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Report to Congressional Requesters

September 1993

DRUG CONTROL

Heavy Investment in Military Surveillance Is Not Paying Off

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National Security and
International Affairs Division

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September 1, 1993

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
Chairman
The Honorable William F. Clinger, Jr.
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Operations
House of Representatives

This report responds to your request that we assess the justification for flying hours and steaming days the Department of Defense uses in carrying out its drug detection and monitoring role. It focuses on the contribution those resources make to drug interdiction and to national goals for reducing drug supplies in the United States.

We plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after the date of the report, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of Defense; the Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy; and other interested parties upon request.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-4841. Other major contributors are listed in appendix I.

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Director, Systems Development
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Executive Summary

Purpose

Since becoming a major drug war participant in fiscal year 1989, the Department of Defense (DOD) has spent about $976 million for the aircraft flying hours and ship steaming days (and, on a much smaller scale, ground training days) it uses in detecting and monitoring drug smugglers. DOD uses these flying hours and steaming days primarily in its surveillance of South American cocaine, which the President's National Drug Control Strategy has designated the top U.S. drug threat.

GAO reviewed the justification for DOD's counterdrug flying hours and steaming days at the request of the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member, House Committee on Government Operations.

Background

The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1989 made DOD the lead agency for detecting and monitoring air and maritime shipments of illegal drugs to the United States. The mission is part of a multi-agency effort, under the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), to deter smuggling and reduce drug supplies by interdicting shipments to the United States. Interdiction involves two broad functions: surveillance (detection and monitoring) and apprehension. DOD's surveillance mission supports the U.S. and foreign law enforcement agencies that apprehend suspects and seize their cargo, both in the source countries where cocaine is produced and in the transit zones between South America and the United States. Law enforcement agencies participate in both the surveillance and apprehension phases. DOD is generally precluded from the apprehension phase (the so-called "end game") because of laws restricting military participation in law enforcement activities.

An Assistant Secretary of Defense serves as the DOD Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support (referred to as the Drug Coordinator). The Drug Coordinator is the principal assistant and adviser to the Secretary of Defense for counterdrug policies, programs, priorities, requirements, and resources.

Funding for DOD's detection and monitoring mission was about $844 million in fiscal year 1993. Nearly two-thirds of the funds were allocated to procurement, projects, and related initiatives. The remainder (about $293 million) was used primarily to pay for the costs of operating aircraft and ships—costs that the military summarizes as "flying hours" and "steaming days." Along with a third category ("ground training days"), the military refers to flying hours and steaming days collectively as its "operating tempo" or "OPTEMPO."

Results in Brief

DOD's OPTEMPO funding has increased by about 300 percent since 1989 despite the fact that neither the DOD Drug Coordinator nor ONDCP has established quantified goals or effectiveness measures for the mission. In the absence of such measures (1) decisionmakers are denied the kinds of assessments needed to evaluate alternatives and make policy decisions and (2) DOD's decisions regarding levels of OPTEMPO funding can only be considered highly subjective.

Although specific goals have not been set for DOD's mission (1) since 1989, ONDCP has prescribed numerical goals for reducing the flow of drugs into the country and (2) since 1992, DOD and the other interdiction agencies have been recording their performance against known drug shipments. When assessed against these kinds of standards—supply reduction goals and interdiction success rates—the government's investment in military OPTEMPO does not appear to be providing a reasonable return. Estimated cocaine flow has not appreciably declined and most drug smugglers are not interdicted. The return on the government's investment in military OPTEMPO is unlikely to increase since most of the circumstances that have relegated DOD to a narrowly focused support role either cannot change or are unlikely to change. In addition, some flying hours and steaming days used in DOD's surveillance mission do not provide the type of training needed to maintain readiness for DOD's primary war-fighting mission.

Principal Findings

Funding Increases Were Not Based on Measurable Goals or Results

Funding for DOD's surveillance mission and its associated flying hours and steaming days has increased from about $212 million in fiscal year 1989 to an estimated $844 million in fiscal year 1993—nearly a 300-percent increase. Funding for OPTEMPO alone has more than doubled since 1990, the year that DOD first reported that it had achieved "the full expansion" of its role in deterring the flow of drugs. The increases have been at least partially attributable to the aggressive approach DOD has used in carrying out its mission, an approach that ONDCP has endorsed. However, neither the DOD Drug Coordinator nor ONDCP has established quantified goals or valid effectiveness measures for the mission. Consequently, DOD's justifications for increased flying hour and steaming day funds have remained highly subjective, while congressional and drug-war decisionmakers have been denied needed information about the mission's effectiveness.

Investment in Flying Hours and Steaming Days Outweighs Benefits

Measured against interdiction success rates and supply reduction goals, the investment in the flying hours and steaming days that support DOD's mission is out of proportion to the benefits it provides. Some level of interdiction effort seems essential to show the government's resolve against drug smuggling, but that effort needs to be balanced and commensurate with its cost. At present, DOD's surveillance capabilities (1) exceed the capabilities of law enforcement agencies to apprehend smugglers, especially in the countries that U.S.-bound cocaine transits and (2) are more costly than beneficial to the drug war. DOD's flying hours and steaming days have contributed to increased cocaine seizures and other limited successes. But cocaine production has also increased, most smugglers are still not apprehended, and the estimated cocaine flow onto American streets has not appreciably declined.

Because of intrinsic limitations on military surveillance, DOD's contribution to the drug war will probably decline as smuggling methods evolve and drugs from other sources gain popularity. Most of the circumstances that have relegated DOD to a narrowly focused support role either cannot change (for example, limitations on the effectiveness of military surveillance against commercial air traffic) or are unlikely to change (for example, legal restrictions on the military engaging in police action against civilians).

Counterdrug OPTEMPO Does Not Provide Appropriate Training

Some of the flying hours and steaming days that DOD uses for its counterdrug mission cannot be justified by its contribution to military readiness. Counterdrug operations do not consistently provide the type of training needed to maintain readiness for DOD's primary war-fighting mission. These unproductive flying hours and steaming days increase DOD's overall OPTEMPO budget. They also tie up resources that could be used to meet other requirements, and they increase the burden on both personnel and equipment.

Recommendation

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the DOD Drug Coordinator to prepare a written justification for DOD's counterdrug OPTEMPO, to accompany future budget requests, that (1) includes measurable goals and the approach for reaching those goals and (2) identifies the associated costs of counterdrug OPTEMPO in terms of its effect on personnel, equipment, and other requirements.

Matters for Congressional Consideration

In light of the negligible contribution that military surveillance has made to the drug war, Congress should consider reducing DOD's counterdrug OPTEMPO funding in fiscal year 1994 by at least $72 million. This would return the services' counterdrug flying hours and steaming days to approximately the level of 1990, when DOD first reported that it had achieved the full expansion of its mission. GAO also believes that Congress should consider reducing DOD's fiscal year 1994 OPTEMPO funding (in the defense budget, not just in the counterdrug budget) by all or part of the $72 million—that is, by the amount that DOD cannot justify retaining for training requirements related to its primary, national defense mission.

Agency Comments

As requested, GAO did not obtain fully coordinated agency comments on this report. GAO did discuss the report's contents with ONDCP officials, who generally concurred, and with DOD officials, who disagreed, especially with the conclusion that any OPTEMPO funds currently allocated to counterdrug operations could be cut from the defense budget without degrading military readiness. DOD contends that all of its flying hours and steaming days, including those used in counterdrug operations, are essential for the training needed to maintain military readiness. DOD acknowledges that some counterdrug OPTEMPO does not provide such training, but also contends that readiness has not been significantly degraded as a result. GAO revised the report, based on comments received from both ONDCP and DOD. As discussed in the report, however, GAO remains convinced that some of DOD's counterdrug flying hours and steaming days are not justified by their contribution to either the drug war or military readiness. If all of those OPTEMPO resources were essential for readiness-related training, GAO believes that after nearly 5 years the lack of equivalent training in some counterdrug operations would have significantly degraded the military's readiness.

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Abbreviations

AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy
OPTEMPO	operating tempo

Introduction

The Department of Defense (DOD) was given a new mission in fiscal year 1989 supporting the law enforcement agencies that interdict drug shipments. DOD had already been assisting those agencies by providing equipment, training, and other support. But its new, expanded role was to "serve as the single lead agency of the Federal Government for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States."

Since fiscal year 1989, DOD has spent nearly $3.3 billion on its detection and monitoring mission, including an estimated $844 million in fiscal year 1993. DOD has spent a large part of that money (about $976 million) operating the aircraft and ships—and, to a far lesser degree, ground units—it uses in carrying out its mission. (The military refers to such costs as "flying hours," "steaming days," and "ground training days"—or, collectively, as its "operating tempo" or "OPTEMPO.") These costs are part of the $12-billion federal drug-war budget, prepared by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), which covers more than 50 federal agencies and numerous programs, ranging from efforts to disrupt cocaine production in the jungles of South America to treatment and prevention programs in U.S. cities.

DOD's Mission Supports Interdiction and Supply Reduction Efforts

DOD's detection and monitoring (or surveillance)[1] mission is part of the federal effort to interdict traffickers in both source countries and transit zones and, thus, to help reduce the flow of drugs into the United States. The President's National Drug Control Strategy, prepared by ONDCP, calls for fighting drug trafficking and use on many fronts, to reduce both the demand for and supply of illegal drugs in the United States. Demand reduction emphasizes prevention and treatment programs. Supply reduction includes efforts to dismantle production facilities in source countries, to interdict shipments in transit and at our borders, and to arrest traffickers within the United States.

Interdiction involves two broad functions: surveillance (detecting, sorting, intercepting, and monitoring or tracking suspected smugglers) and apprehension (searching and arresting suspects, and seizing their cargo and equipment). DOD is generally precluded by law from participating in

[1]The terms "surveillance" and "detection and monitoring" are used synonymously in this report. The legislation that gave DOD its mission specified only detection and monitoring, but as a part of that mission, DOD does all of the surveillance functions involved in interdiction: "detecting" potential suspects, "sorting" suspected smugglers from legal traffic, "intercepting" them to make visual identifications, and "tracking" or "monitoring" them until they can be "handed off" to law enforcement agents.

arrests and seizures and therefore is limited to providing surveillance support for the law enforcement agencies that perform the apprehension phase (the so-called "end game"). These include both civilian U.S. law enforcement agencies—principally, the U.S. Customs Service and the U.S. Coast Guard, which also assist in detecting and monitoring suspects—and law enforcement authorities in other countries. Most of DOD's efforts have been concentrated on cocaine produced in South America, which the national strategy has designated the primary threat. DOD carries out its surveillance mission primarily with radar systems and, in large part, with the flying hour and steaming day funds that pay for operating its radar-equipped planes and ships.

In addition to its detection and monitoring mission, DOD's counterdrug funding for fiscal year 1993 included $297 million for an interagency communications network, National Guard support for state counterdrug activities, and demand reduction in the armed forces. DOD's $1.14 billion budget for all counterdrug activities in fiscal year 1993 accounted for less than 1 percent of the overall defense budget.

An Assistant Secretary of Defense serves as the DOD Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support (referred to as the Drug Coordinator). The Drug Coordinator is the principal assistant and adviser to the Secretary of Defense for policies, programs, requirements, and resources to implement the President's National Drug Control Strategy within DOD and to carry out counterdrug missions assigned to DOD by law. The Secretary of Defense has delegated operational authority for the missions to selected Commanders in Chief.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

As requested by the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member, House Committee on Government Operations, our objective was to assess the justification for the flying hours and steaming days that DOD uses in carrying out its detection and monitoring mission. Our prior reports for the Committee addressed DOD's overall detection and monitoring operations, equipment acquisition, and communications and intelligence support to the law enforcement community.[2]

[2]Drug Control: Status Report on DOD Support to Counternarcotics Activities (GAO/NSIAD-91-117, June 12, 1991); Drug Control: Communications Network Funding and Requirements Uncertain (GAO/NSIAD-92-29, Dec. 31, 1991); Drug Control: Inadequate Guidance Results in Duplicate Intelligence Production Efforts (GAO/NSIAD-92-153, Apr. 14, 1992); Drug Control: Oversight Needed to Prevent Acquisition of Unnecessary Equipment (GAO/NSIAD-92-260, July 30, 1992).

In making our assessment, we considered the purpose for which DOD was brought into the drug war, national goals pertaining to that purpose, DOD's contribution toward those goals, the OPTEMPO funding DOD uses to make that contribution, the effect that DOD's approach to the mission has had on its flying hour and steaming day requirements, the balance between military surveillance and the apprehension effort it supports, the likelihood that DOD's contribution to the drug war will change, and the relationship between DOD's OPTEMPO and military readiness.

We did not assess DOD's performance during this review. However, our previous work has indicated that DOD is doing the job it was asked to do, and current indications are that this remains the case.

We concentrated only on Air Force and Navy flying hours[3] and steaming days, which account for 93 percent of the counterdrug OPTEMPO funds DOD has requested for fiscal year 1994. We excluded Army and Special Operations Command flying hours and Army, Special Operations Command, and Marine Corps "ground training days," which are the third component of DOD's OPTEMPO, because they comprise only a small part of DOD's OPTEMPO budget. Since DOD has focused its efforts heavily on South American cocaine, we concentrated on only one of DOD's five commander in chief organizations and one of the three joint task forces involved in military counterdrug operations—namely, the Atlantic Command and its Joint Task Force Four, which are responsible for carrying out the detection and monitoring mission in most of the cocaine trafficking region between South America and the United States.

We gathered information from documents and meetings at ONDCP; the Office of the Secretary of Defense (specifically, the office of the Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support); the Joint Staff; the Departments of the Navy and the Air Force; and the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, D.C.; the Atlantic Command and the Atlantic Fleet in Norfolk, Va.; the Air Combat Command at Langley Air Force Base, Va.; and DOD's Joint Task Force Four in Key West, Fla. We reviewed reports issued by, among others, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Center for Naval Analyses, the RAND Corporation, and other federal and private groups. We reviewed records of testimony given in congressional hearings and documents obtained on our concurrent reviews of counterdrug radars and Air Force fighter support aircraft requirements.

[3]Including Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard (in federal status), Navy Reserve, Marine Corps, and Marine Corps Reserve flying hours.

We did this work between September 1992 and May 1993 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Two aspects of our work should be noted. First, in regard to estimates of the cocaine flow into the U.S., we relied on December 1992 oral statements from representatives of the Defense Intelligence Agency, who told us they were conveying the consensus of the intelligence agencies that prepare the national cocaine threat assessment. Second, various DOD records and reports have reflected conflicting flying hour totals for fiscal years 1989-91. In each case, we concluded that the preponderance of available evidence indicated the lower of reported figures was more likely to be accurate.

As requested, we did not obtain fully coordinated agency comments on this report. We did discuss the report's contents with ONDCP officials, who generally concurred, and with DOD officials, who disagreed, especially with the conclusion that any OPTEMPO funds currently allocated to counterdrug operations could be cut from the defense budget without degrading military readiness. DOD contends that all of its flying hours and steaming days, including those used in counterdrug operations, are essential for the training needed to maintain military readiness. DOD acknowledges that some counterdrug OPTEMPO does not provide such training but also contends that readiness has not been significantly degraded as a result. We revised the report, based on comments received from both ONDCP and DOD. As discussed in the report, however, we remain convinced that some of DOD's counterdrug flying hours and steaming days are not justified by their contribution to either the drug war or military readiness. If all of those OPTEMPO resources were essential for readiness-related training, we believe that after nearly 5 years the lack of equivalent training in some counterdrug operations would have significantly degraded the military's readiness.

Funding Escalated While Effectiveness Remained Unknown

Concerns in Congress about the funding and effectiveness of DOD's counterdrug mission began even before passage of the fiscal year 1989 National Defense Authorization Act that gave DOD its lead-agency role. Those concerns have persisted while funding for flying hours and steaming days has grown by about 300 percent since fiscal year 1989. The funding increased despite the fact that neither DOD nor ONDCP has established quantified goals or effectiveness measures for the mission. In the absence of such goals or measures, justifications for the flying hours and steaming days that support the mission are highly subjective.

Concerns About Funding and Effectiveness Have Persisted

DOD's designation as a major drug war participant in fiscal year 1989 was prompted by the national cocaine crisis and the threat it posed to U.S. security. However, passage of the legislation giving DOD the key detection and monitoring role was preceded by congressional hearings that raised questions and concerns about the feasibility of employing the military in what is essentially a law enforcement mission—questions and concerns that have persisted over the years. Prominent among those sessions were hearings before the Senate Committee on Armed Services in June 1988, including one joint hearing with the House Committee on Armed Services.[1] The task that the committees had undertaken in the joint hearing was:

> . . . to determine whether the military's role in drug interdiction can be substantially increased in a manner that is consistent with the readiness of the Armed Forces and also in a manner that contributes meaningfully to the overall national goals of curbing the abuse of drugs in this country . . . [And] to determine . . . the most cost effective way to spend the taxpayers' dollar in fighting this drug war.

The 1988 hearings revealed that giving the military an expanded role in the drug war was seen not as a panacea but as a necessary response to the cocaine epidemic threatening the security of the United States. Testimony confirmed that the then existing strategy "based on interrupting and reducing the available supply of illicit drugs [was] not working." Some participants viewed an increased role for DOD as a way of improving the government's efforts to combat the flow of drugs.

Nevertheless, some congressional members, defense officials, and other witnesses at the 1988 hearings raised questions and expressed concerns about such issues as (1) the cost-effectiveness of sophisticated military

[1]Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, June 8, 14, 1988, and a Joint Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, and the Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, June 15, 1988.

weapon systems designed for combat missions being used to detect and monitor a low-technology enemy, (2) the lack of a way to gauge DOD's effectiveness, (3) the quality of military training that could be obtained from counterdrug operations, and (4) the adverse impact the mission could have on military preparedness and other military operations. For example:

- The Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services noted that the hearings were intended to focus attention on such questions as ". . . how will this new role affect military readiness and current military missions and operations?"
- The Ranking Minority Member added that the additional assistance DOD was to provide had to be done "in a way not to denigrate the Department's primary role, namely, of providing for our national defense."
- The Comptroller General of the United States reported that "cost effectiveness analysis" of the federal government's investment in military versus civilian counterdrug operations was precluded "because of a lack of information for measuring the effectiveness of drug interdiction programs. . ." He noted that "we do not know the quantities of drugs being smuggled into the United States and the effect of removing a given quantity of any drug from the market."
- The Secretary of Defense expressed concern about the inefficiency and degraded readiness that could result from an expanded military role. He pointed out that the military's "equipment assets are designed for war fighting, not for law enforcement. They are, therefore, of doubtful cost-effectiveness in a law enforcement role. . . When these assets are regularly diverted to a law enforcement mission . . .the taxpayer is ill-served and readiness for our war fighting mission is degraded." The Secretary concluded that "all the . . . interdiction programs in the world will not be effective as long as the demand for illegal drugs in this country is so great."
- The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted "some very commonly held misperceptions" about DOD and drug interdiction, including the "myths" that "the process of detecting and interdicting hostile strike aircraft is similar to that of detecting and intercepting drug smugglers. . . . [and that] availability and the use of drugs in the United States will be significantly reduced by substantial increases in the volume of interdiction."

These and similar concerns raised at the 1988 hearings have persisted over the years. Congressional committees have expressed frustration over

receiving requests for increased surveillance funding without ways of judging the effectiveness of DOD's mission. For example:

- In September 1991, the Senate Committee on Appropriations stated in regard to DOD's counterdrug OPTEMPO that it would "not allow this program to grow uninhibited and act as a funding source for DOD programs which could not be financed within the nondrug related Defense budget."
- In July 1992, the Senate Committee on Armed Services noted that it had "attempted to focus on the effectiveness of the [Defense] Department's contribution to the national counter-drug effort . . . [but] remains unsatisfied in its quest for a way to gauge the effectiveness of the Department's activities."

Absence of Effectiveness Measures Hinders Decision-Making

Drug war planners have not established valid measures of effectiveness for DOD's mission. In the absence of such measures (1) congressional members and other decisionmakers are denied the kinds of assessments needed to evaluate alternatives and make policy decisions and (2) DOD's decisions regarding the levels of OPTEMPO funding can only be considered highly subjective.

Without specific goals or effectiveness measures, DOD has stated its program objectives only in general, nonmeasurable terms (e.g., "to support the interdiction and apprehension efforts" of law enforcement agencies). The lack of a benchmark means that results are reported without the context or evaluation needed by the congressional committees and administration officials who make funding decisions for various drug war initiatives. Left unanswered are such questions as: How much surveillance support do law enforcement agencies need? What is the military's surveillance support really accomplishing?

In the absence of valid effectiveness measures, DOD's justifications for OPTEMPO resources have been highly subjective. DOD determines the flying hours and steaming days needed for its surveillance mission through essentially the same processes it uses for other joint-service missions, except that it does so in consultation with the civilian law enforcement agencies that its mission supports—two of whom (the Coast Guard and the Customs Service) also participate in surveillance operations. DOD bases its final decisions on the military resources needed to detect and monitor drug traffic on studies and on the judgments of its commanders and managers.

In that respect, the counterdrug mission is not unique. Appropriate resource levels for most missions cannot usually be precisely determined by formula, computation, or other quantitative or completely objective methods. However, drug-war planners have not provided DOD the type of clear-cut goals that are needed to assess results or adequacy of resources. In the absence of such goals, the mission's resource requirements are, in effect, open-ended. They cannot be determined through the traditional process of (1) setting initial levels, (2) assessing results against goals, and (3) adjusting the resources to the minimum levels needed to meet the goals.

DOD participates in quarterly interagency planning conferences and, since 1991, in periodic interagency assessments of interdiction "performance indicators." According to DOD, the agencies use the results of these assessments in determining the force levels to be employed. However, these assessments also lack the kinds of specific, quantified goals or standards needed to objectively assess the appropriateness of resources committed to DOD's mission.

Funding Has Increased

Despite the lack of clear-cut objectives, funding for military surveillance has grown significantly, from about $212 million in fiscal year 1989 to $962 million in fiscal year 1992. After congressional reductions to the fiscal year 1993 defense budget, counterdrug surveillance was decreased to about $844 million, but DOD has requested $890 million for fiscal year 1994. As shown in table 2.1, a large part of this funding (about 35 percent or $293 million in fiscal year 1993) has been used for OPTEMPO. The remainder of the funds have been used for procurement, programs, and related initiatives.[2]

Table 2.1: Funding for DOD's Detection and Monitoring Mission, Fiscal Years 1989-93

Dollars in millions

Activity	1989 actual	1990 actual	1991 actual	1992 actual	1993 est.	Total
Programs, etc.	$139.7	$364.1	$551.0	$686.3	$550.5	**$2,291.6**
OPTEMPO	71.8	119.5	215.5	275.7	293.1	**$975.6**
Total	**$211.5**	**$483.6**	**$766.5**	**$962.0**	**$843.6**	**$3,267.2**

[2]For example, non-OPTEMPO costs include the acquisition and operating costs of ground-based radar systems, such as the aerostat (balloon-mounted radar) system along the southern U.S. border, and the operating costs of three joint task forces.

The Real Measure of DOD's Effectiveness Is Drug Flow

Although measures of effectiveness have not been established for DOD's mission, ONDCP has established goals for reducing the drug flow into the United States—the very objective for which DOD was brought into the drug war and, in our opinion, the real measure of DOD's effectiveness. As required by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, the annual National Drug Control Strategy prepared by ONDCP establishes 2-year and 10-year goals for reducing drug supplies entering the United States. For example, the 1989 strategy called for reducing the flow of cocaine and other drugs by 10 percent in 2 years and by 50 percent in 10 years. Subsequent versions of the strategy called for even higher reductions. Also, since April 1992, DOD and the other interdiction agencies have been assessing their performance at stopping drug shipments. Although these assessments also lack specific goals, they do provide information on the numbers and percentages of known drug shipments that are interdicted or successfully completed.

Congress gave DOD the detection and monitoring mission to help improve the nation's interdiction efforts and reduce drug supplies entering the United States. Therefore, it seems reasonable that DOD's flying hours and steaming days should be justified against those standards. However, some DOD officials disagree. They contend that their narrowly focused mission only supports the law enforcement agencies that actually seize drug shipments and therefore should be judged only by the quality of support it provides. However, in a May 1993 report[3] to Congress, DOD acknowledged that the mission's "overall effectiveness . . . is directly tied to the effectiveness of the supported [law enforcement] organizations." Moreover, in September 1992, ONDCP told the Joint Staff that:

> . . . the Federal government is spending billions of dollars to detect, monitor, and apprehend suspected drug traffickers . . . From a cost/benefit analysis perspective, the detection, monitoring, and interdiction system should have tangible goals . . . that would not only measure the effectiveness of these programs . . . but would also provide an indicator of their impact on the flow of drugs to the United States.

[3]Department of Defense Counterdrug Detection and Monitoring Systems Plan Report (May 25, 1993).

Contribution of Counterdrug OPTEMPO Does Not Justify the Investment

Assessed against interdiction and supply reduction results, DOD's flying hours and steaming days have not provided a reasonable return on investment. From 1989 through 1993, the government invested nearly $976 million in the OPTEMPO that the military uses in its surveillance of drug traffic—principally cocaine traffic. Yet, since 1989, estimated cocaine production has increased, most shipments are still not interdicted, and the estimated cocaine flow into the United States has not appreciably declined. The imbalance between the investment in and benefits of DOD's OPTEMPO is compounded by the inherently expensive nature of military surveillance and the expansionary approach that DOD has taken to its mission.

Benefits From OPTEMPO Have Been Negligible

In September 1991, we reported that although DOD had made a strong commitment to its mission and had expanded the nation's surveillance capabilities, its impact on supply reduction goals had been negligible.[1] Two years later, that situation remains unchanged. Despite the government's sizable investment in military surveillance, the estimated cocaine flow into the United States has not appreciably declined since DOD became the lead agency for detection and monitoring. And, as we reported in February 1993, high-purity cocaine remains affordable and plentiful in U.S. communities.[2]

Identifying the reasons for this lack of progress is complicated by the overlapping roles of other agencies with supply reduction missions, making it difficult to isolate the contribution of a single agency. Also, demand reduction and supply reduction initiatives are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they are highly interrelated. If the demand for cocaine fell by 50 percent, for example, supplies would almost surely drop, regardless of whether interdiction and other supply reduction initiatives were having any effect.

Performance and Effectiveness Are Not Synonymous

Discussions of effectiveness often ignore the important distinction between DOD's performance in carrying out its limited support mission and its contribution to the drug war. How well DOD performs its mission is not, by itself, evidence of its contribution to the drug war. Yet, "performance" is what many suggested indicators of DOD's "effectiveness" actually

[1]Drug Control: Impact of DOD's Detection and Monitoring on Cocaine Flow (GAO/NSIAD-91-297, Sept. 19, 1991).

[2]Drug Control: Increased Interdiction and Its Contribution to the War on Drugs (GAO/T-NSIAD-93-4, Feb. 25, 1993).

address. For example, DOD officials have frequently cited such indicators as their high level of effort, praise from law enforcement officials, and increasing arrests and drug seizures. However, level of effort is an indication of DOD's commitment to its mission, not its success. Praise from the law enforcement people that DOD supports is noteworthy but not proof that military surveillance is producing results commensurate with its cost. Increasing arrests and drug seizures come closer, since they raise trafficking costs but, by themselves, are still not valid measures of DOD's effectiveness. They may reflect only increases in drug trafficking, for example, not reductions in drug availability.

Seizure statistics can be especially misleading because they are often reported without context and in terms of street prices, which far overstate actual costs to traffickers. Arrests and seizures are significant only when they help raise costs and risks enough to deter traffickers, and there is no indication they are approaching that point. The Attorney General of the United States stated at the 1993 National Summit on U.S. Drug Policy that federal officials have repeatedly indicated to her over the years "that to have any impact on drugs in America, you would have to interdict 75 percent of the stuff, and that would be economically prohibitive."

Estimated Production Has Increased

Estimated cocaine production was 845 to 1,050 metric tons in 1989, but by 1991 it had increased to 955 to 1,170 metric tons. May 1993 testimony[3] by a Drug Enforcement Administration official indicated that only 24 percent to 29 percent of estimated cocaine production was seized in 1992—about a 5-percent decrease from 1991. He testified that, "According to preliminary figures, almost 280 metric tons of cocaine were seized worldwide last year . . . It is estimated that between 955 and 1165 metric tons of cocaine may have been produced in 1992." DOD officials have noted that the military assisted in cocaine seizures totaling more than 68 metric tons in fiscal year 1992. However, that is less than a fourth of the estimated cocaine seized in 1992 and, more important, only a small fraction of the cocaine available for shipment to American markets that year.

According to DOD, about 12 percent of its counterdrug flying hours are expended, not in transit zones, but in South America. DOD uses those resources in support of South American countries' efforts to disrupt cocaine production and transportation. However, DOD noted in May 1993 that in those countries "a multitude of issues limit the overall effectiveness

[3]Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations and Human Rights.

of counterdrug [detection and monitoring] and interdiction." That assessment seems borne out by the production estimates shown in table 3.1 and by the previously mentioned estimates of undiminished cocaine flow, which indicate that DOD's efforts in South America apparently have had little effect in disrupting the cartels' production or transportation capabilities.

Table 3.1: Estimated Cocaine Production, 1989-92

Metric tons

Estimated range	1989	1990	1991	1992
Low	845	880	955	955
High	1,050	1,090	1,170	1,165

Interdiction Success Has Been More Symbolic Than Real

As the National Drug Control Strategy has noted, interdiction has both symbolic and real value. Symbolic value lies in the demonstration of our national will to oppose drug smugglers, defend our borders, and protect the security and well-being of U.S. citizens. Real value lies in the disruption of drug operations that increases the chances of apprehending traffickers and raises their cost of doing business. Although there has been some disruption of cocaine trafficking, interdiction success at deterring the cocaine flow has been more symbolic than real. The interdiction assessments that DOD and other agencies have been making since 1992 show that most smugglers are not apprehended. Trafficking has not been disrupted to the point that it has slowed the estimated flow of cocaine into the United States.

There have been some interdiction successes. In addition to seizing increasing amounts of cocaine, interdiction agencies have essentially stopped the direct noncommercial flights into the United States that smugglers used extensively in the 1980s. They also have acquired more information on trafficking operations and forced traffickers to employ different smuggling methods. However, these successes have been relatively inconsequential. The Senate Committee on Armed Services has noted that there is a critical difference between such limited successes and the real success that comes from reduced drug supplies. In a report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1993, the committee concluded:

. . . anecdotal information indicates that DOD efforts have contributed to an increase in contraband drug seizures and in the number of aborted drug deliveries. Nevertheless, the

bottom line is that there is no evidence of any diminution in the supply or the street value of illegal drugs within the United States.

Limited interdiction success may even have the unintended consequence of forcing traffickers to use methods that are less susceptible to surveillance and apprehension. The Joint Staff's Director for Operations testified before the Senate Committee on Armed Services in March 1992 that, "If we make the air bridge too costly for the narcotraffickers and they shift to methods more difficult to detect such as container shipping, that does not contribute to success."

Some federal officials contend that interdiction at least reduces cocaine availability in the United States by the amounts seized. However, we know of no evidence to prove that theory, which apparently is based on an assumption that all available cocaine is already being shipped to the United States. In fact, estimated cocaine production is between 955 and 1,165 metric tons a year, far more than the 150 to 175 metric tons that the U.S. market consumes annually, according to a 1993 report by the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters. A different theory, which seems more consistent with supply and demand principles and estimates, is that the South American cartels ship to the United States whatever amounts their customers demand, with interdiction losses merely replaced by later shipments. In relation to its enormous profits, cocaine is cheap to produce and smuggle, and losses are relatively inconsequential to traffickers.

According to DOD officials, their detection and monitoring success rates are high and their surveillance also supports interdiction through both intelligence-gathering and the deterrent effect the military's presence has on smugglers. However, detection and monitoring success is not the ultimate goal. As the Joint Staff's Director for Operations testified in 1989 before the Investigations Subcommittee of the House Committee on Armed Services ". . . there's no sense in detecting and monitoring if you can't get out and apprehend. . ." Similarly, intelligence-gathering and the deterrent effect of the military's presence are means of achieving interdiction and supply reduction success, not goals to be achieved for their own benefit. Without an increased apprehension capability, for example, deterrence provides only short-term benefits, especially against shipments by air, because traffickers can merely reschedule aborted deliveries at a later date, albeit at a higher overall cost. To have any effect, deterrence requires that there be an effective end game—that is, a real threat to smugglers that they will be apprehended.

Investment Outweighs Benefits

The imbalance between the funding requirements and benefits of DOD's mission is partly due to the costly nature of modern day military surveillance. However, it is also due to the approach DOD has used to carry out its mission.

Military Surveillance Is Inherently Expensive

State-of-the-art military surveillance is inherently expensive. This is especially true when costly, high-technology systems designed to detect and control highly sophisticated weapon systems in combat situations, are employed against the smuggling threat—which, for a given engagement, may be a small propeller driven plane or a small wooden boat.

DOD's detection and monitoring operations are highly dependent on airborne and seaborne radars, and on the flying hour and steaming day funds to operate the platforms for those radars. DOD does use ground-based radars (and other sensors), but many of its radars are employed aboard ships or planes that consume OPTEMPO funds. These assets are costly to operate and maintain, some extraordinarily so. For example, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified at the previously mentioned joint hearing before the armed services committees in 1988 that one airplane now used extensively in DOD's surveillance operations—the Air Force's E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)—has "an estimated direct cost of $4,200 per hour," excluding "associated overhead which would run the hourly cost to almost $10,000."

At least partly because of the heavy funding needed to pay for these flying hours and steaming days, DOD's surveillance budget in fiscal year 1993 ($844 million) far exceeded the total drug interdiction budgets of both the Customs Service ($496 million) and the Coast Guard ($499 million). While DOD is the lead agency only for the detection and monitoring phases of air and maritime interdiction, these two civilian law enforcement agencies are (1) the lead agencies for overall air and maritime interdiction and (2) the key U.S. agencies responsible for the critical apprehension phase that ultimately determines whether interdiction succeeds or fails.

Continued Expansion Has Increased Costs

DOD has employed an aggressive and expansionary approach to carrying out its mission, an approach that has required extensive OPTEMPO funding for ships and aircraft in the cocaine-smuggling region.

The conference report on the 1989 authorization act indicated that Congress expected DOD to expand the nation's drug surveillance efforts.

DOD did that twice in fiscal year 1990—first, to get to the baseline needed to carry out its mission and, second, to conduct what was to have been only a 90-day period of "enhanced" operations. Although DOD's detection and monitoring mission began in fiscal year 1989, DOD officials have said that the first year was largely spent planning, getting organized, and providing assets to ongoing law enforcement operations. In October 1989, however, what one DOD official called "a quantum increase" in assets enabled the joint task force in the key cocaine-smuggling region to begin fully executing its mission. After less than a year at this level, however, DOD again escalated its operations (in August 1990) to what was to have been a temporary, enhanced level.

Although operations at the enhanced level had been scheduled for only 90 days, DOD never returned to its former 1990 operating level. According to DOD officials, the purpose of the enhanced operations was to better determine cocaine trafficking patterns, and the basis for continuing to operate at the enhanced level was the increased threat level detected in 1990.

In January 1991, the Secretary of Defense reported to Congress that "counternarcotics operations in 1990 reflected the full expansion of [DOD's] leading role in deterring the flow of drugs at every phase—production, transit, and distribution in the U.S.—and in implementing the President's National Drug Control Strategy and [his own] Counternarcotics Guidance." As shown in table 3.2, with this full expansion (including over a month at the enhanced level), DOD's surveillance mission in fiscal year 1990 required about 48,000 flying hours and 3,800 steaming days at a combined annual cost of about $120 million. In fiscal year 1991, the first full year at the enhanced level (1) flying hours increased by 63 percent, from 48,026 to 78,168; (2) steaming days increased 32 percent, from 3,830 to 5,051; and (3) total OPTEMPO costs increased by 80 percent, from $119.5 million to $215.5 million.

Table 3.2: Flying Hours, Steaming Days, and OPTEMPO Costs, Fiscal Years 1989-93

Dollars in millions

Activity	1989 actual	1990 actual	1991 actual	1992 actual	1993 estimate
Flying hours	18,436	48,026	78,168	70,733	94,623
Steaming days	2,081	3,830	5,051	4,091	4,968
OPTEMPO costs	$71.8	$119.5	$215.5	$275.7	$293.1

In fiscal year 1993, DOD again increased its OPTEMPO budget, raising its estimated 1993 OPTEMPO level about 145 percent above the 1990 level. In the fiscal year 1994 counterdrug budget, DOD requested $269 million for OPTEMPO. This request included about $127 million for about 75,000 flying hours and about $136 million for nearly 5,000 steaming days.

DOD has used its flying hours and steaming days at the enhanced levels to conduct extensive surveillance in the cocaine trafficking region, encompassing the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific—with AWACS aircraft, Aegis ships, and other less expensive platforms. As the commander of the joint task force in the region said in a March 1992 testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services:

> Our level of effort is substantial. On any day of the year, 24 hours a day, we have about 9 ships, 22 aircraft . . . and 3,000 military personnel deployed out in the theater. We use about 4,000 ship days and 38,000 flight hours. To put that into perspective for you, that is about the equivalent that we would have expended over a year on a Sixth Fleet deployment into the Mediterranean—a substantial commitment.

Questionable Benefits of Routine Patrols and Maritime Boardings

DOD's approach embodies both routine patrols and intelligence-cued alerts and is directed at both air and maritime targets. Although DOD's approach has allowed its surveillance capabilities to exceed law enforcement's apprehension capabilities, ONDCP has concurred with the approach and, in some instances, has urged DOD to commit even more resources to the mission.

Intelligence is the key to interdiction success in general and to surveillance success in particular. As DOD reported in May 1993, "Intelligence, to cue and direct . . . assets, is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the [detection and monitoring] program." It greatly increases effectiveness against air targets, the report noted, and is even more critical against maritime targets. In fact, it "is essential, since intelligence is the only effective means to segregate most maritime drug smuggling targets from normal maritime commerce."

Yet DOD's surveillance operations are not conducted only in response to intelligence cues. DOD does employ "alert" aircraft in response to such cues; however, it also employs "scheduled" aircraft and ships to routinely patrol designated areas, regardless of whether intelligence sources indicate that specific shipments are expected in those areas.

According to DOD officials, they have recently begun placing more emphasis on intelligence-cued operations in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific areas. However, routine patrols continue to be used to "search for trafficking activities throughout the threat region," according to DOD's May 1993 report. DOD officials told us that ships are assigned specific areas to patrol, and aircraft are designated to fly scheduled patrols during "prime threat windows" in key trafficking areas. These ships and planes are looking for "cold" detections, not just responding to intelligence cues on known shipments.

According to DOD, its use of routine (versus cued) patrols has expanded intelligence-gathering capabilities. However, even those expanded capabilities have had limited success. After nearly 5 years of military surveillance, for example, the government remains unable to obtain such essential information as the amount of cocaine shipped to the United States. Moreover, radar systems, which are the workhorse of DOD's detection and monitoring efforts, cannot provide the type of detailed intelligence on specific shipments that informants can provide (such as pinpointing the hiding places on large vessels, which, otherwise, are almost impossible to search at sea).

DOD's approach is geared to maritime as well as air targets in the cocaine-smuggling region. However, the Joint Staff's Director for Operations stated in his March 1992 testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services that noncommercial aircraft are "the principal means" by which cocaine travels from South America through the Caribbean or into Mexico and other locations. The Drug Enforcement Administration has reported that in 1990 two-thirds of U.S.-bound cocaine passed through Mexico. In February 1993, the agency's Administrator testified that most of the cocaine shipped through Mexico enters the United States on the ground.[4] Yet DOD uses many of its expensive flying hours and steaming days to detect and monitor ocean-going vessels, most of which cannot be distinguished from legitimate maritime traffic by use of a "threat profile" or effectively searched at sea without specific intelligence tips.[5] In fiscal year 1992, for instance, over 80 percent of the Navy's 35,591 counterdrug flying hours were flown (at a cost of more than $40 million) by aircraft that are of little use in detecting or monitoring air

[4]Hearing before the Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service and General Government, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, February 24, 1993.

[5]Military ships transport civilian (Coast Guard) law enforcement representatives who board and search suspect vessels at sea.

targets. For example, over half of the hours were flown by P-3 maritime patrol aircraft that do not have an air-search radar.

Return on Investment in Flying Hours and Steaming Days Is Unlikely to Increase

The federal government's return on its sizable investment in DOD's counterdrug flying hours and steaming days is unlikely to increase. In fact, it will probably decline if more of the drug trade threatening the United States shifts away from the transportation methods or region where military surveillance is most effective. Interdiction may yet prove a successful tactic in the war on drugs, but the most needed improvements will not come from military surveillance. DOD's radars cannot compensate for interdiction's major weakness—the inability to apprehend smugglers in other countries and at our borders.

Major Improvements Are Unlikely in the Foreseeable Future

Circumstances have relegated DOD to a narrowly focused support role in the effort to interdict drug shipments—circumstances such as geographic limitations on the capability of military surveillance to detect drug smugglers, intrinsic limitations on the use of military surveillance against commercial air traffic, and legal restrictions on the military's use of police powers. Most of those circumstances are unlikely to change. Conversely, any significant shifts in smuggling methods or drug sources will probably reduce the contribution that DOD's flying hours and steaming days can make to the drug war.

DOD's May 1993 Counterdrug Detection and Monitoring Systems Plan Report seemed to confirm that the picture is not promising. The report stated that:

> The most important conclusion reached by our [detection and monitoring] studies is that there are no near-term or mid-term technologies, [detection and monitoring] systems, or operational tactics/strategies that are capable of stopping drug trafficking or, more specifically, that will provide the clear, complete, and simple solution to the DOD [detection and monitoring] mission.

Even if "near-term or mid-term" solutions to the current threat are developed, there is no assurance that their usefulness will be lasting. Drug smugglers have been extremely resourceful in modifying or abandoning tactics that start to decline in effectiveness, quickly adopting new methods that present new challenges to interdiction efforts. The probability remains that traffickers will convert even larger shares of their cargo to shipping containers (or perhaps even more formidable methods) should DOD and the other interdiction agencies begin to have any real success.

DOD Efforts Are Narrowly Focused by Circumstance

DOD's flying hours and steaming days are necessarily focused on only part of the international drug trade. DOD concentrates on the cocaine trafficking region between South America and the United States—the region with the constricted access routes (or "choke points") that are critical to successful detection and monitoring in the absence of intelligence cues. And DOD concentrates on only part of the drug traffic in that region—small vessels and noncommercial planes that meet a smuggler profile.

This narrow focus is only partly attributable to the fact that South American cocaine has been the main U.S. drug threat in recent years. It is also dictated by the reality that DOD's surveillance capabilities are, for the most part, intrinsically ineffective at helping reduce the flow of drugs coming into the United States via passengers or the cargo aboard commercial aircraft. In the absence of intelligence cues, DOD's surveillance capabilities are also relatively ineffective against (1) trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific shipments, since they do not have to pass through choke points; (2) large seagoing vessels, which cannot be effectively searched at sea; and (3) general aviation aircraft whose trappings of legitimacy place them outside the criteria that DOD uses to "sort" or initially identify suspected traffickers. Expanding the sorting criteria is of limited benefit because the more the criteria are expanded, the less useful they become as a tool for distinguishing suspects from legal traffic. Conversely, according to government officials, expanding the criteria to cover more legitimate appearing traffic increases the government's need for aircraft to intercept potential suspects and make visual identifications and to track them over longer distances.

In practical terms, these exclusions mean that in the absence of intelligence tips DOD's surveillance is potentially effective only against drug shipments traveling more or less directly from South America to the United States. However, there is evidence that the South American cartels are increasing their shipments to Europe, raising the possibility that some of those shipments may then be sent to the United States by trans-Atlantic routes.

Military surveillance is also largely ineffective against most shipments of heroin, which has gained increased popularity among U.S. users in recent years. Some South American heroin enters the United States, but, according to a 1992 report by the Drug Enforcement Administration, it "will not challenge Southeast Asian heroin for dominance in the near term."[1] In 1991, according to the report, 79 percent of heroin in the United

[1]Worldwide Heroin Situation (Sept. 1992).

States came from Southeast Asia (58 percent) and Southwest Asia (21 percent), usually entering East and West Coast cities via commercial aircraft and ships.

Legal Barriers Restrict DOD's Ability to Help Interdiction

DOD's interdiction role is generally restricted to surveillance by the 1989 authorization act and other laws, precluding military personnel from directly participating in searches, seizures, arrests, or similar law enforcement activities associated with drug interdiction. Thus, DOD is excluded from the apprehension phase that is interdiction's major weakness. This weakness is due to (1) inadequate law enforcement assistance in the countries that U.S.-bound cocaine passes through and (2) inadequate technology to aid U.S. law enforcement agencies in finding the cocaine that reaches our borders, airports, and harbors hidden in vehicles, shipping containers, and various other conveyances. Because of these problems, law enforcement's apprehension capabilities are not commensurate with DOD's surveillance capabilities.

According to various government sources, much of the U.S.-bound cocaine that passes through Mexico is flown directly from South America into Mexico. But, increasingly, shipments are first flown into Central American countries—principally Guatemala, which has neither a radar system capable of tracking drug-smuggling planes nor the capability to intercept them. In either event,

- U.S. law enforcement agencies lack jurisdiction in those countries and have to rely on host-nation authorities to apprehend suspects and
- most of the cocaine is ultimately sent by land across the U.S.-Mexico border in vehicles and other conveyances at both legal and illegal points of entry and, therefore, is not susceptible to detection and monitoring by DOD's air and maritime forces.

Interdiction has been unable to seriously restrict this major conduit. In Mexico, the U.S. government has contributed substantial financial assistance to the Northern Border Response Force, a joint U.S.-Mexico interdiction initiative. However, our recent report concluded that, although this effort had caused smugglers to shift their landing zones southward, the majority of drug shipments continue to successfully transit Mexico.[2]

[2]Drug Control: Revised Drug Interdiction Approach Is Needed in Mexico (GAO/NSIAD-93-152, May 10, 1993).

If cocaine deliveries cannot be stopped in route or in transshipment countries, they must be interdicted at our borders and ports of entry. However, the sheer volume of traffic entering the United States makes that a large task. About 8 million shipping containers enter the country in a single year, and large numbers of vehicles cross the border from Mexico every day. The problem is detecting which of these conveyances are transporting illegal drugs, without unduly impeding commerce. Searches by humans, dogs, and existing technology have been inadequate. Law enforcement officials have previously reported that available technology makes the task extremely difficult, and our recent report suggests that a technological breakthrough does not appear imminent, despite continuing research and development efforts.[3] An increased flow of commercial traffic under the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement can only be expected to exacerbate the problem.

Military Assets Not Designed for Drug Mission

Although DOD's inventory of radar-equipped planes and ships was a major reason for giving the military the lead detection and monitoring role, those assets are not ideally suited to the drug smuggling threat. Sensors designed to detect large supersonic aircraft and nuclear-powered submarines are less proficient against low-flying planes and small wooden boats. As DOD officials testified in 1988, their assets were "designed for war fighting" and "the Soviet air-breathing threat," not for "law enforcement" and not for "the kind of threat that the drug smugglers can use in the aerial penetration technique." For example, high-performance jet fighters used to protect U.S. air sovereignty against military aggressors are not well suited to long-range monitoring or tracking of the slow, propeller-driven aircraft often used by smugglers. Consequently, according to DOD officials, they essentially use fighter aircraft only to intercept and make visual identifications of suspect planes, not to monitor or track them on their long journeys from South America.

In many cases, DOD officials told us, long-range tracking has to be done by E-3 AWACS or E-2C aircraft, whose primary role is detection, not tracking or monitoring. The problem is that the military has few aircraft well suited to long-range tracking of slow, drug-smuggling planes.

Similarly, DOD's surveillance capabilities for detecting and monitoring state-of-the-art submarines or surface-combatant vessels are less useful in countering the commercial and private vessels used for smuggling drugs.

[3]Drug Control: Status Report on Counterdrug Technology Development (GAO/NSIAD 93-104, Jan. 28, 1993).

The problem is not detecting or monitoring them per se. In the absence of intelligence tips, the problem is the almost impossible tasks of, first, determining which vessels among the considerable legitimate maritime traffic heading toward the United States are carrying drugs and second, finding the drugs in the numerous hiding places on large vessels.

For these reasons, successful maritime detection is highly dependent on intelligence tips, especially for larger vessels. Yet, as discussed earlier, a large part of DOD's flying hours and steaming days remain allocated to maritime targets.

Counterdrug Operations Do Not Provide Equivalent Readiness Training

Some of the flying hours and steaming days that DOD uses for its counterdrug mission cannot be justified by either their contribution to the drug war—as previously discussed—or by their contribution to military readiness. Although counterdrug operations provide some level of training—for example, operating a ship's propulsion plant or landing an airplane—they do not consistently provide the type of military training needed to maintain readiness for DOD's primary war-fighting mission. These unproductive flying hours and steaming days increase DOD's overall OPTEMPO budget. They also tie up resources that could be used to meet other requirements, and they place an increased burden on both personnel and equipment.

Counterdrug Operations Increase OPTEMPO Budgets

The counterdrug mission increases the services' overall flying hour and steaming day requirements. This is because (1) for at least some ship and aircraft crews, counterdrug operations provide little of the combat training that dictates OPTEMPO requirements and (2) planes and ships that DOD has retained partly or solely for counterdrug operations generate their own OPTEMPO requirements.

Some Crews Receive Little Combat Training During Drug Operations

Some aircraft and ship crews engaged in counterdrug surveillance receive little training related to DOD's traditional war-fighting mission. Therefore, the flying hours and steaming days used by those crews cannot be critical to military readiness. For example, during counterdrug operations:

- According to Air Force officials, the members of AWACS crews who normally direct weapon systems in combat situations receive so little training for that role that they do not even go along on drug-surveillance flights; and the Air Force is considering forming additional AWACS crews for counterdrug operations that will include only 14 members of the normal 23-member crew.
- Crews on the Navy's E-2 and P-3 aircraft receive training in only about 9 percent and 13 percent, respectively, of their "primary mission area requirements," and the training that makes up those percentages is usually repeated during training exercises.

According to some DOD officials, this situation has not degraded readiness because crews participate in counterdrug operations only part of a year and are able to meet the rest of their annual training requirements during the remainder of the year. However, trying to meet training requirements by rotating crews through unproductive counterdrug operations is

inefficient. Counterdrug flying hours and steaming days that provide little or no combat-related training have to be duplicated, thus increasing DOD's overall OPTEMPO requirements. Some DOD officials also told us the frequent rotation of ships between counterdrug operations and other assignments causes other inefficiencies, such as excessive fuel costs and time off-station for ships assigned to counterdrug operations.

DOD Retains Assets for the Drug Mission

According to DOD, almost all of its counterdrug assets also have military missions that justify their retention over and above their counterdrug role. However, we found that some of the aircraft and ships used for counterdrug operations have been retained either solely or partially for their counterdrug role.[1] For example:

- The Navy has retained for the drug mission, on a "trial basis," an E-2C squadron of four aircraft that had been scheduled for deactivation.
- With the decline of the submarine threat, the Navy is (1) giving a larger counterdrug role to its P-3 aircraft, some of which are being modified for the expanded role and (2) retaining for the drug mission three T-AGOS ships that can no longer be justified by the submarine threat they formerly were intended to counter.[2] The three T-AGOS ships are part of a 6-ship contingent reserved for "alternate missions" and "timely reactivation in time of crisis."
- The Navy has until recently retained for the counterdrug mission six hydrofoil vessels, now scheduled to be deactivated in fiscal year 1993.
- The North American Aerospace Defense Command has partially justified its inventory of fighter aircraft on the basis of "ever increasing challenges from drug smugglers"—although (1) direct drug-smuggling flights into the United States essentially ended years ago and (2) jet fighter aircraft cannot efficiently track slow, low-flying drug-smuggling planes.
- The Air National Guard modified and converted to a counterdrug role one C-26 aircraft, to serve as a prototype for additional proposed modifications and conversions.

In retaining assets for the counterdrug mission, DOD effectively increases its flying hour and steaming day requirements above the levels needed for training to sustain military readiness. Our analysis of the services' complex

[1]Some of these ships and aircraft have been (or will be) modified specially for counterdrug operations. In some cases, according to DOD officials, the added equipment is of a "roll-on, roll-off" type that can be transferred among aircraft or of a temporary nature that can be removed if the aircraft or ships are needed for other missions.

[2]Since the T-AGOS ships are contractor-operated, their operation and maintenance costs are not technically classified as "steaming days," according to DOD officials.

formulas for determining such requirements indicates that operational planes and ships retained in the services' inventories generate their own training-related OPTEMPO requirements.

Counterdrug OPTEMPO Has Associated Costs

Flying hours and steaming days used for the counterdrug mission entail other costs. They tie up resources that could be used to meet other operational and training requirements, and they take a toll on both personnel and equipment. These costs are not unique to counterdrug operations; they are a normal part of the costs of most military operations, from waging war to providing humanitarian relief. But they do reflect real costs that must be taken into account when assessing the nation's investment in DOD's counterdrug surveillance.

Counterdrug OPTEMPO Diverts Resources From Other Requirements

Use of planes and ships for the drug mission results in foregone opportunities to meet other requirements. This is especially true for highly sought, scarce assets, such as the AWACS and E-2C aircraft. Navy and Air Force officials told us that some types of assets used in counterdrug operations are sometimes unavailable to meet other military requirements, such as participation in large-scale exercises involving multiple commands or members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In commenting on a draft of this report, Joint Staff officials confirmed that resources must be diverted from other requirements for counterdrug operations.

Counterdrug OPTEMPO Affects Morale and Equipment Life

According to some DOD officials, the counterdrug mission also creates morale problems through the extra burden it places on military personnel. They pointed out that ship and aircraft crews have to perform their stint in counterdrug operations between other routine duties or deployments, sometimes shortening the time they would normally get to spend at home stations.

Some DOD officials also told us that counterdrug operations increase maintenance requirements and shorten the service life of some military assets. It is difficult to quantify or document the precise effects, they said, because of ships and planes rotating in and out of counterdrug operations. According to Air Force officials, however, the AWACS aircraft was programmed to fly 65 hours a month; the actual monthly average is now 83 hours; and the estimated average for AWACS aircraft involved in counterdrug operations is about 140 hours a month. As a result, they said,

those aircraft have to undergo phased maintenance every month and a half, versus the fleet average of every 2-1/2 months.

DOD Disagrees That OPTEMPO Can Be Cut Without Impairing Readiness

DOD officials strongly disagreed with our view that some flying hours and steaming days can be cut from the defense budget without impairing military readiness. The essence of DOD's argument is its contention that counterdrug OPTEMPO is part of—not in addition to—the total OPTEMPO required for readiness-related training. Thus, DOD contends, the OPTEMPO now used for counterdrug operations will still be needed for training, regardless of whether it continues to be used for counterdrug operations.

In our opinion, DOD's argument would be valid only if (1) counterdrug operations consistently provided training equivalent to that which military units can get in operations and exercises more directly related to DOD's primary, war-fighting mission and (2) DOD would have to retain the same aircraft and ship inventories (and the OPTEMPO to support them) irrespective of whether those inventories are used for counterdrug operations. In fact, neither is true. DOD officials have acknowledged that some counterdrug operations do not duplicate—or provide training equivalent to that which can be obtained from—structured military exercises. In addition, DOD has used counterdrug operations as a basis for retaining aircraft and ships in its active inventory. With a reduced counterdrug commitment, DOD could eliminate some of those assets.

The scope of our review did not allow us to determine either the extent to which these conditions exist or the extent to which they increase DOD's overall OPTEMPO requirements. For example, we know that the Air Force uses counterdrug operations as a basis for retaining some fighter aircraft but not the weight it gives to that requirement. However, the examples we developed show that the conditions do exist and that they do increase DOD OPTEMPO requirements—for example, the hydrofoil vessels and the E-2 squadron that have been retained for the counterdrug mission.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Conclusions

The congressional action giving DOD a major drug war role in 1989 was a calculated risk. Despite concerns about cost-effectiveness and military readiness, Congress concluded that the growing national cocaine crisis justified adding DOD's surveillance assets to the war on drugs. Congress' decision reflected both (1) concerns about the threat that escalating cocaine trafficking and use posed to U.S. security and (2) hopes that military surveillance might help make a difference in the nation's attempt to interdict and reduce the flow of cocaine into American communities.

Five years later, that decision can be reconsidered with the benefit of evidence not available at the time. In our opinion, that evidence shows that concerns raised at the 1988 joint congressional hearing have been validated and the hope that military surveillance would make a difference has proven to be overly optimistic. After spending nearly $976 million on DOD's counterdrug OPTEMPO, cocaine production has increased, the estimated flow into the United States is essentially undiminished, and cocaine remains affordable and available on American streets. Any shifts in smuggling tactics or increases in either heroin traffic from Asia or drugs from other countries will probably further reduce the contribution that military surveillance can make to the war on drugs.

As DOD suggests, surveillance provides intelligence and deterrence benefits in addition to its more direct support of apprehension efforts. However, those benefits are limited and, in any event, do not compensate for the government's continuing inability to interdict drug shipments at a level that would begin to make a difference.

In our opinion, the issue is not one of having or not having an interdiction effort—some level of effort seems necessary to demonstrate the government's resolve against drug smuggling. The issue is whether the government has an interdiction effort whose component parts (surveillance and apprehension) are in balance and commensurate with their costs. At present, the surveillance that DOD provides (1) exceeds law enforcement's apprehension capabilities, especially in the countries that U.S.-bound cocaine transits and (2) is not producing drug war benefits that are commensurate with its cost.

Consequently, in our view, the flying hours and steaming days that are the backbone of DOD's surveillance efforts are not providing a reasonable return on the federal government's heavy investment. The cost of those resources has escalated over the years with no specific, mission-unique

goal in sight. One reason for this cost growth has been DOD's aggressive approach to its mission, an approach that ONDCP has endorsed.

We believe that DOD's counterdrug flying hours and steaming days should be significantly reduced. We believe the reduction would not reduce the drug war's effectiveness. We also believe that some counterdrug OPTEMPO could be cut from the defense budget without impairing the military's readiness to perform its primary mission of defending the United States from armed aggression.

The lack of specific goals and effectiveness measures precludes determining the exact OPTEMPO level that is appropriate for DOD's mission. The appropriate level is a judgment that, in our opinion, must consider:

- the minimum level of surveillance effort needed to support law enforcement agencies—not only in terms of those agencies' reported requirements, but especially, in terms of their demonstrated capabilities to apprehend smugglers and
- the contribution the mission makes to the war on drugs—not only in terms of interim successes, such as numbers of detections or seizures, but especially, in terms of the ultimate measures of interdiction success and drug flow.

With these qualifications, we believe that DOD's counterdrug flying hours and steaming days for fiscal year 1994 should not exceed the level funded in 1990—the year that DOD first reported that it had expanded to the level needed to carry out its mission. Returning to the 1990 level would require a 36-percent cut in the counterdrug flying hours DOD has requested for fiscal year 1994 and a 23-percent cut in steaming days. These cuts would reduce DOD's 1994 budget request for counterdrug OPTEMPO by at least $72 million. In particular, we believe DOD's justification for the following OPTEMPO resources are questionable:

- flying hours used in South America, which have not led to significant disruption of the cocaine cartels' production or transportation capabilities;
- flying hours and steaming days used for routine (non-intelligence-cued) patrols;
- flying hours and steaming days directed at maritime targets, many of which can be effectively searched only in port; and
- flying hours and steaming days for ships and planes whose retention is justified largely or exclusively by the counterdrug mission.

Some of those flying hours and steaming days are used for planes and ships that have no immediate combat-related mission and therefore could be cut from the overall defense budget (not just the counterdrug budget) without affecting military readiness—for example, assets such as the E-2C aircraft assigned to the squadron retained only for counterdrug operations. Others may have to be retained in the defense budget to maintain readiness. If so, they should be justified on that basis, not through their contribution to the war on drugs.

In future years, DOD may need to increase its counterdrug OPTEMPO beyond the 1990 level—if, for example, law enforcement agencies in other countries significantly increase their apprehension capabilities. But, unlike previous expansions, DOD should do so only when justified by the need to reach clear-cut goals, not just the need to generally increase surveillance, intelligence, or deterrence levels.

We also believe that the associated costs of DOD's counterdrug OPTEMPO should be recognized and reported as real costs that have to be borne when military flying hours and steaming days are used for counterdrug operations. These are the costs associated with extra burdens on personnel and equipment life (especially for scarce and expensive assets like the AWACS aircraft), and with foregone opportunities to use OPTEMPO resources for other training and operational requirements.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the DOD Drug Coordinator to prepare a written justification for DOD's counterdrug OPTEMPO, to accompany future budget requests, that (1) includes measurable goals and the approach for reaching those goals and (2) identifies the associated costs of counterdrug OPTEMPO in terms of its effect on personnel, equipment, and other requirements.

Matters for Congressional Consideration

In light of the negligible contribution that military surveillance has made to the drug war, Congress should consider reducing DOD's counterdrug OPTEMPO funding in fiscal year 1994 by at least $72 million. This would return the services' counterdrug flying hours and steaming days to approximately the level of 1990, when DOD first reported that it had achieved "the full expansion" of its mission. We also believe that Congress should consider reducing DOD's fiscal year 1994 OPTEMPO funding (in the defense budget, not just in the counterdrug budget) by all or part of the

$72 million—that is, by the amount that DOD cannot justify retaining for training requirements related to its primary, national defense mission.

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