

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Committee on  
Foreign Affairs, House of  
Representatives

March 1990

DRUG CONTROL

Anti-Drug Efforts in  
the Bahamas





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

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**General Government Division**

B-236587

March 8, 1990

The Honorable Dante B. Fascell  
Chairman, Committee on Foreign  
Affairs  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report, in response to your request, discusses anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas. Specifically, the report discusses (1) the extent, results, and limitations of U.S.-Bahamas drug interdiction operations; (2) the status of other drug control activities, including treaties between the United States and the Bahamas; and (3) the strategy, management, and planning of U.S. anti-drug efforts, including efforts to improve coordination among interdiction agencies.

As arranged with the Committee, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after the date of the report, unless you release the report or its contents prior to that time. After 30 days, we will send copies of this report to the Attorney General; the Secretaries of Defense, State, Transportation, and the Treasury; the Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy; and other interested parties.

The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix X. If you have any questions on this report, please call me on 275-8389.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Lowell Dodge'.

Lowell Dodge  
Director, Administration of  
Justice Issues

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Managing and planning anti-drug programs and operations have tended to be decentralized with little or no central control imposed over resources or strategic decisions. GAO believes that while management benefits could result from development of a comprehensive strategic plan, the decentralized approach to planning and managing anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas is a workable strategy and may facilitate flexible responses to future changes in the drug smuggling threat.

U.S. agencies are expanding air interdiction efforts in the Bahamas, including acquisition of additional radars, helicopters, and bases. These acquisitions will improve capabilities for detecting and apprehending airborne drug smugglers and may further deter air smuggling. However, they will be costly and will not eliminate limitations in the interdiction system.

While good arguments exist for maintaining the current level of drug interdiction efforts in the Bahamas, the benefits of an expanded air interdiction system relative to its limitations have not been made clear by the agencies. Accordingly, GAO is not convinced that present air interdiction efforts should be significantly expanded.

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## Principal Findings

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### Managing and Planning U.S. Efforts

Like anti-drug efforts in the United States, managing and planning anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas have evolved on an ad hoc basis and have tended to be decentralized. U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas have evolved from simple bilateral agreements in the early 1970s that allowed U.S. Customs Service aircraft to fly over the Bahamas, to extensive and costly drug interdiction operations in the 1980s that involve several U.S. and Bahamian agencies.

While GAO observed some friction among agencies in particular interdiction operations, GAO found no indications that the number of anti-drug agencies and programs and the decentralized management and planning of anti-drug efforts had caused significant conflicts or had impaired U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas. Operating in this fashion, U.S.-supported interdiction operations resulted in the seizure of about 11 tons of cocaine and 51 tons of marijuana in the Bahamas in 1988. (See pp. 10 and 38.)

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other smuggling methods that can be more difficult to detect, such as cargo shipments. (See pp. 19, 21, 15, and 28.)

GAO, in a June 1989 report on capabilities for interdicting private aircraft, stated that GAO is not convinced that spending additional millions of dollars on air interdiction assets would be the most effective use of the limited additional resources Congress and the Administration may wish to put into the Nation's war on drugs. (See p. 40)

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## Recommendation

GAO is making no recommendations in this report.

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## Agency Comments

The report was sent to the Departments of Transportation, Justice, State, Defense, and the Treasury; and the Office of National Drug Control Policy. (See p. 41.)

The Office of National Drug Control Policy, while not disagreeing with GAO's conclusions, commented that the report did not give enough recognition to the deterrent effect of drug interdiction efforts. The Department of Defense chose not to comment on the report saying that it saw no need to do so. The Departments of Justice, Transportation, and the Treasury disagreed with GAO's conclusion questioning the expansion of air interdiction assets in the Bahamas. The Departments generally held that the use of aerostat radars must be viewed in the context of a total interdiction system and that judgment should be withheld until the planned aerostat system is complete. (See p. 41.)

GAO disagrees with the Departments' position, pointing out that questions on the effectiveness of the system make it essential to approach decisions with caution. For example, aerostats in Florida and the Bahamas are operational about half of the time and contingencies to fill that "down time" have limitations. (See pp. 40 and 46.)

Chapter 6 summarizes comments received and GAO's response. Appendixes V through IX contain the letters that express each Department's comments.

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Force (RBPF) and the Royal Bahamian Defense Force (RBDF) participate with U.S. agencies in joint air and marine drug interdiction operations.

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## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

At the request of the Chairman, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, we reviewed joint U.S.-Bahamas anti-drug efforts and obtained information on certain areas of interest to the Committee. The objectives of our review were to determine (1) the extent, results, and limitations of U.S.-Bahamas drug interdiction operations; (2) the status of other drug control activities, including treaties between the United States and the Bahamas; and (3) the strategy, management, and planning of U.S. anti-drug efforts, including efforts to improve coordination among interdiction agencies. We also obtained information on (1) the status of two projects—a boat docking facility and a boat repair facility—authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and (2) the cost of assigning U.S. personnel to the Bahamas on a temporary basis. As agreed with the Committee, we did not evaluate the adequacy of cooperation between the United States and Bahamian governments in anti-drug matters.

To determine the extent, results, and limitations of U.S.-Bahamas drug interdiction operations, we reviewed daily entries in activity logbooks for the period October 1987 through June 1988. These logbooks were kept by the two facilities that direct drug interdiction missions in the Bahamas—the joint Customs/Coast Guard Command, Control, and Communications Center (C3 center) in Miami, Florida, and the Operation Bahamas and Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) center in Nassau, Bahamas.<sup>1</sup> We also examined such documents as operations manuals, strategies, drug-threat assessments, intelligence reports, and radar logs. We discussed these documents and specific problem cases with agency officials directly involved to validate our interpretation of the logbook entries and to determine the significance of the problems we identified. We also considered how these problems relate to the results of our recent assessment of the federal government's ability to interdict drug smugglers using private aircraft.<sup>2</sup>

To determine the status of other drug control initiatives and activities, we interviewed officials from INM, Department of Justice, and DEA;

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<sup>1</sup>The Turks and Caicos Islands, a British dependent territory, consist of over 30 islands forming the southeastern end of the Bahamas chain of islands and are located approximately 30 miles southeast of the Bahamas.

<sup>2</sup>Drug Smuggling: Capabilities for Interdicting Private Aircraft Are Limited and Costly (GAO/GGD-89-93, June 9, 1989).

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**Chapter 1**  
**Introduction**

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A draft of this report was sent to the Departments of State, Justice, Transportation, Defense, and the Treasury; and the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Comments were received from all agencies except DOD. DOD said that it saw no need to comment on the report. The major points raised in the comment letters and our responses to them are summarized in chapter 6. Technical clarifications and updated information provided by the agencies were incorporated into the report where appropriate. The letters are contained in appendixes V through IX.

interdicting drugs smuggled into the United States on commercial airlines is the Customs Service inspection of the aircraft, passengers, and cargo when the aircraft enters a U.S. airport.

When we began our work in March 1988, Coast Guard was the lead agency for detecting aircraft on which drugs were smuggled into the southeastern United States. However, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1989, Public Law 100-456, dated September 29, 1988, gave DOD lead agency responsibility for detecting and monitoring air and maritime drug smuggling. At present, ground-based and airborne radar systems operated by Customs, Coast Guard, and DOD and based in southern Florida, the Bahamas, and throughout the Caribbean are used to detect airborne drug smugglers. Also, prior information (“intelligence”) on the identity, location, and timing of potential smugglers is a principal means used to identify and distinguish airborne smugglers from other aircraft. According to a senior DEA official in the Miami field division office, 62 percent of all cocaine seizures in the Bahamas during 1988 were based on prior intelligence. In commenting on this report, the Department of Justice said that in fiscal year 1988, 32 percent of drug seizures were the result of radar-acquired targets. The majority of seizures resulted from standard drug control efforts, such as DEA cases, joint investigations with Bahamian authorities, and routine OPBAT patrols.

Customs and Coast Guard share responsibility for intercepting and tracking suspected airborne smugglers in and around the Bahamas. This intercepting and tracking is typically done using Customs and Coast Guard aircraft based in southern Florida. Customs and Coast Guard also temporarily station some aircraft and crews at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and other Caribbean locations.<sup>2</sup> Customs has two interceptors and two tracking aircraft based in southern Florida. Coast Guard has eight specifically dedicated aircraft available full-time to intercept and track suspected airborne smugglers in the southeastern United States and the Caribbean.

The Command, Control, and Communications Center (C3), located near Miami and jointly operated by Customs and Coast Guard, receives information from radar systems and identifies and tracks suspected smugglers until an interceptor can locate and identify the aircraft. If the

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<sup>2</sup>Customs or Coast Guard generally has one interceptor continuously stationed at Guantanamo Bay around-the-clock.

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had 13 personnel, 5 interceptor vessels, and 2 vessels used as communications centers assigned to maritime bases at Gun Cay and West End. The Coast Guard also had one interceptor vessel and seven personnel assigned to these bases. The West End operation was terminated in September 1989. The assets at that site were redeployed to Gun Cay.

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## Limitations of the Existing Radar Network

Although the northern Bahamas are partially covered by the existing radar network, large areas throughout the central and southern Bahamas are not yet covered by radar. As discussed later, U.S. agencies are acquiring and installing additional radars to provide coverage in these areas. (See pp. 21 and 22.) However, many drug smugglers have exploited deficiencies in the radar network and the limitations of other detection methods, such as airborne and shipboard radar systems, to evade detection.

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## Gaps in Current Radar Coverage and Capability

The existing radar detection network that supports drug interdiction in the Bahamas is comprised of

- ground-based air radar systems in Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Cabo Rojo, Dominican Republic; and Borinquen, Puerto Rico;
- two aerostat radars<sup>3</sup> in Florida operated by the Air Force, one in the northern Bahamas operated by the Coast Guard that covers the northern Bahamas; and one recently constructed in the central Bahamas but not operational;
- occasional surveillance flights by U.S. radar-equipped detection aircraft; and
- Coast Guard and Customs patrol boats with on-board surface search radar systems.

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<sup>3</sup>An aerostat radar is an airborne surveillance system that consists of an unmanned, tethered, helium-filled balloon that carries radar.

Ground-based systems currently provide the only radar coverage in or near the southern Bahamas. These radar systems have limited range and are subject to interference from geographical obstacles such as mountains. For example, the Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands, radar can detect aircraft flying as low as 500 feet if they are flying no more than 50 miles from the site. However, airborne smugglers may fly as low as 50 feet enroute to the Bahamas. According to the Coast Guard, the effective range of ground-based radars is 20 nautical miles for an aircraft flying at an altitude of 50 to 100 feet. The Guantanamo Bay radar system has difficulty detecting low flying aircraft because the mountainous terrain near the site creates blind spots in coverage.

Aerostat radar provides the only permanent air radar coverage for the northern Bahamas. The Cudjoe Key and Cape Canaveral, Florida, aerostats have been in place and operational since December 1980 and September 1983, respectively. The aerostat at High Rock, Grand Bahama Island, has been in place since March 1985, and has been staffed to provide around-the-clock coverage since March 1988.

Although the aerostats can operate around-the-clock, as discussed in our recent report on air interdiction programs,<sup>1</sup> aerostats are weather-sensitive and, as a result, are sometimes inoperable for extended periods of time. Because of their sensitivity to even mild winds and the possibility of damage, aerostats must be reeled back to their base in advance of approaching winds. These weather conditions, while affecting aerostat operation, often do not affect the operation of small aircraft.

The aerostat in the Bahamas is usually "down" and inoperable approximately 40 to 50 percent of the time during the months of July, August, and September because of turbulent weather. In addition, scheduled maintenance for aerostats can be frequent. According to Customs records, the "down time" for maintenance of the aerostat located at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, was 37 percent in fiscal year 1988. Overall, the aerostats located at Patrick Air Force Base and Cudjoe Key, Florida, and in the Bahamas were operational an average of about 53 percent of the time in fiscal years 1987 and 1988. Finally, aerostats in operation are easily observed by smugglers or their lookouts.

Capabilities of detecting maritime targets in and around the Bahamas are also limited. According to the Coast Guard and Customs officials

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<sup>1</sup>GAO/GGD-89-93, June 1989

per week had occurred over Cuban airspace. Similarly, a DEA official testified on July 25, 1989, that there had been about 39 airdrops of drugs in Cuban waters since April 1989.

In commenting on our report, ONDCP said that since mid-summer 1989, there has been a decrease in smuggling activity over Cuba. Coast Guard, in its technical comments on this report, said that it and other agencies have developed several initiatives to counter drug smuggling flights over Cuba.

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## Additional Radars Will Not Eliminate Limitations in the Radar Network

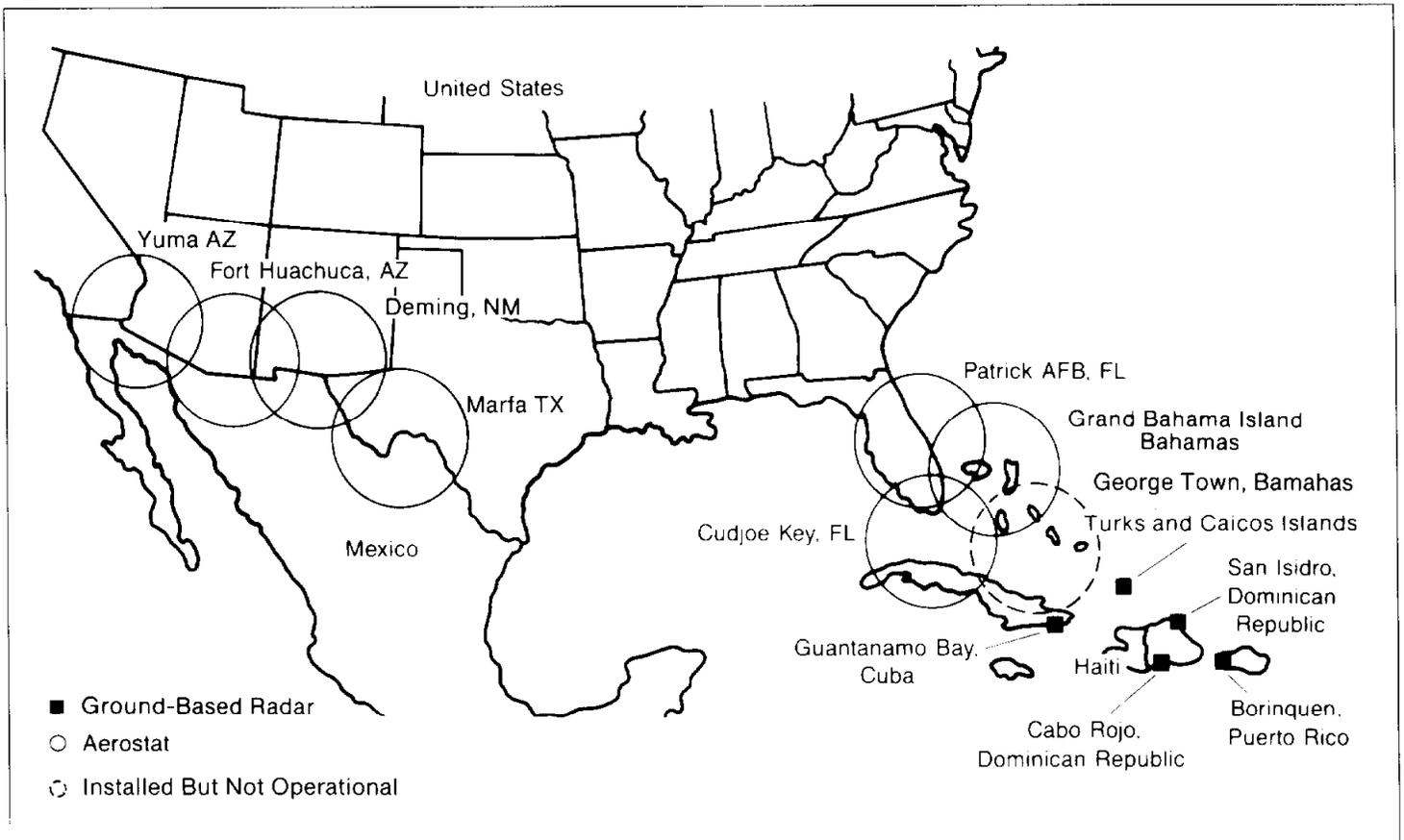
In addition to the aerostat in the northern Bahamas, a second aerostat was recently constructed at George Town in the central Bahamas and a third is being acquired for Great Inagua in the southern Bahamas. Additional radar coverage in and around the central and southern Bahamas may make it easier to detect a suspect aircraft before it enters the heavy inter-island air traffic and may enable radar operators to more effectively detect and sort potential targets. However, even if planned enhancements by Customs and Coast Guard eliminate some of the gaps in radar coverage, the existing and planned radar systems will not provide constant coverage and the Bahamas will remain open to penetration by drug traffickers.

According to a Coast Guard aerostat program officer, the second aerostat at George Town, Great Exuma Island, began limited operation by the contractor in early December 1989. This officer said that Customs is scheduled to begin a "quick look test" in early 1990 prior to acceptance of the aerostat. When Customs accepts the aerostat from the contractor, Coast Guard will assume operational control. However, the aerostat cannot be operated on a full-time basis until completion of a new Bahamian airport. This airport will permit present air traffic to be rerouted away from the aerostat. The officer said that it is difficult to say precisely when the airport will be completed, but the officer said it could be early 1990. Customs estimates that this aerostat will cost \$24.2 million for acquisition and installation. Coast Guard estimates that operating costs will be between \$7 and \$8 million annually.

Customs also plans the installation of a third aerostat on Great Inagua Island in the far southern Bahamas. Customs and Coast Guard estimate that acquisition and installation of this aerostat at Great Inagua will cost from \$17 to \$21 million, depending upon site preparation costs, and will take 15 to 18 months to complete. Annual operating costs will be approximately \$8 million.

of existing land-based aerostats and ground-based radars. Figure 2.4 shows the planned land-based aerostat network.

Figure 2.3: Locations of Existing Land-Based Aerostat and Ground-Based Radars



Note: Land-Based aerostats are operational about 50 percent of the time.

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**Current Number and  
Locations of Helicopters  
and Bases Limit  
Apprehension Efforts**

The current number and locations of helicopters and bases sometimes limits the ability of apprehension teams to reach the sites of suspected smuggling activity in a timely manner. OPBAT helicopters and apprehension teams are currently stationed at three locations in the Bahamas. The Coast Guard has two helicopters at both Nassau and Freeport, DEA has one in Nassau, and the Army has three in George Town to provide around-the-clock coverage at each site. Customs also has two apprehension helicopters based in southern Florida at Homestead, near Miami, to provide around-the-clock coverage.

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site in time. Both cases involved suspected airborne smugglers detected in the far southern Bahamas. In each case, the closest apprehension team did not launch on the target aircraft, which were approximately 175 miles away from the helicopter bases. According to OPBAT and C3 center operations officers, the apprehension teams were not launched because they would have been unable to arrive in time. The officers said that similar situations occur periodically.

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### Efforts to Obtain Additional Bases

Additional helicopters based in or near the southern Bahamas will improve helicopter response time and allow apprehension teams to more quickly respond to smuggling targets.

In May 1988, the Bahamian government presented a proposal to the U.S. Embassy, recommending that the United States construct and operate seven additional apprehension bases scattered throughout the Bahamas. The U.S. Embassy's counterproposal agreed in principle with the value of additional permanent bases in the Bahamas but encouraged the Bahamian government to establish such bases on its own. In October 1988, the Bahamian government presented modifications and alternatives to its original proposal and said that a "disproportionate amount of Bahamian government revenue" is already being spent on preventing drugs from entering the United States. According to the INM officer in Nassau, as of September 1989, the two governments had agreed to establish one additional apprehension base on Great Inagua in the southern Bahamas. This base is scheduled to become operational in May 1990. No additional bases are planned at this time.

With the establishment of a helicopter base at Great Inagua, OPBAT personnel will have the capability to intercept and apprehend drug smugglers who may fly into the Turks and Caicos Islands instead of the Bahamas. In order to make an arrest in the Turks and Caicos Islands it will be necessary to have law enforcement personnel from that country as part of the OPBAT apprehension team. To achieve this, the United Kingdom has prepared and distributed a draft trilateral agreement on interdiction operations that includes the United States, the Bahamas, the United Kingdom, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. According to the State Department, it is hoped that this agreement can be concluded early in 1990.

# Status of Noninterdiction Drug Control Activities in the Bahamas

While the primary focus of U.S. anti-drug efforts and expenditures in the Bahamas has been on the interdiction activities of the law enforcement agencies—DEA, Customs Service, and Coast Guard—the U.S. and Bahamian governments are involved in other important bilateral and unilateral anti-drug initiatives. These efforts include (1) treaties between the two governments, (2) other Bahamian legal and law enforcement initiatives that deter the use of its territory as a staging area by drug traffickers, and (3) efforts to reduce an increasing demand for drugs within the Bahamas.

## U.S.-Bahamian Treaties Await Further Action

The U.S. and Bahamian governments have been working on two treaties important to joint anti-drug efforts—a new extradition treaty and a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT). Final negotiations on a new extradition treaty were completed in July 1989, but the treaty, as yet, has not been signed or submitted to the U.S. Senate for ratification. The U.S. and Bahamian governments signed an MLAT in August 1987. It was ratified by the U.S. Senate in October 1989 and was sent to the President for execution of an instrument of ratification.

## Extradition Treaty Status

The extradition treaty in effect between the United States and the Bahamas was signed in 1931 by the United States and the United Kingdom. The treaty, however, does not cover extradition for some drug- and conspiracy-related offenses. The treaty was inherited by the Bahamian government in 1973 when the Bahamas became an independent country. Under this treaty, there are currently 17 requests for extradition of narcotics violators from the Bahamas to the United States.

To modernize the extradition treaty and make it applicable to a broad range of drug-trafficking offenses, the U.S. and Bahamian governments have negotiated a new extradition treaty. A Department of Justice official said that the current draft of the treaty includes provisions for drug and drug-related crimes, including trafficking and conspiracy. However, Justice and State Department officials developing the treaty said that individuals for whom the U.S. or the Bahamian government has previously requested extradition will continue to be processed for extradition under the provisions of the existing treaty.

A senior U.S. Embassy official said that a final round of negotiations was completed in July 1989. According to a State Department official, the draft treaty was submitted to the Secretary of State for approval but had not yet been acted upon. This official did not know how soon

located in the Bahamas. They also said that Bahamian police and prosecutors are not equipped to trace such illegal financial dealings.

A senior DEA official in the Bahamas also said that some small-scale money laundering still occurs involving the purchase of cars, houses, and boats with cash. According to this official, DEA is participating with Bahamian law enforcement officials in several ongoing investigations involving money laundering in the Bahamas.

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### **New Bahamian Asset Seizure Law Faces First Test**

The Bahamian government has been criticized in the past for not seizing and using assets of convicted drug traffickers, such as boats and planes, to supplement its drug enforcement resources. A senior DEA official in Nassau said that this criticism was based on old seizure laws that required a time-consuming judicial forfeiture process.

In January 1988, the Bahamian government enacted an asset seizure law patterned after similar U.S. laws. The Bahamian law is intended to permit the Bahamian government to seize assets derived from drug-trafficking profits. The DEA official in Nassau said that the first conviction under the new law was concluded in September 1988. Efforts are underway to complete the seizure process for this and subsequent convictions.

Despite new seizure laws, a senior INM official said in April 1989 that the Bahamian government is still not seizing and using drug traffickers' assets as quickly as INM would like.

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### **Special Drug Courts and Increased Penalties**

Responding to (1) substantial increases in arrests for drug trafficking through the Bahamas, (2) a rising number of drug-related crimes in the Bahamas, and (3) criticism from opposition parties and the United States, the Bahamian government has designated special drug courts and has substantially increased penalties for trafficking in and possession of drugs. In July 1987, one of the existing Magistrate Courts was designated to deal exclusively with drug offenses to expedite the backlog of cases pending in the courts. Another Magistrate Court was designated as a drug court in 1988. According to a senior Embassy official in Nassau, the magistrates can dispose of minor drug-related cases but cannot impose a sentence of more than 5 years. Magistrates must refer individuals who are convicted of possession for sale, conspiracy, and other serious drug offenses to the Bahamian Supreme Court for sentencing under the recently enacted penalties. These penalties are discussed below.

each. The fourth class of 25 officers completed training in February 1989.

Upon completion of the course, the officers are assigned to a joint interdiction operation or to Bahamian police field offices. The senior DEA official in Nassau said that newly trained officers typically work with DEA agents in Nassau or with experienced Bahamian police investigators to assist with investigations and to gain additional practical experience.

The senior DEA official in Nassau also said that establishing the drug unit is an ambitious plan for the Bahamian police. This official said that the Bahamian police probably cannot recruit replacement officers or provide office space and equipment as quickly as the Bahamians would like. Current plans anticipate full staffing of the entire unit by the end of 1990. However, he said that he believed creation of the enforcement unit was a positive step that is already providing results in the form of more and better narcotics investigations.

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### Progress in Eliminating Corruption Within the Bahamian Government

Corruption within the Bahamian government is of concern to U.S. officials on two levels: (1) lower-level corruption of police and other mid-level public officials and (2) corruption of high-level elected or appointed officials. In 1983, the Bahamian government established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate alleged drug-related corruption. Responding to allegations that Bahamian authorities had not prosecuted those identified in the inquiry, the Bahamian Ambassador to the United States noted in February 1988 testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government, that

“... the purview of the Commission of Inquiry was not that of a court of law. Therefore, testimony before the commission did not have to meet the same requirements as that of a court of law. The commission received much hearsay testimony without corroborating evidence. While administrative/disciplinary action was taken by the police force as a result of investigations prompted by testimony to the commission, there was insufficient evidence to warrant court action.”

The Bahamian government has taken steps to reduce or eliminate corruption in Bahamian law enforcement agencies. An internal corruption unit reporting to the Senior Deputy Police Commissioner was established in 1987. In March 1988, the Bahamian government passed legislation that required mandatory drug testing of police and Defense Force personnel.

## Efforts to Reduce Drug Demand in the Bahamas

Drug abuse among Bahamian citizens and the drug-related crime rate are increasing problems in the Bahamas, according to senior U.S. Embassy officials and a senior representative of the Bahamian government. Bahamian, United States, and United Nations agencies have participated in efforts aimed at reducing the demand for illegal drugs in the Bahamas. Additionally, the Bahamian Minister of Health and the Attorney General, who also serves as the Minister of Education, form a Narcotics Committee that meets periodically to discuss anti-drug education and drug demand reduction.

A private agency called Drug Action Services publicizes drug problems in the Bahamas, mobilizes public concern, sets up outreach centers, and is involved in rehabilitation. The agency has also established a small halfway house for men. The Narcotics Committee has provided limited financial support (about \$50,000) to Drug Action Services; however, the bulk of its funds are derived from private fundraising.

Government drug rehabilitation capacity is limited and long waiting lists exist. According to senior U.S. Embassy officials who provided this information, the Bahamian government has no national plan; treatment programs are undersized and underfunded; facilities are crowded and have waiting lists; and efforts are concentrated in Nassau and Freeport, with few services available in the outer islands.

The United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control provided \$500,000 to the Bahamians in 1987 for a 2-year project to (1) investigate patterns of drug abuse and (2) assist in developing training programs on preventive education for key personnel in the private and public sectors. Also, INM and the U.S. Information Service recently provided financial assistance and speakers for a "Second International Drug Symposium" held in the Bahamas. The symposium focused on the treatment and rehabilitation of cocaine addicts.

**Chapter 4**  
**Managing and Planning U.S. Anti-Drug**  
**Efforts in the Bahamas**

in fiscal year 1988. Nearly all of these costs resulted from drug interdiction operations, including the operation and maintenance of aerostat radar facilities (but excluding the acquisition and installation costs of aerostats).

Table 4.1 shows annual costs associated with each U.S. agency's anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas for fiscal years 1986, 1987, and 1988.

**Table 4.1: Annual Costs of U.S. Agencies' Anti-Drug Efforts in the Bahamas**

| Agency                   | Fiscal Years    |                     |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
|                          | 1986            | 1987                | 1988            |
| INM                      | \$255           | \$147               | \$892           |
| DEA                      | 1,357           | 1,619               | 2,444           |
| Customs <sup>a</sup>     | 8,064           | 19,214 <sup>b</sup> | 8,838           |
| Coast Guard <sup>a</sup> | <sup>c</sup>    | 7,970               | 18,097          |
| Army                     | <sup>c</sup>    | 1,362               | 2,238           |
| Air Force                | 1,640           | 1,490               | <sup>d</sup>    |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>\$11,316</b> | <b>\$31,802</b>     | <b>\$32,509</b> |

Note: The costs shown are predominately for salaries and operation and maintenance of equipment such as aircraft, helicopters, and aerostat radar.

<sup>a</sup>Includes costs for the joint Coast Guard/Customs command, control, and communication center located near Miami because, according to Coast Guard, a large part of the center's operations support drug interdiction efforts in the Bahamas.

<sup>b</sup>Includes one-time funding of \$10 million for helicopters and communication equipment authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986.

<sup>c</sup>Coast Guard and the Army did not participate in the Bahamas anti-drug efforts until 1987.

<sup>d</sup>Air Force's participation in OPBAT was transferred to the Coast Guard in fiscal year 1988.

Source: Compiled by GAO based on cost estimates furnished by U.S. agencies shown in the table.

Table 4.1 does not include the costs of acquiring and installing a second land-based aerostat in the central Bahamas at George Town. This aerostat is expected to be operational in early 1990. Estimates by Customs and Coast Guard indicate that acquisition and installation of the George Town aerostat will cost about \$24 million, and operating costs will amount to between \$7 and \$8 million annually. A third aerostat, with costs estimated by Coast Guard at between \$17 and \$21 million, has been planned for acquisition and installation in the southern Bahamas. Constructing and operating land-based aerostat radars are two of the most expensive components of U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas.

short- and long-term plans for increased drug interdiction efforts, according to INM officials, it relies heavily on the commitment of additional, costly U.S. resources—navy ships, helicopters and bases, and radars. State Department officials commented that while the Bahamian proposal has merit, the Bahamian government should assume more responsibility for regional anti-drug efforts.

While we observed some friction among agencies in particular operations, we found no indications that the large number of anti-drug agencies and operations in the Bahamas or the decentralized planning and management of anti-drug efforts had caused significant conflicts. We noted that the U.S. Ambassador and agency officials have held periodic coordinating meetings to reduce interagency conflicts and have agreed on memoranda of understanding that define each agency's respective roles and responsibilities.

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# Summary of Agency Comments and Our Response

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We provided drafts of this report to the Departments of State, Justice, Transportation, Defense, and the Treasury; and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). The Department of Defense chose not to comment, stating that it saw no need to do so. The Department of State and ONDCP provided technical comments to clarify and update information contained in the report. In addition, ONDCP, while not disagreeing with our conclusions, commented that the report did not give recognition to the importance of drug interdiction efforts as a deterrent. The Departments of Justice, Transportation, and the Treasury also provided technical comments but disagreed with our conclusion questioning the significant expansion of air interdiction assets in the Bahamas. While disagreeing with our conclusion, the Department of Transportation expressed agreement with many of our findings, commenting that the report generally provides a factual portrayal of anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas.

The agency responses to our request for official comments are contained in appendixes V through IX. We incorporated the agencies' technical comments, including clarifications and updated information, into the report where appropriate. This chapter addresses the agencies' substantive comments and our response. Moreover, because the President's September 1989 National Drug Control Strategy includes comments relating to our conclusion, we included a discussion of those comments in this chapter.

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## Comments From the Department of Transportation and Our Response

The Department of Transportation (DOT) generally agreed with the facts in our report but disagreed with our conclusion relating to expansion of air interdiction assets in the Bahamas. DOT agreed with us that (1) current radar systems in the Bahamas provide inadequate coverage for the task at hand; (2) additional investments in radar systems can reduce, but not eliminate, the gaps in the interdiction system that currently exist; and (3) if we make these investments, any success will only drive smugglers to other modes and areas of drug trafficking. Despite these limitations, DOT maintained that such investments are warranted and that the planned land-based aerostat radar system for the Bahamas should be completed.

DOT said that investments in aerostat radars must be viewed in the context of a total drug interdiction system. DOT said that land-based aerostats were never meant to stand alone, but were part of a planned larger system, including sea-based aerostats, over-the-horizon radar, and radar aircraft (Airborne Early Warning (AEWS): E-2Cs, C-130s and P-3s). DOT

range of an aerostat to detect low flying aircraft, ground-based military radar can operate around-the-clock and provide more continuous coverage. As discussed on page 22, ground-based National Guard radar will be used as an alternative until the planned aerostat designated for Great Inagua is acquired and installed.

Finally, DOT pointed out that the President's September 1989 National Drug Control Strategy calls for completing the planned land-based aerostat network, including the third aerostat designated for Great Inagua in the Bahamas. It should be noted, however, that the Strategy calls for completing the network as funds are available, thus placing no priority on its completion. [Emphasis added.] Since issuance of the Strategy in September 1989, DOD has provided the funding necessary to complete the land-based aerostat system in the Bahamas.

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## Comments From the Department of Justice and Our Response

The Department of Justice, in its response to our draft report, said that it "takes exception to GAOS conclusion that efforts in the Bahamas should not be expanded beyond current levels." Justice further commented that we did not provide adequate discussion of the role of drug intelligence and investigations in the interdiction process, pointing out that the majority of drug seizures in the Bahamas resulted from drug intelligence and investigation activities. Justice also commented that our discussion of radar systems minimized the value of Air National Guard mobile radar systems in enhancing fixed based radar systems in the Bahamas. Justice pointed out that National Guard radar are capable of rapid shifts in location and can operate in inclement weather. Finally, Justice said that our comment that "the decentralized approach to planning and managing anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas is a workable strategy for the present level of resources" implied that this approach would not work for greater levels of resources. [Emphasis added by the Department of Justice.]

Justice interpreted the report's overall conclusion to mean that we questioned the expansion of all anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas, including any expansion in drug investigation and intelligence activities. We did not intend for our conclusion to be interpreted so broadly. Although they are beyond the scope of this report, drug intelligence and investigations play an important role in anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas. We restated our conclusion to clarify that it is limited specifically to expansion of air interdiction assets.

about half the time, pointing out that aerostats should not be viewed as a stand alone solution. Customs asserted that when all three aerostats are installed in the Bahamas, it is very unlikely that all three would be “down” at the same time, and radar aircraft could fill the gaps when aerostats are inoperable. Third, Customs commented on our statement that fixed interdiction assets run the risk of becoming obsolete when smugglers change their modes and patterns of operation, pointing out the importance of deterrence in drug law enforcement strategies. Customs said that closing air routes to drug smugglers will force them to use less preferable and more vulnerable methods of smuggling. Lastly, Customs commented that we should withhold judgment of aerostats until the entire proposed network is completed and operating.

Customs indicated that we overstated the average cost of an aerostat. Rather than \$24 million, Customs said that aerostats cost between \$15 and \$22 million each to acquire and install. Because the costs can vary depending on site preparation, we deleted references to average costs. As noted in the report, the George Town aerostat, according to Customs and Coast Guard, will cost about \$24.2 million when operational in early 1990. The aerostat designated for Great Inagua is expected to cost from \$17 to \$21 million.

Customs, like the Department of Transportation, raised the issue of cost effectiveness of radar systems, stating that aerostats are more cost effective than radar aircraft. As previously noted, comparing the cost and effectiveness of radar systems was not part of the scope and objectives for this report. Rather, our conclusion is based on our findings that additional radars, helicopters, and bases planned for the Bahamas are costly and will not eliminate limitations in the interdiction system. Drug traffickers will likely exploit the limitations and shift to other smuggling modes and routes that can be more difficult to detect.

We have no basis to evaluate Customs’ assertion that it is unlikely that all aerostats in the Bahamas will be “down” at the same time. Customs’ assertion may be valid. Nevertheless, when one aerostat in a network is down, gaps in radar coverage will exist and drug traffickers can exploit those gaps. Additionally, shifting resources to compensate could produce other gaps for drug trafficker exploitation.

We agree with Customs that radar aircraft could be used to fill gaps when aerostats are down, but to use radar aircraft in this way on a full-time basis would be expensive. The use of DOD, Coast Guard, and Customs radar aircraft can be planned in advance to provide radar coverage

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## Comments From ONDCP and Our Response

ONDCP commented that our report does not quantify the term “costly” as applied to interdiction efforts in the Bahamas. ONDCP stated that the entire U.S. interdiction program, at \$1.5 billion in fiscal year 1988, seized less than 100 metric tons of cocaine and 830 metric tons of marijuana. In comparison, the \$30 plus million spent in the Bahamas for the seizure of 11 metric tons of cocaine and 51 tons of marijuana appears to be an unequivocal bargain. We agree that interdiction efforts in the Bahamas have resulted in relatively significant seizures, and we have added a statement to that effect in our report (see p. 10).

As previously discussed, ONDCP, like Customs, pointed out that our report did not recognize deterrence as an important objective of drug interdiction. ONDCP commented that deterrence—the denial of preferred modes and routes to smugglers—is a concept central to interdiction. Further, ONDCP asserted that a statement in our report—expensive investments in fixed air interdiction may become “obsolete” when smugglers change their modes and patterns of operation—failed to recognize the deterrent value of drug interdiction systems. We recognize that one of the objectives of an interdiction system is to deny drug traffickers the use of preferred routes and modes of smuggling. However, as discussed on page 28, when interdiction efforts disrupt or close a particular trafficking route, drug traffickers resort to other smuggling tactics that are even more difficult to detect, such as drug smuggling in cargo shipments. On the basis of ONDCP and Customs comments, we expanded our definition of interdiction (see p. 14) to include deterrence and deleted the reference to interdiction systems becoming “obsolete.” As stated in our report, we are not proposing curtailment of existing air interdiction efforts in the Bahamas. However, we are not convinced that air interdiction assets should be significantly expanded without further assessment.

ONDCP also provided information updating the status of certain aerostats and said that drug smuggling flights over Cuba had decreased since the summer of 1989. We made changes to the report to incorporate this updated information. (See pp. 21 to 23.)

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## Comments Contained in the National Drug Control Strategy

The President’s September 1989, National Drug Control Strategy contains comments pertinent to our conclusion. The Strategy examined the federal efforts needed to reduce both the supply of and demand for illegal drugs. It suggested a cautious approach in future funding of interdiction assets.



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**Appendix I**  
**Information on the Boat Docking Facility**  
**Authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act**  
**of 1986**

- 
- April: The first test results report indicates that the Coast Guard cutter functioning as the mobile support facility has proved adequate to provide diesel fuel and communications but is inadequate to provide gasoline (for small boats), water, commissary support, and crew rest and relaxation.

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**Current Status**

- According to the Coast Guard Liaison to the Bahamas, mobile support facility testing is continuing.
- Coast Guard has approved project funding requests totalling approximately \$117,400 for the facility. As of October 1989, approximately \$4.06 million remains available to acquire a mobile support facility.

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**Expected  
Developments**

- According to a Coast Guard report, the mobile support facility testing will continue for the foreseeable future. Additional testing is necessary to determine the exact vessel type to best meet the mobile support facility requirements. Coast Guard officials have considered using oil drilling platforms and offshore supply vessels as mobile support facilities.

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**Appendix II  
Information on the Boat Repair Facility  
Authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act  
of 1986**

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**1989**

- January: Coast Guard approved project funding requests totalling \$771,628 for the facility, including approximately \$470,000 for construction.

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**Current Status**

- The facility is operational under Coast Guard control.

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**Expected  
Developments**

- Coast Guard is waiting for the Bahamian government to set a date for transferring the facility to the Bahamians.

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**Appendix III**  
**Information on the Cost of Temporarily**  
**Stationing U.S. Drug Interdiction Personnel in**  
**the Bahamas**

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the Bahamas varies from 14 to 60 days, with Coast Guard personnel assigned for 14 days, DEA personnel for 60 days, and Army personnel for 45 days.

According to representatives of the agencies participating in U.S.-Bahamas interdiction efforts, there are advantages and disadvantages to assigning personnel temporarily in the Bahamas. According to the senior Coast Guard operations officer in Nassau, frequent rotation is beneficial because the duty schedule in the Bahamas is heavier than at most other Coast Guard duty stations. Frequent rotation also allows a larger number of personnel to participate in operations and provides training that they would not receive in their home units. On the other hand, according to the senior DEA representative in Nassau, temporarily assigned DEA agents are typically less experienced and are not familiar with the operations in the Bahamas. The frequent rotation of personnel into the Bahamas results in a lack of operational continuity because new personnel require up to a month to become familiar with the various drug interdiction programs and operations in the Bahamas, the geography, and their individual duties.

DEA and Customs have recently taken steps to increase their permanent positions in the Bahamas. In August 1988, the senior DEA official in the Miami field division office requested authorization to add 16 permanent DEA positions in the Bahamas. This request was based on DEA's plans to extend OPBAT coverage into the Turks and Caicos Islands and to enhance the investigative and intelligence capabilities of the Nassau office. According to the Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge of DEA's Miami office, DEA headquarters is considering this request but has not yet made a decision. The Customs Service recently converted its Customs liaison officer position in Nassau from temporary to permanent. According to the Customs liaison officer, this was done to provide continuity and to improve coordination between Customs and the other U.S. agencies operating in the Bahamas.

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**Appendix IV**  
**Agency Offices and Facilities Visited,**  
**March 1988 to January 1989**

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Aerostat Radar Site, High Rock, Bahamas  
Shore Maintenance Detachment, Miami, Florida

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**U.S. Customs Service**

Headquarters, Washington, D.C.  
Air Branch, Homestead, Florida  
Command, Control, and Communications Center, Miami, Florida  
Southeast Regional Office, Miami, Florida  
Liaison Office, U.S. Embassy, Nassau, Bahamas  
Marine Interdiction Base, Gun Cay, Bahamas

Appendix V  
Comments From the Department of  
Transportation

Enclosure

I. TITLE: "Drug Control: Anti-Drug Efforts in the Bahamas,"  
Draft Report.

II. SUMMARY OF GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE (GAO) FINDINGS AND  
RECOMMENDATION:

The GAO is not convinced that present drug interdiction efforts should be significantly expanded. First, while additional radars will improve detection capabilities, the existing and planned radar system will not provide constant coverage due to downtime caused by maintenance and weather. Aerostats located in Florida and the Bahamas are operational about half the time. Second, expanding the current air interdiction system in the Bahamas will be costly. A second aerostat is currently under construction in the Bahamas to augment existing radar coverage, and a third aerostat has been proposed. The U.S. Customs Service and the U.S. Coast Guard estimate that each aerostat will cost about \$24 million, plus an additional \$7 to \$8 million each in annual operating costs. Finally, drug smugglers are able to adapt to improvements in the air interdiction system. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, traffickers have been flying their drug loads around the air interdiction net or using other smuggling methods such as cargo shipments. Thus, expensive investments in fixed interdiction assets may increase drug seizure in the short term but run the risk of becoming obsolete when smugglers change their modes and patterns of operation.

As stated in GAO's June 1989 report on capabilities for interdicting private aircraft, GAO is not convinced that spending additional millions of dollars on air interdiction assets would be the most effective use of the limited additional resources Congress and the administration may wish to put into the Nation's war on drugs. In that report, GAO proposed that Congress may want to pursue the issue further with key administration officials before deciding on specific authorization and appropriation levels for all aspects of the war on drugs. GAO made no specific recommendations to the agencies involved.

III. SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION POSITION:

We have reviewed the draft report and believe it generally provides a factual portrayal of the anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas. We would, however, like to offer some clarifications and technical corrections included as Attachment 1.

We disagree with the conclusions expressed in the report relating to air interdiction. In this regard, this report is really a microcosm of the June 1989 report entitled "Drug Interdiction: Capabilities for Interdicting Private Aircraft

See comment 1.

Appendix V  
Comments From the Department of  
Transportation

- 3 -

Therefore, we suggest that this finding be reconsidered in light of the President's National Drug Strategy which included completion of the LBA network in the southern U.S. and Bahamas as part of its overall strategy. We believe that the strategy is correct and it should be given the opportunity to succeed.

# Comments From the Department of Justice



U.S. Department of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20530

OCT 24 1989

Richard L. Fogel  
Assistant Comptroller General  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

The following information is being provided in response to your request to the Attorney General, dated September 22, 1989, for comments on the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report entitled, "Drug Control: Anti-Drug Efforts In the Bahamas." The Department takes exception to GAO's conclusion that efforts in the Bahamas should not be expanded beyond current levels. The Department believes that expansion of the program in the Bahamas is necessary to enhance its investigative, intelligence and interception capabilities. Further, we disagree with GAO's view that the expansion of radar operations is merely a costly temporary fix. It is the Department's opinion that such expansion will not adversely affect management of drug operations in the Bahamas, and will in fact enhance the Department's efforts.

The Bahamas is one of the two most significant transshipment countries for cocaine entering the United States. Therefore, the completion of a comprehensive and effective drug control program in the Bahamas is essential to the accomplishment of overall drug strategy objectives. The anti-drug program in the Bahamas consists of three major elements: investigation, intelligence and interception. The Department believes that GAO is mistaken in its conclusion that anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas should not be expanded because it fails to consider all three elements of the drug enforcement effort in the Bahamas as well as the relationship and impact of this effort on the overall drug control program. GAO focused on the interception element of the program, radar detection and monitoring of smuggler aircraft, and found that the proposals for expanding anti-drug efforts "will not eliminate vulnerabilities in the interdiction system and smugglers will still be able to use the Bahamas as a drug smuggling route."

Appendix VI  
Comments From the Department of Justice

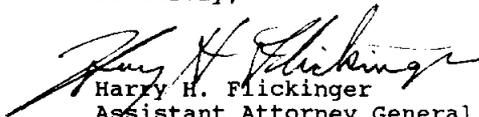
Honorable Richard L. Fogel

3

GAO's conclusion failed to consider the benefits of all aspects of the anti-drug program. Therefore, the Department believes that acting upon GAO's broad conclusion, not to significantly expand the anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas, may be imprudent. We suggest GAO reconsider its conclusion, giving greater attention to the investigative and intelligence efforts in the Bahamas, and assessing radar use in toto.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft report and hope that you find our comments both constructive and beneficial.

Sincerely,



Harry H. Flickinger  
Assistant Attorney General  
for Administration

Appendix VII  
Comments From the Department of  
the Treasury

- 2 -

GAO Report

2. Page 6, line 4, reads:

First, while additional radars will improve detection capabilities, the existing and planned radar system will not provide constant coverage due to downtime caused by maintenance and weather. Aerostats located in Florida and the Bahamas are operational about half the time.

Customs Position

Although the proposed 3 Bahamian Aerostat networks will not be operational 100% of the time during a given year, when operating, they do provide detection coverage over all Bahamian territory and the British Turks and Caicos Islands sufficient to greatly increase the risk of detection for the air smuggler and subsequent law enforcement reaction. Additionally, when all three aerostats are installed, they are very unlikely to all be down for weather or maintenance on a concurrent basis. This greatly complicates the operations and increases the risk for the air smuggler to be detected and apprehended by law enforcement because of their inability to deal with the variable status of three aerostats.

During times when the land-based aerostats are inoperable, DOD, USCG and USCS AEW assets serve as gap filler radars. The aerostats are an integral part of the overall Customs air interdiction strategy and should not be viewed as a standalone solution.

GAO Report

3. Page 6, line 20, reads:

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, traffickers have been flying their drug loads around the air interdiction net using other smuggling methods such as cargo shipments. Thus, expensive investments in fixed air interdiction assets may increase drug seizure in the short term, but run the risk of becoming obsolete when smugglers change their modes and patterns of operation.

Now p. 4.

Now pp. 4 and 5.

# Comments From the Office of National Drug Control Policy



OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY  
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
Washington, D.C. 20500

October 24, 1989

Mr. Richard L. Fogel  
Assistant Comptroller General  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

Thank you for your letter of September 22, 1989, and for giving us the opportunity to review your draft report entitled Drug Control: Anti-Drug Efforts In The Bahamas.

We have circulated this for review within ONDCP and have received comments from these offices. These comments are summarized in the enclosed for your use as appropriate. As you will note, comments range from technical and minor issues to more fundamental conceptual issues.

Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions. Thanks again.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bruce M. Carnes".

Bruce M. Carnes  
Director, Planning, Budget, and  
Administration

Attachment

# Comments From the Department of State

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

25

*T. Dick*

Dear Mr. ~~Fogel~~:

This is in response to your letter of September 22, 1989 to the Secretary which forwarded copies of the draft report entitled Drug Control: Anti-Drug Efforts In the Bahamas, for review and comment.

Enclosed are comments which were coordinated by and prepared by the Bureau of International Narcotics Matters.

We appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

Jill E. Kent  
Chief Financial Officer

Enclosure:  
As stated.

Mr. Richard L. Fogel,  
Assistant Comptroller General,  
General Government Division,  
U. S. General Accounting Office,  
Washington, D. C. 20548.

---

## GAO Comments

1. The report was updated to include additional information the Department of State provided. Subsequent to the Department of State's comment that the George Town aerostat was expected to be operational in December 1989, we discussed this point with the Department of State's INM official in Nassau. This official said that the system is now expected to be fully operational in early 1990.

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# Major Contributors to This Report

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## Dallas Regional Office

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Mark D. Moreland, Evaluator  
James A. Morgan, Evaluator

Appendix IX  
Comments From the Department of State

GAO DRAFT REPORT COMMENTS: DRUG CONTROL: ANTI-DRUG EFFORTS IN  
THE BAHAMAS (CODE 18724)

See comment 1.

Note: the following changes correct error in fact:

Now pp. 16 and 17.

Page 20, third full paragraph, insert after first sentence..."The West End operation was terminated in September 1989. The assets at that site were redeployed to Gun Cay. The Gun Cay operation uses"...pick up beginning "Customs, Coast Guard," etc.

Now p. 21.

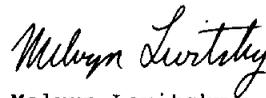
Page 29, first full paragraph, fifth line, make it read..."at George Town, Great Exuma Island, and is expected to be operational by December 1989"...pick up beginning "according to the senior Customs," etc.

Now p. 27.

Page 34, delete subtitle over second full paragraph. Second full paragraph, delete all after first sentence and make remainder of paragraph read..."A southern base would significantly decrease response time to the southeast Bahamas, Further, the United Kingdom has prepared and distributed a draft trilateral agreement on interdiction operations to include the U.S., the Bahamas, the United Kingdom and Turks and Caicos. It is hoped that this agreement can be concluded early in 1990."

Now p. 33.

Page 45, first full paragraph, note that it was a Bahamian Commission of Inquiry that was established, not a British Commission.



Melvyn Levitsky  
Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of International Narcotics  
Matters

Appendix VIII  
Comments From the Office of National Drug  
Control Policy

ONDCP COMMENTS ON ANTI-DRUG EFFORTS IN THE BAHAMAS

- Now pp. 2 and 14.      o    The GAO Report did not consider the overall purpose of Bahamas interdiction. The authors assume that this is the seizure of drugs (p.2, etc.) or the apprehension of smugglers. These are important, certainly. But deterrence -- the denial of preferred modes and routes to smugglers -- is not mentioned as an objective, although this is a concept central to interdiction and to our own strategies.
  
- Now pp. 21 and 23.      o    In various locations, the Report refers to additional or planned "radars." The Georgetown radar (referred to on p. 29) and the fifth USCG sea-based aerostat (p. 30) already exist. Only the Great Inagua radar remains in the planning stage.
  
- Now p. 21.              o    The Report refers to an increase in the use of Cuban airspace by smugglers (p. 28). Since the middle of the summer there has been a dramatic decrease in traffickers' air activity over Cuba.
  
- Now p. 10.              o    The Report does not quantify the term "costly," as applied to the Bahamas interdiction efforts (p. 3, etc.). The entire U.S. interdiction program, at \$1.5 billion in FY 1988, seized less than 100 MT of cocaine and 830 MT of marijuana. Against this figure, the \$30+ million spent in the Bahamas for the seizure of 11 MT of cocaine and 51 tons of marijuana appears to be an unequivocal bargain.
  
- Now p. 40.              o    The Report argues that improved interdiction capabilities will make the Bahamas route -- and the assets we put there -- obsolete (p. 59). But that is exactly what we want: a system which, as it is put in place, makes each mode or route of operation inoperable ("obsolete"). In this context, the Bahamas operation has become increasingly effective over time. To reverse the coin, if it did not exist, U.S. law enforcement would need to be directed at cocaine shipments arriving within the continental U.S.

10/24/89

Appendix VII  
Comments From the Department of  
the Treasury

- 3 -

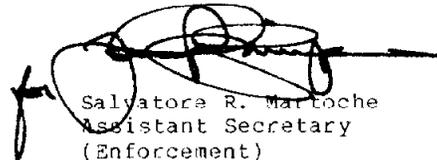
Customs Position

We agree that the Customs Air Strategy will likely deny the air smuggler the open usage of the Bahamas he has enjoyed for too long. The closing of these air routes to the aviation smuggler will force them to use less preferable and more vulnerable methods of smuggling. By maintaining this system as a deterrence, we also allow law enforcement strategies in other areas to reach similar levels of effectiveness to ultimately have the desired affect on all modes and methods of smuggling.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the National Aviation Interdiction Strategy is well on its way to meeting its goal of reducing, by 50 percent by 1992, the number of general aviation aircraft smuggling narcotics into the United States. Where installed, the aerostats have a significant impact on general aviation smuggling, and it is my position that we should withhold judgment on the effectiveness of the entire system until such time as the final aerostat becomes fully operational.

I appreciate the opportunity to review and provide the above comments on your draft report.

Sincerely,



Salvatore R. Martoche  
Assistant Secretary  
(Enforcement)

# Comments From the Department of the Treasury



DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY  
WASHINGTON

ASSISTANT SECRETARY

OCT 30 1989

Mr. Richard L. Fogel  
Assistant Comptroller General  
United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

At my request, the Customs Service has reviewed the draft of the GAO report entitled "Anti-Drug Efforts in the Bahamas" and offer the following comments and observations:

GAO Report

1. Page 3, paragraph 3, line 6, reads:

There are proposals for expanding anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas, including acquisition of additional radars, helicopters and bases. These acquisitions will improve capabilities to detect and apprehend airborne drug smugglers and may further deter air smuggling. However, they will be costly; for example, aerostat radars cost about \$24 million for acquisition and installation, plus an additional \$7 to \$8 million in annual operating costs.

Customs Position

The acquisition cost of each aerostat system is not \$24 million. This figure represents the worst case figure for the installation at the worst case site on Great Inagua. Current aerostat pricing is approximately \$12 million per system, with a variable site and installation cost of \$3 to \$10 million.

The acquisition and on-station cost per flight hour for aerostat systems are dramatically lower than that of any other system able to provide similar surveillance. When considering operating cost and mission effectiveness, this makes aerostats the most cost effective surveillance platform available.

Now pp. 3 and 4.

Honorable Richard L. Fogel

2

In FY 1988, 32 percent of drug seizures were the result of radar acquired targets. The majority of seizures resulted from standard drug control efforts such as DEA transportation cases, joint investigations with Bahamian authorities, and routine OPBAT (Operation Bahamas and Turks and Caicos) patrols. GAO paid inadequate attention to the investigations and intelligence programs that are responsible for a great number of arrests and seizures in the Bahamas and failed to fully consider their impact on the anti-drug effort. GAO's conclusion that the anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas should not be significantly expanded could adversely affect not only the interception activities on which it focused, but the investigative and intelligence activities as well.

We also believe that GAO's determination, as it relates to the use of radar in the Bahamas, is incorrect. If the conclusion is acted upon, it will preclude greater expansion of the use of radar in the Bahamas, including the development of a southern base at Great Inagua. GAO's discussion of radar usage focuses on aerostat bases and concludes that the use of radar, especially as related to fixed air interdiction assets, is not cost effective. GAO's discussion minimizes the value of the Air National Guard mobile units. These mobile radar units have differing capabilities from the fixed bases. The Guard's mobile units are capable of rapid shifts in location and can operate in inclement weather. Drug intelligence indicates that air smugglers have long exploited areas out of the range of OPBAT resources at Georgetown, such as the southern Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands. Without a southern base with a ground-based radar station, traffickers will continue to exploit this gap in detection and response capabilities. Our best weapon for combatting drug trafficking through the Bahamas is a comprehensive anti-drug program, and such a program should include as complete a radar detection system as possible.

Finally, the anti-drug activities in the Bahamas are performed cooperatively by several U.S. and foreign government agencies and are jointly managed by individual agency officials and the U.S. Ambassador for the Bahamas. GAO recognizes that the "decentralized approach to planning and managing anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas is a workable strategy for the present level of resources." (Emphasis added.) Although not stated by GAO, we believe this can be read to imply that at greater resource levels, the decentralized approach to management will not work. It is the Department's opinion that the anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas can effectively continue under a decentralized management even at enhanced levels of resources. We think that GAO should indicate that its statement of present capabilities is not intended to suggest any future difficulties under differing conditions.

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**GAO Comments**

1. GAO made revisions to the report where appropriate based on the clarifications and technical corrections provided in DOR's attachment 1, but we did not reprint that attachment as part of this report.

Appendix V  
Comments From the Department of  
Transportation

- 2 -

Are Limited and Costly." Both reports conclude, and we agree, that current anti-air sensor systems provide inadequate radar coverage versus the tasks at hand; that additional investments in sensors can reduce, but not eliminate, the gaps that currently exist; and, if we make these investments, our success will only be to drive the smugglers to other areas and modes of trafficking. However, we disagree with GAO's conclusion that such an investment is not warranted. Such an investment must be viewed within the context of the total system/capability for drug interdiction.

The strategy of the layout of the Land Based Aerostat (LBA) net was carefully put together in the national interdiction strategy in 1987-88 and reaffirmed by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). The aerostats were never meant to stand alone. They are part of a larger system that includes, or will include, sea-based aerostats, over-the-horizon radar, and airborne radar (E-2C's, C-130's and P-3's). The planned land based radar on Great Inagua (Cariball III) is needed to complete the radar network in the Bahamas. Once Cariball III and OPBAT III are in place, the Bahamas Islands will be covered by a much more effective drug detection and apprehension system. Further, the planned over-the-horizon radar, working in concert with airborne radars in the Caribbean, will provide an early warning system enabling apprehension forces greater response time.

We acknowledge there are drawbacks to each part of the detection strategy. For instance, an LBA is located in one position. Once smugglers learn of its location, they will steer clear of its coverage. But, when the entire net is in place, and given the large effective area of coverage, we believe this is an acceptable tradeoff, especially given the complementary parts of this strategy such as the Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft, land based radars, and over-the-horizon radar. The deterrent effect of the LBA should not be discounted in the Bahamas; if the entire archipelago is put off limits to the air smugglers through the use of the completed net, then AEW resources and ground based radars can be trimmed down and moved to other areas. In the final analysis, the LBA remains the only effective asset to detect low flyers short of putting round the clock AEW aircraft in place at much greater expense.

Finally, the strategy behind the deployment of all of these sensors and interdiction assets is to reduce the options open to drug smugglers. As stated in the National Drug Control Strategy, no interdiction system will be so thorough that it can totally restrict the entry of illegal drugs. What we hope to accomplish is to introduce another level of risk to the individual drug smuggler.

# Comments From the Department of Transportation

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.



U.S. Department of  
Transportation

Assistant Secretary  
for Administration

400 Seventh St., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

NOV 6 1990

Mr. Richard L. Fogel  
Assistant Comptroller General  
General Government Division  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

Enclosed are two copies of the Department of Transportation's comments concerning the U.S. General Accounting Office report entitled "Drug Control: Anti-Drug Efforts in the Bahamas."

Thank you for the opportunity to review this report. If you have any questions concerning our reply, please call Bill Wood on 366-5145.

Sincerely,

*Jon H. Seymour*  
Jon H. Seymour

Enclosures

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# Agency Offices and Facilities Visited, March 1988 to January 1989

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## Department of State

Office of International Narcotics Matters, Washington, D.C.  
U.S. Embassy, Nassau, Bahamas

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## National Drug Policy Board<sup>1</sup>

National Drug Policy Board, Washington, D.C.

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## Department of Defense

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence, Washington, D.C.  
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel/Drug Enforcement, Washington, D.C.  
U.S. Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba  
Puerto Rico Air National Guard, Borinquen, Puerto Rico  
U.S. Air Force Radar Site, Cabo Rojo, Dominican Republic  
U.S. Marine Corps Radar Site, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos Islands  
U.S. Army OPBAT Base, George Town, Bahamas

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## National Narcotics Border Interdiction System<sup>1</sup>

Headquarters, Washington, D.C.  
Southeast Region, Miami, Florida

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## Drug Enforcement Administration

Headquarters, Washington, D.C.  
Miami Field Office, Miami, Florida  
Nassau Country Office, Nassau, Bahamas  
El Paso Intelligence Center, El Paso, Texas  
Operation Bahamas and Turks Operations Center, Nassau, Bahamas

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## U.S. Coast Guard

Headquarters, Washington, D.C.  
7th Coast Guard District, Miami, Florida  
Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Center  
Pre-commissioning Detachment, Miami, Florida  
Liaison Office, U.S. Embassy, Nassau, Bahamas  
OPBAT Base, Nassau, Bahamas

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<sup>1</sup>Terminated by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988.

# Information on the Cost of Temporarily Stationing U.S. Drug Interdiction Personnel in the Bahamas

The agencies involved in U.S.-Bahamas drug interdiction—DEA, Customs, Coast Guard, and the Army—routinely assign personnel to the Bahamas on a temporary basis. For example, Customs has personnel temporarily assigned to marine interdiction bases in Gun Cay and West End, Bahamas; Coast Guard has personnel temporarily assigned to helicopter apprehension bases in Nassau and Freeport, Bahamas; the Army has personnel temporarily assigned to the helicopter base in George Town, Bahamas; and DEA assigns temporary personnel to all three helicopter bases. In addition, each agency has personnel temporarily assigned to the OPBAT center in Nassau, Bahamas.

Agency officials provided information on the number of personnel temporarily assigned to the Bahamas, and the costs of U.S. government-paid housing and utilities, per diem, and vehicle expenses as of October 1988. Using this information, we estimated the annual costs incurred by each agency of temporarily assigning personnel to the Bahamas. As shown in table III.1, the agencies incur costs totalling approximately \$3.6 million annually (excluding salaries) to temporarily assign personnel to the Bahamas.

**Table III.1: Estimated Costs to Temporarily Assign U.S. Personnel to the Bahamas for 1 Year**

| Agency       | Number of temporary positions | Annual costs/person | Total annual costs |
|--------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| DEA          | 13                            | \$47,954            | <b>\$623,398</b>   |
| Customs      | 14                            | 39,125              | <b>547,748</b>     |
| Coast Guard  | 37                            | 35,476              | <b>1,312,599</b>   |
| Army         | 23                            | 47,784              | <b>1,099,027</b>   |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>87</b>                     |                     | <b>\$3,582,772</b> |

Source: Developed by GAO from data provided by Customs Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, Coast Guard, and the U.S. Army

The agencies participating in drug interdiction in the Bahamas have filled certain positions with temporary personnel on a continuous basis (365 days per year) since as early as 1982. For example, DEA has had some personnel temporarily assigned to the Bahamas since 1982, Coast Guard and the Army since 1987, and Customs since early 1988. These positions are filled with personnel rotated to the Bahamas from other offices of each participating agency. For example, Coast Guard rotates personnel from Clearwater, Florida; Customs rotates personnel from Miami, Florida; the Army rotates personnel from a helicopter unit stationed in Savannah, Georgia; and DEA rotates personnel from various DEA offices around the country. The length of a temporary assignment in

# Information on the Boat Repair Facility Authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986

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## Background

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1986

- October: The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 authorized \$5 million for “initial design engineering, and other activities for construction of a drug interdiction docking facility” and for establishing a separate “repair, maintenance, and boat lift facility.”
- October: The above funds were appropriated through the Omnibus Drug Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1987.
- December: Coast Guard officials selected a site for the facility at the Royal Bahamian Defense Force (RBDF) base at Coral Harbor and approved initial funds for the facility.

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1987

- February: Coast Guard officials awarded the contract for a travel lift (the machinery for the boat repair facility) priced at \$251,000.
- March: Coast Guard officials completed Coral Harbor soil studies and site inspections.
- May: Original estimate of signing date for the 3-page U.S.-Bahamas Memorandum of Understanding on the boat repair facility.
- July: Coast Guard officials completed a draft concept of operations for the boat repair facility.
- September: Coast Guard officials completed draft site plans.

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1988

- January: Original scheduled facility completion date.
- February: Draft of the U.S.-Bahamas Memorandum of Understanding said that the Bahamian government would select a Bahamian contractor to perform the facility construction.
- July: Coast Guard and Bahamian government officials signed the Memorandum of Understanding. According to the supervisor of the Shore Maintenance Detachment in Miami, negotiations on the Memorandum of Understanding took 14 months because of U.S. and Bahamian government concerns about liability and maintenance costs.
- September: Coast Guard officials, Royal Bahamian Defense Force officials, and Bahamian contractors met for the pre-bid meeting.
- October: Construction bidding deadline.
- November: Coast Guard awarded the construction contract to a Bahamian contractor.
- December: Contractor began construction.

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# Information on the Boat Docking Facility Authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986

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## Background

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1986

- October: The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 authorized \$5 million for “initial design engineering, and other activities for construction of a drug interdiction docking facility” and for establishing a separate “repair, maintenance, and boat lift facility.”
- October: The above funds were appropriated through the Omnibus Drug Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1987.
- December: Coast Guard approved the first block of funds for the facility and, according to the supervisor of the Shore Maintenance Detachment in Miami, selected a site on Stocking Island near George Town, Great Exuma Island.

1987

- February: The Bahamian government notified Coast Guard that there was not enough land available on Stocking Island for the facility.
- May: Coast Guard officials inspected a new site called Exuma Station and completed a draft concept of operations for the facility.
- July: According to the Coast Guard Liaison to the Bahamas, Coast Guard decided to locate the boat docking facility, the new Operation Bahamas and Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) helipad, and the planned aerostat radar at Exuma Station.
- August: Coast Guard completed cost estimates for various site configurations.
- September: Coast Guard requested \$15 million to build the consolidated facility at Exuma Station.
- November: The Bahamian government informed the U.S. Embassy that construction and installation of the facility at Exuma Station could begin.

1988

- January: Coast Guard officials were told that the \$15 million requested in September 1987 would not be forthcoming for the construction of the facility.
- February: Coast Guard abandoned plans for a land-based boat docking facility after spending 14 months and approximately \$80,000. As an alternative to a land-based facility, Coast Guard began testing a mobile support facility to fulfill the land-based boat docking facility requirement. Coast Guard officials believe the mobile support facility, a Coast Guard cutter, or other suitable vessel, will meet their requirements.

In discussing interdiction efforts in general, the Strategy states that

“Despite interdiction’s successful disruptions of trafficking patterns, the supply of illegal drugs entering the United States has, by all estimates, continued to grow. Every time we disrupt or close a particular trafficking route, we have found that traffickers resort to other smuggling tactics that are even more difficult to detect. Indeed, our recent experiences with drug interdiction have persuasively demonstrated that interdiction alone cannot prevent the entry of drugs, or fully deter traffickers and their organizations.”

The Strategy further says that

“Resources for interdiction have increased faster than for any other component of the drug control program, and the Strategy recommends holding the current level relatively constant for the time being while funded assets are deployed and the situation is assessed.”

Concerning air interdiction specifically, the September 1989 Strategy calls for completing the fixed and mobile detection networks, including aerostat radars discussed in this report, along our Southern border and the Caribbean as funds are available. The Strategy cautions that “The Administration will undertake a thorough review of existing methods for deterring air smugglers.” Since issuance of the September 1989 Strategy, DOD provided funding for completion of the land-based aerostat system in the Bahamas.

In January 1990, the President issued the second National Drug Control Strategy. While this Strategy proposed increased funding for all aspects of the war on drugs, including interdiction, these additional funds will be used to complete and integrate existing interdiction systems. The Strategy continues to recommend that no new systems be initiated.

when aerostats are “down” for scheduled maintenance. However, it is difficult to deploy radar aircraft on short notice when aerostats must be brought “down” for unscheduled maintenance and weather conditions that limit operations. Further, as shown in our June 1989 report on air interdiction programs,<sup>2</sup> there are limited radar aircraft available for air interdiction surveillance, and these aircraft can remain on station for relatively short periods of time.

We agree with Customs that deterrence is an important element in drug law enforcement strategies. ONDCP, as later discussed, made a similar comment. On the basis of these comments, we expanded the report’s definition of interdiction to include deterrence—the denial of preferred smuggling modes and transportation routes. (See p. 14.) We also deleted a statement that interdiction systems could become obsolete when drug traffickers shift to other smuggling modes and transportation routes.

While recognizing the value of deterrence, we question Customs’ comment that deterring drug traffickers from using a particular route will force them to use less preferable and more vulnerable drug smuggling methods. The September 1989, National Drug Control Strategy, as discussed on pages 28 and 48, says, that when faced with a disrupted or closed smuggling route, drug traffickers resort to other smuggling tactics that are even more difficult to detect.

We disagree with Customs’ position that we should withhold judgment on the effectiveness of the entire aerostat system until such time as the final aerostat becomes fully operational. Questions on the effectiveness of the system make it essential to approach decisions with caution. Aerostats located in Florida and the Bahamas are operational about half of the time, and contingencies to fill gaps during aerostat downtime, in our opinion, have limitations. (See page 45.) Further, as pointed out by the Department of Justice in its comments on this report, the majority of drug seizures in the Bahamas were not a result of radar targets but were products of drug intelligence and investigations. In our opinion, this information suggests that additional anti-drug funds for interdiction purposes in the Bahamas might be more effectively used on drug intelligence and investigation.

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<sup>2</sup>Drug Smuggling: Capabilities For Interdicting Private Aircraft Are Limited and Costly, (GAO/ GGD-89-93, June 9, 1989)

In our opinion, Justice's comment that the majority of drug seizures did not result from radar-acquired targets provides further evidence that anti-drug funds for the Bahamas could be put to more effective use on aspects of the drug war other than expensive radar. We noted in our report that DEA had informed us that 62 percent of all cocaine seizures in the Bahamas during 1988 were based on prior intelligence. This statistic, provided by DEA and re-emphasized by the Department of Justice in its formal comments, suggests that one way to improve interdiction efforts in the Bahamas may be to increase DEA's intelligence and investigation activities.

Justice commented that our discussion of radar minimized the value of Air National Guard mobile radar systems. Our report included the most recent, although limited, information available. As discussed on page 20, Air National Guard radar had been used in the Bahamas only briefly during a 2-week special operation in September 1988. The results of the operation were limited primarily because of turbulent weather resulting from hurricane Gilbert.

Subsequently, on the basis of information provided by the INM official in Nassau, we updated our report to disclose that National Guard radar will be deployed at Great Inagua in May 1990 as an alternative until the planned aerostat is acquired and installed. This use of National Guard radar is consistent with the Department of Justice's view of the radar's value. Further, this use of National Guard radar at Great Inagua provides an opportunity to assess an alternative to the planned aerostat.

Justice commented that our statement that "the decentralized approach to managing and planning is a workable strategy for the present level of resources" implies that this approach might not work at greater levels of resources. [Emphasis added by the Department of Justice.] We believe that at some resource level a centralized approach could facilitate setting long-range priorities and determining resource needs. However, our analysis was not designed to determine what that resource level would be for the Bahamas. Thus, we deleted the underlined phrase.

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## Comments From the Department of the Treasury and Our Response

The Department of the Treasury asked the Customs Service to review and comment on this report. The Customs Service raised several issues. First, it said that the amount we used to show the average cost for acquiring and installing an aerostat was overstated and that aerostats were "the most cost effective surveillance platform available." Second, Customs commented on our statement that aerostats are inoperable

commented that land-based aerostats are the only effective asset to detect low flying aircraft short of putting round-the-clock radar aircraft, such as AEW aircraft, in place at much greater expense. While recognizing that limitations will continue to exist even when the planned land-based aerostat radar system in the Bahamas is complete, DOT said that a completed system covering a larger geographic area will be more effective than a partial system. Finally, it pointed out that the President's September 1989 National Drug Control Strategy calls for completing the land-based aerostat network in the southern United States and Bahamas as part of its overall strategy.

In making its case for completing the aerostat radar system in the Bahamas, we believe that DOT may have overstated the value and capabilities of other radar that it says can be used to offset the limitations of aerostats and may have overlooked the usefulness of other alternatives to provide radar coverage in the southern Bahamas. As we said in our June 1989 report,<sup>1</sup> (1) sea-based aerostats are used primarily for marine surveillance and have a limited capability to detect aircraft; (2) radar aircraft are expensive to operate and can remain on station for limited periods; and (3) over-the-horizon radar systems are in the developmental stage, have limited capability, and the Air Force does not expect to request procurement funds for a system capable of covering the Caribbean until fiscal year 1991.

Concerning DOT's comment that radar aircraft, though more expensive, are the only effective alternative to land-based aerostats, our report does not compare the costs and effectiveness of radar systems. Rather, we question the significant expansion of air interdiction assets in the Bahamas because the air interdiction systems are costly and will not eliminate limitations in the interdiction system. As stated in the report, land-based aerostats do not provide constant radar coverage. Aerostats currently located in Florida and the Bahamas are "down" about half of the time and contingencies (as discussed on page 45), proposed to fill gaps when aerostats are "down" also have limitations.

In commenting on this report, DOT did not mention the potential use of other radar systems, such as ground-based, military radar, as an alternative to the planned aerostat at Great Inagua in the southern Bahamas. Ground-based military radar are currently operating in the Turks and Caicos Islands and other parts of the Caribbean. While not providing the

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<sup>1</sup>Drug Smuggling: Capabilities for Interdicting Private Aircraft Are Limited and Costly (GAO/GGD-89-93, June 9, 1989).

# Conclusions

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Managing and planning U.S. anti-drug programs and operations have tended to be decentralized, and there has been little or no central control over resources or strategic decisions. Management benefits could result from the development of a comprehensive strategic plan that would provide a mechanism for setting long-range objectives and for defining resource needs and priorities. However, in our opinion, the decentralized approach to managing and planning anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas is a workable strategy and could facilitate flexible responses to future changes in the drug smuggling threat.

While good arguments may exist for maintaining the current level of U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas, the benefits of an expanded air interdiction system relative to its limitations have not been made clear by the agencies. Accordingly, we are not convinced that present air interdiction efforts should be significantly expanded. Ongoing and planned expansion of air interdiction efforts in the Bahamas emphasize expensive investments in fixed-base aerostat radars and helicopter bases. Such assets are aimed at stopping airborne drug smugglers who travel along specific corridors from drug-producing countries to the United States. These assets, however, cannot be easily adapted to future shifts in drug-trafficking methods and routes.

In our opinion, airborne drug traffickers, in response to intensified air interdiction efforts, are likely to shift to other drug smuggling methods and routes that can be more difficult to detect. Although additional radar systems, helicopters, and helicopter bases planned for the Bahamas will improve the capabilities of detecting and apprehending airborne drug smugglers, these investments will not eliminate gaps in the air interdiction system, and thus, air and other smuggling avenues will still be available.

Additionally, federal resources are scarce, and there are many competing needs for the limited funds available for anti-drug programs. In a June 9, 1989, report on air interdiction programs,<sup>1</sup> we stated that we are not convinced that spending additional millions of dollars on air interdiction assets is the best use for additional funds Congress and the Administration may wish to put into the Nation's war on drugs. In that report, we proposed that Congress may want to pursue the issue further with key Administration officials before deciding on specific authorization and appropriation levels for all aspects of the war on drugs.

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<sup>1</sup>Drug Smuggling: Capabilities for Interdicting Private Aircraft Are Limited and Costly (GAO/ GGD-89-93, June 1989).

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## Management and Planning of U.S. Anti- Drug Efforts Tend to Be Decentralized

Because the U.S. agencies operating in the Bahamas are accountable to both the U.S. Ambassador and their own agency management, the planning and management of U.S. anti-drug efforts tend to be decentralized. While the Ambassador has general oversight and may disapprove a specific action, policy, or operation proposed by an agency if it would adversely affect U.S. relations with the Bahamian government, the Ambassador cannot direct agencies' day-to-day operations. For example, the DEA official that directs OPBAT is accountable to both the Ambassador and the DEA Special-Agent-In-Charge of the Miami Field Division. For specific operations, each U.S. agency receives guidance and resources from its own agency management in the United States. The U.S. Ambassador holds periodic meetings with the agencies involved to coordinate the various agencies' operations and activities.

A U.S.-Bahamas Joint Task Force was established by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and was supported by the Bahamian government. The joint task force, co-chaired by the U.S. Ambassador and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Bahamas, was charged with planning for the operation and maintenance of specific drug interdiction assets authorized by the 1986 act. The U.S. component of the task force, chaired by the Ambassador and comprised of involved U.S. agencies, has evolved into one of the principal mechanisms for coordinating U.S. interdiction efforts, but it does not centrally control interdiction operations.

U.S. agencies operating in the Bahamas have developed a variety of plans covering individual anti-drug programs and operations. We identified numerous operational plans, agreements, and memoranda of understanding covering various anti-drug activities in the Bahamas. These documents generally define objectives, procedures, and operating instructions for specific programs, operations, or groups of operations. The documents often identify the equipment and personnel currently available to support the program or operation and describe where these resources will be deployed. Many of these documents also describe the roles and responsibilities of each agency and its personnel participating in the program or operation.

The various operational plans developed by U.S. anti-drug agencies in the Bahamas have not been consolidated in a single strategic planning document. We found no indication that the absence of such a document has impaired U.S. efforts.

The Bahamian government has developed a proposal to expand drug interdiction activities in the Bahamas. While this proposal includes

# Managing and Planning U.S. Anti-Drug Efforts in the Bahamas

U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas have evolved from a relatively simple and inexpensive activity to one involving many different agencies and activities. The Bahamas is an important location for anti-drug efforts because of (1) its proximity to, and strategic location between, the United States and drug-producing countries and (2) intensified anti-drug efforts in South Florida. In addition, the willingness of the Bahamian government to support joint anti-drug operations facilitates U.S. efforts. Consequently, anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas now play a key role in the U.S. war on drugs.

Managing and planning these efforts have evolved on an ad hoc basis and have tended to be decentralized. We found no indications, however, that the lack of central management and planning have caused significant conflicts or impaired U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas.

## Extent and Cost of U.S. Anti-Drug Efforts in the Bahamas Have Increased

U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas have evolved from simple bilateral agreements in the early 1970s that allowed Customs aircraft to fly over the Bahamas, to extensive and costly drug interdiction operations in the 1980s that involve several U.S. and Bahamian agencies. For example, in 1982, U.S. anti-drug efforts focused primarily on OPBAT, a joint U.S.-Bahamas operation that used U.S. equipment (primarily helicopters) and personnel to transport and support RBPF officers to apprehend drug smugglers who used private aircraft. U.S. participation in the operation involved a small number of DEA agents and two U.S. Air Force helicopters. Since then, OPBAT has grown into a multi-agency operation with eight apprehension helicopters and numerous personnel from DEA, Coast Guard, and the U.S. Army.

In addition, there are five other ongoing air and marine drug interdiction operations in the Bahamas that involve five U.S. and two Bahamian agencies. As described in chapter 2, OPBAT and the other air and marine interdiction operations involve hundreds of U.S. and Bahamian personnel, including DEA special agents; Bahamian police and defense forces; Customs, Coast Guard, DEA, and U.S. military pilots; aviation support personnel; and radar and communication specialists. OPBAT and the other air and marine interdiction operations are supported by an extensive radar detection network. Managing this large and diverse set of activities is a difficult task.

The buildup of U.S. anti-drug efforts has been costly. Agency estimates show that the annual cost of U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas increased from about \$11 million in fiscal year 1986 to about \$33 million

According to the senior DEA official in Nassau, DEA agents have provided information on suspected criminal activity in several recent cases that resulted in convictions of Bahamian police officers for conspiracy and other drug-related crimes. He noted that while some official corruption still exists, it does not prevent cooperation between U.S. and Bahamian law enforcement officials or cause major problems for OPBAT drug interdiction operations. For example, he noted that DEA agents and the Bahamian police share informants.

The 1984 Commission of Inquiry also identified high-level corruption as a problem. For instance, the Commission identified two members of the Bahamian parliament as being involved in drug-related corruption. Nevertheless, both individuals were renominated by the ruling Progressive Liberal Party for parliamentary seats and were subsequently reelected in June 1987.

Senior U.S. Embassy officials in Nassau and senior DEA and State Department officials in Washington said that the Bahamian Attorney General has asked the United States for documentary evidence that could be used to prosecute corrupt officials, but that the United States has been unable to provide such evidence.

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### Bahamian Government Has Agreed to Establish an Information Center

DEA has encouraged the Bahamian government to establish a joint information center patterned after a similar facility in the Dominican Republic. The purpose of such a center is to computerize a variety of information on people and conveyances entering and leaving the country to monitor the movement of suspected drug traffickers. According to the senior DEA official in Nassau, the Bahamian government has agreed to establish such a center in principle but wants to employ a more elaborate computer system than the DEA proposed system, which would meet the basic requirements. This official said that the Bahamian government currently faces the additional problem of having no qualified personnel to operate a computer system.

Justice Department officials commented that the proposed joint information center is vital to intelligence collection activities that are necessary to realize long-term goals in the Bahamas. However, they said that implementation of this proposal continues to be impeded by delays on the part of the Bahamian government. The Department officials noted that these delays have been at least as detrimental to the implementation of the center as some of the problems we noted.

In January 1988, the Bahamian government amended its drug laws to increase minimum mandatory sentences for certain drug-related crimes. According to the senior DEA official at the U.S. Embassy in Nassau, this legislation makes drug trafficking and possession of specified quantities of dangerous drugs (2 pounds of cocaine or 10 pounds of marijuana) punishable by 10 years to life in prison. Other significant changes include an increase in penalties for drug-related conspiracy and the willingness of Bahamian courts to convict drug smugglers on these charges. This official said that as of December 1988, four defendants had been prosecuted and found guilty and had received sentences of 15 years or more under the new laws. The DEA official said that DEA had assisted the Bahamian police in these cases by providing evidence to the police anti-corruption unit, which, in turn, developed the case.

The Bahamian courts have also substantially modified bail practices for drug offenders, according to the senior DEA official in Nassau. Previously, foreign nationals routinely paid small amounts of bail and then fled to avoid prosecution. Foreign nationals are now held without bail until trial. The Bahamian courts have also changed bail practices for Bahamian citizens. Although they are not considered as likely as foreigners to flee to avoid prosecution, Bahamian citizens living in the Bahamas who were previously released without bail are now typically required to post bail.

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### Full Staffing of Bahamian Narcotics Enforcement Unit Will Take Time

In May 1988, the Bahamian government began training, with U.S. assistance, the first 25 officers for what will eventually be a 270-person drug enforcement unit. The purpose of the unit is to provide the Bahamian government with a unilateral capability to enforce its domestic narcotics laws. The RBPF will staff the new unit with experienced officers already on the force, who will be replaced in their old units by new recruits. However, according to a senior U.S. Embassy official in Nassau, the Bahamian government has experienced difficulties attracting new police officers because of the relatively low salaries offered. These difficulties have delayed full staffing and training of the narcotics enforcement unit.

INM has provided about \$300,000 dollars for training and equipping the first 100 officers. According to the senior DEA official in Nassau, officers selected to serve in the drug enforcement unit undergo a 4-week training course designed to improve their investigative skills. The DEA international training team from Quantico, Virginia, provides 2 weeks of the training, and the DEA Miami field office and the RBPF provide a week

the treaty would be signed or when it would be submitted to the U.S. Senate for advice and consent.

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### Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty Status

MLATS facilitate the exchange of information between countries to obtain evidence used in prosecuting criminal cases. MLATS were first developed in the mid-1960s, primarily because a class of cases having to do with organized crime and tax shelters could not be made without evidence from other countries. These treaties expedite the very slow and complex process of obtaining bank records and other evidence from foreign countries.

The MLAT agreement between the U.S. and Bahamian governments was negotiated in 1987. According to State Department officials, the Bahamian government signed the MLAT and passed implementing legislation in March 1988. The agreement was ratified by the U.S. Senate in October 1989. According to a State Department official, the treaty is awaiting the President's execution of an instrument of ratification. The official did not know when final action on the MLAT would occur.

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### Progress on Bahamian Legal and Law Enforcement Initiatives

The Bahamian government has made progress on a variety of legal and law enforcement initiatives to improve its unilateral capability to combat drug trafficking and associated problems. The government has (1) issued new regulations to discourage money laundering, (2) enacted a new asset seizure law, (3) increased penalties for drug crimes, and (4) established a new narcotics unit in its police force. The Bahamian government has also taken steps to reduce official corruption, establish a central information center to help track suspected drug traffickers, and reduce drug abuse among its citizens.

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### Bahamian Efforts to Control Money Laundering

Bahamian banks are self-policing, subscribing to the "Code of Conduct" of the Association of International Banks and Trust Companies. In response to criticism that Bahamian banks were facilitating the laundering of drug profits, the Central Bank of the Bahamas issued regulations that require the reporting of cash transactions over \$10,000. Although the new regulations have helped cut down on the laundering of large sums of money through Bahamian banks, senior DEA and U.S. Embassy officials in the Bahamas said that money laundering operations still exist in the Bahamas. These officials said that the principal means used is the wire transfer of large sums of money through "front" companies

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## Drug Traffickers Can Use Different Smuggling Routes and Methods

As discussed in our recent report on air interdiction programs,<sup>5</sup> drug smugglers have proven their ability in the past to respond successfully to changes in the interdiction system and appear to be adapting to improvements in the air interdiction programs. According to EPIC intelligence reports, traffickers have been either flying their drug loads around the air interdiction net or have been using other smuggling methods such as cargo shipments.

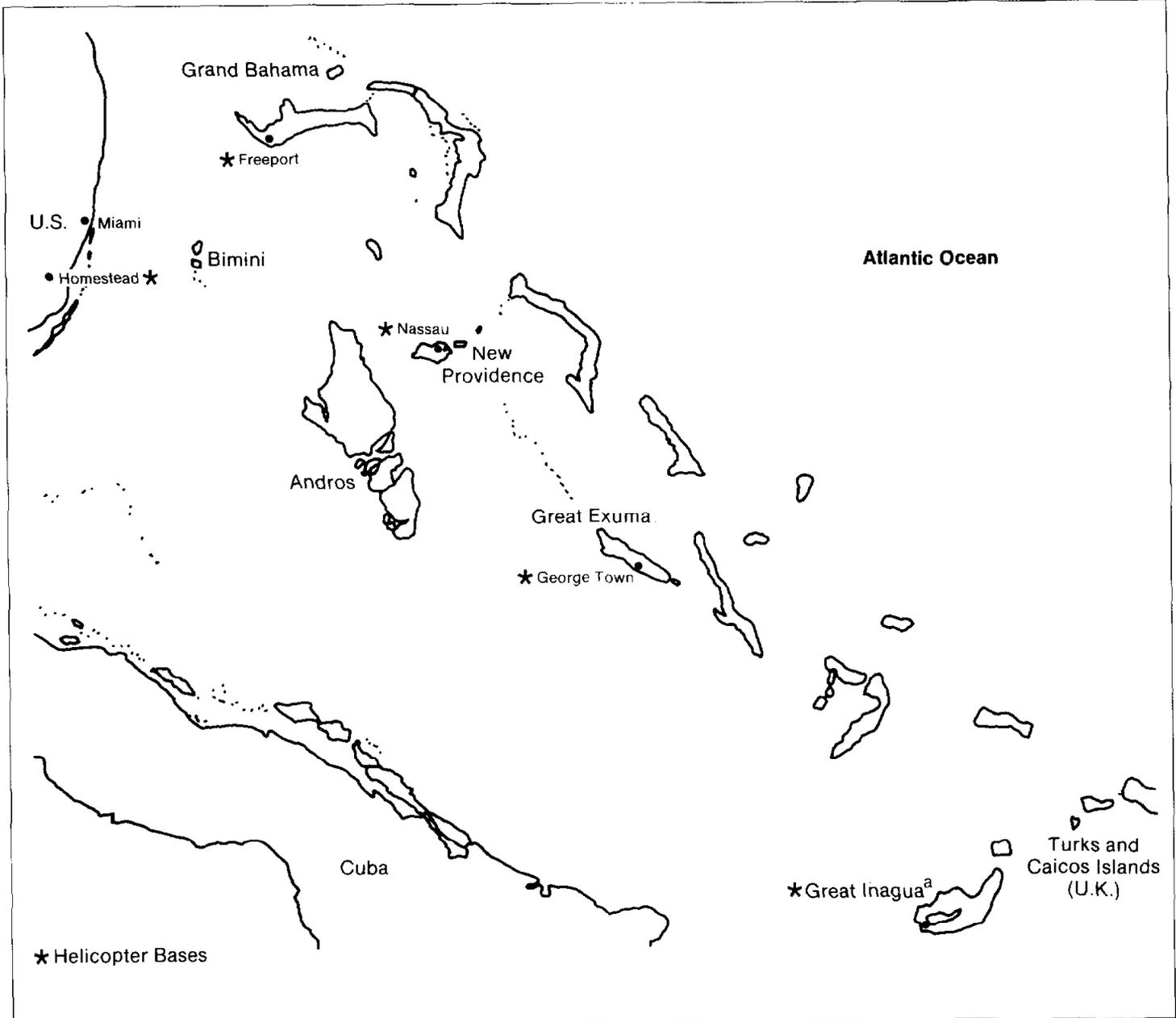
EPIC intelligence reports also indicate that air smugglers are making more use of smuggling routes from South America through Central America and landing in Mexico. These reports indicate that smugglers are making more use of private and commercial marine vessels and commercial aircraft to smuggle cocaine and other drugs into the United States. We were unable to determine whether the increased use of other transportation methods was caused by the buildup in air interdiction resources. However, other smuggling options, besides air smuggling, are available and are being exploited by drug traffickers.

The President's September 1989 National Drug Control Strategy also states that drug traffickers have been successful in responding to increased interdiction efforts. Further, the Strategy says that, "Every time we disrupt or close a particular trafficking route, we have found that traffickers resort to other smuggling tactics that are even more difficult to detect."

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<sup>5</sup>GAO/GGD-89-93, June 1989.

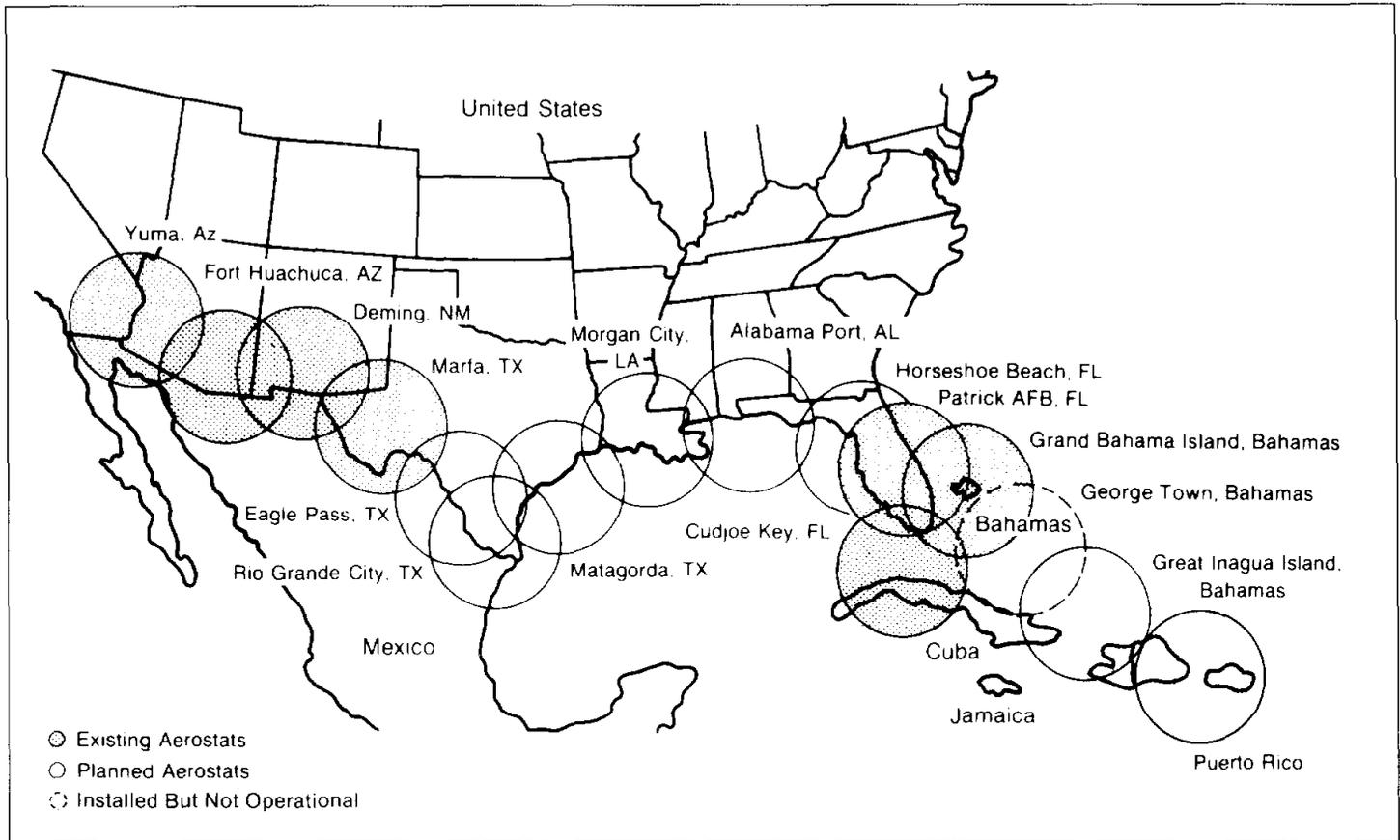
Figure 2.5: Locations of Apprehension Helicopter Bases



<sup>a</sup>The base at Great Inagua is scheduled to become operational in May 1990.

In our review of C3 center and OPBAT center daily activity records for the 9-month period October 1987 through June 1988, we identified two incidents in which apprehension teams were unable to reach a smuggling

Figure 2.4: Planned Land-Based Aerostat Network



Note: Land-Based aerostats are operational about 50 percent of the time.

## Additional Helicopters and Bases Proposed to Improve Apprehension Capabilities

Once suspected smugglers are identified and intercepted by fixed-wing aircraft, successful apprehension depends on the timely arrival of helicopter-borne apprehension teams to arrest suspects and seize illegal drugs. However, apprehension teams in the southern Bahamas are sometimes unable to reach the site of suspected drug smuggling activity soon enough to make arrests and seizures. To address this problem, the U.S. and Bahamian governments have agreed to establish one additional apprehension helicopter base on Great Inagua. In addition, the Bahamian government has proposed that the United States further increase the number of helicopters and bases in the Bahamas.

In January 1989, Customs determined that the aerostat then designated for Great Inagua should be placed on the southwestern U.S. border because it could be installed and operated there sooner. According to a DOD official, DOD has since provided funding for an aerostat to be acquired and installed at Great Inagua. Current plans call for this aerostat to be operational by August 1991.

According to the INM official in Nassau, the National Guard Bureau has agreed to deploy and operate a ground-based military radar system at Great Inagua until the planned aerostat is operational. The National Guard radar is planned to become operational concurrently with the establishment of a planned helicopter apprehension base. As discussed later, the base is scheduled to become operational in May 1990. The National Guard is committed to providing radar support through the end of 1990 with the possibility of a 1-year extension. According to this official, the military radar can detect aircraft flying at 500 feet up to 60 miles and will be able to provide radar coverage of the Windward Passage.

Coast Guard supplements the radar detection network with five sea-based aerostats positioned south of the Bahamas. As of August 1989, Coast Guard was operating four sea-based aerostats tethered to contractor-owned and -operated boats. The fifth sea-based aerostat became operational in October 1989. The Coast Guard official responsible for the aerostat program said that these aerostats cost about \$10 million each and estimated that the annual operating costs will be \$4 million for each aerostat. Four of the sea-based aerostats will have both maritime and limited air detection capabilities. These aerostats will cover the passages or "choke points," such as the Windward Passage between Cuba and Haiti that maritime smugglers often use enroute to the Bahamas.

In coordination with Customs, Coast Guard is also overseeing research and development so that land-based aerostats can provide both air and maritime radar coverage. If the modification is determined to be technically feasible, it will cost about \$2 million for the first aerostat and \$1 million for each additional aerostat that is modified.

Although these actions will improve detection capabilities, the expanded radar systems will not provide constant coverage. As previously discussed, aerostat radars must be taken down for maintenance and cannot operate in adverse weather conditions. Current land-based aerostats are operational about 50 percent of the time. Figure 2.3 shows the locations

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responsible for the maritime programs in Miami, Coast Guard and Customs vessels equipped with on-board radar systems occasionally detect and apprehend smugglers who use boats to smuggle drugs. U.S. patrol boats without on-board radar systems detect and apprehend some smugglers by patrolling and boarding suspect boats in known drug-trafficking areas.

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### Many Smugglers Have Evaded Ground-Based Radar Detection

The senior OPBAT operations officer in Nassau said that intelligence reports indicate that many smugglers routinely evade detection by exploiting geographic gaps in radar coverage. The senior DEA official in Nassau provided us with specific information on 16 cases during 1987 and 1988 in which drug smugglers evaded ground-based radar detection systems and successfully penetrated Bahamian airspace. Our review of DEA intelligence reports indicated that air smugglers routinely used Cuban air corridors and other routes not presently covered by radar to fly into the Bahamas. Smugglers in aircraft using these routes have evaded detection by ground-based radars. In one case, a smuggler passed over Cuba and was not detected until reaching an area south of Bimini in the northern Bahamas just before airdropping a large load of marijuana.

In response to a DEA threat-assessment of the Cuban corridors, the Missouri and Tennessee Air National Guard temporarily deployed mobile ground-based radar units to the Bahamas for a 2-week special operation in September 1988 as part of their annual training requirement. The National Guard units deployed radar systems at Andros Island and George Town, Great Exuma Island, two areas not normally covered by radar. A primary objective of the operation was to detect and apprehend drug smugglers flying over Cuba. Customs and Coast Guard provided interceptor aircraft and OPBAT apprehension helicopters in support of the operation. The results of the operation, the first of several similar operations planned for the Bahamas during fiscal year 1989, were limited primarily because of turbulent weather resulting from hurricane Gilbert. Twenty-eight suspect aircraft were detected, but none of these detections resulted in drug seizures or arrests.

According to DEA and Customs officials, there had been a significant increase in drug-related activity over Cuba. In June 1989, Customs' Special-Agent-In-Charge (SAC), South Florida, said that drug smuggling flights over Cuba had been a major threat to U.S. drug interdiction efforts in South Florida. The SAC estimated that at least one drug flight

Figure 2.1: GAO Photograph of Aerostat Radar Balloon at High Rock, Grand Bahama Island, Bahamas.

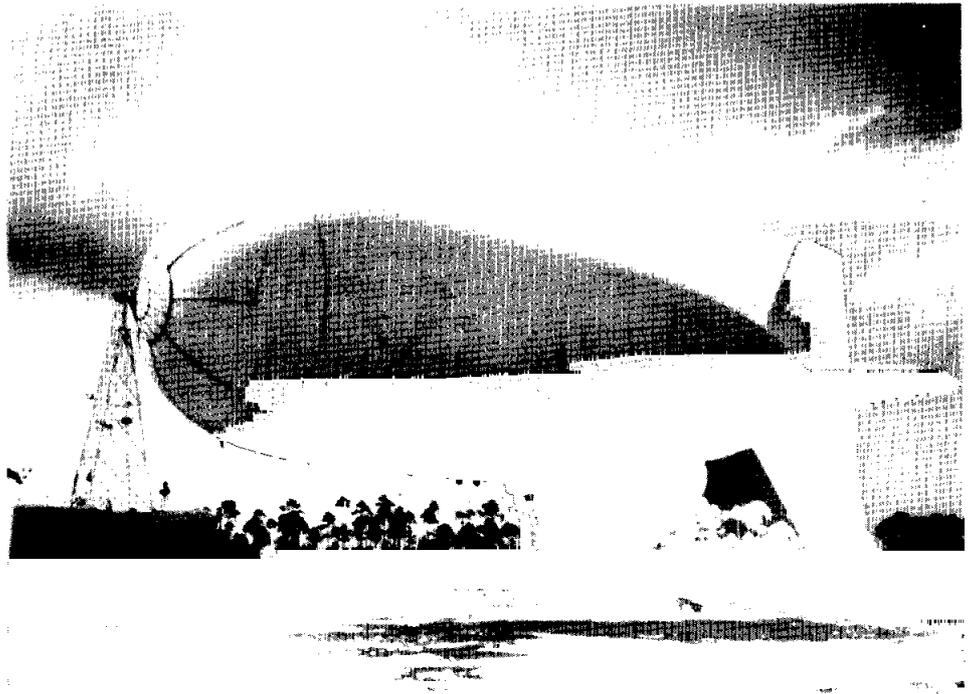
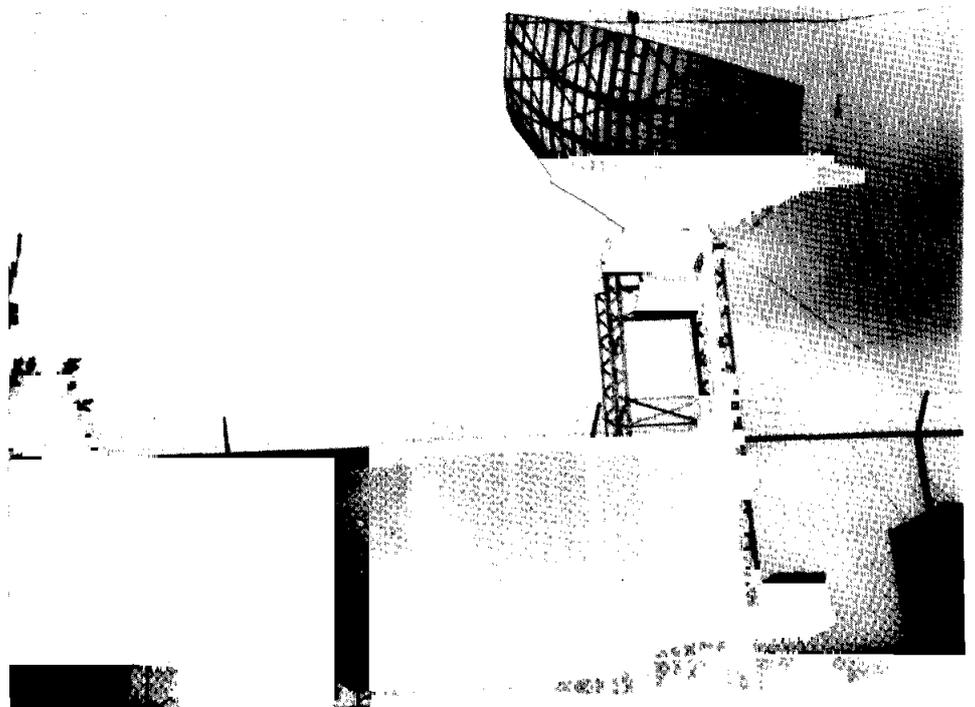


Figure 2.2: GAO Photograph of Ground-Based Radar at Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands.



aircraft is heading toward the Bahamas, control over the operation is to be given to the OPBAT control center in Nassau.

OPBAT's primary mission is to apprehend airborne smugglers in the Bahamas. Initiated in 1982, OPBAT is a joint U.S.-Bahamas operation that uses U.S. equipment (primarily helicopters) and personnel to transport and support RBPF officers in apprehending suspected smugglers. OPBAT employs DEA, Coast Guard, and Army personnel and equipment located at three sites in the Bahamas. In addition, DEA and Coast Guard personnel direct OPBAT helicopter operations and coordinate all other interdiction operations in the Bahamas from the OPBAT center located within the U.S. Embassy in Nassau. OPBAT has operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week since October 1987.

Other operations developed to support air interdiction efforts in the Bahamas include Operation Bandit and Operation SEABAT. Customs initiated Operation Bandit in September 1986 to improve apprehension response time in the Bahamas. Providing around-the-clock coverage since February 1988, Bandit uses Florida-based helicopters with RBPF personnel aboard to authorize arrests and seizures in the Bahamas.

SEABAT, a Coast Guard extension of OPBAT, provides a ship-based launch platform for helicopters with Bahamian law enforcement personnel aboard. SEABAT was initiated in October 1986, but has not been a continuous operation. According to the Coast Guard, SEABAT helicopters flew about 156 hours over 39 days in fiscal year 1988.

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## Maritime Interdiction Programs

Maritime interdiction efforts include Coast Guard's Operation Shiprider and joint Customs/Coast Guard interdiction operations at Gun Cay and West End, Bahamas. Under the Shiprider operation, RBDF personnel sail aboard U.S. Coast Guard ships to authorize the boarding of suspect vessels in Bahamian waters. According to the Coast Guard, one or more Bahamian shipriders were onboard Coast Guard ships for 140 days during 1988.

Customs initiated around-the-clock maritime interdiction operations at Gun Cay in April 1987, and at West End in August 1988. The Gun Cay operation uses Customs, Coast Guard, and RBDF personnel on Customs and Coast Guard vessels to patrol in the northern Bahamas. The Customs official in Miami who manages the Customs' marine interdiction program said that these operations have reduced maritime smuggling activity between the northern Bahamas and southern Florida. Customs

# U.S.-Bahamas Drug Interdiction Efforts

The drug interdiction systems have limitations, and thus, many smugglers avoid detection and apprehension. These limitations include gaps in geographic coverage, operational limitations of radars, and limited numbers of helicopters and bases. Additional radars, helicopters, and bases being acquired for the Bahamas will increase the capabilities of drug interdiction efforts but are costly and will not eliminate limitations in the interdiction systems.

## Joint U.S.-Bahamas Drug Interdiction Programs

The primary objective of U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas is drug interdiction—the seizure of illegal drugs and the denial of preferred smuggling modes and transportation routes to drug traffickers.

DEA, Customs, Coast Guard, DOD, and two Bahamian agencies—the RBPF and the RBDF—jointly participate in interdiction programs and operations designed to stop the flow of drugs through the Bahamas and into the United States. These programs and operations are directed at both air and maritime smuggling targets. Interdiction focuses on detecting, identifying, and intercepting shipments of illegal drugs as they move from source countries along smuggling routes to the U.S. land, sea, and air borders.

The primary method of transporting drugs into the Bahamas is by private aircraft,<sup>1</sup> according to the senior DEA official in Nassau. Drug smuggling aircraft typically depart from various locations in South American countries and fly at very low altitudes to avoid radar detection. Approaching the Bahamas at altitudes of 500 feet or less, smugglers transfer their cargoes to smaller aircraft or vessels (either by dropping the drugs from the air or unloading after landing) for transport to the United States. Although private aircraft remain the primary mode of smuggling cocaine, a DEA Assistant Administrator said that the trend is shifting toward greater use of commercial cargo to smuggle drugs into the United States.

## Air Interdiction Programs

Air interdiction programs are aimed at stopping smugglers from using aircraft to bring drugs into the United States. Air interdiction efforts focus on small, privately owned aircraft as opposed to aircraft operated by commercial passenger and cargo airlines. The principal method of

<sup>1</sup>See GAO report *Drug Smuggling: Capabilities for Interdicting Private Aircraft Are Limited and Costly* (GAO/GGD-89-93, June 9, 1989) for a detailed discussion of federal efforts to interdict drug smugglers using private aircraft.

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reviewed Congressional hearings; and examined files, State Department cables, and bilateral agreements between the two governments.

To obtain information on the strategy, management, and planning of U.S. anti-drug efforts, we reviewed (1) the former National Drug Policy Board's (predecessor to the current Office of National Drug Control Policy) national drug strategy and lead agency implementing strategies, (2) the Bahamian drug interdiction proposal and the U.S. response, (3) operational plans for joint U.S.-Bahamas air and maritime drug interdiction programs and operations, and (4) memoranda of understanding among the various agencies participating in joint operations. We discussed these strategies, plans, and memoranda with cognizant agency officials. We also obtained cost data from the various U.S. agencies operating in the Bahamas for fiscal years 1986 through 1988. We reviewed the cost data for completeness but did not verify the data for accuracy.

To obtain information on the boat docking and boat repair facilities authorized by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, we interviewed Coast Guard officials responsible for managing the projects and reviewed project files, including engineering reports, contracts, status reports, and agreements, with the Bahamian government. This information is included in appendixes I and II.

To obtain information on the cost of assigning U.S. government personnel to the Bahamas on a temporary basis, we interviewed representatives from each of the agencies who had personnel stationed in the Bahamas and asked these officials to provide estimates of the costs of these assignments. We did not verify the information that is presented in appendix III.

We did our work at the offices of INM, DEA, Coast Guard, Customs, DOD, the former National Drug Policy Board, and the former National Narcotics Border Interdiction System headquarters in Washington, D.C.; at field offices of DEA, Customs, Coast Guard, and the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System in southern Florida; and at offices of INM, DEA, Customs, and Coast Guard at the U.S. Embassy in Nassau, Bahamas. We also visited various joint U.S.-Bahamas air and maritime drug interdiction bases in the Bahamas and radar sites located throughout the Caribbean. A detailed list of all agency offices and facilities visited is included in appendix IV.

We did our work from March 1988 through May 1989, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

# Introduction

Despite increased U.S. and Bahamian anti-drug efforts, the Bahamas continues to be a major transit country for illegal shipments of drugs destined for the United States. Composed of 700 islands scattered over 100,000 square miles, the Bahamas is close to the United States and occupies a strategic location between the United States and drug-producing countries. It thus provides an ideal setting for drug smuggling. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Bahamas is one of the principal smuggling routes for drugs destined for the United States. U.S. and Bahamian efforts to deny drug smugglers use of the Bahamas have resulted in increased cocaine seizures. However, the flow of illicit drugs through the Bahamas continues.

According to DEA's El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), cocaine seizures in the Bahamas increased about 53 percent, from 14,214 pounds to 21,732 pounds, between 1985 and 1988. Despite these increased seizures, however, the price of cocaine in Miami dropped by 50 percent, from about \$32,000 a kilogram in 1985 to about \$16,000 in 1988, indicating that cocaine had become more readily available. Marijuana seizures in the Bahamas decreased by about 71 percent during the same period, from 351,415 pounds to 101,694 pounds. U.S.-supported anti-drug programs and operations in the Bahamas aimed at reducing the flow of drugs through the Bahamas and into the United States cost about \$33 million in fiscal year 1988 (see table 4.1, page 37). In commenting on this report, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) said that the \$33 million spent on anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas to seize 11 tons of cocaine and 51 tons of marijuana is a bargain when compared to the entire U.S. interdiction program. That program, in fiscal year 1988, seized 100 metric tons of cocaine and 830 metric tons of marijuana at a cost of \$1.5 billion according to ONDCP.

## Agencies Involved in U.S.-Bahamas Anti-Drug Efforts

The U.S. Ambassador to the Bahamas has overall responsibility for overseeing U.S. anti-drug efforts. The Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters (INM) and DEA also have major responsibilities for directing and coordinating U.S. anti-drug programs and operations. Other U.S. agencies involved in joint U.S.-Bahamas drug interdiction activities include the U.S. Customs Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Department of Defense (DOD). Each of these agencies provides personnel and equipment to support drug interdiction efforts in the Bahamas.

The Minister of National Security of the Bahamas has primary responsibility for Bahamian anti-drug efforts. Both the Royal Bahamian Police

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**Abbreviations**

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AEW   | Airborne Early Warning                 |
| C3    | Command, Control, and Communications   |
| DEA   | Drug Enforcement Administration        |
| DOD   | Department of Defense                  |
| DOT   | Department of Transportation           |
| EPIC  | El Paso Intelligence Center            |
| INM   | International Narcotics Matters        |
| MLAT  | Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty         |
| ONDCP | Office of National Drug Control Policy |
| OPBAT | Operation Bahamas and Turks            |
| RBDF  | Royal Bahamian Defense Force           |
| RBPF  | Royal Bahamian Police Force            |
| SAC   | Special-Agent-In-Charge                |

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Status of Other Anti-Drug Efforts

Although the primary focus of U.S. anti-drug efforts and expenditures in the Bahamas has been on interdiction, the U.S. and Bahamian governments are making progress on other anti-drug initiatives. A new extradition treaty has been negotiated and is awaiting approval by the Secretary of State prior to submission to the U.S. Senate. A Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty was ratified in October 1989 by the U.S. Senate. In addition, the Bahamian government has made progress on a variety of legal and law enforcement initiatives to improve its unilateral capability to combat drug trafficking and associated problems. (See p. 29.)

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Limitations of Interdiction Efforts

Limitations in the radar system in the Bahamas allow many smugglers to avoid detection. Also, U.S. apprehension helicopters are sometimes unable to reach the site of smuggling operations in a timely manner because there are not enough helicopters and bases to effectively cover the entire Bahamian archipelago and adjacent areas. (See pp. 17 and 25.)

To deal with some of these limitations, U.S. agencies are in the process of installing and acquiring additional radars and establishing a helicopter base, costing millions of dollars, to extend the air interdiction system in the Bahamas. (See p. 21 and 24.)

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Benefits From Additional Air Interdiction Spending Unclear

The installation and acquisition of additional radars, helicopters, and bases planned or underway in the Bahamas will increase the capabilities of drug interdiction efforts but are costly and will not eliminate limitations in the interdiction systems. First, while additional radars would improve detection capabilities, completion of the planned aerostat system (radars attached to tethered balloons) will not provide constant coverage in all areas because maintenance and weather will cause significant down time. Aerostats located in Florida and the Bahamas are operational about half the time. Second, expanding the current air interdiction system in the Bahamas will be costly. The second aerostat expected to be operational in George Town in early 1990, will cost about \$24 million. The Coast Guard estimates that a third aerostat, being acquired for Great Inagua, could cost from \$17-21 million. In addition, an aerostat costs \$7-8 million annually to operate. Third, the majority of drug seizures in the Bahamas are the result of drug intelligence and investigations and not the result of radar-acquired targets. Finally, drug smugglers are able to adapt to improvements in the air interdiction system by flying their drug loads around the air interdiction net or using

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# Executive Summary

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## Purpose

Anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas play a vital role in the U.S. war on drugs because the Bahamas occupies a strategic location between the United States and drug-producing countries. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bahamas is one of the principal smuggling routes for drugs shipped from Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States.

At the request of the Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee, GAO examined anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas, including

- the extent, results, and limitations of U.S.-Bahamas drug interdiction operations;
- the status of other drug control activities, including treaties between the United States and the Bahamas; and
- the strategy, management, and planning of U.S. anti-drug efforts, including efforts to improve coordination among interdiction agencies.

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## Background

The primary objective of U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas is drug interdiction—the seizure of illegal drugs and the denial of preferred smuggling modes and transportation routes to drug traffickers. The primary method of smuggling drugs through the Bahamas is by private aircraft. U.S. and Bahamian agencies have jointly participated in an increasing number of drug interdiction programs and operations since 1982, resulting in the seizure of large quantities of cocaine and marijuana. The U.S. and Bahamian governments contribute personnel to support joint programs and operations. Many of the aircraft, boats, and radars used in interdiction are provided by the United States. (See pp. 10 to 11 and 14.)

U.S. efforts in the Bahamas include a variety of anti-drug operations and activities that involve five federal agencies. The Department of State is the lead agency for anti-drug efforts in foreign countries. Through its Bureau of International Narcotics Matters and the U.S. Ambassador, State oversees the activities of all federal agencies operating in the Bahamas, including the Drug Enforcement Administration, Coast Guard, Customs, and the Department of Defense. (See p. 10.)

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## Results in Brief

U.S. anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas have evolved from a relatively simple and inexpensive activity to one involving five federal agencies and many activities. U.S. agencies spent about \$76 million over the last 3 years in support of anti-drug efforts in the Bahamas.

