COUNTERNARCOTICS
Overview of U.S. Efforts in the Western Hemisphere

Why GAO Did This Study
Western Hemisphere nations such as Mexico and Colombia are major sources of illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana. Precursor chemicals used in the production of illicit fentanyl and other dangerous synthetic drugs often originate in China but typically enter the United States through Canada and Mexico. U.S. agencies implementing the National Drug Control Strategy conduct several activities to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs and dismantle the organizations that control them (see fig.). In December 2016, Congress established the Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission to, among other things, evaluate the U.S.-funded counternarcotics programs in the Western Hemisphere.

In this context, GAO was asked to review key issues related to U.S. counternarcotics efforts in the Western Hemisphere. This report examines (1) U.S. agencies’ spending for counternarcotics efforts in the Western Hemisphere during fiscal years 2010-2015, the most recent data available; (2) how agencies are gathering and sharing best practices and lessons learned from their counternarcotics efforts domestically and internationally; and (3) mechanisms U.S. agencies have used to address changing drug threats. GAO analyzed agencies’ data and documents, interviewed agency officials, and conducted fieldwork at the U.S. Southern Command and Joint Interagency Task Force South in Florida.

GAO is not making any recommendations in this report. Several agencies provided technical comments on a draft of this report which we incorporated as appropriate.

What GAO Found
U.S. agencies implementing the National Drug Control Strategy identified billions in spending for Western Hemisphere counternarcotics efforts in fiscal years 2010 through 2015. Agencies that track their counternarcotics spending regionally—the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development—reported spending nearly $5 billion for such activities in the region during this period. Agencies that do not track counternarcotics spending regionally—DHS’s Customs and Border Protection and Coast Guard; and the Department of Justice’s Drug Enforcement Administration and Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces—reported spending about $34 billion for counternarcotics activities in fiscal years 2010 through 2015. According to officials of these four agencies, most of their counternarcotics activities are in the Western Hemisphere.

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