated to collecting intelligence, providing surveillance, and engaging in reconnaissance decreased by over 30 percent from fiscal years 1997 through 1999 in Central and South America and the Caribbean (see fig. 2). As a result, DOD could only meet 43 percent of U.S. Southern Command's requests for these flights in fiscal year 1999. DOD uses intelligence,

⁴ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1989 (P.L. 100-456 [Sept. 29, 1988]).

surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft to provide timely, specific intelligence information to forces involved in detecting, monitoring, and interdicting illegal drug activities. Without this information, which includes signal and imagery intelligence, forces cannot react quickly to changes in drug-traffickers' patterns throughout the region that Southern Command covers.

Figure 2: DOD's Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Counterdrug Aircraft Support in Central and South America and the Caribbean, Fiscal Years 1997-99

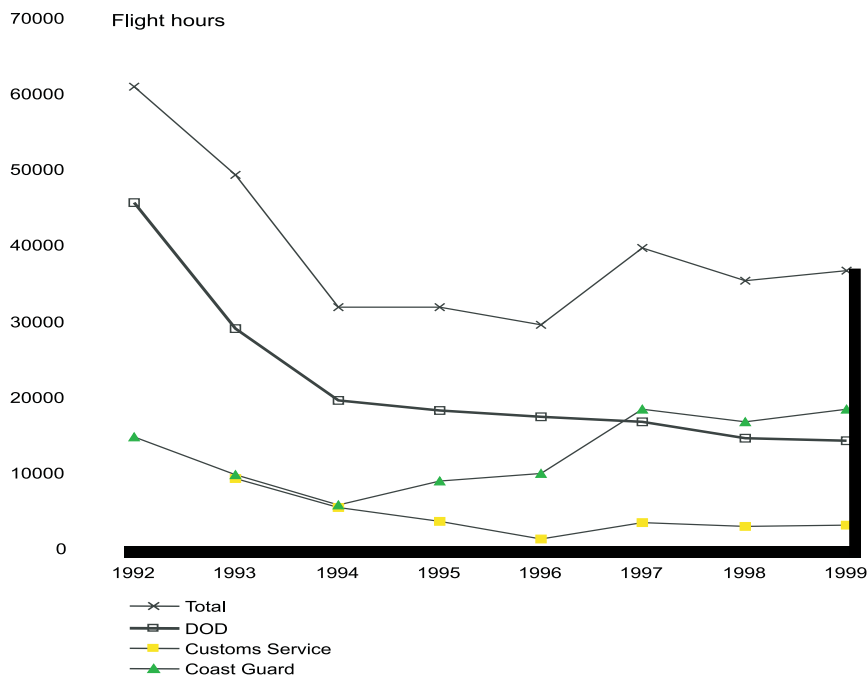


Note: Data prior to 1997 was not available.

Source: U.S. Southern Command.

In addition, the number of flying hours devoted to tracking suspect shipments in transit to the United States declined 68 percent, from 46,264 to 14,770, from fiscal years 1992 through 1999. Some of this reduction is attributed to drug-traffickers' shift from aerial to maritime methods. Beginning in fiscal year 1993 and continuing through fiscal year 1998, air drug-trafficking events decreased by 42 percent, while maritime events increased by 55 percent. During this period, the U.S. Customs Service and U.S. Coast Guard independently increased aircraft flight hours that, as shown in figure 3, offset some of the decline in DOD's flight hours.

Figure 3: DOD, U.S. Customs Service, and U.S. Coast Guard Flight Hours Allocated to Tracking Illegal Drug Shipments in Transshipment Areas, Fiscal Years 1992-99

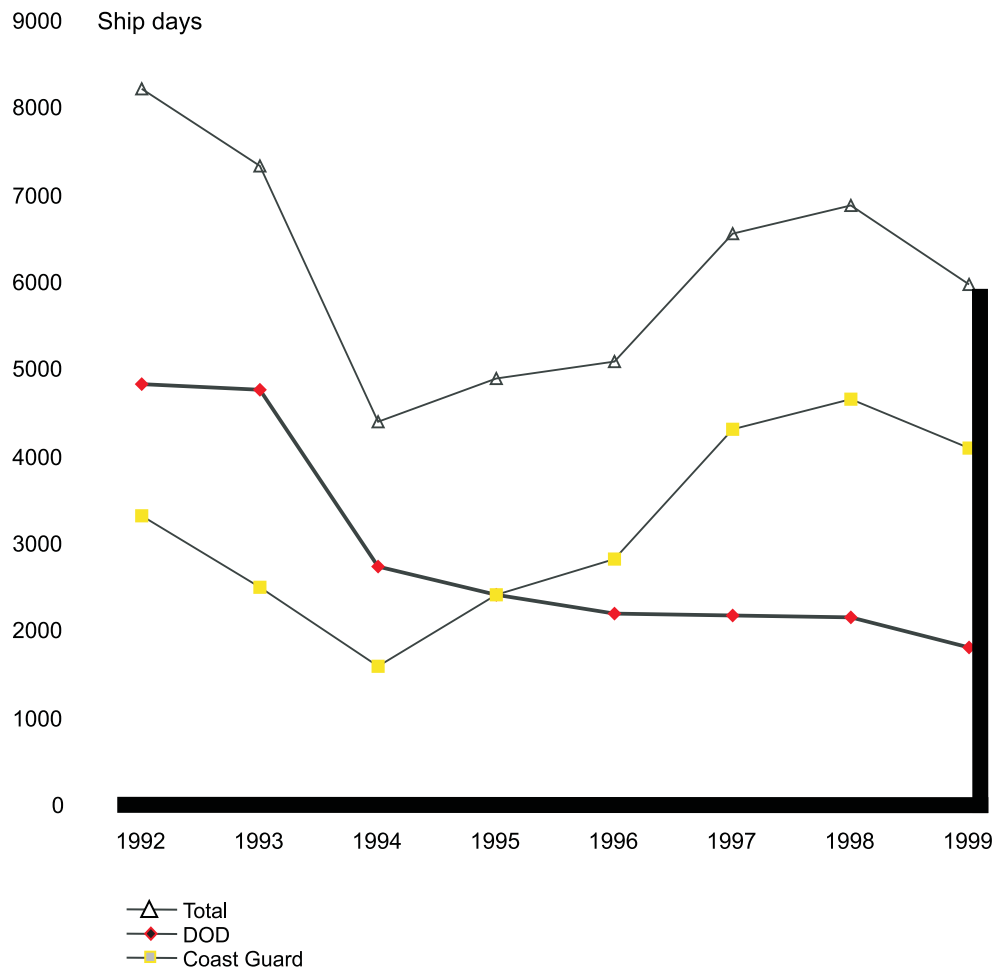


Note: U.S. Customs Service data prior to 1993 was not available.

Source: Joint Interagency Task Forces East and West, U.S. Customs Service, and U.S. Coast Guard.

While drug traffickers have shifted from primarily airborne to mostly maritime drug transshipment methods, DOD also reduced the number of ship days devoted to interdiction efforts by 62 percent from 1992 through 1999. These declines in maritime interdiction were partially offset by the increase in U.S. Coast Guard ship days during the same period⁵ (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: DOD and U.S. Coast Guard Counterdrug Ship Days, Fiscal Years 1992-99



Source: Joint Interagency Task Forces East and West and U.S. Coast Guard.

Limited Coverage, Gaps in Monitoring Illegal Drug Activities Exist

As DOD's flight hours and ship days devoted to covering illegal drug shipments have declined, DOD officials indicated that gaps in coverage of high-threat, drug-trafficking routes in South America and transit routes to the United States have occurred.

Reductions in DOD's air coverage to interdict drug traffickers have particularly affected the cocaine source countries of Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. Between fiscal years 1998 and 1999, detection and monitoring flight hours over these countries declined from 2,092 to 1,090, or 48 percent.⁶ U.S. officials in Peru told us that there has been little or no U.S. airborne intelligence or surveillance of air traffic routes between Peru and Colombia since 1997. And, in an October 1998 letter to the State Department from the U.S. Ambassador in Peru, the Ambassador warned that the reduction in air support could have a serious impact on coca price. DOD's difficulty in maintaining aerial detection capabilities was further exacerbated by the closure of Howard Air Force Base in Panama in May 1999. The base provided a position close to cocaine-producing countries for launching U.S. counterdrug aircraft. To offset this loss, DOD has established two forward operating locations in the Caribbean and South America. The Department is seeking to establish a third location in Central America.

⁵ The increase, due in part to congressional funding decisions to enhance law enforcement interdiction capabilities, was not planned as a direct response to DOD reductions.

Low Priority, Reduced Funding of Counterdrug Missions

DOD sets priorities for the use of its aircraft, weapons systems, and personnel that are in continual high demand worldwide. The counterdrug mission, according to DOD, is the fourth priority, after (1) war, (2) other military operations that might involve contact with hostile forces such as peacekeeping, and (3) training. In addition, DOD does not purchase major equipment such as aircraft and ships especially for the counterdrug mission. Instead, it carries out counterdrug activities using assets that are purchased mainly for other missions.

DOD's budget for counterdrug activities has generally declined since 1993 as well. From fiscal years 1993 through 1999, DOD's overall counterdrug budget fell from \$1.3 billion to \$975 million, or 24 percent.⁷ At the same time, DOD's overall budget declined by approximately 14 percent during this period, from \$300 billion in fiscal year 1993 to about \$260 billion in fiscal year 1999.⁸

Further, DOD made corresponding force structure reductions which included reductions in military personnel and equipment levels. The number of ships and aircraft frequently used for counterdrug missions also declined. For example, from 1992 through 1999, the inventory of Navy P-3C and E-2 airborne early warning aircraft by four percent and 38 percent, respectively.

⁶ Data prior to fiscal year 1998 was not available.

⁷ This amount includes DOD support to both domestic and international counterdrug activities.

DOD Cites Greater Efficiency, Other Efforts
as Mitigating These Declines

DOD officials acknowledge that reducing support to the counterdrug effort has hampered its coverage of key drug-trafficking routes. However, they note that their activities are more efficient today because U.S. counterdrug organizations better understand the drug threat. They also say that U.S. and host nations' antidrug organizations are improving their coordination in planning and conducting regional counterdrug operations. For example, Panama supported the United States in the seizure of 27 kilograms of cocaine off the Panamanian coast in 1999. In addition, Panamanian and Nicaraguan law enforcement officials eradicated 1.7 million marijuana plants during that same year.

DOD FACES CHALLENGES IN SUPPORTING
HOST-NATIONS' COUNTERDRUG EFFORTS

DOD supports host-nations' counterdrug activities in many ways but has encountered a number of challenges in doing so. DOD provides a variety of support, such as detection and monitoring, intelligence, training, logistics, and equipment. Among the challenges to supplying this assistance are (1) host-nations' limited capability to operate and repair U.S.-supplied equipment or to effectively utilize U.S. training, (2) host-nations' difficulties in meeting U.S. eligibility conditions for providing training aid to military units, and (3)

⁸ All figures are in 1999 constant dollars.

U.S. restrictions on sharing intelligence with some host-nation counterdrug organizations.

Equipment Maintenance, Human Rights Concerns, and Information-sharing Are Challenges

A number of counterdrug organizations in host nations have not always been able to use the equipment and training DOD provides. For example, Congress has appropriated \$89 million over 5 years (1998-2002) for a program to interdict drug shipments on the rivers of Colombia and Peru. However, according to U.S. embassy officials in Peru, the Peruvian police (the lead agency for counterdrug enforcement) does not have maintenance capabilities or adequately trained staff to manage its own or U.S.-provided boats designed for river operations. For example, in 1998, boats purchased by the Peruvian police were accidentally beached because of lowered water levels. The Peruvian police lacked adequately trained staff and/or parts to repair the boats. DOD officials told us that they are working with the Peruvian police to improve the situation.

In addition, human rights concerns also limit DOD's counterdrug assistance to foreign governments. U.S. law prohibits giving such assistance to personnel or units in foreign countries that have credible evidence against them of having committed gross human rights violations.⁹ U.S. officials have raised concerns about human rights problems with Colombian and Peruvian military and police units. Indeed, U.S. embassy personnel in Colombia told us that it would be difficult to provide support for counterdrug efforts to

the Colombian military unless its units pass State Department screening for human rights abuses. So far, only three of six army brigades operating in drug-trafficking areas have passed the screening.¹⁰

Furthermore, concerns over evidence of corruption within foreign government counternarcotics units have caused the United States to limit the amount of intelligence information it will share with other governments. Thus, although DOD may have such information, it cannot always provide it to the host nation. Another problem arises from internal situations in host nations. For example, in Colombia, where DOD can share information on insurgent activity if it is directly related to an approved counterdrug operation, U.S. embassy officials sometimes have difficulty distinguishing insurgents from drug traffickers.

DOD HAS COUNTERDRUG PLANS AND STRATEGIES

BUT NO PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Although DOD has designed counterdrug plans and strategies that are linked to the National Drug Control Strategy, DOD has not yet developed a set of performance measures to assess the impact of its counterdrug operations. Without such measures, DOD cannot clearly evaluate the effectiveness of its strategy, operations, and limited counterdrug assets. DOD is aware of this problem and has taken some steps to improve its ability to judge its performance.

⁹ 22 U.S.C. 2304 (a) (2).

DOD's Counterdrug Plans and Strategies

DOD's Office for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support has developed a 5-year counterdrug plan that is based on the goals of the National Drug Control Strategy.¹¹ The plan broadly describes the military personnel, detection and monitoring assets, intelligence support, communication systems, and training DOD will provide to domestic law enforcement agencies and foreign counterdrug military and policy forces to help reduce drug-trafficking activities. Regional commanders in the field develop more detailed plans and strategies that are crafted for a specific purpose and that support the high-level strategies. For example, the U.S. Southern Command's August 1999 counterdrug campaign plan describes the illicit drug threat, the command's counterdrug mission, objectives intended to counter the threat, and some of the key resources available to achieve the plan's objectives. While the campaign plan assumes that these resources will be available, DOD told us that assets for counterdrug purposes would continue to be constrained by other DOD requirements.

No Performance Measures Developed; Initial Steps Taken

While DOD has not yet developed performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of its counterdrug activities, the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act

¹⁰ See our report, Drug Control: Narcotics Threat From Colombia Continues to Grow (GAO/NSIAD-99-136, June 22, 1999).

¹¹ Two key goals of the National Drug Control Strategy are to interdict drugs in transit to the United States and to stop drugs at their source.

incorporates performance measurement as one of its most important features.¹² Under the act, executive branch agencies are required to develop annual performance plans that use performance measurement to reinforce the connection between the long-term strategic goals outlined in their strategic plans and their day-to-day activities. According to DOD, the Department supports the goals and measures of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. However, we found that the Office's measures are intended to determine progress in achieving national counterdrug-related goals, not to measure the performance of individual federal agencies. None of the Office's measures relates directly to DOD's current detection and monitoring efforts.

We recommended in our report that DOD develop performance measures to assess its counterdrug operations. DOD concurred with our recommendation and told us that it is currently working with groups within its agency to help develop performance measures and that it will use its Consolidated Counterdrug Data Base to help judge the performance of its detection and monitoring assets. The data base tracks information on the detection, monitoring, and interdiction of illegal drug traffic. DOD officials believe these initial steps will enable them to begin the process of establishing Departmentwide counterdrug performance measures.

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

¹² Public Law 103-62 (Aug. 3, 1993).

Contact and Acknowledgments

For future contacts regarding this testimony, please call Jess Ford at (202) 512-4268.

Individuals making key contributions to this testimony included Lawrence Suda, Janice V. Morrison, David Bruno, and Rona Mendelsohn.

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