United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman, Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate

December 2000

DRUG CONTROL

International Counterdrug Sites Being Developed

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

GAO-01-63BR

Contents

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

December 28, 2000

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman, Caucus on International Narcotics Control
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

From the 1980s until 1999, Howard Air Force Base in Panama was the main location from which the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Customs Service conducted counterdrug operations in South America, the Caribbean, and the Eastern Pacific. However, the United States ceased counterdrug operations from Howard on May 1, 1999.[1] To permit the United States to continue to mount counterdrug operations close to the drug producing or source zones and illicit drug transshipment or transit zones, the U.S. Southern Command, which is responsible for counterdrug operations within the region, sought usable airfields. The United States has secured 10-year agreements for the use of four airfields for counterdrug activities. However, each airfield requires some construction to support a designated mix of aircraft. Since the spring of 1999, the Defense Department and the U.S. Customs Service have been conducting limited counterdrug operations from airfields at Manta, Ecuador; and from Aruba and Curacao in the Netherlands Antilles;[2] and since August 2000 from San Salvador, El Salvador.

You expressed concern over the costs of developing and operating the four sites and whether these “forward operating locations” would meet the needs of the interagency users, principally DOD and the U.S. Customs Service. As requested, on July 20, 2000, we briefed your staff on (1) the process the United States used to select the sites, (2) the estimated costs to develop and maintain the sites, and (3) issues that might affect operational capabilities at the sites. This report updates information provided in that briefing.

[1]Under the Panama Canal Treaty, the United States agreed to leave the base at the end of 1999.

[2]Aruba is a protectorate of the Netherlands; Curacao is a possession.

Results in Brief

The United States used a two-track process to select the four forward operating locations. First, U.S. embassies canvassed regional governments' willingness to host U.S. military counterdrug operations. Second, Defense Department and U.S. Customs Service personnel assessed airfields within the region to determine whether they met operational requirements by providing proximity to the source and transit zones and force protection. Defense and Customs users of the sites indicated that with enhancements, the sites would be adequate to meet their operational requirements. They said the sites collectively would

- accommodate the mix of interagency aircraft required to perform counterdrug missions;
- provide greater geographic coverage of the Eastern Pacific transit zone and deeper access into the source zone than was possible from Howard Air Force Base; and
- provide more flexibility than Howard did to vary flight operations, thus complicating traffickers' attempts to monitor U.S. aircraft operations.

As of July 2000, DOD estimated the total cost of developing the four airfields, which is driven by the anticipated aircraft mix, would be about $136.6 million. Approximately $61.3 million is required to enhance the Manta, Ecuador, site, primarily to construct airfields, taxiways, and parking aprons and housing to support the U.S. Air Force's E-3 Airborne Early Warning System aircraft and its crews and other detection and monitoring assets. DOD estimated that about $63.4 million would be needed for enhancements to runways and aircraft parking areas at the international airports in Aruba, Curacao, and San Salvador. In addition, the Air Force estimated operations and maintenance costs[3] for Aruba/Curacao and Manta to be about $22.9 million through 2001 and anticipated that this cost would increase to an average of $32.3 million annually once the sites became fully operational in late 2002. Navy estimates for these costs at San Salvador, which will be fully operational in late 2003, were about $3.6 million through 2001 and would decline to about $2.8 million annually thereafter.

The level of operations at the sites could be affected by the unavailability of U.S. aircraft to conduct counterdrug operations. In December 1999, we

[3]The costs of operating and maintaining the sites, i.e., utilities, airfield fuels, and ground maintenance, are borne by DOD.

reported that between 1992 and 1999, DOD allocated fewer aircraft to the counterdrug mission, particularly in the high priority source zone. Since then, some key aircraft have continued to be unavailable.[4] For example, only one of the two required E-3 aircraft has been in the region since the beginning of 1999, and DOD has not been able to provide the required zone coverage. In addition, an ongoing DOD and Customs assessment of aircraft used to track suspect traffickers could affect the asset mix at Aruba and Curacao as well as construction costs. Another unresolved issue is the lack of interagency agreement over who will pay to ship the equipment and spare parts necessary to maintain operations at Manta. The success of counterdrug operations mounted from the forward operating locations also partially depends on U.S. assistance provided to foreign governments for interdicting or apprehending traffickers over their territory.[5] To assist Colombia and Peru in the short term, the State Department began, in fiscal year 1999, a $29.6-million effort to upgrade these counties' A-37 aircraft. However, Defense and State Department officials are concerned that the aging aircraft will likely be operable for only 4 to 6 more years even with these upgrades, and no long-term effort is under way to replace the aircraft. This could affect the level of interdiction in both countries. Finally, U.S. operations can also be adversely affected if U.S. aircraft cannot fly over countries in transit or in pursuit of traffickers.

Agency Comments

We obtained written comments on a draft of this report from the Department of Defense (see app. III). DOD concurred with the report and provided technical comments that we incorporated as appropriate.

Scope and Methodology

To determine how the United States selected sites, we met with officials at the Departments of State and Defense, the U.S. Customs Service, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, and the Joint Interagency Task Force–East. We examined these agencies' documents outlining operational requirements for potential locations and site selection criteria. We also reviewed official site surveys and messages regarding the identification of potential host nations and possible sites from the Department of State, U.S. embassies in the region, the Department

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

[5] Interdiction is the arrest of personnel and seizure of equipment or illegal drugs.

of Defense, the U.S. Southern Command, and the U.S. Customs Service. Further, we reviewed and analyzed operational requirement documents and flight data and spoke with aircraft operators and interagency members of the Office of the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, which coordinates counterdrug asset requirements, about the capabilities of the selected sites.

To identify the cost of developing and maintaining the forward operating locations, we analyzed cost estimates generated by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the U.S. Southern Command, and the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy—the two DOD components responsible for operating and maintaining the sites. We also met with Air Force officials to discuss the operations and maintenance functions they are supporting at Aruba, Curacao, and Manta.

To determine issues that might affect operational capabilities at the sites, we spoke with officials at the Departments of State and Defense. We obtained and analyzed documentation on U.S. counterdrug aircraft flight hours beginning on May 1, 1999. We used this date because historical flight hour data was not available prior to Howard's closure. We also discussed logistics issues affecting aircraft availability and plans to provide and upgrade foreign governments' interdiction aircraft with U.S. Customs Service, Defense, and State Department officials.

We conducted our review from May through October 2000 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this report to appropriate congressional committees and to the Honorable William S. Cohen, the Secretary of Defense; the Honorable Madeline Albright, the Secretary of State; the Honorable Lawrence H. Summers, the Secretary of the Treasury; the Honorable Raymond W. Kelly, Commissioner, U.S. Customs Service; and the Honorable Barry R. McCaffrey, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy. We will send copies to other interested parties upon request.

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

Sincerely yours,

Jess T. Ford, Director
International Affairs and Trade

Background

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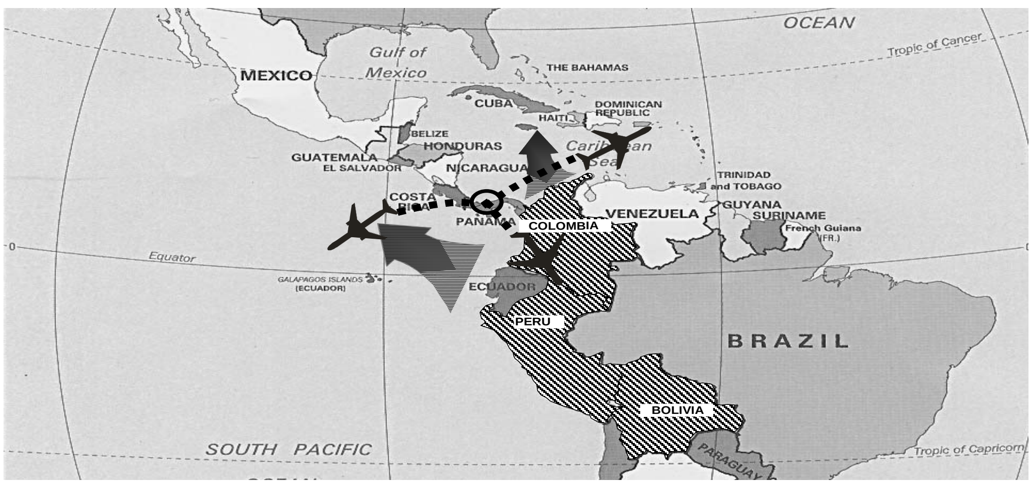
Howard's Proximity to Key Trafficking Zones



Howard Air Force Base, Panama

Source Zone Nations

Principal Trafficking Routes

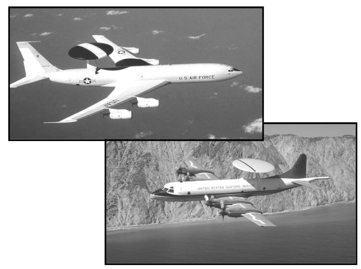
Before the closure of Howard Air Force Base in December 1999, the U.S. government had used the secure base to provide unified logistical support for counterdrug operations and other missions covering a wide geographic area. From the centrally located base, the Department of Defense (DOD); the U.S. Customs Service; and the U.S. Coast Guard, directed by the Joint Interagency Task Force,[1] operated airborne early warning, marine patrol, and tracker aircraft in support of U.S. counterdrug objectives. These aircraft patrolled the drug trafficking routes within the South American source zone and Caribbean and Eastern Pacific transit zones.

Prior to the closure of the airfield at Howard Air Force Base, DOD moved some U.S. aircraft to the United States. Because these locations were far from the source and transit zones, these aircraft spent more time transiting to the zones and less time executing their monitoring mission. For example, according to DOD officials, the Air Force Airborne Early Warning and Control System E-3 aircraft operating from the United States could fly only about half of the required hours over the transit zone and provide very limited source zone coverage. To counter the loss in capability, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, which provides policy and guidance for international and domestic counterdrug efforts, instructed DOD to establish a post-Panama presence in the region. After an initial search, the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Southern Command concluded that no single location could support the aircraft used in the counterdrug mission.

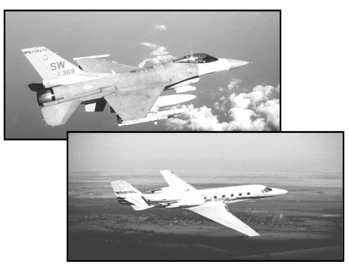
[1]The Joint Interagency Task Force-East tasks aerial and maritime assets in counterdrug operations throughout the Caribbean and Central and South American Regions.

Process for Tacking and Interdicting Drug Traffickers

1. Ground-based radar detect suspected trafficker



2. Early warning aircraft, such as the U.S. Air Force E-3 and the U.S. Customs P-3B, track the target with radar



3. Tracker aircraft, such as the Air Force F-16 and the Customs Citation, visually identify and track the target

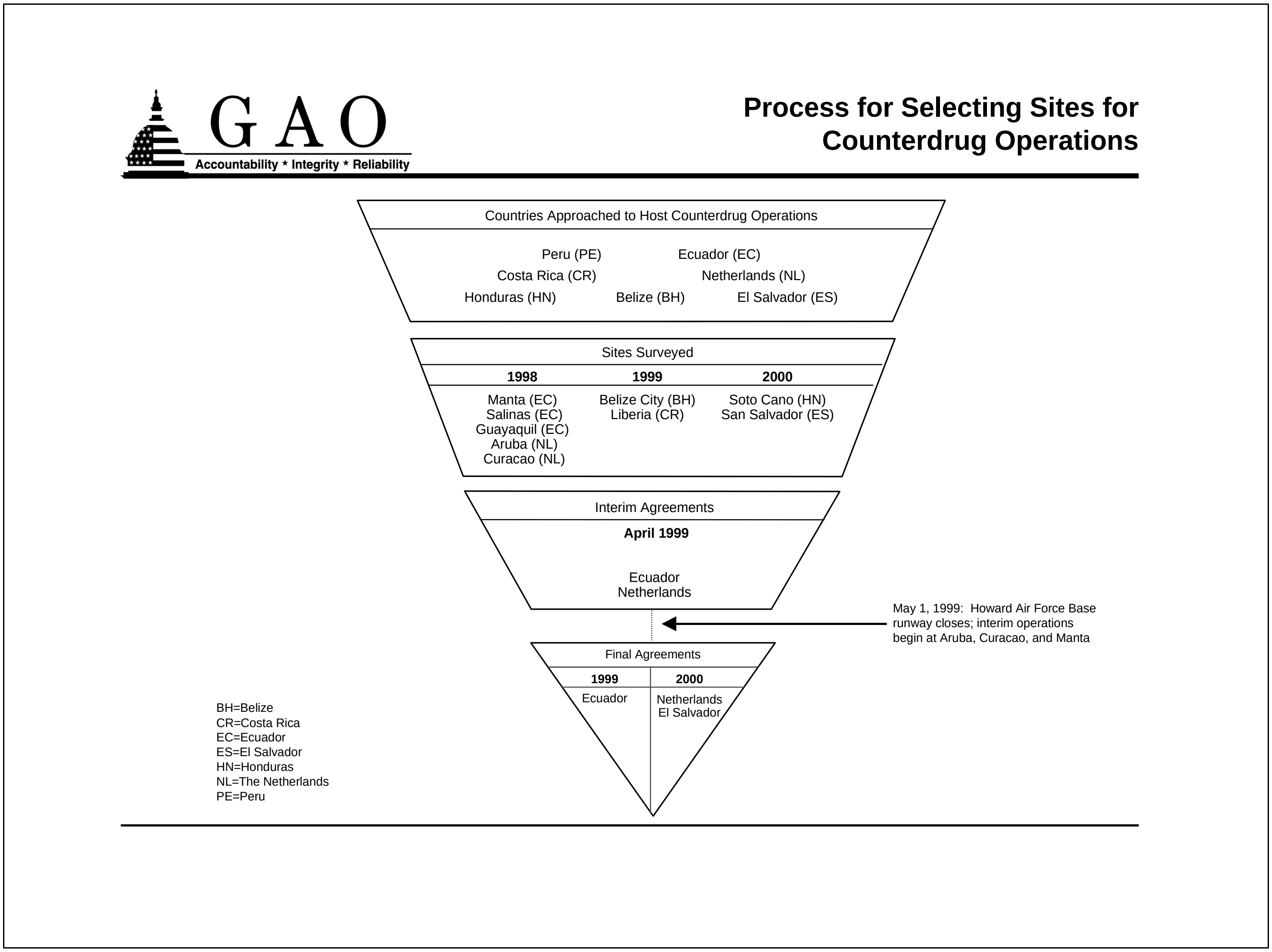
4. Foreign government forces interdict trafficker

In a multiphase process, U.S. aircraft detect and monitor suspected drug traffickers operating over land and sea. These detection and monitoring efforts help foreign authorities interdict or apprehend traffickers on or over their land. To illustrate, the U.S. Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar[2] or other ground-based radar first detects small, low-flying aircraft on a known trafficking route. Using this data and intelligence information, the Joint Interagency Task Force–East in Key West, Florida, directs U.S. aircraft to a suspect's approximate location.

Second, aircraft, such as the U.S. Customs P-3 or a U.S. Air Force E-3, use their sophisticated radar systems to track the suspect. These aircraft make routine short-term deployments from either the United States or regional sites to support their operations. Third, using information supplied by these airborne early warning aircraft, the Task Force directs a U.S. tracker aircraft, such as a U.S. Air Force Reserve F-16 or a U.S. Customs Citation, to approach the suspect aircraft to make a visual identification of it. Last, U.S. aircraft provide location and identification information to foreign government law enforcement officials, who are responsible for intercepting the aircraft. Participating nation liaison officers, called host nation riders, travel on board U.S. airborne detection, monitoring, and tracking aircraft to facilitate interdiction efforts by communicating information to their defense agencies on the ground. Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador currently participate in this program.

[2]Located in the United States and Puerto Rico, these radar systems continually scan source and transit zones for potential drug traffickers.

Selecting Sites That Meet Operational Requirements



Note: Ratification of the agreement by the Parliament of the Netherlands expected in early 2001.

By July 1998, the United States recognized that U.S. access to Howard Air Force Base would not be extended beyond December 31, 1999. By September 1998, DOD had developed basic site selection criteria and had begun the search for new operating locations. Key criteria were (1) proximity to the source and transit zones, (2) protection of U.S. personnel and equipment, and (3) adequate infrastructure to minimize construction costs.

The United States used a two-track process to identify suitable airfields and nations willing to host U.S. operations. DOD and U.S. Customs Service officials surveyed several sites in the Caribbean and South America between September and December 1998. DOD officials also surveyed sites in Central America in 1999. Concurrently, the State Department queried regional nations on their willingness to allow the United States to conduct counterdrug missions from their territories. The United States sought to secure agreements before the closure of the Howard Air Force Base runway on May 1, 1999.

The operational limitations of potential sites, the difficulty protecting U.S. forces, and the reluctance of some nations to have U.S. military aircraft at their airports narrowed DOD's choices. DOD ultimately selected Manta, Ecuador, and Aruba and Curacao in the Netherlands Antilles and continued to search for a Central American site. By April 1999, the United States had signed interim operating agreements on the use of the sites with the governments of Ecuador and the Netherlands. These agreements permitted shared use of the international airports in Aruba and Curacao and an air force base in Manta and allowed the United States to continue limited counterdrug operations from these three locations after ceasing operations at Howard Air Force Base.

By November 1999, the United States finalized a long-term agreement with Ecuador for the use of Manta, and in early March 2000, the United States concluded long-term agreements for the use of the Aruba and Curacao sites. State Department officials expect ratification of the agreement by the Parliament of the Netherlands in early 2001. Also, by late March 2000, the United States had signed a long-term agreement with El Salvador for use of the San Salvador international airport. DOD officials said that this site located northwest of Panama extends the geographic coverage of the Eastern Pacific transit zone beyond that available from Howard Air Force Base.

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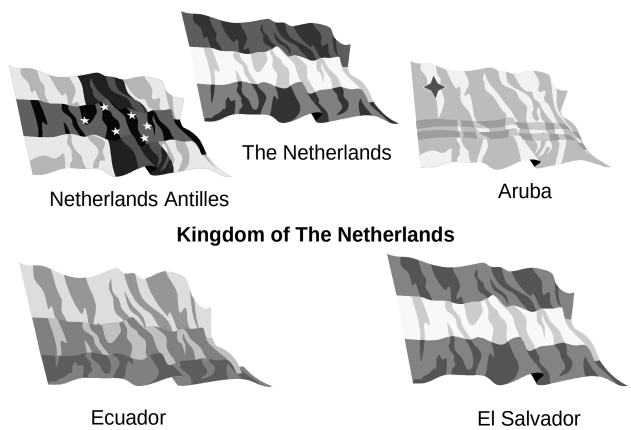
Agreements Allow Unrestricted Use for Counterdrug Operations Only



- United States may conduct only counterdrug detection, tracking, and monitoring operations
- Following consultation, facilities and U.S.-funded improvements revert to host nations
- Contracts are for 10-year duration with renewable 5-year terms
- Access is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Host nations provide perimeter security

The agreements with the governments of Ecuador, El Salvador, and the Netherlands allow the United States unrestricted airfield access solely to conduct U.S. counterdrug detection and monitoring operations. The United States does not own or rent any facilities but may receive the use of any land it needs to establish the sites. After the agreements' expiration and with mutual agreement of the parties, facilities built by the United States for its use during the period of the agreement will be transferred to the other nations' governments. The airfields and national airspace remain under the sovereign control of the governments.

Each agreement is for a 10-year period, which State and Defense officials told us is the minimum period needed to justify the capital investment in these facilities. After the initial 10-year period, either party may terminate the agreement with 1 year's notice. However, if both parties agree, the agreements may be renewed for 5-year periods.

Under the agreements, host nation authorities have overall responsibility for air traffic control and the physical security of the airfield. Each of the locations requires some enhancements, and the agreements permit the United States to construct the necessary facilities. The United States will also maintain these facilities and provide physical security for its aircraft. The agreements also state that the United States will pay reasonable charges for services such as utilities and fire protection.

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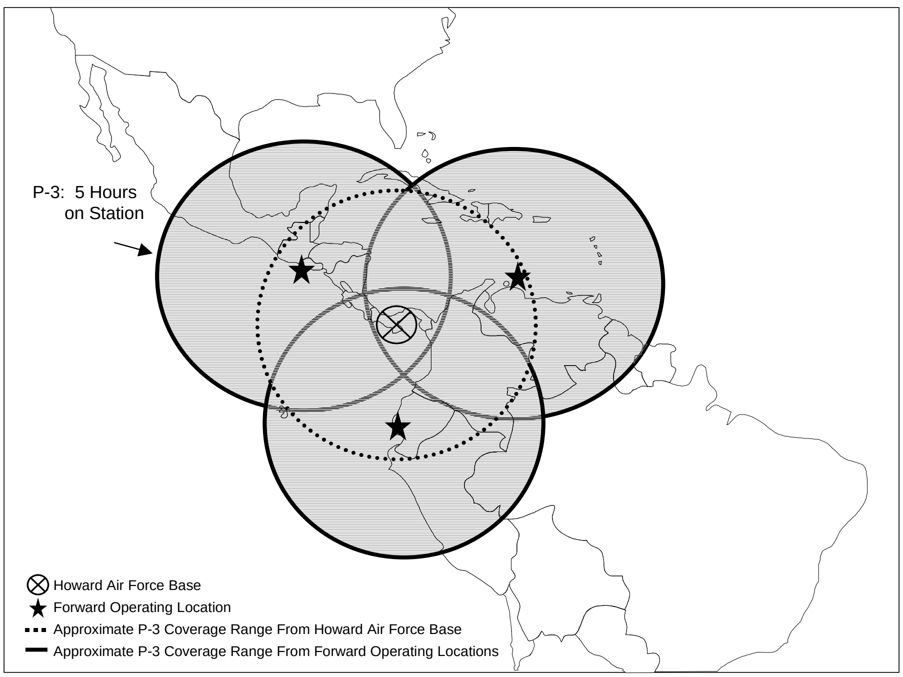
Comparative Coverage From Howard and Forward Operating Locations



Together, the four sites provide greater geographic coverage than did Howard Air Force Base, according to DOD officials. In particular, they provide deeper source zone coverage and extend coverage farther into the increasingly trafficked Eastern Pacific because of their proximity to the targeted zones. The actual coverage provided will depend upon the type of aircraft and its ability to fly over foreign territories when tracking or pursuing suspect traffickers. (See app. II for information on U.S. regional overflight agreements.) DOD officials said that with multiple sites, flight operations could be varied, thus complicating traffickers' attempts to monitor U.S. aircraft operations.

Aruba and Curacao, situated in the Caribbean Sea just off the South American coast, can support both DOD and U.S. Customs Service source zone operations. DOD officials also noted that the sites' strategic locations allow U.S. aircraft to detect traffickers flying from the northern coast of Colombia over the Caribbean Sea. Manta, located about 500 miles from the Southeastern Colombian source zone, permits coverage of this area while also being closer than Howard Air Force Base to source zones in Peru and Bolivia. DOD officials said that the advantage of the San Salvador site is that it extends the ability to support aerial and marine detection of maritime traffickers in the Eastern Pacific.

Costs to Develop and Maintain Forward Operating Locations

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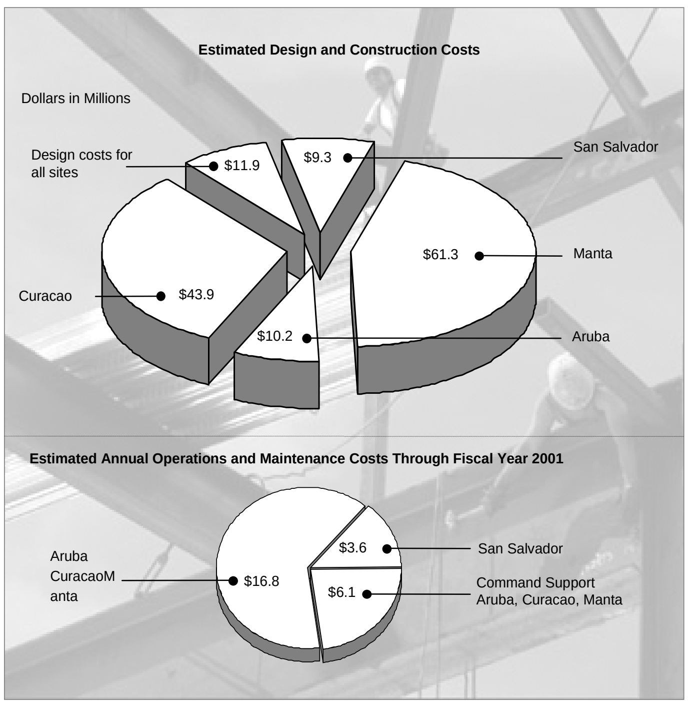
Construction and Operations and Maintenance Costs



As of July 2000, DOD estimates that it will cost a total of about $136.6 million to design and complete construction. When fully operational between late 2002 and late 2003, the four sites will be able to accommodate a planned mix of aircraft. As the lead U.S. agency, DOD is responsible for upgrading and building facilities at the sites to meet interagency requirements. Estimates for operating and maintaining the sites vary by location.

- Manta will require the most construction, which DOD estimates will total about $61.3 million. The costs are largely driven by the need to strengthen the runway and widen the taxiway and build a parking area to accommodate the U.S. Air Force E-3 aircraft and its accompanying refueling tanker. Other aircraft such as P-3s and C-130s will also use the site.
- Curacao and Aruba construction costs are estimated at about $43.9 million and $10.2 million, respectively. The Curacao construction will include a taxiway, aircraft parking spaces, and a hangar, also partially in support of the E-3 as well as other aircraft. Aruba, which will support fewer and smaller aircraft, will require aircraft parking space and small operations and maintenance facilities.
- The San Salvador site will require aircraft parking space, an operations center, and other facilities that DOD estimates will cost about $9.3 million.

Operating and maintenance costs for Aruba, Curacao, and Manta are estimated to be about $22.9 million through fiscal year 2001, including $6.1 million for command support. The funds will be used to provide support such as communications, airfield management, maintenance, and supplies. DOD officials said that these costs are likely to increase to about $32.3 million annually, as the sites become fully operational. For the San Salvador site, annual operating and maintenance costs are estimated to be about $3.6 million in 2001 and to decrease to about $2.8 million annually in later years.

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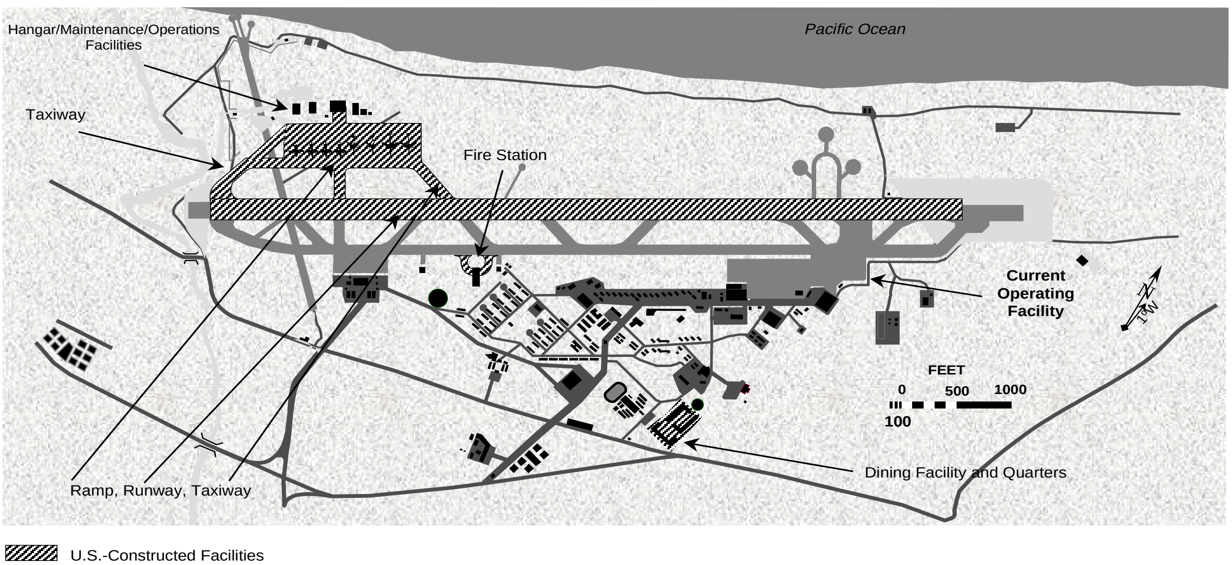
Manta: Primary Site for Staging Source Zone Operations



Manta, Ecuador, will serve as the primary site for staging operations in the source zone, which, since 1993, has been the highest U.S. priority for counterdrug operations. Manta requires the most construction of all the sites because the runway and taxiway do not meet U.S. standards for large aircraft. When runway construction is completed, currently estimated to be by September 2001, the site will accommodate the large U.S. Air Force E-3 airborne early warning aircraft and its accompanying KC-135 aerial refueling aircraft. When fully operational in about mid-2002, the site is to accommodate four large and seven medium aircraft, such as the U.S. Navy's or Customs Service's P-3 aircraft. On a periodic basis since April 1999, one U.S. Navy P-3 has flown from Manta; the U.S. Customs Service began periodic, 7-day deployments of P-3 aircraft in June 2000.

Of the estimated total cost for construction at Manta ($61.3 million), 73 percent, or $44.4 million, is directly attributable to construction needed to support the E-3 aircraft, according to DOD officials. Runway and taxiway construction are estimated to cost $38.6 million. The current runway's strength will not support the E-3 aircraft, and the taxiways are not wide enough for safe movement on them. Other construction estimates are for lodging and dining facilities ($6.3 million), hangar facilities ($6.7 million), a maintenance facility ($4.9 million), a squadron operations facility ($2.6 million), and a fire/rescue station ($2.2 million).[1]

The U.S. Air Force will manage base support services such as airfield management, security, communications, and food services. Base operating costs are estimated to total about $7.4 million in fiscal year 2001 but will likely rise once the construction is completed and Manta becomes fully operational. Air Force officials told us that they expect Manta will require a permanent staff of eight persons that will be augmented by contractor support staff.

[1]Personnel under contract with DOD will operate the fire station.

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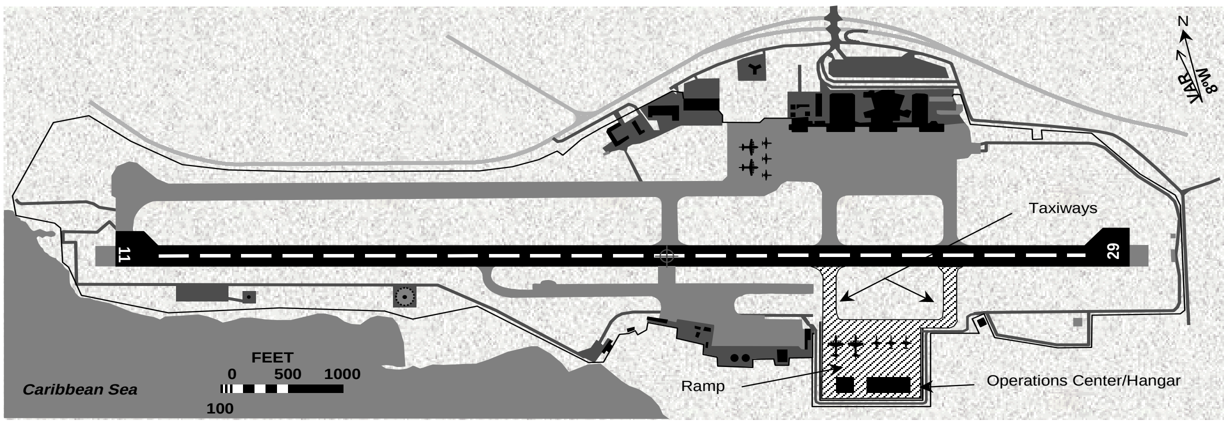
Aruba: Supporting U.S. Customs Service Operations



U.S.-Constructed Facilities

The forward operating location at Aruba will support the U.S. Customs Service's operations in the South American source zone and the Caribbean transit zone. According to officials at the U.S. Southern Command, Aruba can accommodate two medium-sized P-3 aircraft and three small-sized tracker aircraft when fully operational in late 2002. U.S. Customs officials said that the P-3 aircraft would conduct airborne early warning and tracking operations mainly in the source zone. At least one tracker aircraft will be on alert at all times to track potential traffickers over the Caribbean Sea. Customs aircraft have been operating from this site since April 28, 1999, and share parking spaces and other facilities with commercial aircraft.

Of the estimated $10.2 million total construction costs, DOD will use about $8.8 million to construct a new ramp, taxiway, and rinse facility for the use of U.S. Customs aircraft. The Department will also spend about $1.5 million to construct a new hangar and squadron operations facility. These costs could increase if Customs assumes a larger role in tracking traffickers and requires additional hangar and operations space. DOD and Customs will not need lodging facilities because Aruba has an ample supply of hotels.

The Air Force estimates that it will spend about $1.9 million in fiscal year 2001 for base operations. The Air Force expects to maintain a permanent staff of about three personnel to operate and maintain the site.

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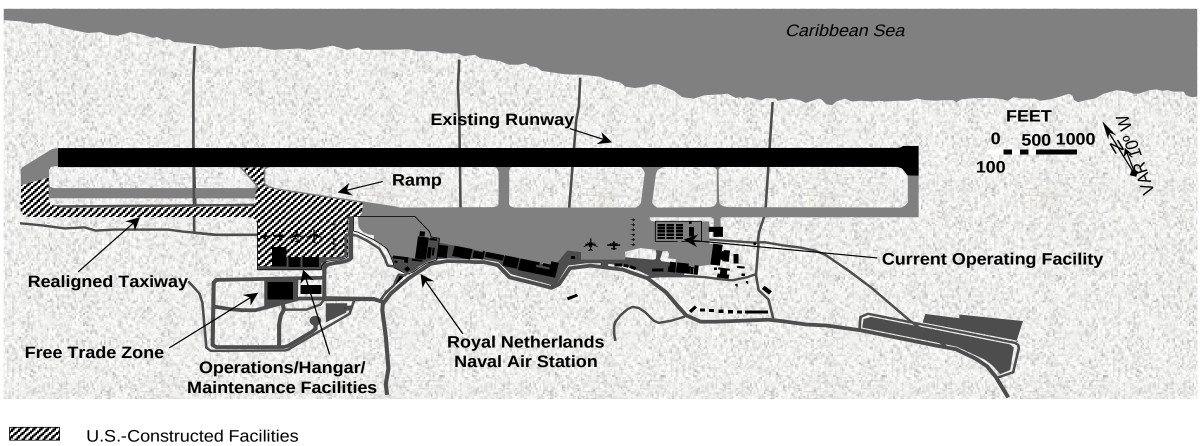
Curacao: Supporting DOD Operations



The forward operating location at Curacao will host a range of DOD aircraft supporting both source and transit zone operations. The facility will accommodate four to six F-16s used in the transit zone: one to two Navy P-3s, one Navy E-2, and one Air Force E-3 airborne early warning aircraft for detection and monitoring in the source and transit zones and two C-130-type planes. DOD has operated aircraft from this site since May 1, 1999.

Initially, DOD planned to construct the U.S. facilities at the eastern end of the airport. However, according to a DOD official, this construction would have required extending electric and utility lines. DOD ultimately decided to construct the facilities at the western end near the Royal Dutch Naval Air Station. The Dutch favored the move since they use similar aircraft to conduct counterdrug operations and can share facilities if necessary. In addition, DOD can benefit from the security provided by Royal Dutch forces and minimize the overall visibility of U.S. personnel. The official said that DOD had not studied the costs of making the change but did not anticipate that the move would increase overall costs.

DOD estimates it will spend about $43.9 million to construct new facilities and upgrade existing ones. Of the total costs, about $29.5 million will be used to construct new parking spaces and a taxiway that will connect the aircraft parking area to the runway. An additional $14.4 million will be used to construct an operations center and hanger and maintenance facilities.

The Air Force estimates that operating costs will average about $7.5 million through fiscal year 2001. A permanent presence of six personnel will provide support services such as site maintenance, communications, and resupply.

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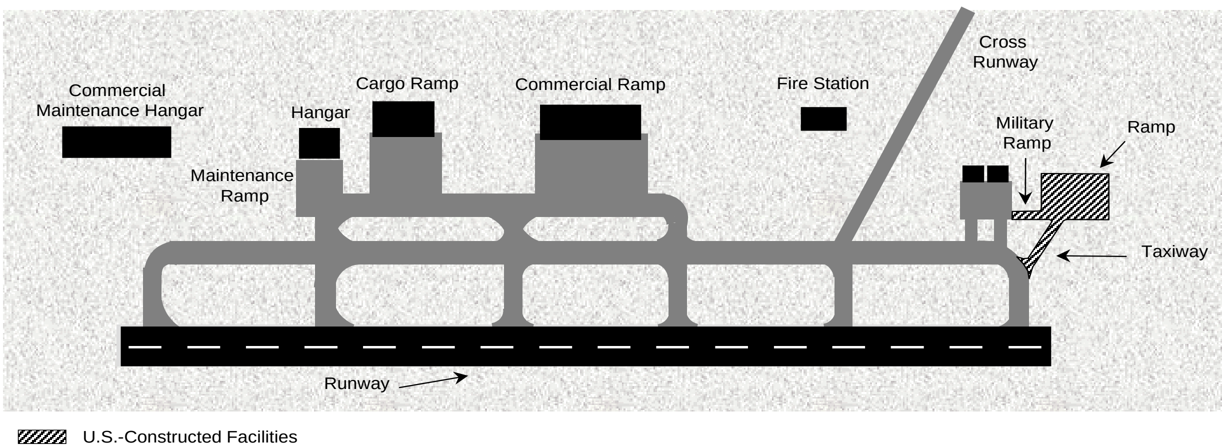
San Salvador: Supporting U. S. Navy Maritime Operations



From the San Salvador, El Salvador, forward operating location, U.S. Navy aircraft will conduct maritime patrol operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. According to DOD officials, traffickers are increasingly using the Eastern Pacific Ocean to move drugs toward the United States. The Defense Department plans to build this site to host four medium-sized DOD and Customs aircraft. DOD projects that the construction in San Salvador, the last of the locations to be selected, will begin in 2002 and be completed by late 2003. The Navy began conducting limited operations from this site in August 2000. The site will be fully operational upon completion of ramp and taxiway construction.

DOD plans to spend about $9.3 million on construction. The construction of new parking spaces and a taxiway is estimated to cost about $5 million. The remaining amount will be used for new maintenance and squadron operations facilities and other site improvements.

The San Salvador international airport includes both a commercial terminal and an adjacent, secure Salvadoran air force base. The new U.S. facility will be located on this military facility. This facility will offer security for U.S. personnel and equipment. However, Salvadoran munitions previously housed in a bunker located near the intended U.S. site have been moved to a temporary location to allow for safe U.S. operations. A permanent bunker will be constructed at U.S. expense. A DOD official estimated that this construction could cost an additional $1.2 million.

The U.S. Navy expects annual base operating costs to be about $3.6 million in fiscal year 2001 and drop to about $2.7 million annually thereafter. The Navy estimates the permanent U.S. presence to be about eight support personnel.

Issues Affecting Operational Capabilities

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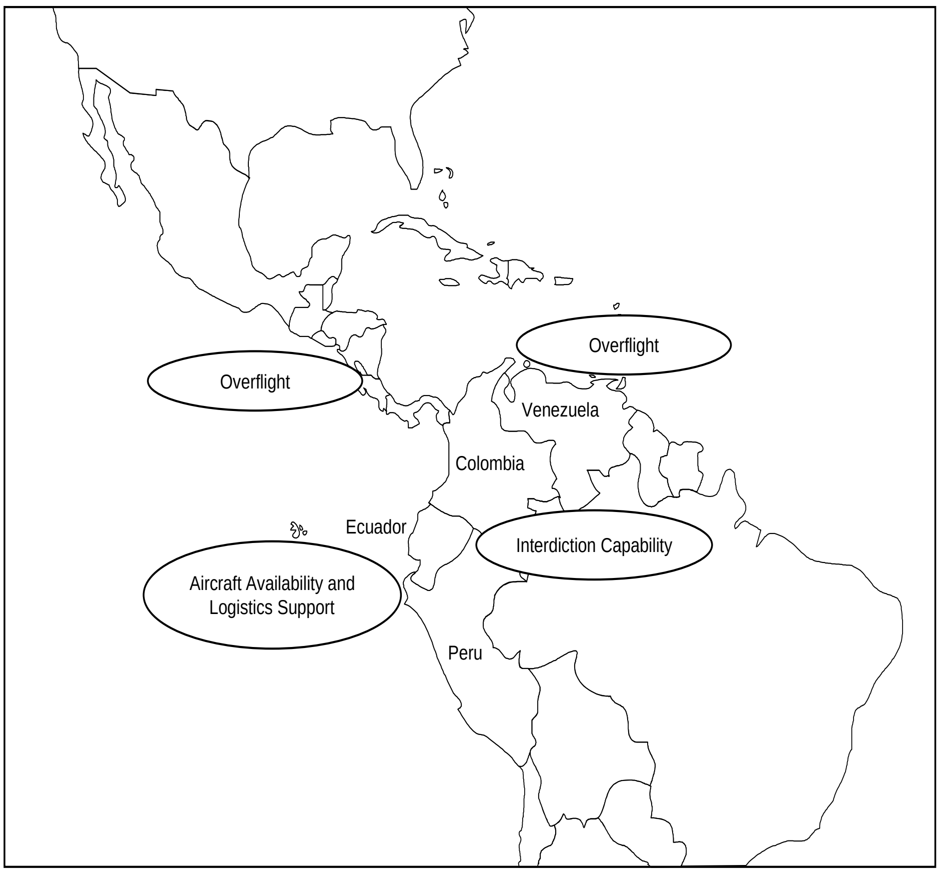
Certain Issues May Limit the Counterdrug Mission



The U.S. counterdrug mission supported by the forward operating locations may be affected by the (1) availability of U.S. aircraft, (2) U.S. efforts to equip foreign forces responsible for interdicting traffickers within their territories, and (3) standing overflight authority in foreign airspace for U.S. aircraft supporting counterdrug operations.

DOD has allocated fewer aircraft to the counterdrug mission since 1992 in part due to DOD-wide force reductions, which affected its ability to fly the required number of hours over the trafficking zones.[1] For example, in 1999, we reported that between fiscal year 1998 and 1999, DOD's detection and monitoring flight hours over the high-priority source zone countries of Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru decreased by 48 percent.[2] Customs, which has provided primary early warning and tracking coverage of the source zone since April 1999, has partially offset this decrease and plans to add six more planes to its inventory by October 2001. While constructing the Manta site to support the required two Air Force E-3 aircraft, DOD has been able to provide only one E-3 aircraft in nearly 2 years due to higher priority operations. Between May and December 1999, the only available E-3 aircraft operated primarily in the lower priority transit zone. This aircraft has not been able to provide its required flight hours.[3] During the period, it conducted very few sorties in the source zone but it has provided about 39 hours of coverage per month since January 2000. (See app. I for flight hour information.) In addition, a current DOD assessment of the aircraft being used to track suspect traffickers could affect the asset mix planned for some of the locations.

Two aspects of logistics support affect aircraft availability—timely resupply of the remote Manta site and delivery costs for non-DOD parts. On its first deployment to Manta in June 2000, for example, U.S. Customs aircraft could not operate for several days because the crew was awaiting delivery of replacement propeller parts. Ultimately, DOD delivered the parts; however, the agencies have not resolved who is responsible for the $71,215 cost of the delivery. The logistics issue remains to be resolved, and neither agency has budgeted for Customs logistics support in its fiscal year 2001 budget.

[1]The military services provide required equipment from their existing inventories.

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

[3]The required number of flight hours spent over the zones of interest is classified.

The success of counterdrug operations mounted from the forward operating locations depends in part on the U.S.-provided assistance that enables foreign governments to interdict traffickers over their territories.[4] The United States, for example, provides foreign forces with equipment and spare parts, largely under an excess equipment program so that they can interdict suspect traffickers.[5] To assist Colombia and Peru in the short term, the State Department began, in fiscal year 1999, a $29.6-million effort to upgrade its A-37 aircraft. However, Defense and State Department officials are concerned that the aging aircraft will likely be operable for only 4 to 6 more years, even with these upgrades, and no long-term effort is underway to replace the aircraft.

The United States has overflight and pursuit agreements with many of the countries in the counterdrug region. However, U.S. operations can be adversely affected if U.S. aircraft cannot fly over countries in transit to their search areas or in pursuit of traffickers. For example, the lack of an overflight agreement with Venezuela increases the transit time for U.S. aircraft flying from Aruba and Curacao to the source region. Appendix II provides information on countries overflight provisions.

[4]DOD personnel are prohibited from interdicting suspect aircraft over foreign territory and must cooperate with foreign government forces to execute an interdiction.

[5]Section 506 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (22U.S.C. 2318), authorizes the President to provide up to $150 million per fiscal year, subject to limitations, in articles and services from any U.S. agency, and military education and training to foreign countries for certain purposes, including international narcotics control assistance, if it is in the national interest of the United States to do so.

U.S. Operations in the Source and Transit Zones (May 1, 1999, Through September 30, 2000)

Type of aircraft	Average sorties per month	Average monitoring hours per month
Source Zone		
U.S. Air Force E-3[a]	3	20
U.S. Customs Service P-3B	8	50
U.S. Customs Service P-3A	6	34
U.S. Navy P-3CDU	10	53
Transit Zone		
U.S. Air Force E-3	8	53
U.S. Customs Service P-3B	19	114
U.S. Customs Service P-3A	8	47
U.S. Navy P-3CDU	4	18
U.S. Navy P-3C	61	288
U.S. Navy E-2C	66	232

[a]From January 2000 through September 2000, the E-3 conducted, on average, six source zone sorties per month, which totaled an average of 39 monitoring hours per month.

Note: Data prior to May 1999 was not available. The aircraft listed above are the primary detection and monitoring types operating from forward operating locations, but the data also includes operations from other sites. Other U.S. aircraft not listed also operate in the sources and transit zones.

Source: GAO analysis of Joint Interagency Task Force–East data.

U.S. Overflight Arrangements With Selected Countries

Country	Overflight allowed[a]	Pursuit allowed[b]	Comments
Antigua and Barbuda	Yes	Yes	
Bahamas	Yes	Yes	
Barbados	Yes	Yes	
Belize	Yes	Yes	
Colombia	Yes	Yes	
Costa Rica	No	Yes	
Cuba	No	No	
Dominica	No	Yes	
Dominican Republic	Yes	Yes	
Ecuador	Yes	Yes	Overflight permitted as part of the forward operating agreement
El Salvador	Yes	Yes	Overflight permitted as part of the forward operating agreement
French West Indies	No	No	
Grenada	Yes	Yes	
Guatemala	No	No	
Haiti	Yes	Yes	
Honduras	Yes	Yes	
Jamaica	Yes	Yes	
Mexico	Yes	Yes	
Netherlands Antilles	Yes	Yes	Overflight permitted as part of the forward operating agreement
Nicaragua	No	No	Agreement pending
Panama	Yes	Yes	On a case by case basis
Peru	Yes	Yes	On a case by case basis
St. Kitts and Nevis	Yes	Yes	
St. Lucia	Yes	Yes	
St. Vincent Grenadines	Yes	Yes	
Suriname	Yes	Yes	
Trinidad and Tobago	Yes	Yes	
Turks and Caicos	No	No	
Venezuela	No	No	With preflight plan, U.S. Customs aircraft recently flew over Venezuelan air space

[a]Overflight arrangements allow U.S. law enforcement assets to fly in foreign airspace in support of counterdrug operations.

[b]Pursuit arrangements allow U.S. law enforcement assets to pursue suspect vessels or aircraft in foreign waters or airspace.

Note: This table represents only a portion of counterdrug-related arrangements covered in U.S. bilateral agreements. Ship boarding and port access are examples of other agreed-upon arrangements.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard and the Joint Interagency Task Force-East.

Comments From the Department of Defense

OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COORDINATOR
FOR DRUG ENFORCEMENT POLICY AND SUPPORT

1510 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON DC 20301-1510

November 30, 2000

Mr. Jess T. Ford
Associate Director, International Relations and Trade Issues
National Security and International Affairs Division
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Ford:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, 'DRUG CONTROL: International Counterdrug Sites Being Developed,' dated November 13, 2000 (GAO Code 711565 previously 711523/OSD Case 3007). The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report, and concurs with the draft report subject to the enclosed list of minor comments.

Sincerely,

Ana Maria Salazar
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for
Drug Enforcement Policy and Support

Enclosure:
As stated

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Lawrence L. Suda (202) 512-5380

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