

PREVENTING A SECURITY CRISIS IN THE CARIBBEAN

A REPORT

BY THE

UNITED STATES SENATE CAUCUS
ON
INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES SENATE
CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL

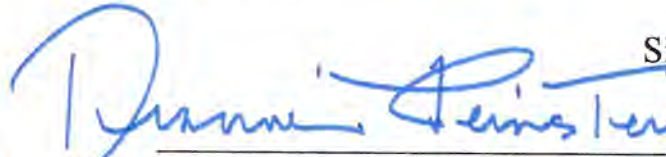
September 2012

Dear Colleague:

The Caribbean region has come a long way since the 1980s when it served as a hub for the majority of illegal drugs entering the United States. However, we cannot take this success for granted and must continue to find ways to support the nations of the Caribbean. As enforcement efforts in Mexico and Central America inevitably move trafficking patterns back to the Caribbean, this will be particularly crucial. This report and its recommendations provide a blueprint for how precisely we can do this.

Our report synthesizes information gathered by Caucus staff through briefings, interviews, and a review of documents from both government and non-government subject matter experts. We look forward to hearing your feedback on this report.

Sincerely,



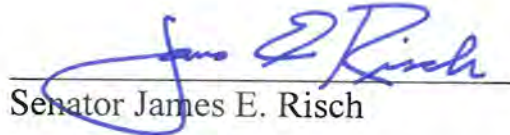
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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Caucus is supportive of the excellent whole-of-government approach taken to Caribbean security by the Obama Administration.

We offer the following policy recommendations to enhance current efforts:

MONEY LAUNDERING

- 1. *Finding:*** Money laundering and illicit financing continue to flourish across the globe. According to a report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Caribbean is the “most important destination for the laundering of cocaine-related trafficking income.”¹ The net inflow of cocaine-related funds into the Caribbean would amount to some U.S. \$6 billion – equivalent to 2.3 percent of the Caribbean’s gross domestic product. According to UNODC, these are “amounts that are not negligible.”²

Recommendation: While it is clear that much work remains to coordinate a global anti-money laundering and illicit financing strategy, Congress should update and strengthen anti-money laundering laws inside the United States. The Combatting Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing, and Counterfeiting Act of 2011 (S.1731) – introduced by Senators Grassley, Feinstein, and Levin – would strengthen U.S. anti-money laundering laws and set an example for other nations.

S.1731 would amend the federal criminal code to provide law enforcement with important authorities to help combat money laundering, protect the financial infrastructure of the United States, and protect our homeland by shutting down the financial sources that help fund drug trafficking and terrorist organizations. The bill also makes necessary updates to the criminal code to allow prosecutors to charge money laundering as a course of conduct, address comingled funds and structured transactions; authorizes communication intercepts for certain money laundering offenses; makes international money laundering provisions applicable to tax evasion; prohibits the possession of any material that can be used to counterfeit U.S. obligations or securities; and simplifies the predicate offenses eligible to trigger a money laundering charge. These changes are similar to proposals supported by the U.S. Department of Justice as part of the President’s July 2011 Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime.

VETTED UNITS

- Finding:*** Sensitive Investigative Units (SIUs) are highly trained, vetted law enforcement units that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) trains and collaborates with in select countries throughout the world. They are considered the “gold standard” in police vetted units. The Dominican Republic is the only Caribbean nation with an SIU. In the Western Hemisphere, there are also SIUs in Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala and Panama.

Recommendation: The SIU model should be replicated on an as-needed basis in the Caribbean. The Caucus asks that the DEA and State Department assess where in the Caribbean SIUs are most needed, would be most effective and would be welcomed by host country counterparts. Once this assessment is completed, Congress and the DEA should work together to use existing funding to create additional SIUs. Given its high homicide rate – 52 homicides per 100,000 people in 2010 which was the fourth highest in the world – the Caucus believes that Jamaica is a top candidate for a DEA-trained SIU.

PUERTO RICO

- Finding:*** As a U.S. territory, Puerto Rico is within the U.S. customs zone. As such, airport travel from the island is not subject to the same level of scrutiny as travel from a foreign country into the U.S. Once drugs enter Puerto Rico, it is relatively easy to transport them into other parts of the United States by plane. DEA reports that cocaine seizures along maritime routes between Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands increased from two metric tons in 2009 to seven metric tons in the first three quarters of 2010.

Drug-related violence in Puerto Rico has increased dramatically in recent years. In 2011, murder rates in Puerto Rico reached record levels with 1,136 homicides. According to government officials in Puerto Rico, over 70 percent of these murders were connected to drug trafficking activity.

Recommendation: As a U.S. territory, Puerto Rico is not eligible for State Department assistance through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). However, the Caucus believes that Puerto Rico could play an active part in CBSI by participating in the U.S. – Caribbean Security Dialogues

each year. The Caucus also recommends that Puerto Rican authorities be included in other working level meetings held by the U.S. with Caribbean authorities.

HAITI

4. ***Finding:*** Since Haiti's devastating January 2010 earthquake, the country has seen a marked decrease in the amount of narcotics transiting the country. Data compiled by DEA and the State Department show that in 2009, an estimated 11,050 kilograms of cocaine transited the country. In 2011, that number dropped to 3,685 kilograms. Although these decreases in trafficking are positive, the reality is that drug traffickers were affected by the destruction of infrastructure in Haiti. Without proper roads or maintained airstrips, traffickers' ability to access the country has been severely limited. In 2011, there were just seven reported drug flights into the country, down from 21 drug flights recorded in 2009. This decrease in trafficking highlights the level of devastation the earthquake caused. As the Haitian government rebuilds following the earthquake, drug traffickers may again utilize the new infrastructure to their advantage. An increase in clandestine drug flights and maritime drug movements is likely in the coming years.

Recommendation: Haiti is extremely susceptible to drug trafficking in the near future. While the United States and the international community must continue our support of Haitian redevelopment, our investments in Haiti's infrastructure should be coupled with strong support of Haitian counternarcotics efforts.

OPERATION BAHAMAS, TURKS AND CAICOS

5. ***Finding:*** Since it was first launched in 1982, Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) has been remarkably successful in reducing drug trafficking through those islands and their surrounding waters. Over the three decades of OPBAT operations, the percentage of cocaine entering the United States via The Bahamas has been reduced from nearly 80 percent to less than 5 percent. Through OPBAT, the DEA, U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Department of Defense conduct drug interdiction in cooperation with the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the Royal Bahamas Defence Force. An important dimension of this program has been the availability of U.S. helicopters for interdiction and maritime monitoring. Over the course of

OPBAT, the helicopters have been supplied and maintained by a number of different civilian and military agencies.

In 2011, however, two DEA helicopters were removed from the Exumas Islands in The Bahamas. As a result, a Department of Defense facility constructed to house them there is now not being fully utilized. At the Caucus's February 1, 2010 hearing, the Bahamian Ambassador to the United States, Cornelius Smith, raised concerns that this could leave vulnerable gaps in The Bahamas and its surrounding waters.

Recommendation: The Caucus urges DEA to consider returning the two Exumas Island-based helicopters. While the Caucus understands the reallocation of resources based on evolving needs, it is essential that the gains made in the Caribbean are not lost. Traffickers must be prevented from reactivating old routes and exploiting gaps in coverage due to insufficient air assets in the region.

DEPORTATION OF CRIMINALS TO THE CARIBBEAN

6. ***Finding:*** Each year, the United States deports thousands of Caribbean nationals to their home countries in the Caribbean for both criminal and immigration offenses. Currently, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) provides between three and five days advance notice to receiving countries along with information on the offense that has caused the deportee's removal to the receiving country.

The only information accompanying these deportees is the reason for deportation. Therefore, even if a deportee has been convicted of a serious crime or has an extensive criminal record, the only information given to receiving country authorities is the reason the offender was deported. ICE is forbidden from sharing further information without permission from the state or federal authority that holds the criminal records. As a result, receiving countries are left unaware of many deportees' criminal pasts, leaving them ill-prepared to prevent further criminal activity.

ICE is currently implementing a pilot program with Mexico to share greater details on serious criminal convictions. This program shares information on a previously agreed to list of crimes with a law enforcement entity in the deportee's home country so that they can prepare to effectively handle the removed person. ICE has also informed the Caucus that El Salvador has

requested a similar program with a letter of intent already signed between our countries.

Recommendation: A full criminal history should be sent with all deportees to their receiving countries' authorities. In particular, ICE should expand the sharing of serious criminal convictions with Caribbean nations that express a desire for such information.

EXTRADITION

7. **Finding:** The Caucus strongly supports the extradition of drug kingpins to the United States. Extradition helps to ensure that corruption and security concerns do not impact the trials or incarceration of these individuals. Extradition also helps to create a clear sense of consequences.

The United States has bilateral extradition treaties with each of the Caribbean nations. However, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Suriname do not have agreements with the U.S. to extradite their own nationals to the United States. Despite the lack of a formal agreement allowing for the extradition of their own nationals, the Dominican Republic and Haiti have allowed for the extradition of their own nationals for drug-related offenses. While Suriname does not extradite its own nationals, it has not been a serious issue for the U.S. as it has been for the Netherlands and France which have extradition requests that have not been met.

Recommendation: The United States should encourage its partners in the Caribbean to continue to extradite to the United States their nationals who are involved in international drug trafficking. It could be helpful for the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Suriname to formally allow for the extradition of their own nationals to the United States.

LEGAL TOOLS/CARIBBEAN BASIN SECURITY INITIATIVE

8. **Finding:** The May 2010 Caribbean – U.S. Plan of Action on Security Cooperation called for “new and improved legal tools to combat drug trafficking and the diversion of precursor chemicals, including through the development of additional and improved investigative techniques.” More recently, in the joint statement of the Second Caribbean – U.S. Security Cooperation Dialogue held in November 2011, nations pledged to “enact, as necessary, and harmonize legislation in the Caribbean that allows for the

seizure of assets used in illicit activity and, in turn, makes these assets available to support law enforcement and crime prevention initiatives as a means to strengthen national and regional security capabilities.”

These are steps in the right direction, but there needs to be a better plan to strengthen each nation’s legal capabilities. Without a complete understanding of the legal shortcomings and limitations within the Caribbean, countries may remain ill-equipped and unable to compete with transnational drug trafficking organizations.

Recommendation: The Caucus urges the United States and the Caribbean nations to work together to identify new or improved legal tools potentially needed in Caribbean countries, including investigative techniques, to combat drug trafficking and the diversion of precursor chemicals. Once identified, the United States should assist Caribbean countries, within budgetary constraints, in bringing about these needed changes, particularly in the following three areas:

- (1) Creating wiretapping laws that provide judicial due process and allow for the use of intercepted phone calls in judicial proceedings;
- (2) Seizing assets through asset forfeiture laws; and
- (3) Putting in place controls on precursor chemicals used to make illegal drugs.

Introduction

In 2011, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control released bipartisan reports on both Mexico and Central America. These reports provided policy recommendations on how Congress and the Administration could better respond to pressing security crises.

This report on the Caribbean – a follow up to the February 1, 2012, Caucus hearing on U.S. – Caribbean Security Cooperation – is more preventative in nature. Drug trafficking through the Caribbean is still minimal compared to Central America and Mexico. An estimated 95 percent of cocaine entering the United States comes through Central America and Mexico. Only five percent comes through the Caribbean. Mexico's brutal drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are fighting for control of trafficking routes not only in Mexico but throughout Central America. These major DTOs have much less of a presence in the Caribbean, with a reported limited presence in the Dominican Republic.

Through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), we believe that the United States has taken a preventative approach to security in the Caribbean. CBSI balances the provision of key equipment and training with essential youth gang prevention and drug demand reduction programs. We believe that this is crucial in any security assistance program.

By talking about preventing a security crisis, we by no means intend to downplay the Caribbean's current security situation. Violence in the Caribbean is on the rise. In 2010, Jamaica had the fourth highest murder rate in the world with 52 homicides per 100,000 people. That same year, the Dominican Republic reported 25 homicides per 100,000 people compared to a rate of 14 per 100,000 in 2000. This is a very serious situation which demands U.S. attention.

Finally, it is important to note that the United States must do significantly more to reduce our country's demand for illegal drugs. Drug consumption in the United States contributes to violence throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. Preventing drug use in the United States will help prevent drug trafficking and the violence and loss of life it brings. The Caucus published a separate report entitled *Reducing the U.S. Demand for Illegal Drugs* that provides specific recommendations in this area.

Caribbean Security: An Overview

Introduction

The Caribbean region has come a long way since it served as the primary transit route for South American drugs entering the United States in the 1980s. Current estimates show that **no more than five percent of the cocaine destined for the United States flows through the Caribbean.**³ This is down from ten percent in 2006 and 26 percent in 2001.⁴ Increased interdiction efforts by both the U.S. and partner nations in the region have largely forced traffickers to abandon the Caribbean for Mexico and Central America. **Yet, this progress is by no means guaranteed, and the U.S. must remain vigilant to ensure traffickers do not return to the region.**



Source: Congressional Research Service

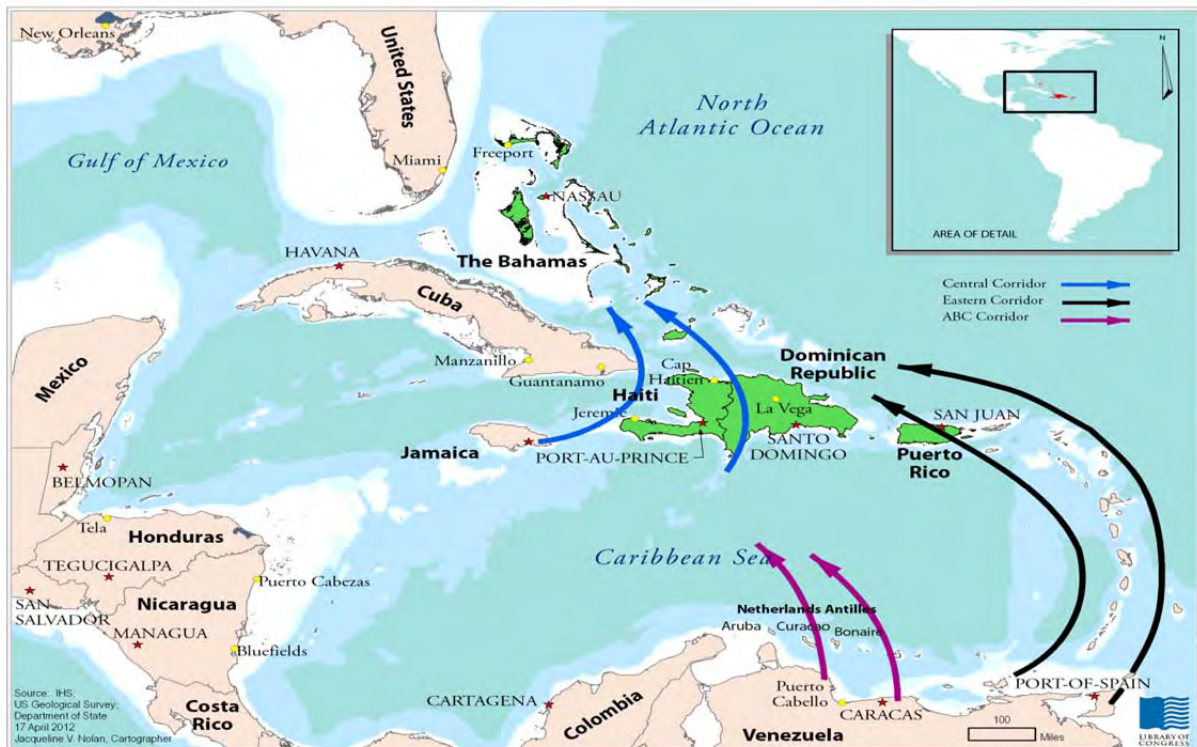
Despite the impressive gains that have been made, drug trafficking and local drug consumption remain major causes of the high crime and violence rates that plague many Caribbean nations. **Of the 15 independent countries in the Caribbean region, President Obama identified four – The Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica – as major drug transit countries in September 2011.**⁵ All four designated Caribbean countries are major transit countries for cocaine, and Jamaica is also the largest Caribbean supplier of marijuana to the United States. The region has also seen increasing cocaine shipped to Europe where cocaine consumption has been on the rise in recent years.⁶ **In addition, eight Caribbean nations or territories were designated**

jurisdictions of primary concern for money laundering activities in 2012. These are Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Curacao, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and St. Maarten.⁷

Transportation Corridors and Methods

There are three main illicit pathways for narcotics in the Caribbean. The first route is the “**Central Corridor**” which consists primarily of cocaine leaving South America and flowing through Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and The Bahamas into the United States.⁸ Maritime trafficking of small loads is the predominant transport method, though some air conveyance also exists. The second is the “**Eastern Corridor**” which includes the seven smaller nations of the eastern Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago.⁹ Heroin and cocaine transit these islands en route to Puerto Rico before easily entering the rest of the United States. Finally, the “**ABC Corridor**” of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao is a minor cocaine shipment route and to a lesser extent a route for synthetic drugs.¹⁰

Map of Caribbean Drug Transit Corridors



Source: Prepared by Jacqueline V. Nolan, Cartographer, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

A variety of private boats, including go-fast boats, pleasure craft and fishing vessels are used to move drugs short distances between a number of Caribbean islands. Narcotics are also trafficked through the region hidden in legitimate, containerized cargo.¹¹ Semi-submersible vessels have been utilized to transport cocaine in the western Caribbean from Colombia to Central America. While they have not been detected en route to any Caribbean islands, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) testified before the Senate Foreign Relations in December 2011 that they expect drug traffickers to begin exploring this option to carry multi-ton loads of cocaine through the eastern Caribbean.¹²

Self Propelled Semi-Submersible Submarine Interdicted by the U.S. Coast Guard in the Western Caribbean on September 17, 2011



Source: Coast Guard Compass, October 4, 2011

Fully-Submersible Drug Submarine Found in Colombia in February 2011

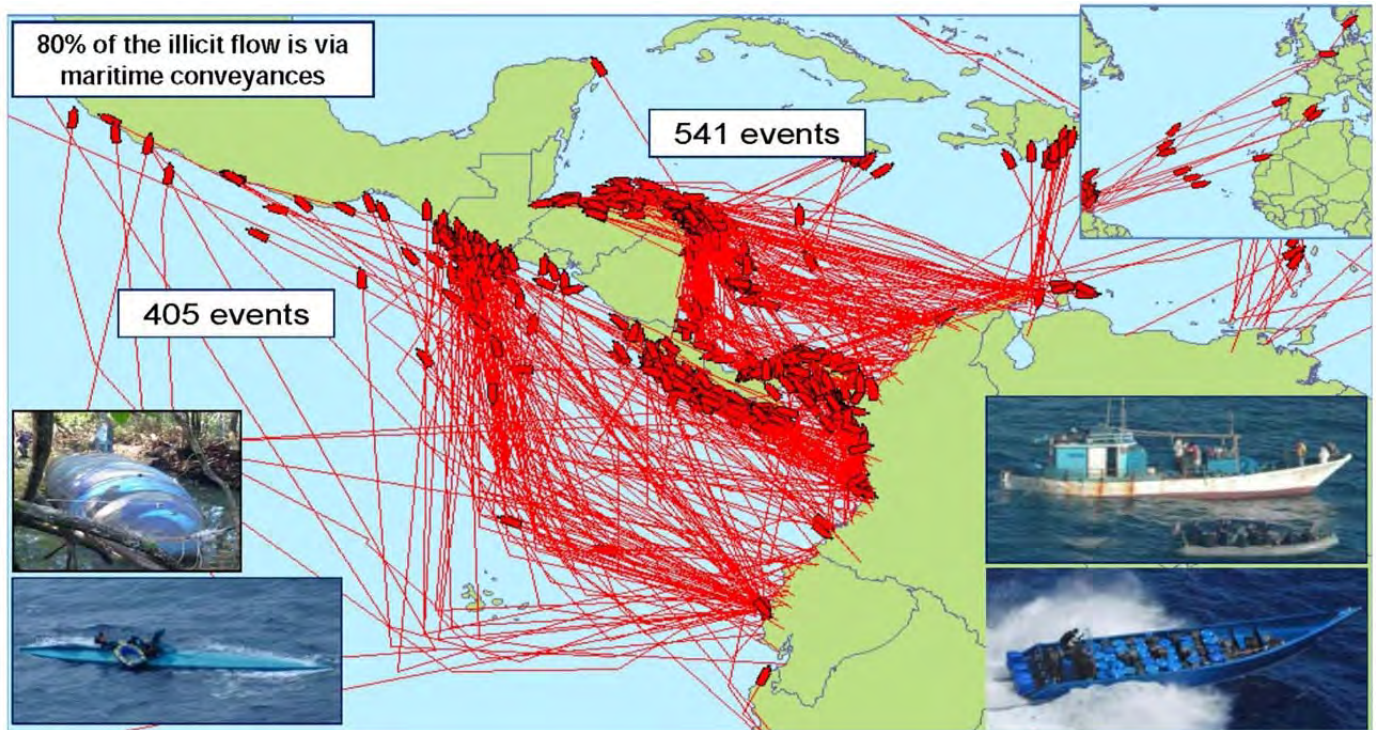


Source: Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Office of Congressional Affairs

Small aircraft laden with illicit drugs, primarily originating from Venezuela, make their way to a number of Caribbean countries, most notably the Dominican Republic and Haiti.¹³ **However, interdiction efforts in the Dominican Republic have largely pushed air traffic to Central America since 2009 and maritime traffic now accounts for the majority of drugs transiting the Caribbean.**¹⁴

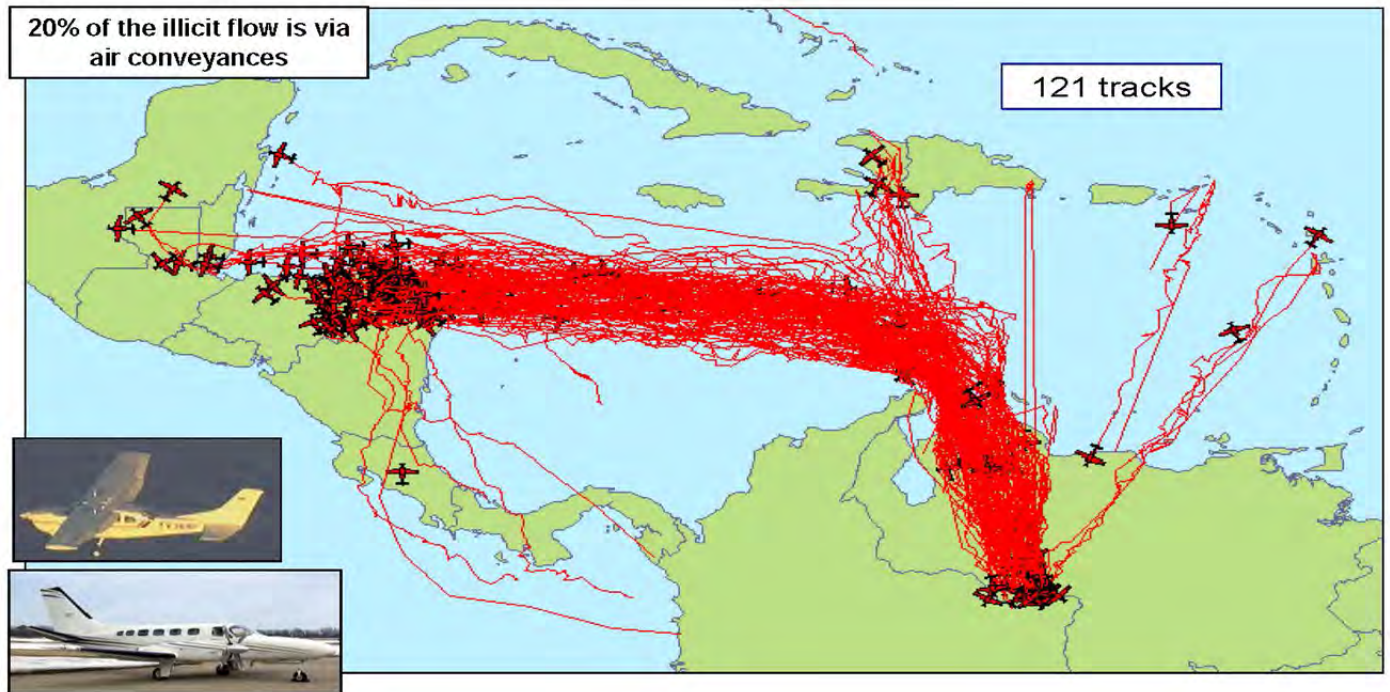
The Joint Inter-Agency Task Force South has prepared new maps showing the maritime and air tracks through the Caribbean and Central America in 2011. The maps show that 80 percent of drug movement takes place at sea while 20 percent is shipped via flights. The new maps are provided below and on the next page.

Maritime Drug Transit through the Caribbean and Central America (2011)



Source: Joint Inter-Agency Task Force South, April 2012.

Aerial Drug Transit through the Caribbean and Central America (2011)

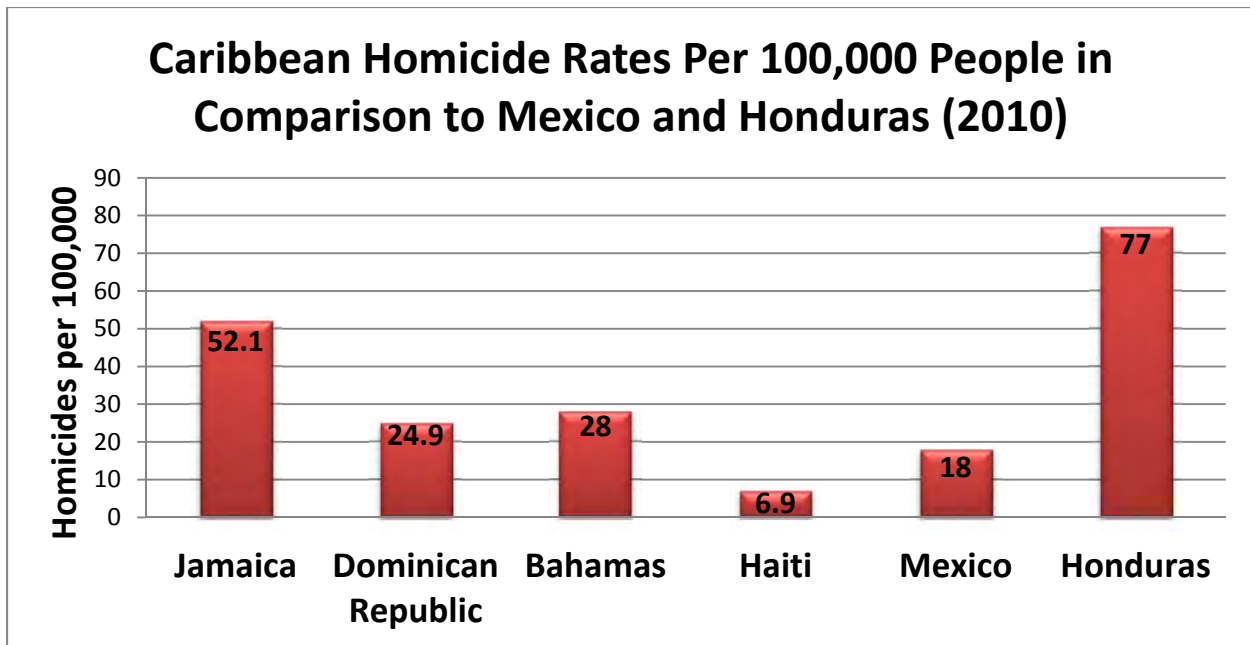


Source: Joint Inter-Agency Task Force South, April 2012.

Increasing Homicide Rates

While drug trafficking through the Caribbean has not yet returned to the levels of the 1980s, drug-related violence continues to rise. Recently, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime found that Jamaica has the fourth highest murder rate in the world behind only Honduras, El Salvador and the Ivory Coast. In Jamaica, there were 52 homicides per 100,000 people in 2010. That same year, The Bahamas recorded its highest murder rate with 28 homicides per 100,000 people. The Dominican Republic had 25 homicides per 100,000 people which is up from 14 per 100,000 in the year 2000.¹⁵

The chart on the next page provides further perspective on the homicide rates in the Caribbean, in comparison to Mexico (which had 18 murders per 100,000 people in 2010) and Honduras (which had 77 murders per 100,000 people in 2010).



Source: U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime

The Caucus is very concerned with the potential shift of drug trafficking patterns back to the Caribbean as a result of increased interdiction efforts in Mexico and Central America. Violence in the Caribbean has already risen in recent years and a further shift would likely bring with it more violence.

We agree with the sentiments of Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs William Brownfield who recently said the following in response to concerns about the return of major drug trafficking through the Caribbean: “I do not see it right now, but simple logic and common sense tells you that you probably are going to see it in the next two or three years.”¹⁶ An integrated approach to counternarcotics in the Western Hemisphere – which focuses on problem areas in Mexico and Central America without losing sight of future problem areas – is essential. As we will discuss later in this report, we believe the Obama Administration is doing precisely this with the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

Countries and Territories of Interest

In this section, we have identified five Caribbean countries and territories of particular interest to the Caucus. This section also identifies policy options moving forward.

The Bahamas



Source: Prepared for Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control Hearing on “U.S.-Caribbean Security Cooperation,” February 1, 2012

As the Caribbean country nearest to the United States, The Bahamas has long served as a transshipment point for illicit drugs entering our country. With some 700 islands and cays sprawled out over 100,000 square miles, The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos cover an area of ocean and land the size of California.¹⁷ Due to the country’s proximity to the U.S. and the enormous area it encompasses, a number of drug trafficking organizations continue to operate in The Bahamas. The drug trade contributes to violent crime and a murder rate that is fourth highest in the region and rising. In 2010, The Bahamas had its highest recorded murder rate, 28 per 100,000, and by September 2011, the total number of murders in 2011 had surpassed those for all of 2010.¹⁸

Long before the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative was launched in 2009, the United States worked bilaterally with The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos to interdict drug trafficking in the region. Since it was first launched in 1982, the primary vehicle for this cooperation has been Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos (OPBAT). OPBAT is a coordinated effort in which the Drug Enforcement

Administration (DEA), Coast Guard, and Department of Defense conduct drug interdiction missions jointly with the Royal Bahamas Police Force and Royal Bahamas Defence Force.¹⁹ OPBAT has proven extremely effective in diminishing the amount of illegal narcotics transiting The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos. In keeping with region-wide trends, the two jurisdictions have seen a precipitous drop in the flow of drugs across their borders.

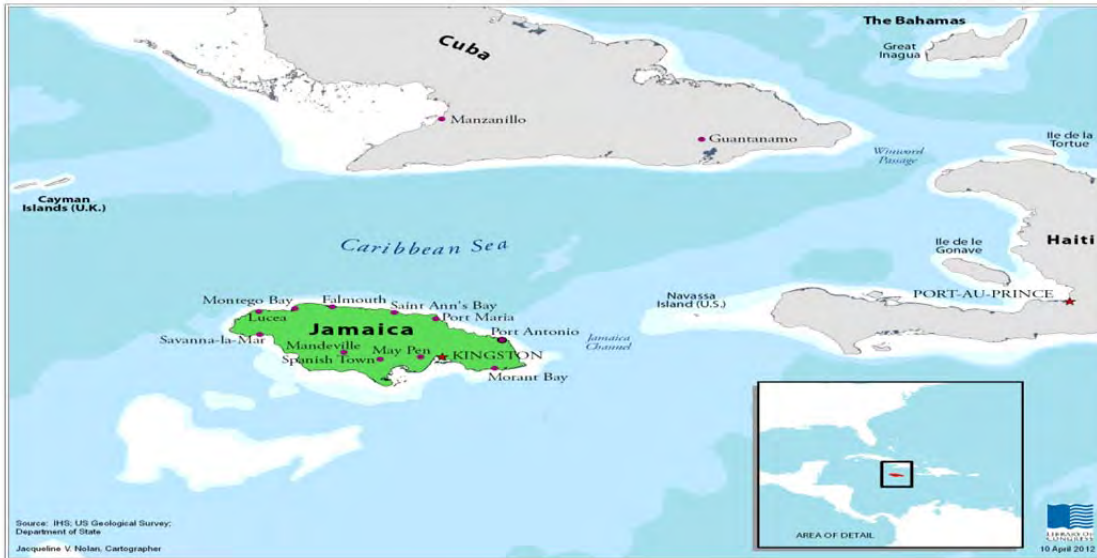
Through OPBAT, DEA and the Coast Guard conduct joint maritime patrols with their Bahamian partners to interdict illicit drugs. A number of U.S. assets are based in the region to fulfill this mission including helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and Coast Guard vessels. Two Coast Guard helicopters, based in Turks and Caicos, are slated to return to The Bahamas following the construction of a hangar to replace one destroyed by Hurricane Ike in 2008. A second set of helicopters, operated by DEA in the Bahamian Exuma Islands, was transferred out of the region in October 2011.²⁰ The Caucus believes that these helicopters should return to the Bahamian Exuma Islands. In February 2012, Senators Feinstein and Grassley wrote to DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart urging DEA to consider the return of these helicopters to The Bahamas.²¹ A copy of this letter is included in the report's appendix.

The Caucus understands that decreases in drug trafficking through the Caribbean in conjunction with upticks elsewhere – particularly Central America and Mexico – justify the reallocation of certain assets based on evolving law enforcement needs. However, it is important to understand that the gains made in the Caribbean are not irreversible. Officials from the Caribbean countries have expressed concerns that these shifts could result in gaps that traffickers are able to exploit.²² DEA and its partners should work to ensure that sufficient resources remain in the region to prevent a resurgence of drug trafficking.

The United States has made a substantial investment in a state of the art airbase in The Bahamas. This facility is strategically located to cover the central Bahamas and includes full barracks for 25-30 individuals as well as aircraft hangars.²³ The “Hawk’s Nest,” as it is known, was previously operated by the Department of Defense but also utilized by DEA. Since the removal of Defense Department support in 2010 and the DEA removal of its helicopter in 2011, the facility has remained vacant.²⁴ All agencies should look for ways to effectively utilize the “Hawk’s Nest,” as a platform for interdiction efforts in and around the Bahamas.

OPBAT has been a tremendous success in diminishing the drug trade in The Bahamas. In the 1980s, over 80 percent of cocaine destined for the United States transited The Bahamas. Today, that number is under two percent.²⁵ The Obama Administration and Congress must ensure that OPBAT is adequately resourced to prevent drug trafficking in and around The Bahamas.

Jamaica



Source: Prepared by Jacqueline V. Nolan, Cartographer, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

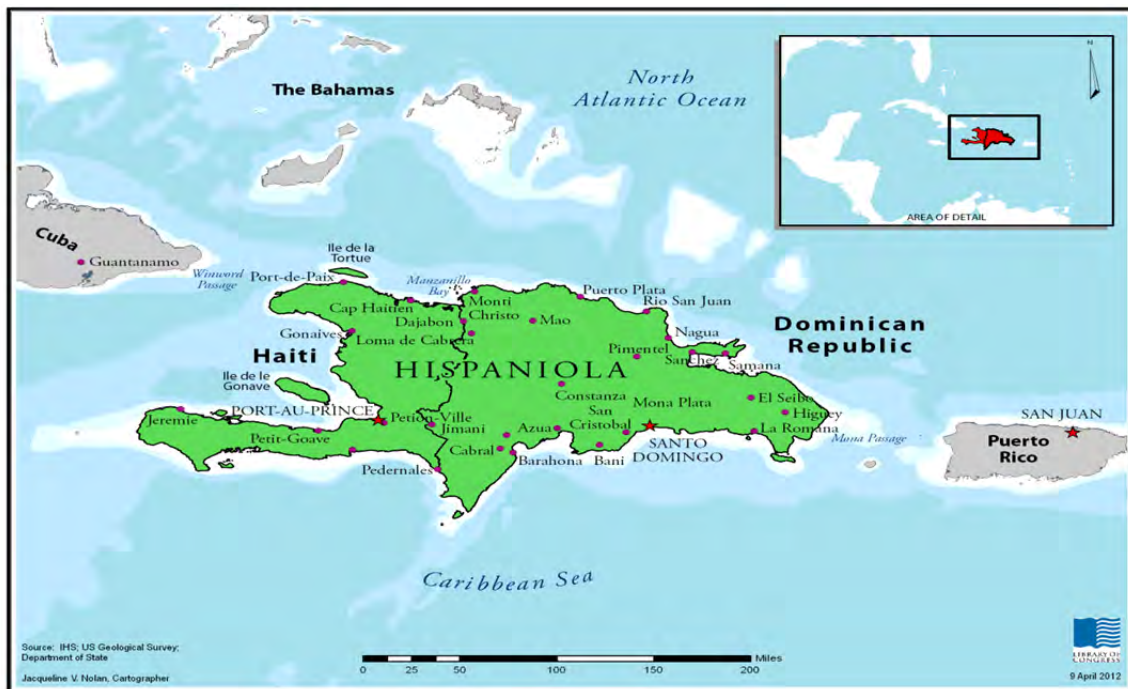
Jamaica serves as a transshipment point for approximately one percent of the cocaine entering the U.S. and is the largest supplier of marijuana in the Caribbean. In 2010, **Jamaica had the highest murder rate in the Caribbean and fourth highest in the world at 52.1 per 100,000 people.** A recent study by the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development ranked Jamaica as the third country worldwide most affected by lethal violence between 2004 and 2009.²⁶

Although Jamaica and the United States have a positive working relationship on counternarcotics, this relationship was strained by a 2010 incident involving drug kingpin Christopher Coke. Coke was the leader of a drug gang known as the Shower Posse. The U.S. requested his extradition, but the government of then-Prime Minister Bruce Golding did not initially grant the request.

After much delay and under a great deal of pressure, in May 2010, the Jamaican government issued an arrest warrant for Coke. In response, Coke's followers attacked a number of police stations, and the Jamaican government

ultimately declared a state of emergency in some areas of Kingston. Sadly, the conflict led to the death of at least 74 people. It was not until June 22, 2010, that Coke was finally arrested and extradited to the United States. This followed allegations that the Jamaican government did a great deal to protect him from extradition. In August 2011, Coke pled guilty in U.S. Federal District Court in New York for leading a large Jamaican marijuana and cocaine network.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic



Source: Prepared by Jacqueline V. Nolan, Cartographer, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

There have been concerns for several years about increased drug flights out of Venezuela to the island of Hispaniola which includes the countries of Dominican Republic and Haiti. Currently, around three percent of cocaine en route to the United States transits the island.²⁷

Since Haiti's devastating January 2010 earthquake, the country has seen a marked decrease in the amount of narcotics transiting the country. Data compiled by DEA and the State Department show that in 2009 an estimated 11,050 kilograms of cocaine transited the country. In 2011, that number dropped to just 3,685 kilograms. Although these decreases in trafficking are positive, the reality is that drug traffickers were also greatly affected by the destruction of infrastructure in Haiti. Without proper roads or maintained airstrips, traffickers' ability to access

the country has been severely limited. In 2011, there were just seven reported drug flights into the country which is down from the 21 recorded in 2009. This decrease in trafficking highlights the level of devastation the earthquake caused. As the Haitian government rebuilds following the earthquake, drug traffickers may utilize the new infrastructure to their advantage. An increase in clandestine drug flights and maritime drug movements is likely in the coming years.²⁸ While the United States and the international community must continue to support Haitian redevelopment, U.S. investments in Haiti's infrastructure should be coupled with strong support of Haitian counternarcotics efforts.

The Dominican Republic is the primary Caribbean drug hub and serves as a major transit point for cocaine en route to Europe, as well as the United States, via aircraft, go-fast boats, private vessels, and containerized cargo ships.²⁹ Over half of the cocaine transiting through the Caribbean is smuggled through the Dominican Republic.³⁰ The Dominican Republic also remains a major source of drug trafficking into the United States, particularly via Puerto Rico.³¹

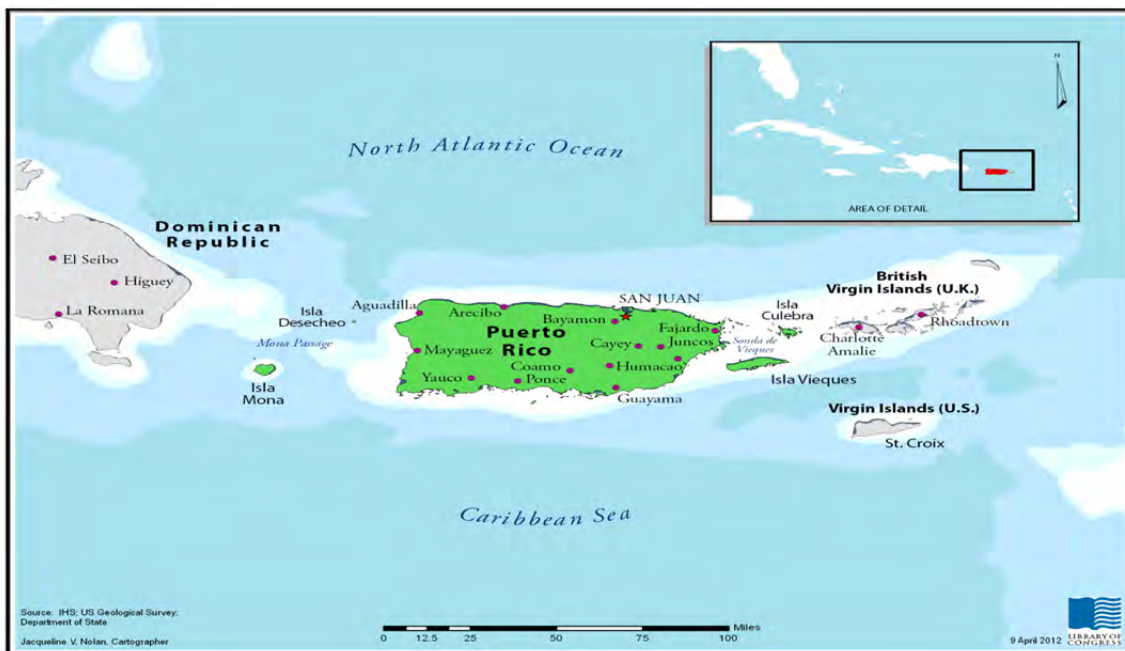
Between 2004 and 2008, threat assessments pointed to the significant number of drug flights from Venezuela that smuggled cocaine and other narcotics into the Dominican Republic.³² Since that time, the Dominican government has carried out an aggressive interdiction effort, focusing its counternarcotics efforts on its southern border and effectively reduced the number of drug flights into the country.³³ In 2011, extensive radar surveillance and monitoring of Caribbean air space revealed a significant reduction of recorded drug flights entering the Dominican Republic.³⁴ The success of radar-led flight interdictions offers one explanation for illicit maritime operations becoming the primary method for smuggling narcotics in and through the Dominican Republic.

Less encouragingly, recent DEA testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations showed that the Dominican Republic has become a popular transshipment location for Mexican and South American drug trafficking organizations. The presence of such DTOs has also been linked with a recent rise in the Dominican Republic's homicide rate which is nearing 25 homicides per 100,000 people.³⁵

In conjunction with the Dominican Republic's focus on maritime smuggling and drug flight interdiction, the government has stated that they intend to focus on targeting major drug traffickers and the dismantling of their organizations. This strategy has led to some increases in the amount of narcotics seized in 2010 as compared to 2009. According to the State Department, in 2010 the Dominican

Republic seized approximately 4.85 metric tons of cocaine, 30 kilograms of heroin, 642 kilograms of marijuana, and 138 ecstasy tablets.³⁶

Puerto Rico



Source: Prepared by Jacqueline V. Nolan, Cartographer, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Puerto Rico, and to a lesser extent the U.S. Virgin Islands, serve as important entry points for illicit drugs coming into the U.S.³⁷ **Once drugs have entered these territories, they are inside the U.S. customs zone and no longer subject to subsequent inspections.** Therefore, it is no surprise that drug traffickers seek to exploit these islands. Cocaine, marijuana and heroin enter the territories primarily via maritime routes in container ships and private vessels.³⁸

Maritime interdiction efforts in Puerto Rico are primarily conducted by the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and the Puerto Rico Police Department's Maritime Unit. All of these entities are engaged in routine patrol activities in Puerto Rican territorial waters, and support targeted interdiction operations based on intelligence provided by law enforcement agencies.³⁹

Once drugs enter Puerto Rico, it is relatively easy to bring them into other parts of the United States by plane.⁴⁰ Puerto Rico is within the U.S. customs zone so airport travel from the island is not subject to the same level of scrutiny as travel from a foreign country into the U.S.⁴¹ While it remains a small fraction of the

overall cocaine shipments to the United States, 70 to 80 percent of cocaine that transits Puerto Rico is destined to the continental United States.⁴²

Drug-related violence in Puerto Rico has increased dramatically in recent years. According to written testimony submitted to the Caucus by Puerto Rico's Congressman Pedro Pierluisi, "Since 2006, the murder rates in Puerto Rico—and in the neighboring U.S. Virgin Islands—have risen steadily, and are now over six times the national average and over twice as high as that of any state."⁴³ In 2011, murder rates in Puerto Rico reached record levels with 1,136 murders. According to government officials in Puerto Rico, over 70 percent of these murders were connected to drug trafficking activity.⁴⁴ In the U.S. Virgin Islands, the homicide rate was even higher with 60 murders per 100,000 people.

This high level of violence reflects both a local drug use and gang problem and Puerto Rico's strategic value as a transshipment point. According to the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) office which oversees Puerto Rico, most of the violence on the island is associated with turf wars for control over the local drug market. One report stated that cocaine seizures in Puerto Rico increased by 30 percent between 2009 and 2010.

Despite this increase, proportionately, a relatively small amount of illegal drugs consumed in the United States come from Puerto Rico. According to the Inter-Agency Assessment of Cocaine Movement, five percent of drugs bound for the United States transited the Caribbean Corridor in 2010. Of those drugs flowing through the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic remains the primary Caribbean transit point for South American cocaine.⁴⁵ One factor that contributes to this discrepancy is that there is significant local drug consumption in Puerto Rico. According to officials with the HIDTA office which oversees Puerto Rico, 20 to 30 percent of the cocaine that arrives in Puerto Rico is consumed on the island and there is a local market for marijuana consumption.

Some have argued that federal law enforcement staffing levels in Puerto Rico need to be increased. For example, members of the House of Representatives have called for an inter-agency effort to increase the number of federal law enforcement personnel and resources assigned to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Despite potential staffing needs, the Drug Enforcement Administration has aggressively been working with nine strike forces to target trafficking groups in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.⁴⁶ As a U.S. territory, Puerto Rico is not eligible for State Department assistance through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). However, the Caucus believes that Puerto Rico should be

integrated into CBSI as an attendee to the U.S. – Caribbean Security Dialogues each year.

Eastern Caribbean

Though the Eastern Caribbean sees less drug traffic than the central Caribbean corridor, it remains a transshipment point for cocaine en route to Europe and Canada, as well as Colombian heroin destined for Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland.⁴⁷ Only seven miles from the Venezuelan coast, Trinidad and Tobago has experienced a significant rise in crime due to drug trafficking culminating in the imposition of an almost four month curfew in 2011.⁴⁸ A number of the smaller island nations have experienced similar security challenges. Last year, for example, St. Kitts and Nevis's murder rate surpassed the 2010 rate of 38.2 per 100,000 by August.⁴⁹

U.S. Assistance to the Caribbean

Caribbean Basin Security Initiative

Since the 1980s, the United States counternarcotics support to the Caribbean has had several incarnations. As noted above, Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos has been a successful partnership to combat drug smuggling since 1982. Under the Bush Administration, the Third Border Initiative was implemented in 2001 to provide support for Caribbean nations to improve port and airport security. In 2006, the Bush Administration began providing maritime security aid to the Caribbean through Operation Enduring Friendship.

At the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009, President Obama announced that security assistance to the Caribbean would be provided through a program known as the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative or CBSI. CBSI was a response to increased drug-related violence in the Caribbean and the “anticipation of a potential balloon effect of narcotics trafficking through the region resulting from counternarcotics efforts funded by the Mérida Initiative for Mexico and Plan Colombia.”⁵⁰ Creating the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative before any crisis made it necessary to do so was an important step in the right direction.

Between Fiscal Year 2010 and Fiscal Year 2012, Congress appropriated \$203 million for CBSI – with \$62 million in FY 2010, \$77 million in FY 2011 and \$64 million in FY 2012. The President has requested \$59 million for CBSI in his Fiscal Year 2013 Budget. A chart on CBSI assistance is provided below:

Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Assistance (in millions of US dollars)

	Economic Support Funds	Development Assistance	Foreign Military Financing	International Narcotics and Law Enforcement	Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining	Total
FY2010 (actual)	14.0	6.0	14.5	27.30	--	61.8
FY2011 (actual)	17.0	--	16.5	37.5	6.4	77.4
FY2012 (estimate)	17.0	--	15.0	30.0	2.0	64.0
FY2013 (request)	26.2	--	10.0	21.0	1.8	59.0

Source: U.S. Department of State, FY2011, FY2012, and FY2013 Congressional Budget Justification Foreign Operations, Annex Regional Perspectives. Additional information provided to CRS by the Department of State. For FY 2010, assistance includes \$10.607 million originally appropriated in INCLE assistance, and an additional \$16.65 million INCLE assistance that was reprogrammed for CBSI.

Funding under CBSI has helped to provide key equipment, training and prevention programs to our partners in the Caribbean. According to the State Department, assistance has been provided in five main areas:⁵¹

- (1) **Maritime and Aerial Security Cooperation**, with equipment and training to enable countries to carry out maritime and aerial operations and support for improvement in radar coverage in strategic locations;
- (2) **Law Enforcement Capacity Building**, with support for police professionalization, anti-corruption training, community-based policing and the sharing of regional ballistics and fingerprint information;
- (3) **Border/Port Security and Firearms Interdiction**, with training for intercepting smuggled narcotics, weapons, bulk cash and other contraband at airports and seaports;
- (4) **Justice Sector Reform**, with support to reform and strengthen juvenile justice systems, provide technical assistance to judges and prosecutors and support prison assessments and training to alleviate overcrowding and improve prison conditions; and
- (5) **Crime Prevention**, with support for educational opportunities and job training for at-risk youth and training for drug treatment and rehabilitation specialists.

The comprehensive approach to CBSI which focuses not simply on the provision of equipment but also institutional reforms that are necessary to improve the criminal justice systems in the Caribbean is important and noteworthy.

As Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs William Brownfield pointed out in recent Senate testimony, CBSI is more than a foreign assistance program – it is a “partnership that takes a comprehensive approach to improving citizen security.”⁵² Beyond foreign assistance, this partnership has three core elements:

- (1) An annual high-level dialogue;
- (2) A commission to oversee the implementation of CBSI; and

- (3) Technical working groups to develop projects that will meet the objectives of CBSI.

In addition to U.S. assistance, CBSI benefits from strong regional organizations in the Caribbean which support security enhancement efforts. In his testimony, Ambassador Brownfield explained:

“Unlike Central America, the Caribbean has a tradition of pooling limited resources through institutions like the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Regional Security System in the Eastern Caribbean.”⁵³

Drug Enforcement Administration Assistance to the Caribbean

The United States not only provides assistance to the Caribbean through CBSI but also through the Drug Enforcement Administration’s (DEA) ongoing efforts in the Caribbean. DEA has a significant footprint in the Caribbean. According to recent testimony from the DEA’s Chief of Intelligence Rodney Benson, DEA has:⁵⁴

- A Caribbean field division office in Puerto Rico covering that island, the U.S. Virgin Islands, 27 island nations in the Caribbean, Guyana and Suriname;
- Seven DEA Caribbean island country offices in Barbados, Curacao, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago; and
- Coverage of The Bahamas via the Miami Field division and offices in Nassau and Freeport.

The Caucus believes that some of DEA’s best work worldwide is done through its Sensitive Investigative Units (SIUs). This has been the case in Central America, Mexico and Afghanistan.

Considered the “gold standard” in police vetted units, there is one DEA SIU operating in the Caribbean – in the Dominican Republic. SIUs are congressionally funded and regulated. Each member of the SIU is subjected to a polygraph examination, a full background investigation and drug testing. Members must pass Leahy Law vetting meaning that their backgrounds are checked to ensure that they have not committed past human rights violations. In addition, members are

required to successfully complete specialized training conducted by U.S. personnel both in the host countries and in the United States. The SIUs are provided equipment and logistical support. Finally, their salaries are supplemented with a pay stipend for their participation in the unit.

While DEA has additional vetted units in several Caribbean nations, its only Caribbean SIU is located in the Dominican Republic where it has been since 2002. The SIU currently has 45 law enforcement officials assigned to it, with an additional five vetted units in the Dominican Republic comprised of approximately 175 members. In Haiti, DEA is working with the State Department to reconfigure the Haitian National Police's Anti-Narcotics Unit as a vetted narcotics task force.

The Caucus believes that the SIU model that has been effective in other parts of the world should be replicated in the Caribbean. The Caucus urges DEA and the State Department to assess where in the Caribbean SIUs are most needed, would be most effective, and would be welcomed by host country counterparts. Given its high homicide rate – 52 homicides per 100,000 people in 2010 – the Caucus believes Jamaica may be a top candidate for a DEA-trained SIU. Once an assessment is completed, DEA and Congress should work together to use existing funding to create additional SIUs.

Money Laundering through the Caribbean

For many years, the United States has had concerns about money laundering in the Caribbean region because of the preponderance of offshore financial sectors in a number of countries. In the State Department's 2012 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, a number of Caribbean nations are listed as jurisdictions of "primary concern" for money laundering, including: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Curacao, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and St. Maarten.⁵⁵ It should be noted that the United States is also included on this list.

In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in December 2011, the Drug Enforcement Administration's Chief of Intelligence Rodney Benson discussed the major bulk currency and money laundering trends in the Caribbean. He said:

"Bulk currency smuggling through the Caribbean is the primary method for returning illicit proceeds to the source zones. Traffickers conceal bulk cash in parcels, luggage, and via courier...Traffickers also launder illicit proceeds in order to avoid the risk of moving large amounts of bulk currency. Preferred money laundering methods in the Caribbean include purchasing real estate and other tangible goods like high end vehicles and jewelry, money remitters, structured bank deposits and the black market peso exchange."⁵⁶

Offshore financial havens are a particular concern in the Caribbean. Douglas Farah of the International Assessment and Strategy Center argues that "offshore banking and corporate registries are the lifeblood of drug trafficking organizations."⁵⁷ He further notes that while "know your customer" regulations have become stronger in much of the world, some countries in the Caribbean continue to have lax laws. For example, the State Department notes that the British Virgin Islands – which has a population of around 23,000 people – has 456,547 active companies, 237 licensed banks and 2,951 registered mutual funds.⁵⁸ The Caucus urges the countries of the Caribbean to continue efforts to implement better "know your customer" and other anti-money laundering regulations.

At the inaugural U.S. – Caribbean Security Dialogue in May 2010, a number of actions were proposed to curb money laundering. These include:

- Expanded cooperation on financial investigations of trafficking and criminal organizations;
- International support for criminal sanction against large-scale bulk cash smuggling;
- Enhancing the capacity of investigators and prosecutors to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute money laundering, and to effectively and transparently use forfeited assets to build the capacity of the criminal justice system; and
- Continued anti-money laundering trainings through the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force.

Only if we stop illicit money flows can we curb drug trafficking and enhance citizen security in the Caribbean.

Impact of Deportation to the Caribbean

Each year, Caribbean nationals in the United States are deported either for criminal offenses or immigration violations. In recent years, there have been growing concerns that Caribbean nationals deported from the United States – particularly those deported for criminal offenses – contribute to rising crime in the region. Caribbean officials have stated that some of these deportees have spent the majority of their lives in the United States and have few support networks or connections in their home countries, making them vulnerable to criminal careers.⁵⁹

Some deportees have served sentences in American prisons for violent crimes or drug offenses. Of particular concern are those with gang affiliations who remain able to utilize those networks to traffic illicit drugs into the United States after returning to their home countries. Below is a table showing country specific removals for 2011. Though the number of these individuals is relatively small in proportion to the U.S. population, Caribbean officials have voiced concerns that these deportees strain and overwhelm smaller Caribbean nations.⁶⁰

Caribbean Region: FY 2011 Removals by Country

	Total	Convicted Criminal	Non-Criminal
Antigua and Barbuda	20	13	7
Bahamas	166	129	37
Barbados	46	34	12
Dominica	49	22	27
Dominican Republic	3,380	2,199	1,181
Grenada	47	28	19
Guyana	195	143	52
Haiti	731	249	482
Jamaica	1,572	1,289	283
St. Kitts and Nevis	28	11	17
St. Lucia	29	10	19
St. Vincent	27	18	9
Suriname	12	7	5
Trinidad and Tobago	370	260	110

Source: Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Deportations are handled by Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Enforcement and Removal Operations. Since 1997, the United States has provided the receiving countries with at least three days notification of the intended removal of criminal aliens and escorted non-criminal aliens.⁶¹

Currently, the only information accompanying these deportees is the reason for deportation.⁶² Therefore, even if a deportee has been convicted of a serious crime or has an extensive criminal record, the only information given to receiving country authorities is the reason the offender was deported.⁶³ ICE is forbidden from sharing further information without permission from the state or federal authority that holds the criminal records.⁶⁴ As a result, receiving countries are left unaware of many deportees' criminal pasts, leaving them ill-prepared to prevent further criminal activity.

In order to rectify this problem and better equip our Caribbean partners to fight crime and drug trafficking, a full criminal history should be sent with all deportees to their receiving countries' authorities. This would not only benefit other countries, but would also benefit U.S. law enforcement officials. Thus, the information sharing must be mutual with Caribbean nations sharing information on immigrants equally. ICE is currently implementing a pilot program with Mexico to share greater details on serious criminal convictions.⁶⁵ This program shares information on a previously agreed to list of crimes with a law enforcement entity in the deportee's home country so that they can prepare to effectively handle the removed person.⁶⁶ El Salvador has requested a similar program with a letter of intent already signed between our countries. They are hoping to reach a Memorandum of Understanding on the program in the near future.⁶⁷

Pending a successful result of this pilot program, ICE should expand it to include all the nations of the Caribbean. Such information sharing and collaboration aids both the U.S. and the nations of the Caribbean in fighting drug trafficking and transnational crime.

Extradition from the Caribbean to the United States

The United States has bilateral extradition treaties with each of the Caribbean nations. Most of these treaties cover both host country nationals and foreigners so that all those who are requested by the United States will be considered for extradition.⁶⁸

Three countries in the Caribbean, **the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Suriname** do not have agreements with the United States to extradite their own nationals to the United States. **Despite the lack of a formal agreement, the 2012 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report states that the Dominican Republic and Haiti have nonetheless allowed for the extradition of their own nationals for drug-related offenses.**⁶⁹

The Dominican Republic still extradites about 25 people per year. In the past administration, the Haitian president allowed for the extradition of Haitian nationals wanted by the United States on a case by case basis.⁷⁰

In some countries, even those with bilateral extradition treaties, there are some complications with agreements. For example, the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report highlighted again this year that U.S. extradition requests to The Bahamas often are met with long delays. These delays are largely due to a process that permits defendants an appeal in the United Kingdom. This indicates a substantial need for bail reform in The Bahamas, as currently defendants are free during the entire judicial process, which can sometimes take years. In some cases, this can allow individuals to continue illicit operations while awaiting trial.⁷¹

While Suriname does not extradite its own nationals, it has not been a serious issue for the U.S. in the same way it has for the Netherlands and France which have extradition requests that have not been met.⁷²

The Caucus believes that extradition has been a critical tool in combating drug trafficking organizations. This helps to create a clear sense of consequences in countries which lack the judicial and institutional capacity to provide a strong and consistent consequence to organized crime. The Caucus has been impressed with the positive results of high-level extraditions from Colombia and Mexico to the United States.

Conclusion

Clearly, the countries of the Caribbean do not face the same security crisis as Mexico and Central America. Yet, we must be prepared as the “balloon effect” inevitably moves drug trafficking routes back to the Caribbean. The United States must have a more integrated approach to security assistance in the Americas that does not overly support one sub-region at the expense of others.

We believe the recommendations in this report will complement the efforts already being taken by the executive branch. These include:

- An assessment by the DEA and the State Department on where highly-vetted Sensitive Investigative Units are needed in the Caribbean and installation of these units in the Caribbean countries with the greatest needs;
- The provision of full criminal histories of deportees to recipient countries in the Caribbean; and
- Targeted U.S. support to help Caribbean countries introduce new or improved legal tools to combat drug trafficking and the diversion of precursor chemicals.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁹ Sullivan, M. “Background for February 1, 2012 Hearing on U.S. – Caribbean Security Cooperation.” pg. 2.
- ²⁰ Phone call with DEA Office of Congressional Affairs on OPBAT resources and current state of affairs, February 15, 2012
- ²¹ Letter attached in report appendix.
- ²² Testimony from Ambassador Cornelius Smith, U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control hearing on “U.S.-Caribbean Security Cooperation,” February 1, 2012.
- ²³ Conversation with David Jea, Narcotics Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Bahamas
- ²⁴ Phone call with DEA Office of Congressional Affairs on OPBAT resources and current state of affairs, February 15, 2012
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- ²⁷ Sullivan, M. “Background for February 1, 2012 Hearing on U.S. – Caribbean Security Cooperation.” p. 1.
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APPENDICES

- I. Additional views from Chairman Dianne Feinstein on U.S. – Cuba Counternarcotics Cooperation
- II. Letter from Senators Dianne Feinstein and Charles Grassley to Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Administrator Michele Leonhart on Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos (OPBAT)
- III. DEA Response to Senators Feinstein and Grassley on OPBAT

ADDITIONAL VIEWS FROM CHAIRMAN DIANNE FEINSTEIN ON U.S. – CUBA COUNTERNARCOTICS COOPERATION



Source: Congressional Research Service, March 2012.

Deepening our counternarcotics relationship with Cuba would meet key national security goals. Just 90 miles from Florida, Cuba has the potential to be a major transshipment point for illicit drugs. Like the rest of the Caribbean, the island is located between the United States, the world’s largest drug-consuming nation, and South America, the world’s largest drug production zone. According to the State Department’s 2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Cuba’s geographic location “offers an incentive to drug trafficking organizations to utilize its 5,746 kilometers of coastline and coastal waters for transshipment operations that avoid U.S. government counter drug patrol vessels and aircraft.”

The Cuban government takes its counternarcotics mission seriously and has been relatively successful in interdicting illegal drugs and educating Cubans about the dangers of these substances. In 2011, the Cuban government reported a total of 9 metric tons of illegal narcotics intercepted. This is a 360 percent increase from the previous year’s 2.5 metric tons. The State Department’s 2012 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report said, “Cuba continues to dedicate significant

resources to preventing illegal drugs and illegal drug use from spreading on the island, so far successfully.”

The *Congressional Research Service* reports that in the late 1990s, Cuban officials became increasingly concerned about the use of their waters and airspace for the transit of illegal drugs as well as increased drug use in the country. This concern came as the country was opening up to foreign tourists. In response to these concerns, the Cuban government took a number of steps, including:

- (1) Enhancing penalties for drug traffickers;
- (2) Increasing training for counternarcotics officials; and
- (3) Increasing cooperation with other countries on counternarcotics.

Operation Hatchet began in Cuba in 1999. It has concentrated on maritime and air interdiction as well as the recovery of illegal drugs washed up on Cuban shores.

While overall cooperation between the United States and Cuba is extremely limited, our countries work very well together on counternarcotics. Since 2000, a Coast Guard Drug Interdiction Specialist has been posted at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. This individual communicates with the Cuban Border Guard on specific drug interdiction cases. This limited Coast Guard presence in Cuba has been useful in carrying out our counternarcotics goals. However, this is just one individual handling a portfolio that would normally be shared by multiple people and multiple agencies at most U.S. missions abroad.

The State Department’s 2012 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) is very clear in stating the benefits of increased counternarcotics cooperation between the United States and Cuba. It says, “Greater communication and cooperation among the U.S., its international partners and Cuba, particularly in the area of real-time tactical information-sharing and improved tactics, techniques and procedures would likely lead to increased interdictions and disruptions of illegal trafficking.”

Like the 2011 INCSR report, the 2012 report suggests that there would be a potential benefit to a U.S. – Cuba agreement on counternarcotics. The report states:

“The Cuban government presented the United States with a draft bilateral accord for counternarcotics cooperation, which is still under review.

Structured appropriately, such an accord could advance the counternarcotics efforts undertaken by both countries.”

The Obama Administration should consider taking the following steps to increase our collaboration with Cuba on counternarcotics:

- (1) **Expand the U.S. Coast Guard and law enforcement presence at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana.** Additional Coast Guard personnel should be added along with at least one Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent. A DEA presence should be accompanied by enhanced case specific information sharing between the DEA and relevant Cuban agencies. This would be particularly useful on money laundering cases.
- (2) **Establish protocols for direct ship-to-ship communication between the U.S. Coast Guard and the Cuban Border Guard.** It would be very useful to have direct ship-to-ship communication between the Coast Guard and the Cuban Border Guard. This would allow both countries to take quicker action when interdicting drugs.
- (3) **Negotiate a bilateral counternarcotics agreement with Cuba.** The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs has presented the State Department with a draft bilateral counternarcotics agreement. It would be useful for our two countries to negotiate such an agreement. As mentioned above, the State Department’s 2011 and 2012 International Narcotics Control Strategy report noted that, “Structured appropriately, such an accord could advance the counternarcotics efforts undertaken by both countries.”
- (4) **Allow for Cuba’s participation in the U.S. – Caribbean Security Dialogue:** While current law restricts U.S. assistance to Cuba under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, Cuba should be invited to participate in the annual U.S. – Caribbean Security Dialogue so that we can better coordinate our counternarcotics efforts.

United States Senate

SENATE CAUCUS ON
INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 818-C
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 21, 2012

The Honorable Michele Leonhart
Administrator
Drug Enforcement Administration
600 Army Navy Drive
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Administrator Leonhart,

We write to urge the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to explore the feasibility of returning two Bell 412 helicopters to the Central Bahamas where they were carrying out crucial counternarcotics work. We believe it is imperative that the United States work with our Caribbean partners to ensure they have adequate resources to prevent illegal drugs from transiting their countries and entering the United States.


As Chairman and Co-Chairman of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, we held a hearing on *U.S.-Caribbean Security Cooperation* on February 1st. At this hearing, Ambassador Cornelius Smith of The Bahamas testified that two DEA helicopters stationed in The Bahamas since 2007 as part of Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos were shifted out of the region.

It is our understanding that prior to being transferred, these DEA assets were based at a Department of Defense facility in the Exumas Islands where they provided counternarcotics coverage for up to 350 islands in the Central Bahamas. We believe that their removal exposes both The Bahamas and the United States to increased drug trafficking and drug-related crime.

Great progress has been made since the 1980s when the Caribbean served as the transit route for the majority of drugs entering the United States. We must work with continued vigilance so that these gains are not lost. In light of increasing enforcement efforts in both Mexico and Central America, it is essential that drug trafficking organizations do not have an easy alternative route to return to in the Caribbean.

We urge you to consider returning these helicopters to The Bahamas or find a way to prevent drug traffickers from exploiting this gap in counternarcotics coverage. We look forward to your response and our continued collaboration on narcotics-related issues in the Caribbean and around the world.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
Chairman



Charles E. Grassley
Co-Chairman



U. S. Department of Justice
Drug Enforcement Administration

www.dea.gov

Springfield, VA 22152

MAY 05 2012

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairman
Senate Caucus on International Narcotics
Control
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Feinstein:

Thank you for your letter dated February 21, 2012, regarding the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) role in Operation Bahamas and Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) to address the drug threat posed to the United States and our partner nations in the Caribbean. On behalf of DEA Administrator Leonhart, we appreciate the opportunity to respond to your concerns.

Due to its geographic location and proximity to the Southeastern United States, The Bahamas has historically provided an attractive smuggling route to Colombian, Jamaican, Haitian, and Bahamian drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). During the peak of drug trafficking activity in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the islands provided such a favorable atmosphere that at its height, an estimated 80 percent of the cocaine reaching the U.S. transited the islands. As a result of this threat, OPBAT was created in 1982. OPBAT is a joint cooperative effort among DEA, Department of State, Department of Defense (DOD), United States Coast Guard (USCG), United States Customs and Border Protection-Air and Marine, the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, and the Turks and Caicos Islands (a British Protectorate).

Since its inception, OPBAT has allowed the U.S. to effectively provide law enforcement additional opportunities to interdict drug shipments before they reach the U.S. Today, cocaine transits The Bahamas via go-fast boats, small commercial freighters, or small aircraft originating from Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Venezuela. DEA estimates that this accounts for approximately five percent of the cocaine flow to the U.S. This is a significant drop in activity from the years prior to OPBAT.

In reference to the helicopters, in 2007, DOD announced its decision to withdraw three Black Hawk helicopters that had been based at the Hawk's Nest in Georgetown, Great Exuma Island in The Bahamas. Hawk's Nest is one of three aviation support bases that provided support to the aviation resources to OPBAT. To compensate for the recall of the Black Hawk helicopters, the U.S. Army agreed to provide three refurbished S-76B helicopters while continuing to fund Hawk's Nest maintenance and logistics costs for the next five years. DEA agreed to bridge the gap in aviation coverage using three Bell 412 helicopters (two DEA owned and one leased) until the S-76B

helicopters could be delivered. From FY 2007 to FY 2009, DEA received approximately \$5 million annually from DOD for aviation support conducted out of Hawk's Nest. In FY 2010, DEA began self-funding the aviation support to OPBAT at a cost of \$3.6 million per year and terminated the lease for the third Bell 412 helicopter due to lack of available funding.

In addition, DEA took possession of two of the S-76B helicopters in May 2010 and the third in February of 2011. On December 3, 2010, DEA requested funding from DOD in the amount of approximately \$11 million to cover the operational maintenance and training costs for the S-76B helicopters over a period of three years. To date, DOD has supported OPBAT with funding and resources totaling \$30 million. This included the cost of the aircraft, their refurbishment, and costs associated with maintaining Hawk's Nest. On May 13, 2011, DEA learned that the request for additional funding was denied. Accordingly, DEA advised DOD that it could no longer continue to fund the S-76B helicopters due to budgetary restraints and offered to return them to the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army declined. However, the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) within the Department of Homeland Security agreed to take the two S-76B helicopters, and, in April 2012, DEA transferred them to ICE.

In October 2011, DEA determined that our current level of investment in OPBAT could not be sustained at Hawk's Nest without additional funds. Accordingly, DEA relocated the two Bell 412 helicopters based at Hawk's Nest. One Bell 412 helicopter was relocated to the Aviation Operations Center in Fort Worth, Texas to support Southwest Border operations. The second Bell 412 helicopter was deployed to DEA's aviation facility in Nassau to continue to support OPBAT missions at a lower cost to DEA than operating out of Hawk's Nest. These shifts have allowed DEA to continue funding aviation support to OPBAT at a cost of \$1.5 million per year. DEA also operates a King Air 350 fixed-wing aircraft stationed in Nassau, which is used for OPBAT on a collateral basis.

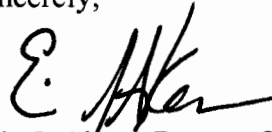
While there are no longer any aircraft permanently stationed at Hawk's Nest, the DEA Nassau Country Office (CO), along with the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF), Drug Enforcement Unit, continues to man and utilize the Hawk's Nest facility on a 24 hour, 7 days a week basis. We have established outstanding relationships within the Bahamian law enforcement community, and DEA has enjoyed a unique partnership with the RBPF and the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force (RTCIPF). This has enabled DEA to participate side-by-side with the RBPF and RTCIPF in joint enforcement operations. DEA Special Agents participate in every OPBAT mission; flying with host nation counterparts from The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands.

The success of OPBAT is due in large part to DEA's intelligence capabilities. DEA continues to capitalize on its ability to gather and provide actionable intelligence on DTOs; to include their organizational structure, finances, communications, and shipment patterns. Once DEA identifies actionable intelligence, it is then analyzed, exploited, and disseminated to the OPBAT Operation Center which will continue to be manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by USCG personnel. Depending on the intelligence received, DEA will continue to deploy OPBAT air assets and marine vessels to specific target areas. DEA will continue to coordinate these efforts to assure

that the Caribbean corridor is not again exploited by DTOs. We would appreciate your continued support as OPBAT continues to evolve and adapt to DTOs methodology in this austere fiscal environment. OPBAT is a longstanding and successful U.S. Government operation to combat the illegal drug flow to the U.S. from the source to the transit zone in the Caribbean, and we are confident it will continue to play an important role in that effort.

Please extend my appreciation to the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control for its sincere interest and concern for the OPBAT program. I hope that the information provided will assist you in your continued support of DEA and our efforts to prevent illegal drugs reaching our shores. If we may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact DEA again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Akers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and a long, sweeping underline.

Eric J. Akers, Deputy Chief
Congressional & Public Affairs