

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-10](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

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 counternarcotic 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.

View [GAO-18-10](#). For more information, contact Jessica Farb at (202) 512-6991, or farbj@gao.gov.

October 2017

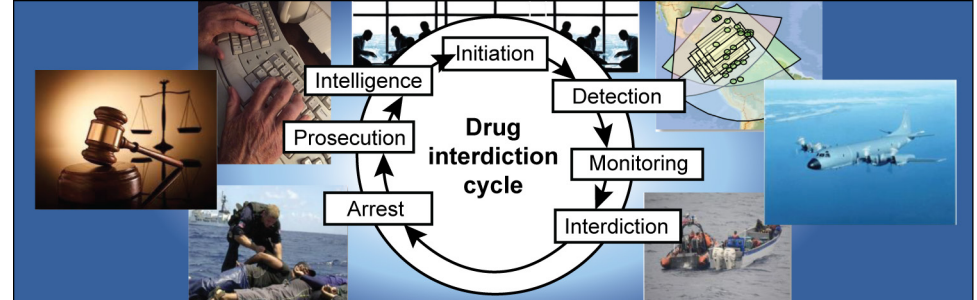
COUNTERNARCOTICS

Overview of U.S. Efforts in the Western Hemisphere

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. We are not reporting Federal Bureau of Investigation counternarcotics spending separately, since it is included as part of Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces.

The Drug Interdiction Cycle



Source: GAO analysis of agency documentation; Joint Interagency Task Force South (photos); GAO (photo) | GAO-18-10

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), which coordinates the National Drug Control Program, facilitates the sharing of best practices and lessons learned at meetings such as the North American Drug Dialogue workshop, including Canada, Mexico, and the United States. In addition, 7 of the 10 agencies GAO reviewed described processes they have in place for identifying and collecting best practices or lessons learned from counternarcotics efforts in the Western Hemisphere. For example, DOD reported using a process, known as the Joint Lessons Learned Program, that consists of five phases: discovery, validation, resolution, evaluation, and dissemination.

U.S. agencies use a variety of mechanisms to address changing narcotics conditions in the Western Hemisphere. ONDCP collaborates with agencies working directly on regional counternarcotics efforts to address emerging threats, as reflected in the annually updated National Drug Control Strategy and the Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy. In addition, documentary evidence GAO reviewed showed that a variety of interagency groups, task forces, and committees have been created to coordinate the U.S. government's responses to counternarcotics threats. For example, the National Heroin Coordination Group was established to provide guidance aimed at reducing the growing supply of heroin and illicit fentanyl in the U.S. market.