

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on National Security,
International Affairs, and Criminal Justice, Committee on
Government Reform and Oversight, House of
Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at
1:00 p.m., EST
Thursday,
March 12, 1998

DRUG CONTROL

Status of U.S. International Counternarcotics Activities

Statement for the Record by Benjamin F. Nelson, Director,
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to be able to provide this statement for the record which summarizes our observations on the effectiveness of U.S. efforts to combat drug production and the movement of drugs into the United States. Specifically, this statement discusses (1) the challenges of addressing international counternarcotics issues, (2) obstacles to implementation of U.S. drug control efforts, and (3) areas requiring attention to improve the operational effectiveness of U.S. drug control efforts. The information in this statement is based primarily on our February 1997 report, which was initiated at the request of this Subcommittee.¹ (See also the list of related GAO products at the end of this statement.)

Summary

Despite long-standing efforts and expenditures of billions of dollars, illegal drugs still flood the United States. Although U.S. counternarcotics efforts have resulted in the arrest of major drug traffickers, the seizure of large amounts of drugs, and the eradication of illicit drug crops, they have not materially reduced the availability of drugs in the United States.

The United States and drug-producing and -transiting nations face a number of obstacles in attempting to reduce the production of and trafficking in illegal drugs. International drug-trafficking organizations are sophisticated, multibillion-dollar industries that quickly adapt to new U.S. drug control efforts. As success is achieved in one area, the drug-trafficking organizations change tactics, thwarting U.S. efforts.

There are also other obstacles that impede U.S. and drug-producing and -transiting countries' drug control efforts. In the drug-producing and -transiting countries, counternarcotics efforts are constrained by corruption, competing economic and political policies, inadequate laws, limited resources and institutional capabilities, and internal problems such as terrorism and civil unrest. Moreover, drug traffickers are increasingly resourceful in corrupting the countries' institutions.

For its part, the United States has not been able to maintain a well-organized and consistently funded international counternarcotics program. U.S. efforts have also been hampered by competing U.S. foreign

¹Drug Control: Long-Standing Problems Hinder U.S. International Efforts (GAO/NSIAD-97-75, Feb. 27, 1997).

policy objectives, organizational and operational limitations, and the lack of clear goals and objectives.

Since our February 1997 report, some countries, with U.S. assistance, have taken steps to improve their capacity to reduce the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. Among other things, these countries have taken action to extradite drug criminals; enacted legislation to control organized crime, money laundering, and chemicals used in the production of illicit drugs; and instituted reforms to reduce corruption. While these actions represent positive steps, it is too early to determine their impact, and challenges remain.

There is no panacea for resolving all of the problems associated with illegal drug trafficking, but based on our work over the past 10 years, we believe U.S. efforts could be better organized and that implementation can be improved. Thus, we recommended in our February 1997 report that the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) develop a multiyear plan that includes performance measures and long-term funding needs linked to the goals and objectives of the international drug control strategy.² We believe such a plan describing where, when, and how U.S. agencies intend to apply resources would provide a framework for the overall U.S. effort. In February 1998, ONDCP issued its 1998 National Drug Control Strategy and specific performance measures linked to the strategy. We are encouraged by ONDCP's latest effort to outline specific performance measures to assess the effectiveness of its strategy.

Background

Illegal drug use, particularly of cocaine and heroin, continues to be a serious health problem in the United States. Under the National Drug Control Strategy, the United States has established domestic and international efforts to reduce the supply and demand for illegal drugs. Over the past 10 years, the United States has spent over \$19 billion on international drug control and interdiction efforts to reduce the supply of illegal drugs.

The United States has developed a multifaceted drug control strategy intended to reduce the supply and demand for illegal drugs. The 1998 National Drug Control Strategy includes five goals: (1) educate and enable America's youth to reject illegal drugs as well as alcohol and tobacco; (2) increase the safety of U.S. citizens by substantially lowering drug-related crime and violence; (3) reduce health and social costs to the

²Drug Control (GAO/NSIAD-97-75, Feb. 27, 1997).

public of illegal drug use; (4) shield America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat; and (5) break foreign and domestic drug supply sources. The last two goals are the primary emphasis of U.S. international drug control and interdiction efforts. These are aimed at assisting the source and transiting nations³ in their efforts to reduce drug cultivation and trafficking, improve their capabilities and coordination, promote the development of policies and laws, support research and technology, and conduct other related initiatives.

Section 490 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 requires the President to annually certify which drug-producing and -transiting countries are cooperating fully with the United States or taking adequate steps on their own to achieve full compliance with the goals and objectives established by the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances during the previous year.⁴ On February 26, 1998, the President issued his certification in which 22 countries were certified; 4 were certified with a national interest waiver (Cambodia, Colombia, Pakistan, and Paraguay); and 4 were denied certification or "decertified" (Afghanistan, Burma, Iran, and Nigeria).

ONDCP is responsible for producing the National Drug Control Strategy and coordinating its implementation with other federal agencies. ONDCP has authority to review various agencies' funding levels to ensure they are sufficient to meet the goals of the national strategy, but it has no direct control over how these resources are used. The Departments of State and Defense and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) are the principle agencies involved in implementing the international portion of the drug control strategy. Other U.S. agencies involved in counternarcotics activities overseas include the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Customs Service, various U.S. intelligence organizations, and other U.S. agencies.

Illegal Drugs Remain Readily Available

Over the past 10 years, the U.S. agencies involved in counternarcotics efforts have attempted to reduce the supply and availability of illegal drugs in the United States through the implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy. Although they have achieved some successes, the cultivation of drug crops has not been reduced significantly, and cocaine,

³The major source countries for coca and cocaine are Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. The major source nations for opium are Burma, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Laos, Colombia, and Mexico. The major drug transit areas include Mexico, the eastern Pacific, the Caribbean, and the nations of Central America.

⁴Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (22 U.S.C. 2291j).

heroin, and other illegal drugs remain readily available in the United States. According to a July 1997 report of the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee,⁵ cocaine and heroin were readily available in all major U.S. metropolitan areas during 1996. The report also states that methamphetamine trafficking and abuse in the United States have been increasing during the past few years.

Despite long-term efforts by the United States and many drug-producing countries to reduce drug cultivation and eradicate illegal crops, the total net cultivation of coca leaf and opium poppy has actually increased. While the areas under cultivation have changed from year to year, farmers have planted new coca faster than existing crops have been eradicated. For example, while the amount of coca under cultivation in the primary growing area of Colombia was reduced by 9,600 hectares⁶ between 1996 and 1997, cultivation in two other Colombian growing areas increased by 21,900 hectares during this period. Overall, there has been very little change in the net area under coca cultivation since 1988. At the same time, the amount of opium poppy under cultivation increased by over 59,000 hectares, or by more than 30 percent between 1988 and 1997.

The amount of cocaine and heroin seized between 1990 and 1996 made little impact on the availability of illegal drugs in the United States and on the amount needed to satisfy the estimated U.S. demand. The July 1997 report by the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee estimates potential cocaine production at about 760 metric tons for 1996, of which about 200 metric tons were seized worldwide. The remaining amount was more than enough to meet U.S. demand, which is estimated at about 300 metric tons per year.

Drug-Trafficking Organizations Have Substantial Resources, Capabilities, and Operational Flexibility

A primary reason that U.S. and foreign governments' counternarcotics efforts are constrained is the growing power, influence, adaptability, and capabilities of drug-trafficking organizations. Because of their enormous financial resources, power to corrupt counternarcotics personnel, and operational flexibility, drug-trafficking organizations are a formidable threat. Despite some short-term achievements by U.S. and foreign government law enforcement agencies in disrupting the flow of illegal

⁵The 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.

⁶One hectare equals 2.47 acres.

drugs into the United States, drug-trafficking organizations have found ways to continue to meet and exceed the demand of U.S. drug consumers.

According to U.S. agencies, drug-traffickers' organizations use their vast wealth to acquire and make use of expensive modern technology such as global positioning systems and cellular communications equipment. They use this technology to communicate and to coordinate transportation as well as to monitor and report on the activities of government organizations involved in counterdrug activities. In some countries, the complexity and sophistication of their equipment exceed the capabilities of the foreign governments trying to stop them. For example, we reported in October 1997 that many Caribbean countries continue to be hampered by inadequate counternarcotics capabilities and have insufficient resources for conducting law enforcement activities in their coastal waters.⁷

When confronted with threats to their activities, drug-trafficking organizations use a variety of techniques to quickly change their modes of operation, thus avoiding capture of their personnel and seizure of their illegal drugs. For example, when air interdiction efforts have proven successful, traffickers have increased their use of maritime and overland transportation routes.⁸ According to recent U.S. government reports, even after the capturing or killing of several drug cartel leaders in Colombia and Mexico, other leaders or organizations soon filled the void and adjusted their areas of operations. For example, we reported in February 1998 that, although the Colombian government had disrupted the activities of two major drug-trafficking organizations, the disruption had not reduced drug-trafficking activities and a new generation of relatively young traffickers was emerging.⁹

Obstacles in Foreign Countries Impede U.S. Drug Control Efforts

The United States is largely dependent on the countries that are the source of drug production and are transiting points for trafficking-related activities to reduce the amount of coca and opium poppy being cultivated and to make the drug seizures, arrests, and prosecutions necessary to stop the production and movement of illegal drugs. While the United States can provide assistance and support for drug control efforts in these countries,

⁷Drug Control: Update on U.S. Interdiction Efforts in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific (GAO/NSIAD-98-30, Oct. 15, 1997).

⁸Drug Control: Revised Drug Interdiction Approach Is Needed in Mexico (GAO/NSIAD-93-152, May 10, 1993).

⁹Drug Control: U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia Face Continuing Challenges (GAO/NSIAD-98-60, Feb. 12, 1998).

the success of those efforts depends on the countries' willingness and ability to combat the drug trade within their borders.

Like the United States, source and transiting countries face long-standing obstacles that limit the effectiveness of their drug control efforts. These obstacles, many of which are interrelated, are competing economic, political, and cultural problems, including terrorism and internal unrest; corruption; and inadequate law enforcement resources and institutional capabilities. The extent to which the United States can affect many of these obstacles is minimal.

Drug Control Competes With Other Economic, Political, and Cultural Problems

The governments involved in drug eradication and control have other problems that compete for limited resources. As we reported over the years, drug-producing countries' efforts to curtail drug cultivation were constrained by political, economic, and/or cultural problems that far exceeded counternarcotics program managers' abilities to resolve. For example, these countries often had ineffective central government control over drug cultivation areas, competing demands for scarce host nation resources, weak economies that enhanced financial incentives for drug cultivation, corrupt or intimidated law enforcement and judicial officials, and legal cultivation of drug crops and traditional use of drugs.¹⁰

Internal strife in the source countries is another problem that competes for resources. Two primary source countries—Peru and Colombia—have had to allocate scarce funds to support military and other internal defense operations to combat guerrilla groups, which negatively affects counternarcotics operations. We reported that in Peru, for example, terrorist activities had hampered antidrug efforts.¹¹ The December 1996 hostage situation at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima is an example of the Peruvian government's having to divert antidrug resources to confront a terrorist threat. Although some key guerrilla leaders in Peru and Colombia have been captured, terrorist groups will continue to hinder efforts to reduce coca cultivation and efforts to reduce its dependence on coca as a contributor to the economy. In 1991, 1993, and 1998, we reported similar problems in Colombia, where several guerrilla groups made it difficult to conduct effective antidrug operations in many areas of the

¹⁰Controlling Drug Abuse: A Status Report (GAO/GGD-88-39, Mar. 1, 1988).

¹¹The Drug War: U.S. Programs in Peru Face Serious Obstacles (GAO/NSIAD-92-36, Oct. 21, 1991) and The Drug War: Observations on Counternarcotics Programs in Colombia and Peru (GAO/T-NSIAD-92-2, Oct. 23, 1991).

country.¹² Colombia has also encountered resistance from farmers when it has tried to eradicate their coca crops.

Corruption Permeates Institutions in Countries Involved in Drug Production and Movement

Narcotics-related corruption is a long-standing problem impacting U.S. and foreign governments' efforts to reduce drug-trafficking activities. Our work has identified widespread corruption in Burma, Pakistan, Thailand, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, and the countries of Central America and the Caribbean—among the countries most significantly involved in the cultivation, production, and transit of illicit narcotics.¹³

Corruption remains a serious, widespread problem in Colombia and Mexico, the two countries most significantly involved in producing and shipping cocaine.¹⁴ According to the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, corruption in Colombia is the most significant impediment to a successful counternarcotics effort. The State Department also reported that persistent corruption within Mexico continued to undermine both police and law enforcement operations. Many law enforcement officers have been arrested and dismissed due to corruption. The most noteworthy was the February 1997 arrest of General José Gutierrez Rebollo—former head of the Mexican equivalent of DEA. He was charged with drug trafficking, organized crime and bribery, illicit enrichment, and association with one of the leading drug-trafficking organizations in Mexico. In February 1998, the U.S. embassy reported that three Mexican law enforcement officials who had successfully passed screening procedures were arrested for stealing seized cocaine—illustrating that corruption continues despite measures designed to root it out. The government of Mexico acknowledges that narcotics-related corruption is pervasive and entrenched within the criminal justice system and has placed drug-related corruption in the forefront of its national priorities.

¹²The Drug War: Counternarcotics Programs in Colombia and Peru ([GAO/T-NSIAD-92-9](#), Feb. 20, 1992); The Drug War: Colombia Is Implementing Antidrug Efforts, but Impact Is Uncertain ([GAO/T-NSIAD-94-53](#), Oct. 5, 1993); and Drug Control ([GAO/NSIAD-98-60](#), Feb. 12, 1998).

¹³Drug Control: U.S.-Supported Efforts in Burma, Pakistan, and Thailand ([GAO/NSIAD-88-94](#), Feb. 26, 1988); The Drug War ([GAO/T-NSIAD-92-2](#), Oct. 23, 1991); The Drug War: Colombia Is Undertaking Antidrug Programs, but Impact Is Uncertain ([GAO/NSIAD-93-158](#), Aug. 10, 1993); The Drug War ([GAO/T-NSIAD-94-53](#), Oct. 5, 1993); Drug Control: Interdiction Efforts in Central America Have Had Little Impact on the Flow of Drugs ([GAO/NSIAD-94-233](#), Aug. 2, 1994); Drug Control: U.S. Interdiction Efforts in the Caribbean Decline ([GAO/NSIAD-96-119](#), Apr. 17, 1996); and Drug Control: Counternarcotics Efforts in Mexico ([GAO/NSIAD-96-163](#), June 12, 1996).

¹⁴Drug War: Observations on the U.S. International Drug Control Strategy ([GAO/T-NSIAD-95-182](#), June 27, 1995) and Drug Control ([GAO/NSIAD-96-163](#), June 12, 1996).

Inadequate Resources and Institutional Capabilities Limit Arrests and Convictions of Drug Traffickers

Effective law enforcement operations and adequate judicial and legislative tools are key to the success of efforts to stop the flow of drugs from the source and transiting countries. Although the United States can provide assistance, these countries must seize the illegal drugs and arrest, prosecute, and extradite the traffickers, when possible, in order to stop the production and movement of drugs internationally. However, as we have reported on several occasions, these countries lack the resources and capabilities necessary to stop drug-trafficking activities within their borders.

In 1991, we reported that the lack of resources and adequately trained police personnel hindered Panama's ability to address drug-trafficking and money-laundering activities.¹⁵ Also, in 1994, we reported that Central American countries did not have the resources or institutional capability to combat drug trafficking and depended heavily on U.S. counternarcotics assistance.¹⁶ In June 1996, we reported that equipment shortcomings and inadequately trained personnel limited the government of Mexico's ability to detect and interdict drugs and drug traffickers, as well as to aerially eradicate drug crops.¹⁷ Our more recent work in Mexico indicates that these problems persist. For example, in 1997 the U.S. embassy reported that the 73 UH-1H helicopters provided by the United States to the Mexican military for eradication and reconnaissance purposes were of little utility above 5,000 feet, where most of the opium poppy is cultivated. Furthermore, the Bilateral Border Task Forces, which were established to investigate and dismantle the most significant drug-trafficking organizations along the U.S.-Mexico border, face operational and support problems, including inadequate Mexican government funding for equipment, fuel, and salary supplements for personnel assigned to the units.

Other Obstacles Inhibit Success in Fulfilling U.S. International Drug Control Strategy

Our work over the past 10 years has identified other obstacles to implementing the U.S. international drug control strategy: (1) competing U.S. foreign policy objectives, (2) organizational and operational limitations among and within the U.S. agencies involved, and (3) inconsistent U.S. funding levels.

¹⁵The War on Drugs: Narcotics Control Efforts in Panama (GAO/NSIAD-91-233, June 16, 1991).

¹⁶Drug Control (GAO/NSIAD-94-233, Aug. 2, 1994).

¹⁷Drug Control (GAO/NSIAD-96-163, June 12, 1996).

U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives Compete for Attention and Resources

In carrying out its foreign policy, the United States seeks to promote U.S. business and trade, improve human rights, and support democracy, as well as to reduce the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. These objectives compete for attention and resources, and U.S. officials must make tough choices about which to pursue more vigorously. As a result of U.S. policy decisions, counternarcotics issues have often received less attention than other objectives. According to an August 1996 Congressional Research Service report, inherent contradictions regularly appear between U.S. counternarcotics policy and other policy goals and concerns.¹⁸

Our work has shown the difficulties in balancing counternarcotics and other U.S. foreign policy objectives. For example, in 1990 we reported that the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Agency for International Development disagreed over providing assistance to Bolivia for the growth of soybeans as an alternative to coca plants.¹⁹ The Agriculture Department feared that such assistance would interfere with U.S. trade objectives by developing a potential competitor for U.S. exports of soybeans. In 1995, we reported that countering the drug trade was the fourth highest priority of the U.S. embassy in Mexico.²⁰ During our May 1995 visit to Mexico, the U.S. Ambassador told us that he had focused his attention during the prior 18 months on higher priority issues of trade and commerce such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the U.S. financial support program for the Mexican peso. In 1996, the embassy elevated counternarcotics to an equal priority with the promotion of U.S. business and trade as the top priorities of the embassy, and it still remains that way.²¹

In addition, resources allocated for counternarcotics efforts are sometimes shifted to satisfy other policy objectives. For example, as we reported in 1995, \$45 million originally intended for counternarcotics assistance for cocaine source countries was reprogrammed by the Department of State to assist Haiti's democratic transition.²² The funds

¹⁸International Drug Trade and Its Impact on the United States, Congressional Research Service, 96-671F, August 9, 1996.

¹⁹Restrictions on U.S. Aid to Bolivia for Crop Development Is Competing With U.S. Agricultural Exports and Their Relationship to U.S. Anti-Drug Efforts (GAO/T-NSIAD-90-52, June 27, 1990).

²⁰Drug War (GAO/T-NSIAD-95-182, June 27, 1995).

²¹Drug Control (GAO/NSIAD-96-163, June 12, 1996).

²²Drug War: Observations on U.S. International Drug Control Efforts (GAO/T-NSIAD-95-194, Aug. 1, 1995).

were used to pay for such items as the cost of non-U.S. personnel assigned to the multinational force, training of a police force, and development of a job creation and feeding program. A similar diversion occurred in the early 1990s when U.S. Coast Guard assets in the Caribbean were reallocated from counternarcotics missions to the humanitarian mission of aiding emigrants in their mass exodus from Cuba and Haiti.

The United States terminated most of its efforts to address opium cultivation in Burma, the world's largest opium producer, because of its human rights policies and the failure of the Burmese government to recognize the democratically elected government.²³

Organizational and Operational Limitations Hamper Drug Control Efforts

The United States faces several organizational and operational challenges that limit its ability to implement effective antidrug efforts. Many of these challenges are long-standing problems. Several of our reports have identified problems involving competing priorities, interagency rivalries, lack of operational coordination, inadequate staffing of joint interagency task forces, and lack of oversight.

For example, our 1995 work in Colombia indicated that there was confusion among U.S. embassy officials about the role of the offices involved in intelligence analysis and related operational plans for interdiction.²⁴ In 1996, we reported that several agencies, including the U.S. Customs Service, DEA, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had not provided personnel, as they had agreed, to the Joint Interagency Task Force in Key West because of budgetary constraints.²⁵ With the exception of a few positions that have been filled at the Task Force since then, staffing shortfalls continued to exist when we reported in October 1997.²⁶

Furthermore, we have reported that in some cases, the United States did not adequately control the use of U.S. counternarcotics assistance and was unable to ensure that it was used as intended. Despite legislative requirements mandating controls over U.S.-provided assistance, we found instances of inadequate oversight of counternarcotics funds. For example, between 1991 and 1994, we issued four reports in which we concluded that

²³Drug Control: U.S. Heroin Program Encounters Many Obstacles in Southeast Asia (GAO/NSIAD-96-83, Mar. 1, 1996).

²⁴Drug War (GAO/T-NSIAD-95-182, June 27, 1995).

²⁵Drug Control (GAO/NSIAD-96-119, Apr. 17, 1996).

²⁶Drug Control (GAO/NSIAD-98-30, Oct. 15, 1997).

U.S. officials lacked sufficient oversight of aid to ensure that it was being used effectively and as intended in Peru and Colombia.²⁷ We also reported that the government of Mexico had misused U.S.-provided counternarcotics helicopters to transport Mexican military personnel during the 1994 uprising in the Mexican state of Chiapas.²⁸

Our recent work in Mexico indicates that oversight and accountability of counternarcotics assistance continues to be a problem. We found that embassy records on UH-1H helicopter usage for the civilian law enforcement agencies were incomplete. Additionally, we found that the U.S. military's ability to provide adequate oversight is limited by the end-use monitoring agreement signed by the governments of the United States and Mexico.

We also found instances where lessons learned from past counternarcotics efforts were not known to current planners and operators, both internally in an agency and within the U.S. antidrug community. For example, the United States initiated an operation to support Colombia and Peru in their efforts to curtail the air movement of coca products between the two countries. However, U.S. Southern Command personnel stated that while they were generally aware of the previous operation, they were neither aware of the problems that had been encountered, nor of the solutions developed in the early 1990s when planning the current operation. U.S. Southern Command officials attributed this problem to the continual turnover of personnel and the requirement to destroy most classified documents and reports after 5 years. These officials stated that an after-action reporting system for counternarcotics activities is now in place at the U.S. Southern Command.

Funding Levels Have Complicated Drug Control Efforts

From 1988 to 1997, the United States spent about \$110 billion on domestic and international efforts to reduce the use and availability of illegal drugs in the United States. Of this amount, over \$19 billion was expended on international counternarcotics efforts supporting (1) the eradication of drug crops, the development of alternative forms of income for drug crop farmers, and increased foreign law enforcement capabilities (\$4.2 billion) and (2) interdiction activities (\$15.3 billion). However, from year to year, funding for international counternarcotics efforts has fluctuated and until recently had declined. In some instances, because of budgetary

²⁷Drug War: Observations on Counternarcotics Aid to Colombia ([GAO/NSIAD-91-296](#), Sept. 30, 1991); The Drug War ([GAO/NSIAD-92-36](#), Oct. 21, 1991); The Drug War ([GAO/T-NSIAD-92-2](#), Oct. 23, 1991); and The Drug War ([GAO/T-NSIAD-94-53](#), Oct. 5, 1993).

²⁸Drug Control ([GAO/NSIAD-96-163](#), June 12, 1996).

constraints, Congress did not appropriate the level of funding agencies requested; in others, the agencies applied funding erratically, depending on other priorities. The reduction in funding has sometimes made it difficult to carry out U.S. operations and has also hampered source and transiting countries' operations.

For fiscal year 1998, the funding levels for counternarcotics activities were increased. For example, the State Department's international narcotics control and law enforcement programs were fully funded for fiscal year 1998 at \$210 million. However, without longer-term budget stability, it may be difficult for agencies to plan and implement programs that they believe will reduce drug production and drug trafficking.

Need for Long-Term Plans That Include Measurable Goals and Objectives

There is no easy remedy for overcoming all of the obstacles posed by drug-trafficking activities. International drug control efforts aimed at stopping the production of illegal drugs and drug-related activities in the source and transiting countries are only one element of an overall national drug control strategy. Alone, these efforts will not likely solve the U.S. drug problem. Overcoming many of the long-standing obstacles to reducing the supply and smuggling of illegal drugs requires a long-term commitment. In our February 1997 report, we pointed out that the United States can improve the effectiveness of planning and implementing its current international drug control efforts by developing a multiyear plan with measurable goals and objectives and a multiyear funding plan.²⁹

We have been reporting since 1988 that U.S. counternarcotics efforts have been hampered by the absence of a long-term plan outlining each agency's commitment to achieving the goals and objectives of the international drug control strategy. We pointed out that judging U.S. agencies' performance in reducing the supply of and interdicting illegal drugs is difficult because the agencies have not established meaningful measures to evaluate their contribution to achieving these goals. Also, agencies have not devised multiyear funding plans that could serve as a more consistent basis for policymakers and program managers to determine requirements for effectively implementing a plan and determining the best use of resources.

We have issued numerous reports citing the need for an overall implementation plan with specific goals and objectives and performance measures linked to them. In 1988, we reported that goals and objectives

²⁹Drug Control (GAO/NSIAD-97-75, Feb. 27, 1997).

had not been established in the drug-producing countries examined and, in 1993, we recommended that ONDCP develop performance measures to evaluate agencies' drug control efforts and incorporate the measures in the national drug control strategy.³⁰ Under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-62), federal agencies are required to develop strategic plans covering at least 5 years, with results-oriented performance measures.

In February 1998, ONDCP issued its annual National Drug Control Strategy. The strategy contains various performance measures to assess the strategy's effectiveness. In March 1998, ONDCP issued more specific and comprehensive performance measures for this strategy. In the near future, ONDCP plans to publish a classified annex to the strategy which, according to ONDCP officials, will be regional and, in some instances, country specific, and will be results oriented. While we have not reviewed the 1998 Strategy and its related performance measures in detail, we believe this parallels the recommendations we have made over the years to develop a long-term plan with meaningful performance measures. Additionally, the United States and Mexico issued a bi-national drug strategy in February 1998, but it did not contain critical performance measures and milestones for assessing performance. ONDCP officials told us that they plan to issue comprehensive performance measures for the bi-national strategy by the end of the year.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, this concludes our statement for the record. Thank you for permitting us to provide you with this information.

³⁰Drug Control: U.S. International Narcotics Control Activities ([GAO/NSIAD-88-114](#), Mar. 1, 1988) and Drug Control: Reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy ([GAO/GGD-93-144](#), Sept. 29, 1993).

Related GAO Products

Drug Control: Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia Face Continuing Challenges ([GAO/T-NSIAD-98-103](#), Feb. 26, 1998).

Drug Control: U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia Face Continuing Challenges ([GAO/NSIAD-98-60](#), Feb. 12, 1998).

Drug Control: Planned Actions Should Clarify Counterdrug Technology Assessment Center's Impact ([GAO/GGD-98-28](#), Feb. 3, 1998).

Drug Control: Update on U.S. Interdiction Efforts in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific ([GAO/NSIAD-98-30](#), Oct. 15, 1997).

Drug Control: Delays in Obtaining State Department Records Relating to Colombia ([GAO/T-NSIAD-97-202](#), July 9, 1997).

Drug Control: Reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy ([GAO/T-GGD-97-97](#), May 1, 1997).

Drug Control: Observations on Elements of the Federal Drug Control Strategy ([GAO/GGD-97-42](#), Mar. 14, 1997).

Drug Control: Long-standing Problems Hinder U.S. International Efforts ([GAO/NSIAD-97-75](#), Feb. 27, 1997).

Customs Service: Drug Interdiction Efforts ([GAO/GGD-96-189BR](#), Sept. 26, 1996).

Drug Control: U.S. Heroin Control Efforts in Southeast Asia ([GAO/T-NSIAD-96-240](#), Sept. 19, 1996).

Drug Control: Observations on Counternarcotics Activities in Mexico ([GAO/T-NSIAD-96-239](#), Sept. 12, 1996).

Terrorism and Drug Trafficking: Technologies for Detecting Explosives and Narcotics ([GAO/NSIAD/RCED-96-252](#), Sept. 4, 1996).

Drug Control: Counternarcotics Efforts in Mexico ([GAO/NSIAD-96-163](#), June 12, 1996).

Drug Control: Observations on Counternarcotics Efforts in Mexico ([GAO/T-NSIAD-96-182](#), June 12, 1996).

Drug Control: Observations on U.S. Interdiction in the Caribbean
(GAO/T-NSIAD-96-171, May 23, 1996).

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

Terrorism and Drug Trafficking: Threats and Roles of Explosives and Narcotics Detection Technology (GAO/NSIAD/RCED-96-76BR, Mar. 27, 1996).

Drug Control: U.S. Heroin Program Encounters Many Obstacles in Southeast Asia (GAO/NSIAD-96-83, Mar. 1, 1996).

Review of Assistance to Colombia (GAO/NSIAD-96-62R, Dec. 12, 1995).

Drug War: Observations on U.S. International Drug Control Efforts
(GAO/T-NSIAD-95-194, Aug. 1, 1995).

Drug War: Observations on the U.S. International Drug Control Strategy
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