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United States General Accounting Office

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee  
of the Committee on Justice, Education  
and Government Operations, House of  
Representatives

DRUG CONTROL

Report of the Bureau  
of the General Accounting Office  
to the Committee on Justice,  
Education and Government  
Operations, House of  
Representatives



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U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-257824

August 2, 1994

The Honorable Gary A. Condit  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Information,  
Justice, Transportation, and Agriculture  
Committee on Government Operations  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to your request, we reviewed U.S.-assisted narcotics control efforts in Central America.<sup>1</sup> This report describes (1) the drug trafficking situation in that region, (2) the efforts being made by various U.S. departments and agencies to curb the flow of cocaine and the obstacles they face in carrying out these efforts, (3) the capabilities of Central American countries to interdict cocaine shipments and their dependence on U.S. assistance, and (4) new U.S. counterdrug initiatives.

## Results in Brief

Despite various U.S. government interdiction efforts, Central America continues to be a primary transshipment point for cocaine shipments to the United States. Available evidence suggests that the supply of drugs entering the United States via Central America remains virtually uninterrupted.<sup>2</sup> Law enforcement officials stated that drug traffickers have adjusted their modes of operations to evade U.S. air interdiction efforts and are increasingly using sea and land transportation to move drugs through Central America to the United States. Drugs moved by these new trafficking modes are very difficult to detect and interdict. The Central American nations have neither the resources nor the institutional capability to address the new drug trafficking modes and are heavily dependent on U.S. assistance. Various U.S. government agencies are working with some Central American countries on a number of small-scale projects to address new trafficking modes. However, the outcome of these efforts is uncertain due to limited host country capabilities and shifts in U.S. program emphasis from drug interdiction in the transit countries of Central America toward intercepting drugs and disrupting drug organizations in the source countries of South America.

<sup>1</sup>Central American countries are Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

<sup>2</sup>Drug Control: Expanded Military Surveillance Not Justified by Measured Goals or Results (GAO/T-NSIAD-94-14, Oct. 5, 1993); Drug Control: Heavy Investment in Military Surveillance Is Not Paying Off (GAO/NSIAD-93-220, Sept. 1, 1993); and Drug Control: Impact of DOD's Detection and Monitoring on Cocaine Flow (GAO/NSIAD-91-297, Sept. 19, 1991).

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## Background

By the late 1980s, most cocaine entering the United States was flown directly from the producing countries of South America into northern Mexico, where the cargo was then transported by truck across the border. However, in response to joint U.S.-Mexican drug interdiction efforts in northern Mexico, traffickers began to adjust their routes and moved their operations and staging areas to southern Mexico and neighboring Central American countries.<sup>3</sup>

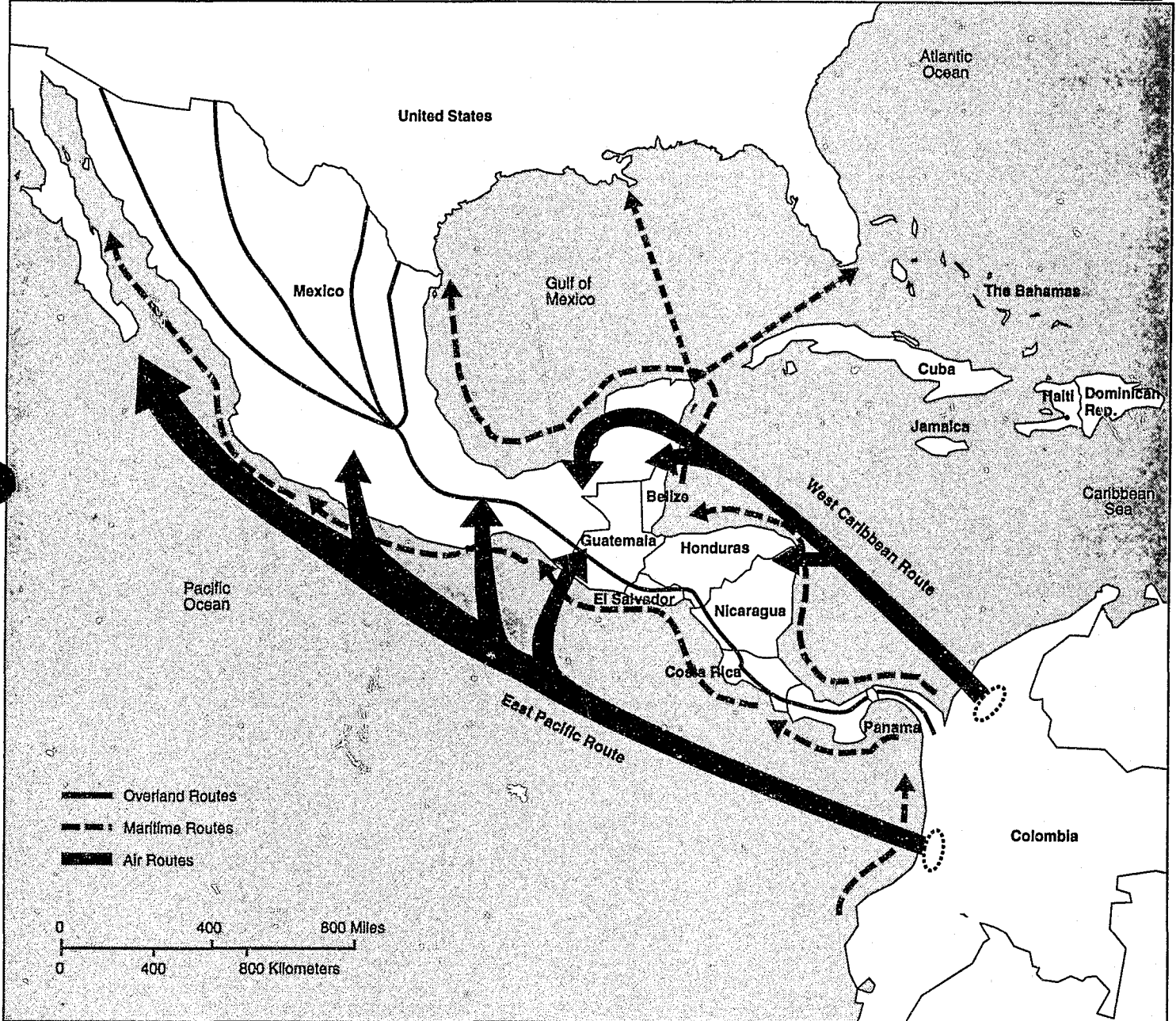
Strategically located between the United States and the cocaine producing countries of South America, Central America and its coastline are used as a bridge by drug traffickers to facilitate cocaine transshipment to the United States. The two primary air routes used to move cocaine from Colombia to Central America and Mexico are the western Caribbean corridor and the more frequently used eastern Pacific corridor.<sup>4</sup> (See fig. 1.) From various points along these corridors, traffickers either land and offload their drugs or airdrop their drug cargoes. Drugs are then stockpiled for shipment to Mexico and then the United States.

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<sup>3</sup>Drug Control: Revised Drug Interdiction Approach Is Needed in Mexico (GAO/NSIAD-93-152, May 10, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>In a limited number of cases, traffickers in producing countries have been known to fly their drug cargoes directly to the United States or Canada.

Figure 1: Primary Cocaine Trafficking Routes From Colombia to Central America and the United States



In 1991, the United States initiated a major effort to interdict drugs transiting Central America. In fiscal year 1993, the U.S. government

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programmed more than \$56 million on efforts to curb the flow of drugs through Central America.

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## Drugs Continue to Transit Central America

In recent years, the major thrust of the U.S. drug strategy in Central America has been to intercept drug trafficking aircraft as they move drug cargoes along established trafficking routes. This strategy appears to have been successful in Guatemala, the primary transshipment country of the region, but has had little impact on the flow of drugs to the United States. According to law enforcement officials, the strategy has not been effective because traffickers have adjusted their methods of operation and destinations to evade U.S. detection and interdiction efforts. In addition, the U.S. government and Central American countries face numerous obstacles to developing effective counterdrug programs. Although the amount of cocaine that transits Central America is not known, the Department of State estimates that as much as 70 tons of cocaine transits Guatemala annually, the country at the focus of U.S. interdiction efforts in the region.

As the United States has increased its ability to detect, monitor, and interdict drug trafficking aircraft moving from South America to Central America and the United States, traffickers have turned to more complex and evasive means of air delivery and to less detectable highway and sea transportation. Some U.S. officials believe that, in a limited number of instances, drug traffickers have changed their air shipment methods to avoid detection by Department of Defense (DOD) radar. For example, one drug enforcement official told us that traffickers are flying small aircraft into the jungle area that spans the border between Colombia and Panama, trucking drug cargoes across Panama, and reloading the drugs on small aircraft that mix with legitimate air traffic in the region. This technique avoids the radar assets that DOD has focused on the northern coast of South America.

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), maritime vessels and air cargo conveyances are now responsible for the bulk of the cocaine being moved into Central America and much of the cocaine being smuggled into the United States. The use of ships and boats allows cocaine to be transported in greater bulk so that it can be more easily concealed and increases the difficulty of detecting drugs that are commingled with legitimate cargo. The National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee reports that cocaine has been hidden in the walls of cargo containers, in bulk cargo such as coffee, and attached to the vessels

themselves.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Customs Service faces an enormous challenge as it attempts to examine all containers entering U.S. ports. For example, over 44,000 sea containers arrived at U.S. seaports from cocaine source and transit countries during fiscal year 1992. Of this total, Customs examined 13 percent of the full containers and 25 percent of the empty ones.

The large volume of vehicular traffic crossing into Mexico from Central America also provides traffickers with ample smuggling opportunities. Once into Mexico, whether by air, boat, or land, the drugs are usually destined for the United States. Almost 6,600 tractor trailer trucks and 211,000 passenger vehicles cross the U.S.-Mexico border each day. Customs estimates that two-thirds of all cocaine entering the United States crosses the U.S.-Mexico land border concealed in cargo. Appendix I contains detailed information on drug trafficking in Central America.

## Numerous Agencies Involved in U.S. Interdiction and Control Efforts

U.S. narcotics control efforts in Central America have centered on intercepting drug trafficking aircraft transiting the region and seizing drugs destined for the United States. The primary focus has been Operation Cadence, a program combining the efforts of various U.S. government agencies with interdiction operations conducted by DEA and Central American police personnel. Initiated in 1991, Operation Cadence involves the deployment of specially trained U.S. law enforcement agents to Guatemala who work with information and intelligence developed by DEA, DOD, and Customs to seize trafficking aircraft and their cargoes.

Available data indicates that State, DEA, DOD, and Customs programmed over \$48 million to support Operation Cadence and other interdiction activities in Central America during fiscal year 1993. These expenditures primarily represented the cost of U.S. personnel and services and the operation of U.S.-owned radar and aviation assets. With the use of various land-, sea-, and air-based radar assets, DOD spent an estimated \$24.7 million on detecting and monitoring drug trafficking aircraft as they left South America and approached the Central American isthmus. Customs spent at least \$9 million to monitor suspect trafficking aircraft and track them once they entered a particular country's airspace. The Department of State spent \$6.1 million to operate and maintain aircraft used to transport Cadence personnel to aircraft landing sites and \$1 million to train and support Guatemalan police personnel involved in interdiction operations. DEA spent \$828,000 to support the deployment of Cadence teams to the

<sup>5</sup>The National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee is a multiagency U.S. government panel that was established in 1978 to coordinate foreign and domestic collection, analysis, dissemination, and evaluation of drug-related intelligence.

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region. DEA also spent about \$6.5 million to conduct routine investigative activities not related to Operation Cadence and operate offices in six Central American countries.

According to DEA, Operation Cadence has been responsible for seizing almost 29 metric tons of cocaine since its inception in May 1991.<sup>6</sup> However, annual Cadence cocaine seizures have declined. The number of detected flights to the seven Central American countries fell from 84 in 1992 to 25 in 1993. The number of suspected trafficking flights into Guatemala fell from 57 in 1992 to 13 in 1993. As a result of Operation Cadence's ability to successfully seize a growing percent of those aircraft landing in Guatemala and six consecutive successful interdiction operations from June to September 1993, traffickers have avoided Guatemala. No suspected trafficking flights were detected entering Guatemala from October 1993 to March 1994, the last month for which data is available. Operation Cadence has also provided some interdiction and training assistance to Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras through the short-term deployment of DEA personnel.

In addition to supporting Operation Cadence, the Department of State spent almost \$4 million to improve the drug interdiction capabilities of six Central American nations; support drug eradication efforts; and inform Central American citizens about the adverse impacts of drug production, trafficking, and abuse. It also spent \$4 million to operate and maintain State-owned eradication aircraft in Guatemala and Belize. The U.S. Coast Guard spent \$400,000 to train regional maritime forces in vessel boarding and inspection procedures. Appendix II further discusses U.S. anti-narcotics activities in Central America.

In addition to problems inherent in identifying and interdicting drug traffickers, U.S. efforts in the Central American transit zone have been limited by national sovereignty and jurisdiction issues. For example, Cadence activities in Belize were suspended for about 1 year because the government of Belize prohibited the entrance of Cadence personnel armed with M-16 rifles. The government of Belize currently prohibits Department of State helicopters armed with M-60 machine guns from flying over that country. Similarly, the government of Honduras does not allow

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<sup>6</sup>One metric ton equals 1,000 kilograms or 2,205 pounds.

Guatemalan aircraft or personnel to fly over its territory.<sup>7</sup> In Honduras, flight plans for U.S. interdiction aircraft must be filed 48 hours in advance. One State Department official said that regional suspicions have also inhibited joint training and adversely affected joint drug interdiction operations.

Central American presidents discussed greater anti-drug cooperation at a conference in February 1993 and issued a declaration stating their commitment to develop specific regional counterdrug programs within 6 months. As part of their agreement, the presidents also committed to establishing a new Central American counterdrug commission. To date, none of the actions approved at the conference have been initiated.

## Central American Drug Interdiction Capabilities Are Limited and Dependent on U.S. Assistance

Although all of the Central American countries have drug control efforts underway, no country possesses the technical, financial, or human resources necessary to run an efficient drug interdiction program. In addition, none of the countries has an organization in place to effectively counter the overland or maritime drug movement. The limited interdiction efforts that they do undertake are highly dependent on U.S. assistance. A senior Guatemalan narcotics control official told us that air and land interdiction rates in Guatemala would fall by at least 80 percent without U.S. assistance. In Honduras, a Department of State representative said that the drug interdiction effort would quickly wither away without the continued insistence and assistance from the United States.

## Limited Capabilities and Obstacles

None of the Central American countries has the resources necessary to purchase sophisticated equipment and develop well-trained personnel to combat the well-financed, creative, and highly adaptable drug traffickers. No Central American nation has a navy or coast guard capable of completely controlling its territorial waters. For example, four Honduran Navy ships are responsible for patrolling that country's extensive Caribbean coast. Three of these ships have been in dry dock, and Honduras could not afford fuel for the fourth ship for a long period of time. In addition, Honduras is the only Central American country with the radar capability to monitor its airspace.

<sup>7</sup>Department of State helicopters used in Cadence operations are operated and maintained by a U.S. contractor, which employs Guatemalan civilian pilots. Also, Cadence interdiction teams include a number of host nation law enforcement personnel who are restricted to operations within their specific country.



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Corruption also limits the effectiveness of Central American governments' narcotics control efforts. In its 1994 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report to Congress, State reported concerns of narcotics-related corruption in all seven Central American countries. Instances cited by State ranged from the premature release of people arrested and convicted on drug charges to the alleged involvement of prominent individuals in drug trafficking. In another country, DEA has reported that the host nation organization responsible for conducting its surveillance and undercover operations is the least professional law enforcement agency in the country and the one most susceptible to corruption.

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### Funding for U.S. Narcotics Control Activities

Budgetary constraints and concern over the effectiveness of State's narcotics control program resulted in Congress reducing the funds available for this worldwide program from \$147.8 million in fiscal year 1993 to \$100 million in fiscal year 1994. Both host country assistance and U.S. direct interdiction efforts are being reduced to accommodate the lower level of funding.

The United States, through the Department of State, provided about \$5 million in narcotics control assistance to six of the seven Central American countries during fiscal year 1993 and plans to provide about \$3 million in similar aid during fiscal year 1994. This assistance provides training and logistics and maintenance support to counternarcotics police in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama. Narcotics control training provided by the Department of State focused on strengthening the capabilities of drug law enforcement units. Some of this training is provided by the U.S. Customs Service, which instructs Central American personnel on interdiction techniques and detector dog operations; the U.S. Coast Guard, which provides training on vessel boarding techniques; and DEA, which provides training in investigatory techniques.

Within Central America, the Department of State has focused its efforts in Guatemala and Panama, where it established narcotics affairs sections to manage in-country programs and oversee much smaller projects in neighboring countries. State helped the government of Guatemala to organize an interdiction unit, develop a narcotics-related intelligence and information clearinghouse, and establish a unit to coordinate interdiction operations. State also supports Guatemalan efforts to eradicate opium poppy and marijuana cultivations by providing equipment, commodities, and aviation support.

To accommodate reduced funding for counterdrug programs in Central America, State terminated the deployment of an interdiction/eradication helicopter to Belize, reduced the number of helicopters it had deployed to Guatemala, and greatly reduced the number of flying hours available for support of Operation Cadence interdiction activities. This reduced level of aviation support has adversely affected interdiction efforts and DEA has reduced the number of Operation Cadence teams deployed in Guatemala.

## U.S. Plans to Combat Maritime and Overland Drug Trafficking

In recognition of the limited usefulness of existing programs, U.S. anti-drug agencies, along with some Central American governments, are developing new small-scale approaches to address the growing threat of maritime and overland trafficking through the region. However, it is not clear whether these initiatives will develop into viable programs because of limited host country capabilities and changing emphasis and program priorities in the U.S. drug control strategy.

DEA has developed a proposal for a maritime force to patrol the coast of Honduras. Funding constraints, however, have caused State to reject DEA's proposal. In Guatemala, the Department of State has approached Guatemalan shipping interests and proposed a port inspection project that would tighten controls and safeguard the integrity of goods shipped via Guatemalan ports. Start-up costs for this project would be provided by State, and subsequent costs would be the responsibility of the port authority, which would impose a fee on those who use the port and its facilities.

In the meantime, in February 1994, the White House released the new National Drug Control Strategy, which shifted the focus from interdicting drug shipments in the transit countries of Central America to intercepting drugs and disrupting drug organizations in the source countries of South America. The strategy clearly envisions a reduced role for DOD and its detecting and monitoring assets in Central America and makes less money available for U.S. assistance to Central American countries. The full impact of this strategy shift on transit zone efforts is not yet clear.

## Scope and Methodology

In conducting this review, we interviewed program officers and reviewed planning documents, field reports, studies, and cables at the Department of State, DEA, DOD, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Washington, D.C. We also met with program and operational officers at DEA's El Paso Intelligence Center in Texas and

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with officials in Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama. We conducted our work between June 1993 and April 1994 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Additional information on our scope and methodology is discussed in appendix III.

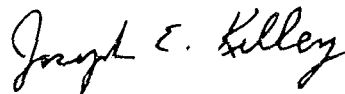
We did not obtain written agency comments on this report. However, we discussed the information in a draft of this report with officials from the Departments of State and Defense and the Drug Enforcement Administration and incorporated their comments where appropriate.

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As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 7 days from the issue date. At that time, we will send copies to appropriate congressional committees, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Attorney General, the Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Directors of the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Office of Management and Budget. We will also provide copies to others on request.

Please contact me on (202) 512-4128 if you or your staff have any questions on this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,



Joseph E. Kelley  
Director-in-Charge  
International Affairs Issues



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**Abbreviations**

DEA      Drug Enforcement Administration  
DOD      Department of Defense

# Efforts to Control Drug Trafficking Through Central America

To reduce the use of Central America as a staging area for U.S.-bound drug shipments, the United States has created and funded a number of programs that assist countries as they combat narcotics trafficking. All seven Central American countries have received U.S. narcotics control assistance and have narcotics control efforts in place. Although U.S. narcotics control initiatives vary among the Central American countries, the overall U.S. strategy aims to increase their ability to curb drug trafficking and eventually take responsibility for drug control operations within their respective countries.

## Drug Trafficking in Guatemala

In 1990, drug traffickers began to alter their established air transit routes through Mexico and expand their operations into Guatemala. The Department of State estimates that as much as 70 tons of cocaine annually transit Guatemala. The number of confirmed drug trafficking flights entering the country increased from 4 in 1989 to 36 in 1990. Guatemala is an attractive transit location for drug trafficking because it is situated halfway between the United States and Colombia, has hundreds of unmonitored landing strips, and has no radar capability. Drug trafficking aircraft have concentrated their activities in three regions of the country: the coastal Pacific plains of southwestern Guatemala, the river valleys and isolated jungle flatlands of the northern Peten region, and the area around Lake Izabal in eastern Guatemala. Air delivery techniques involve the traditional landing and offloading drug cargoes and the increasing practice of airdropping drug cargoes over land and sea to waiting confederates. Seaborne drug transshipment is centered in the eastern Guatemalan port of Puerto Santo Tomas.

Once in Guatemala, traffickers use a variety of smuggling methods to forward drug cargoes to the United States. These range from traditional air transportation to the use of cargo containers, tractor trailers, automobiles, boats, and air cargo. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the transportation of cocaine aboard air cargo shipments departing Guatemala and the overland shipment of cocaine by tractor trailer through Mexico are the two most serious problems being encountered in Guatemala.

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## Narcotics Control Organizations

Three organizations in the Guatemalan government have anti-narcotics responsibilities: the Treasury Police, the National Police, and the military's intelligence unit.

### The Guatemalan Treasury Police

The Guatemalan Treasury Police has primary responsibility for drug enforcement and eradication and is the principal beneficiary in Guatemala of U.S. narcotics control assistance. About 350 Treasury Police agents are involved in different aspects of the drug war. A 20-man Treasury Police unit known as the "Tiburones" patrols Guatemala's coast and inland waterways and is responsible for monitoring the entry and exit of contraband at Guatemala's largest seaport. Another unit known as the "Halcones" focuses on road blocks and is involved in overland interdiction operations. A 15-man rapid reaction airmobile platoon accompanies DEA agents during drug seizure operations. A unit of helicopter door gunners protects U.S. helicopters involved in eradication and interdiction operations. In addition, manual eradication units address the problem of opium poppy and marijuana cultivation. The Treasury Police also has a drug detector dog unit.

### The Guatemalan National Police

At the request of DEA, a Narcotics Task Force consisting of 15 National Police investigators was formed in 1989 to conduct undercover and surveillance operations. DEA, however, reported in 1992 that the National Police was the law enforcement agency believed to be most susceptible to corruption and least professional in Guatemala.

### Guatemalan Military Intelligence

All drug enforcement activities must be coordinated with the Guatemalan military intelligence unit, currently the sole source of narcotics-related intelligence. U.S. officials prefer that the Guatemalan military not be involved in the drug war because of its poor human rights record. All forms of U.S. military assistance, except for military education and training, have been suspended.

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## Narcotics Control Efforts

In addition to participating in Operation Cadence, the government of Guatemala is undertaking several other narcotics control activities that are supported by the Department of State. The government of Guatemala has established a clearinghouse for narcotics-related information and intelligence, a drug detector dog program, a port inspection and policing unit, and a counternarcotics intelligence unit and has participated with the United States in counternarcotics exercises.



The Guatemala City Joint Information Coordination Center is a counternarcotics information clearinghouse staffed with Guatemalan personnel and supported by the Department of State. The center has several computer terminals that are used to track private aircraft, vessels, and people suspected of drug trafficking.

A drug detector dog program at the Guatemala City international airport was established in 1990. The program consists of Treasury Police dog handlers and eight dogs that have been trained to detect illegal drugs. Under this program, all baggage, both private and commercial, and air cargo is to be inspected. Although the program has not resulted in any major seizures, DEA believes the level of security awareness at the airport has been raised and the presence of the dogs and handlers poses a deterrent to drug smugglers. The program is funded by airline, cargo, and export association organizations that use the airport.

The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City is working with Guatemalan shippers and port authorities to establish a self-inspection/policing unit. This unit will inspect ships and cargo for drugs prior to their departure from the port. According to U.S. officials in Guatemala, State will provide the funds necessary to initiate the unit, and subsequent costs are expected to be met by a tax levied on shippers and vessels using Guatemalan ports.

During 1993, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps conducted a small joint exercise with Guatemalan Naval Forces that focused on coastal and river counternarcotics operations on Guatemala's Pacific and Caribbean coasts.

## Cocaine Seizures

As shown in table I.1, the amount of cocaine seized in Guatemala has declined since joint U.S.-Guatemalan interdiction operations began in 1991. U.S. officials view this decline as an indicator of the success of the program, since fewer trafficking aircraft are now choosing to land in Guatemala. These officials also note that a higher percentage of those aircraft that choose to land are being seized than before Operation Cadence began. For example, from May 1993, when interdiction helicopters and personnel began using night vision equipment, to the end of 1993, Operation Cadence teams interdicted all six trafficking aircraft detected by the U.S. Southern Command. Although some U.S. officials noted that aircraft have apparently evaded U.S. radar assets and continue to land in Guatemala, Operation Cadence is viewed as the most successful interdiction program anywhere. The Department of State believes the operation's success can be corroborated by the number of landings

reported by ground intelligence sources. According to State, these reports have historically paralleled the number of flights detected by the U.S. Southern Command and have revealed no undetected landings.

**Table I.1: Cocaine Seizures in Guatemala (1989-93)**

Figures in metric tons	
Year	Cocaine seizures
1989	3.2
1990	15.5
1991	15.4
1992	9.5
1993	7.6

Source: Department of State.

## Drug Trafficking in Honduras

According to the Department of State and DEA, Honduras is a transit route for cocaine destined for the United States and, to a lesser extent, Europe. The government of Honduras maintains a radar system that covers a majority of the country. Furthermore, the Honduran Air Force has shot down suspected traffickers three times since 1986. Although Honduras possesses the capability to effectively deter air trafficking, its capability to deter other methods of trafficking are limited. Drug trafficking via land and sea routes remains essentially unhindered, according to State.

Honduras is attractive for maritime drug trafficking because of its poorly guarded coastline, Bay Islands region with a long history of smuggling, active fishing industry, and containerized export of seafood products to the United States. U.S. officials view maritime transportation as the primary shipping method used by organizations operating in Honduras.

According to DEA and Department of Defense (DOD) officials, several Honduran families residing in the Bay Islands have extensive family and business ties throughout Central America and are believed to be transporting cocaine throughout the region and into the southeastern United States. The close-knit island society, their mistrust of outsiders, and the islanders distinct appearance have prevented DEA from developing informants with knowledge of island drug trafficking or current information on the activities of the island families. The government of Honduras has a minimal presence on the Bay Islands, and, according to U.S. officials, law enforcement personnel assigned to the islands have

been quickly corrupted and all drug interdiction efforts to date have been compromised.

Although few roads are paved in Honduras, the country is a transit country for the overland shipment of drugs. The Inter-American Highway passes through a small portion of southwestern Honduras and is viewed as the major route for drug-laden trucks bound for the United States. According to officials in Honduras, traffic on the highway is heavy and vehicle monitoring and inspection is minimal.

## Narcotics Control Organizations

As of March 1994, four organizations in the Honduran government had anti-narcotics responsibilities: the National Police, the Air Force, the Navy, and the military's intelligence unit.

### The Honduran National Police

Narcotics control efforts in Honduras are to be carried out by three strike units of the National Police, which is an arm of the Ministry of Defense. These units receive equipment and support from the Department of State and are located in the capital of Tegucigalpa, the northwestern city of San Pedro Sula, and the Caribbean port of La Ceiba.

### The Honduran Air Force

The Honduran Air Force plays a major role in deterring the air movement of drugs through Honduras. The Honduran Air Force has three radar facilities that provide almost complete radar coverage of the country. State reports that airborne traffickers generally avoid Honduras because on three occasions—most recently in 1992—the Honduran Air Force shot down drug smuggling aircraft.

### The Honduran Navy

The Honduran Navy is responsible for deterring maritime trafficking. However, the Honduran Navy is small and has four ships available to patrol its extensive Caribbean coast. One U.S. official found that three of the ships were in dry dock awaiting funds to finance repair and the fourth had been tied to a pier for a long period of time because Honduras cannot afford fuel. In 1994, DEA proposed establishing a maritime anti-narcotics strike force in Honduras. The lack of available funds to purchase the necessary boats and equipment caused State to reject this proposal.

### Honduran Military Intelligence

During the mid-1980s, the Honduran military's intelligence unit assumed border inspection duties that had previously been the responsibility of the Honduran customs and border patrol agencies because of the threat posed by Contra rebels. According to U.S. officials, the Honduran military

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intelligence unit has also assumed increased responsibility for investigating drug trafficking activities.

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## Narcotics Control Efforts

The government of Honduras has attempted to strengthen its counternarcotics capabilities. However, it lacks the technical and financial resources necessary to combat drug trafficking and faces a number of serious organizational problems.

In April 1994, the Department of State reported that large cocaine shipments were continuing to transit Honduras, in part because of several institutional weaknesses. In addition to the difficulties involved in detecting maritime drug shipments, State reported that Honduran enforcement efforts were hindered by an underpaid and insufficiently trained police force, an inadequate judicial system, and widespread corruption. Law enforcement personnel in Honduras are paid as little as \$60 per month.

Officials at the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa were equally as skeptical about Honduras' capabilities and willingness to interdict drugs. For example, one U.S. Embassy official believes the Honduran military, which is in charge of the police, has little or no knowledge of day-to-day police investigative activities. Another U.S. Embassy official believes that the Honduran drug interdiction effort would wither away without U.S. prodding.

Until recently, law enforcement activities in Honduras had come under the purview of the military, and, as a result, the Honduran National Police was an arm of the Ministry of Defense. This action blurred the line between civilian law enforcement activities and military operations, which had a negative impact on drug enforcement. According to U.S. officials in Tegucigalpa, military officials with little or no police training or experience were traditionally placed in senior positions within the National Police. U.S. officials are optimistic that this situation will eventually change as graduates of a 4-year National Police academy gain seniority and assume positions of greater responsibility. According to these officials, the narcotics control units of the National Police are now being staffed with academy graduates.

In March 1994, Honduras created an independent Public Ministry, which is to have authority over criminal investigations and prosecutions. According

to State, the ministry will recruit and train new personnel who will be independent of the military.

A major State Department program in Honduras has been the establishment of a Joint Information Coordination Center. The center became operational in 1993 and is staffed by 14 Hondurans who can query a number of databases (e.g., telephone company records and vehicle registrations) to investigate narcotics-related crimes. A State official in Honduras views the center as a success and said the government of Honduras has made a commitment to the center's operation. This commitment has been demonstrated through a fourfold increase in the Honduran contribution to this State-sponsored project and the government's decision to staff the center with qualified personnel who are paid professional salaries.

Conversely, despite U.S. support and training, Honduras' detector drug dog program has not met expectations and is viewed by one Embassy official as the weakest link in the U.S. program in Honduras. According to DEA officials in Honduras, trained dog handlers have been transferred, and dogs have not been cared for properly. One U.S. official in Honduras said that the dogs were confined to small cages for long periods of time and were generally malnourished and mistreated. This official uses his personal funds to purchase dog food for the animals. DEA officials believe any future narcotics dog program in Honduras depends entirely on U.S. willingness to fund the program on a continuing basis.

## Cocaine Seizures

Table I.2 summarizes cocaine seizures in Honduras since 1989.

Table I.2: Cocaine Seizures in Honduras (1989-93)

Figures in metric tons	
Year	Cocaine seizures
1989	0.041
1990	0.254
1991	0.491
1992	1.460
1993	2.610

Source: Department of State.

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## Narcotics Trafficking in Other Central American Countries

All Central American countries have organizations and programs in place to address illegal narcotics trafficking. These control mechanisms are modest in scope and have achieved only limited results. The following provides a brief description of the drug trafficking problems confronting Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama; efforts by these countries to address these problems; and U.S. narcotics control assistance to these countries.

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### Belize

Belize is a transshipment staging area for cocaine and marijuana, which is grown in the northern Guatemala province that borders Belize. The Department of State reports that Belize's proximity to Guatemala and Mexico, its dense unpopulated jungle, extensive seacoast, and unsophisticated infrastructure for combating drug problems make it a potentially significant transshipment point for illicit drugs.

U.S. financial support for training, transportation, and equipment have been instrumental in increasing drug seizures and drug-related arrests in Belize during recent years. The Belize Police Force, with U.S. assistance, has formed an investigative unit that targets drug traffickers who have amassed significant assets. State reported in April 1994 that Belize customs, working with the Belize police force, had begun a maritime and land container search and review program. The Department of State provided \$298,000 in narcotics control assistance to Belize in fiscal year 1993 and plans to provide \$110,000 in assistance in fiscal year 1994. During 1993, Belize officials participated in a State-sponsored training program to strengthen basic law enforcement skills. The Belize police also conducted a marijuana eradication program and arrested suspected drug traffickers. A drug detector dog program was also in place at the Belize International Airport.

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### Costa Rica

Costa Rica has long been a transit point for cocaine, and recent seizures indicated that heroin is also being moved through the country. DEA attributes Costa Rica's extensive coastline, large number of uncontrolled airstrips, and limited government resources as factors contributing to the country's growing use as a drug transshipment site. DEA estimates that significant quantities of cocaine transits Costa Rica annually. In addition to the air movement of cocaine, increased quantities of the drug are believed to be entering Costa Rica from the island of San Andres (a possession of Colombia, located off the eastern coast of Nicaragua) and from the Nicaraguan coast. According to DEA, both coasts of Costa Rica are used by

smuggling aircraft and vessels, and overland shipments of cocaine are entering from Panama. In its April 1994 report to Congress, State reported that 611 kilograms of cocaine had been seized during the first 11 months of 1993 and concluded that Costa Rican law enforcement agencies could not effectively safeguard the country against traffickers. According to DEA officials, drugs are smuggled out of Costa Rica by land along the Inter-American Highway and by sea in containerized cargoes. These drugs are destined for the United States.

State's April 1994 report further noted that the Costa Rican government had modernized its counternarcotics laws, streamlined narcotics control enforcement, and encouraged demand reduction activities. The State report stated that effective drug control efforts in Costa Rica were hampered by a scarcity of resources, the lack of a fully professional police force, and bottlenecks in the judicial system. There is also corruption within the Costa Rican government. Since Costa Rica has no military force, the underequipped air and maritime sections of the Ministry of Public Security conduct limited counternarcotics patrols, but they are hindered by a lack of ships, aircraft, fuel, and trained personnel.

In fiscal year 1993, the Department of State provided \$272,000 in narcotics control assistance that focused on training and supporting Costa Rican drug interdiction forces and continuing support for a counternarcotics intelligence center, which has been operational since 1988. An estimated \$86,000 in narcotics control assistance is planned for Costa Rica in fiscal year 1994.

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## El Salvador

The Department of State reported that traffickers are using the Inter-American Highway, which passes through El Salvador, to move significant quantities of cocaine and smaller quantities of heroin. Salvadoran government officials are concerned that trafficking aircraft increasingly use their territory to evade U.S.-supported counternarcotics forces in Guatemala and Mexico. DOD officials believe the large number of landing strips along El Salvador's Pacific coast and the lack of radar to monitor air traffic will attract drug traffickers if interdiction efforts in Guatemala continue to be successful. In June 1993, nearly 6 metric tons of cocaine were seized in San Salvador—the largest seizure in El Salvador's history.

In 1990, the government of El Salvador created the Executive Anti-Narcotics Unit, which, according to the Department of State, has

proven to be effective despite its small size. The anti-narcotics unit relies on the military for air and maritime capability. The Executive Anti-Narcotics Unit was incorporated into the civilian national police in September 1993 and granted wider investigative authority than was previously authorized.

The United States has provided telecommunications equipment and vehicles to the anti-narcotics unit, without which it would have been incapable of operating effectively, according to one Salvadoran official. In addition, a U.S.-supported canine team allows Salvadorans to monitor airports, ports, and border-crossing points for illegal drugs. State's narcotics assistance program provided El Salvador with \$205,000 in assistance in fiscal year 1993 and plans to provide an estimated \$129,000 in assistance during fiscal year 1994.

## Nicaragua

Nicaragua plays a relatively minor role in the transshipment of cocaine to the United States and Europe. However, as enforcement efforts intensify elsewhere in the region, drug smuggling organizations have increased their activities in Nicaragua. Nicaragua's remote and sparsely populated Caribbean coastline, access to the Inter-American Highway, and limited government resources also contribute to the nation's potential use as a drug transshipment site. According to DEA, cocaine transiting Nicaragua moves by fishing vessel, cargo vessel, private and commercial aircraft, and land vehicles. A frequent method of transshipment along the Caribbean coastline has been airdrops from low-flying aircraft to waiting speed boats. An additional trafficking method has been coast hopping, a practice in which cocaine-laden vessels and aircraft mix with legitimate traffic and slowly move up the Caribbean coast, stopping to refuel or buy supplies.

The government has created a part-time civilian coordinator for narcotics affairs, who may also head a governmentwide narcotics commission. In March 1993, the government of Nicaragua implemented a national police reformation project, which created three anti-narcotics units designed to combat all forms of drug trafficking. The anti-narcotics units are divided into airport activity, national trafficking matters, and international trafficking matters. According to State, the anti-narcotics units are severely lacking in resources and have captured small and medium-size shipments of cocaine transiting the country.

In recent years, State has offered to provide \$100,000 in narcotics control assistance if Nicaragua would establish an anti-drug force that was not



under the control of the Sandinista-influenced military or police. The government agreed to create such a force; however, personnel assigned to the new unit were believed to be tied to the Nicaraguan military, and the U.S. assistance was withheld. The United States and Nicaragua agreed in 1994 to reprogram these funds to support a demand reduction project.

At present, there is neither a DEA office nor a Department of State narcotics control program in Nicaragua. During the early months of 1994, the government of Nicaragua made a number of drug seizures, both on its own and with information provided by DEA. These seizures and the government of Nicaragua's assumption of a leadership role in regional drug enforcement conferences has caused U.S. officials to reconsider their opinion of narcotics control efforts in Nicaragua. During informal discussions in May 1994, Nicaraguan officials informed U.S. representatives that they planned to request that the United States establish a DEA office at the U.S. Embassy in Managua. Due to a lack of funds and absence of an official request, action on establishing a DEA office in Managua has been postponed.

## Panama

Panama plays a role in international drug trafficking by being a financial center for laundering drug profits and a major transshipment point for cocaine, according to DEA. Although Operation Just Cause disrupted money laundering activities in December 1989, DEA reports that the disruption was only temporary and money laundering has resumed. DEA officials in Washington told us that the continued use of Panama as a money laundering center and the government of Panama's inability or unwillingness to curb these operations was the biggest problem currently confronting international law enforcement officials dealing with this country. Panamanian agencies responsible for money laundering control are viewed by State as weak. They do not coordinate with one another, and their resources are small.

One of Panama's greatest attractions for drug traffickers is the Colon Free Trade Zone. According to a U.S. official in Panama, legitimate commercial goods entering the Free Zone are often disassembled, repackaged, and/or transferred to other shipping containers. These activities, along with the traffickers ability to forge shipping documents, makes it all but impossible for law enforcement officials to monitor the movement of drugs once they enter the area. According to one U.S. official in Panama, drug traffickers are sophisticated, and many legitimate businessmen do not know their operations are being used to move drugs. Most of the large drug seizures

have occurred in the Free Zone or in port facilities serviced by the Free Zone.

During 1993, drug seizures by the Panamanian Judicial Technical Police and Customs increased, several combined U.S./Panamanian maritime interdiction campaigns were staged, and a new drug detector dog program was established in the Free Zone. Overall, seizures of cocaine (5.7 metric tons) decreased from the record 10 metric tons seized in 1992.

According to DEA, although the government of Panama has provided limited funding for law enforcement efforts against drug activities, the national police organizations lack the necessary training, appropriate salaries and equipment to conduct effective anti-drug operations.<sup>1</sup> During fiscal year 1993, the Department of State provided \$1.5 million in narcotics control assistance to Panama and had budgeted \$500,000 for fiscal year 1994. In April 1994, the President was unable to certify that Panama was cooperating fully with the United States, or was taking adequate steps on its own, to achieve full compliance with the goals and objectives of the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.<sup>2</sup> In an explanation that accompanied the discussion, the President indicated that even though the government of Panama had cooperated with many U.S. drug control efforts, it had not made significant progress on its own to deter money laundering. This lack of action made Panama a haven for drug launders and hindered efforts to bring narcotics traffickers to justice. Although Panama's law enforcement performance showed improvement, it remained weak. Citing the need to preserve a cooperative relationship necessary to operate the Panama Canal and permit the orderly withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Panama, the President determined that it was in the "vital national interest" of the United States to continue assistance to Panama.

<sup>1</sup>The needs of Panama's law enforcement agencies for resources and training to combat drug trafficking and money laundering are also discussed in an earlier report, The War on Drugs: Narcotics Control Efforts in Panama (GAO/NSIAD-91-233, July 16, 1991).

<sup>2</sup>Section 490 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, sets out requirements for withholding of bilateral foreign assistance and opposition to multilateral development assistance to major illicit drug-producing countries and major drug transit countries. These provisions will not apply in cases in which, under section 490(b), the President determines and certifies to Congress that either (1) the country has cooperated fully during the previous year with the United States or has taken adequate steps on its own to achieve compliance with the goals and objectives established by the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances or (2) vital national interests of the United States require support for such assistance.

# U.S. Narcotics Control Activities in Central America

To curb the increased use of Central America as a staging area for South American cocaine shipments, the United States initiated Operation Cadence, a DEA-led interdiction effort, in May 1991. Five U.S. government agencies participate in Operation Cadence: DEA, DOD, the Department of State, the U.S. Customs Service, and the U.S. Border Patrol. Operation Cadence involves (1) developing human intelligence on possible trafficking flights, (2) using U.S. radar assets to detect and monitor suspect aircraft leaving South American countries, (3) tracking those suspect aircraft using specially equipped Customs aircraft from the time they enter Central American airspace until they land, (4) arresting traffickers and seizing their cargoes, and (5) conducting follow-up investigations. The specific roles of these agencies are listed in table II.1.

**Table II.1: Roles of U.S. Organizations Involved in Supporting Operation Cadence**

Organization	Role
DEA	Provides interdiction personnel, program leadership, and oversight for U.S. participants. Assists and trains host nation interdiction and investigative personnel.
Department of State	Provides diplomatic, logistics, financial, and aircraft support and training assistance.
DOD	Detects and monitors suspect aircraft leaving South America until they enter Central American airspace. Provides communication assistance, intelligence resources, equipment, and personnel to coordinate operations.
U.S. Customs Service	Tracks suspect aircraft entering Central American airspace until they land. Provides four U.S. tracking aircraft and crews deployed in Honduras and Panama.
U.S. Border Patrol	Instructs host country personnel in road interdiction techniques and methods for controlling the overland movement of narcotics.

In addition to its support of Operation Cadence, the Department of State funds bilateral narcotics control programs with all of the Central American countries, except Nicaragua, and maintains an interregional aviation service. Although it is not a participant in Operation Cadence, the U.S. Coast Guard helps by deploying training teams to improve the law enforcement skills of Central American maritime police forces. Table II.2 summarizes the Central American narcotics control assistance provided by the United States during fiscal year 1993.

Appendix II  
 U.S. Narcotics Control Activities in Central  
 America

**Table II.2: U.S. Assistance to Narcotics Control Activities in Central America**

Fiscal year 1993 dollars in thousands

Country	Department of State	DEA	DOD	U.S. Customs Service	U.S. Coast Guard	Total
Belize	\$298	\$500	0	0	0	\$798
Costa Rica	272	908	0	0	0	\$1,180
El Salvador	205	796	0	0	0	\$1,001
Guatemala	2,500	2,420	0	0	0	\$4,920
Honduras	198	637	0	0	0	\$835
Nicaragua	0	0	0	0	0	0
Panama	1,500	1,288	0	0	\$399	\$3,187
Noncountry specific assistance	10,100 <sup>a</sup>	828 <sup>b</sup>	\$24,700	\$8,981 <sup>c</sup>	0	\$44,609
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,073</b>	<b>\$7,376</b>	<b>\$24,700</b>	<b>\$8,981</b>	<b>\$399</b>	<b>\$56,530</b>

<sup>a</sup>Regional aviation support was provided to Operation Cadence interdiction efforts and Department of State eradication operations.

<sup>b</sup>This amount was for Operation Cadence.

<sup>c</sup>This figure includes operation and maintenance of P-3 Orion detection aircraft and Citation tracking aircraft and does not include U.S. Customs Service personnel costs.

**DEA**

DEA supports drug interdiction efforts in the region by having DEA offices in the Central American countries, except Nicaragua, and deploying specially trained Operation Cadence teams. Within the six countries, DEA activities are designed to help host nations to reduce the supply and flow of drugs and develop intelligence that will lead to the arrest of traffickers within the host country and the United States.

To supplement the traditional drug enforcement activities of DEA agents permanently assigned to the U.S. embassies in Central America, teams of specially trained interdiction personnel are deployed to Guatemala for 90-day periods. The multiagency Cadence teams are composed of approximately 10 DEA special agents as well as communications specialists, medics, and U.S. Border Patrol personnel who have received U.S. Army training in such specialties as air mobile techniques, land navigation, field medicine, and communications. According to DEA, Operation Cadence has resulted in the seizure of 28.8 metric tons of cocaine and 16 aircraft since its inception.

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Under the Operation Cadence concept, DEA agents and Guatemalan Treasury Police personnel are dispersed to forward operation bases located in four geographic regions used by drug trafficking aircraft and await notification by the U.S. Southern Command in Panama that an aircraft believed to be carrying narcotics is en route. Using intelligence data and trafficking profiles developed through hundreds of such tracks, the U.S. Southern Command identifies potential trafficking aircraft and monitors their movement along the Central American isthmus. As the trafficking aircraft enters Central American airspace, responsibility for tracking the suspect is passed to specially equipped tracking aircraft of the U.S. Customs Service, which directs the Cadence team to the anticipated landing site. The interdiction teams are transported to the landing sites by helicopters funded by the Department of State. Operation Cadence is primarily based in Guatemala, but Cadence teams have assisted in interdiction operations in Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras.

When Operation Cadence began in 1991, the majority of trafficking flights transited the Pacific and landed along Guatemala's southwestern Pacific coast region. Operation Cadence initially focused on this area, established its first forward operating base in the southwestern town of Retalhuleu, and deployed two Department of State helicopters and interdiction personnel to the base. After some initial seizures, U.S. officials observed that the traffickers began to use different routes into Guatemala that evaded the sole forward operating location. One State official in Guatemala told us that it took 6 months to establish a forward operating base but that it took the traffickers only 6 days to get around it. Three additional forward operating bases have been established, and the response teams are now able to cover most of Guatemala.

Another change in tactics occurred shortly after the program was initiated when traffickers changed from delivering drugs during the daytime to delivering at dusk or night. This change proved to be effective because (1) the interdiction helicopters lacked night vision equipment and could not be flown at night and (2) the interdiction teams would land only if the operation could be completed and the helicopters returned to the secure forward operating bases during daylight hours. Night vision equipment was installed in the Department of State helicopters, and by May 1993, the flight crews and interdiction teams had completed training in the use of the equipment and night assault techniques. The first night interdiction operation occurred on June 2, 1993, and resulted in the seizure of 1.7 metric tons of cocaine. According to DEA officials, Operation Cadence

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has successfully interdicted all six trafficking aircraft that landed in Guatemala from June 2, 1993, through March 30, 1994.

Some law enforcement officials believe drug traffickers have again changed their tactics and are bypassing DOD detection and monitoring assets that surround the traditional trafficking routes out of Colombia and northern South America. According to one U.S. official, a few aircraft that were undetected by DOD have crashed and, when the crash site was investigated, the planes were found to be loaded with cocaine. This official believes that traffickers are now flying smaller aircraft into the Darian jungle that spans Panama and Colombia. The drug cargoes are then moved across Panama and either loaded on tractor trailer trucks, transferred to ocean-going vessels, or reloaded onto small aircraft and flown northward. These aircraft fly at low altitudes to avoid radar and are designed to mix with legitimate air traffic. This technique allows the trafficker to avoid the air- and sea-based radars that are positioned along the northern tier of South America.

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## The Department of State

The Department of State, through its Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, has primary responsibility for developing, implementing, and monitoring the U.S. international narcotics control policy. As part of its drug control effort, State funds programs in six of the seven Central American countries and maintains an interregional aviation program. At the U.S. embassies in Guatemala and Panama, State has established Narcotics Affairs Sections to administer the in-country programs and provide general oversight for the much smaller programs in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras.

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## Assistance to Guatemala

U.S. narcotics control objectives in Guatemala are to (1) reduce narcotics trafficking from and through Guatemala to the United States, (2) reduce opium production, (3) develop an effective civilian narcotics law enforcement agency, and (4) improve Guatemalan public awareness of the dangers of drug production and use. To achieve these objectives, State funds four narcotics control projects and provides aviation support for eradication and drug interdiction operations.

State's efforts to develop an effective civilian narcotics law enforcement agency in Guatemala involve the organization, training, and equipping of several drug interdiction and eradication control units within the Guatemalan Treasury Police. The Department has supported the

establishment of an anti-narcotics directorate, a narcotics investigative unit, manual eradication units, a rapid reaction unit that supports Operation Cadence, an interdiction force that patrols Guatemala's inland waterways, two drug canine units, and a Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center.

In addition to being a major transit country for cocaine, Guatemala is a producing country for opium and marijuana. To address this problem, the Department of State supports an aerial and manual eradication project that eliminated almost 95 percent of the opium poppy crop and about 500 acres of marijuana in 1993. The State Department provides herbicides for Department of State eradication aircraft, ground support equipment, communications and photographic equipment, and field rations. Similar assistance is also provided for manual eradication operations.

Another Department of State project in Guatemala is designed to increase public awareness of the harm caused by drug production, trafficking, and abuse. The Department of State program in Guatemala also included \$295,000 in fiscal year 1993 to support U.S. and foreign national personnel involved in program planning, development, monitoring, and evaluation at the Narcotics Affairs Section in Guatemala City.

State also maintains an aviation unit in Guatemala, consisting of five aircraft to conduct aerial eradication and assist in law enforcement efforts; one aircraft to transport interdiction personnel between field locations; and three helicopters to conduct aerial eradication, surveillance, and transport interdiction personnel. Five helicopters had been assigned to Guatemala before November 1993.

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## Assistance to Honduras

U.S. drug control efforts in Honduras are aimed at (1) increasing Honduran drug enforcement activities, (2) promoting government efforts to combat narcotics-related corruption, (3) urging the government of Honduras to strengthen laws on asset seizure and money laundering, and (4) pursuing demand reduction programs. In recent years, State efforts in Honduras have focused on establishing and outfitting three counternarcotics task forces, establishing a Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center, and improving the effectiveness of the drug dog program.

Drug program oversight and reporting is the responsibility of a U.S. Embassy officer. General program oversight for State's programs in Honduras is provided by the Narcotics Affairs Section in Guatemala City.

## DOD

DOD supports Operation Cadence and narcotics control efforts in Central America by detecting and monitoring suspect aircraft and maritime shipments as they approach and transit the region, providing equipment and expertise to Operation Cadence operations, developing targeting packages for interdiction operations, and assisting the countries of the region in drug awareness and drug abuse prevention programs. 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 countries between South America and the United States.

DOD operates a network of airborne, ground-, and sea-based radar systems to detect and monitor potential drug trafficking aircraft as they move from South America through the transit zones of Central America and the Caribbean. Information from these radars is passed to U.S. law enforcement officials and used to support the interdiction operations of U.S. and foreign agencies.

DOD supports in-country interdiction efforts by deploying various specialists and equipment to the countries of Central America to assist U.S. law enforcement officials and train host country counternarcotics personnel. To support U.S. embassy intelligence needs, DOD has deployed tactical analysis teams to several embassies in the major drug-producing and transit countries of Guatemala and Honduras. These teams analyze and produce intelligence on narcotics traffickers using reports from agencies such as the Defense Intelligence Agency, DOD, DEA, and other sources and provide this information to in-country counternarcotics personnel. They use a sophisticated communications system that can securely transmit and receive classified documents, photographs, text, or radar images on a real-time basis to and from U.S. counternarcotics personnel in the Western Hemisphere. DOD has also deployed military teams to Guatemala, Panama, and five South American countries to work with U.S. Embassy personnel and coordinate and assist in the development and counternarcotics plans.

Finally, the Defense Intelligence Agency develops targeting packages for potential interdiction operations and provides intelligence studies and



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information on trafficking organizations. For example, it has developed targeting packages on many of the numerous landing strips along Guatemala's southwest coast and written reports on the organization and interrelationships of trafficking families operating in the Bay Islands of Honduras.

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## The U.S. Customs Service

The U.S. Customs Service supports Operation Cadence and narcotics interdiction efforts in Central America by deploying detection, monitoring, and tracking aircraft and personnel to the region. Customs also provides some training to Central American interdiction and inspection personnel. Customs deploys three Cessna Citation aircraft to track suspect aircraft once they enter Central American airspace. The planes, crews, and mechanics are assigned on a temporary rotational duty basis and are deployed to Panama and Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras. To supplement the detection and monitoring activities of the U.S. Southern Command in Panama, Customs stations up to three surveillance aircraft on a 90-day basis in Panama to track suspect aircraft as they leave Colombia. Surveillance aircraft from Corpus Christi, Texas, also fly routine sorties over the Gulf of Mexico as they perform their normal Customs functions.

During 1993, Customs conducted several State-funded training programs for Central American narcotics control personnel. Examples of this training include detector dog training and a forthcoming regional interdiction course in El Salvador, a contraband enforcement course being provided to Guatemalan personnel, and a course in narcotics security techniques provided to managers and employees of private carrier companies in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

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## The U.S. Coast Guard

The U.S. Coast Guard supports narcotics control efforts in Central America by providing training to improve the law enforcement skills of indigenous maritime police forces and by establishing a liaison office to coordinate maritime and river narcotics control activities.

# Scope and Methodology

At the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City, Guatemala, we interviewed the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission and responsible officials from the Narcotics Affairs, Political and Economic Sections, Military Assistance Group, Defense Attache Office, Tactical Analysis Team, DEA, and DEA's Operation Cadence interdiction team. We attended meetings of the Embassy's Country Team and the Narcotics Affairs Committee. To examine and evaluate narcotics trafficking and interdiction efforts, we reviewed documents prepared by U.S. Embassy personnel and supplemented the information in interviews with U.S. officials. We also visited the Department of State's aviation facility in Guatemala City and Operation Cadence's forward operating base in Flores, Guatemala. To obtain the views of the Guatemalan government, we met with the Director of Guatemala's Anti-Narcotics Operations Department.

At the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, we interviewed the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission and responsible officials from the Political Section, Military Assistance Group, Defense Attache Office, Tactical Analysis Team, DEA, and members of DEA's Operation Cadence interdiction team who were deployed to Honduras at the time of our visit. To examine and evaluate narcotics trafficking and interdiction efforts, we reviewed documents prepared by U.S. Embassy personnel. We also visited Soto Cano Air Base and met with representatives of the U.S. Southern Command. We were not permitted to meet with the pilots and crews of the U.S. Customs Service interdiction aircraft stationed at Soto Cano. To obtain the views of the Honduran government, we met with the Director of the Honduran National Police's Joint Information Collection Center.

In Panama, we were briefed by officials of the U.S. Southern Command. We also met with civilian liaison officers attached to the Southern Command from the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs Service, and DEA. At the U.S. Embassy in Panama City, Panama, we interviewed the Deputy Chief of Mission and responsible officials from the Narcotics Affairs Section, U.S. Customs Service, and DEA.

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# Related GAO Products

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The Drug War: Colombia Is Implementing Antidrug Efforts, but Impact Is Uncertain (GAO/T-NSIAD-94-53, Oct. 5, 1993).

Drug Control: Expanded Military Surveillance Not Justified by Measurable Goals or Results (GAO/T-NSIAD-94-14, Oct. 5, 1993).

Drug Control: Heavy Investment in Military Surveillance Is Not Paying Off (GAO/NSIAD-93-220, Sept. 1, 1993).

The Drug War: Colombia Is Undertaking Antidrug Programs, but Impact Is Uncertain (GAO/NSIAD-93-158, Aug. 10, 1993).

Drug Control: Revised Drug Interdiction Approach Is Needed in Mexico (GAO/NSIAD-93-162, May 10, 1993).

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

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

The War on Drugs: Narcotics Control Efforts in Panama (GAO/NSIAD-91-233, July 16, 1991).

Drug Control: Status Report on DOD Support to Counternarcotics Activities (GAO/NSIAD-91-117, June 12, 1991).