

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman,
Committee on Government Operations,
House of Representatives

April 1993

DRUG CONTROL

Coordination of Intelligence Activities



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General Government Division

B-252416

April 2, 1993

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on
Government Operations
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This briefing report responds to your request for information on the coordination of domestic narcotics intelligence activities. Several organizations have established intelligence centers to collect and analyze intelligence. In February 1993 we briefed your staff on (1) the number and functions of federal counternarcotics intelligence centers, (2) duplication found among centers' intelligence analyses, (3) past efforts to coordinate agencies' antidrug intelligence activities, and (4) the role and authority of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and its efforts to coordinate intelligence activities. After the briefing, your staff requested a summary of our findings, which this briefing report provides.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

Federal organizations reported operating 19 counternarcotics intelligence centers with another, a national center, planned for the summer of 1993. The primary function of 15 of these centers is to gather and analyze time-sensitive information such as current location and movement of specific drug smuggling activities. The remaining four centers generally produce information on long-term trends and patterns. This information is used to determine where to concentrate future drug interdiction resources.

Duplication exists in the analysis and reporting of drug intelligence data. For example, four intelligence centers analyzed air traffic activity along the southwest U.S. border. Each reported on aircraft type, routes, and suspected drugs being transported. We reported similar examples of duplication in an April 1992 report, Drug Control: Inadequate Guidance Results in Duplicate Intelligence Production Efforts (GAO/NSIAD-92-153, Apr. 14, 1992).

Congress and the executive branch have long recognized the need for coordination among federal organizations to reduce the supply of illegal drugs. Since 1968 Congress has charged at least 10 entities with responsibility for counternarcotics activities. In the most recent attempt to coordinate intelligence efforts, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. This act gave ONDCP responsibility for managing the nation's war on drugs, including intelligence policies to support counternarcotics activities.

ONDCP establishes priorities for intelligence functions and encourages agency cooperation in coordinating and sharing intelligence information. ONDCP has the responsibility to certify whether agency budgets reflect the priorities established in the National Drug Control Strategy. However, it does not have the authority to direct agency intelligence activities.

BACKGROUND

There are many federal law enforcement agencies (LEAs) participating in counternarcotics activities, and each has its own intelligence organization. Appendix V contains a list of intelligence centers operated by federal organizations. Counternarcotics agencies agree that efforts to interdict the supply of drugs depend to a great extent on the availability of good intelligence. The LEAs with primary responsibility for intelligence activities are the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Customs Service, and Coast Guard. In addition, the Department of Defense (DOD) provides drug intelligence to support these agencies' efforts to dismantle drug trafficking organizations. As the number of agencies entering the fight against drugs has increased, the number of intelligence centers has increased. These centers collect and analyze information necessary to support counternarcotics activities. These activities range from immediate interdiction of suspected drug shipments to predictions of long-term trafficking patterns used to make programming and planning decisions.

ONDCP's annual National Drug Control Strategy, a comprehensive plan for federal drug control activities, recognizes the importance of agencies sharing information. In early 1990, ONDCP recommended the creation of the multi-agency National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC). The NDIC, expected to be operational in July 1993, will coordinate the LEAs efforts to collect and produce intelligence information on drug trafficking.

ONDCP COMMENTS

We discussed this briefing report with the senior ONDCP official responsible for overseeing federal drug intelligence programs. The official generally agreed with the information presented and recognized that duplication of effort among intelligence centers does exist. He also agreed that agencies lack a collective focus in the analysis of intelligence. We have included his comments in this briefing report where appropriate.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To develop the information requested our work focused on the primary federal organizations collecting and analyzing domestic drug-related intelligence. We reviewed a sample of intelligence reports produced by 14 centers to identify duplicate reporting on such data as geographic region, transportation method, and type of drugs. We did not measure the extent to which the centers duplicated intelligence activities. We also gathered data from the headquarters of the Department of Justice, DEA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Customs Service, the Coast Guard, DOD, and ONDCP. We also spoke with officials at the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force and Operation Alliance--two federal multiagency organizations that use intelligence in their efforts against drug trafficking. In addition, we visited intelligence centers on the southwest border and Pacific coast of the United States. We also (1) reviewed legislation and prior GAO studies, (2) interviewed agency officials at headquarters and field locations from the above-mentioned agencies, (3) collected documentation on the mission and function of centers, and (4) compared written reports to identify duplicate analyses among the various organizations.

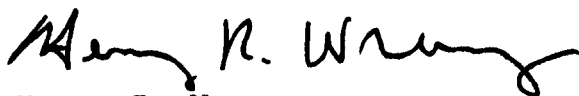
We did our work between November 1991 and February 1993 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As agreed with the Committee, we plan no further distribution of this briefing report until 30 days after its date, unless you publicly release its contents earlier. At that time, we will send copies to the Director, ONDCP, heads of other agencies mentioned in this report and other interested parties. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

B-252416

Major contributors to this briefing report are listed in appendix VII. If you need additional information on the contents of this report, please contact me on (202) 566-0026.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry R. Wray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "H".

Henry R. Wray
Director, Administration
of Justice Issues

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ABBREVIATIONS

DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
EPIC	El Paso Intelligence Center
LEA	law enforcement agency
NDIC	National Drug Intelligence Center
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy

INTELLIGENCE FUNCTIONS VARY AMONG CENTERS

Intelligence Functions Vary Among Centers

- Federal organizations operate 19 intelligence centers.
 - 15 of the 19 centers produce time-sensitive intelligence.
 - 12 of the 19 centers have missions encompassing more than intelligence gathering, processing, and analysis.
-

Federal organizations reported operating 19 intelligence centers. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Customs Service, Coast Guard, and DOD--the organizations with major counternarcotics intelligence responsibility--operate most of the centers. Appendix V contains a list of intelligence centers operated by federal organizations.

Fifteen of the 19 centers are producing time-sensitive intelligence information that LEAs use primarily to arrest drug traffickers quickly and seize illegal drugs. The other four centers, for example DEA's Intelligence Division, generally produce intelligence about long-term trends in illegal drug trafficking.

In addition, 12 of the 19 centers have missions that encompass more than intelligence gathering, processing, and analysis. The Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Centers, for example, coordinate air interdictions and provide aviation support in addition to gathering intelligence. Similarly, the primary role of the DOD centers is to detect aerial and maritime transport of illegal drugs into the country. These centers then provide this intelligence to LEAs for interdiction purposes. The seven remaining centers have intelligence gathering, processing, and analysis as their sole mission.

DUPLICATION EXISTS

Duplication Exists

- Several LEA and DOD centers
 - analyzed air traffic along the southwest U.S. border,
 - analyzed air traffic between Colombia and Mexico, and
 - analyzed and reported on major drug traffickers operating in Central America.
-

While the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has the responsibility for setting priorities for intelligence functions, no central entity has the authority to direct what specific analyses a federal organization should do. We found duplication in intelligence reports issued by intelligence centers. An ONDCP official believed that the newly established National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) may help resolve the duplication problem.

Our review of LEA and Department of Defense (DOD) intelligence reports showed duplication between several federal organizations with overlapping areas of responsibility. We identified examples of duplication among centers, but we did not measure the extent to which centers duplicated intelligence analyses. Six LEA and DOD organizations are analyzing and reporting on narcotics trafficking activities along the southwest border of the United States. For example, four centers analyzed air traffic movement along the southwest U.S. border. Each reported on information such as aircraft types, routes, and suspected drug type.

In another instance, four centers analyzed air traffic between Colombia and Mexico. Each center repeated such data as aircraft types, routes, and suspected drug type. In another case, one LEA center and two DOD centers analyzed and reported on major drug traffickers operating in Central America. Each report discussed drug trafficking members and methods of drug shipment.

In April 1992 we reported on similar duplication of efforts.¹ This report found duplicative analyses among five DOD and LEA organizations analyzing the movement of illegal drugs into Mexico by aircraft. Coordinated analyses should better ensure agreement on the various drug threats the United States faces and how to counter them. Responding to the April report, DOD generally agreed the report was accurate and noted that efforts are underway to help detect and minimize duplication. DOD also noted, however, that all duplication is not, in itself, counterproductive. For example, products considered duplicative of those from other centers can be responsive to the needs of the individual center that produced them.

¹Drug Control: Inadequate Guidance Results in Duplicate Intelligence Production Efforts (GAO/NSIAD-92-153, Apr. 14, 1992).

ATTEMPTS TO COORDINATE

Attempts to Coordinate

- 1968—Federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs created.
 - 1973—DEA created.
 - 1974—DEA created EPIC.
 - 1984—National Drug Enforcement Policy Board created.
-

Congress and the executive branch have tried since the 1960s to lessen the fragmentation of federal counternarcotics efforts. These efforts have included realignments of federal agency responsibilities such as mergers and reorganizations. In 1968, for example, executive action merged two narcotics bureaus to create the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. See appendix VI for a more complete chronology of coordination attempts.

In 1973, Executive Order 11727 in conjunction with Reorganization Plan No. 2, created DEA while abolishing three other entities. These actions established DEA to direct the country's drug intelligence program. They also gave DEA the responsibility to develop overall drug law enforcement strategy, programs, planning, and evaluation. This was expected to result in the compilation of more complete and cumulative drug law enforcement intelligence.

To carry out its responsibility, DEA created the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) in 1974. EPIC's primary objective is to provide complete and accurate intelligence on drug movement by land, sea, and air throughout the world. Although EPIC has no direct authority to manage intelligence collection by other agencies, it provides intelligence to its Advisory Board members for action. The Advisory Board consists of 13 member agencies from the law enforcement, DOD, and intelligence communities.

In 1984, Congress created the National Drug Enforcement Policy Board as part of the National Narcotics Act. Although proposals to create a drug czar position were introduced, the legislation enacted did not create a drug czar. Rather it formed the Policy Board as a cabinet level council under the chairmanship of the attorney general. The act gave the Policy Board the responsibility to coordinate the collection and evaluation of information necessary to carry out illegal drug law enforcement policy. However, Congressional evaluations of the Policy Board found that it did not adequately fulfill its responsibilities of coordinating the activities of drug control agencies.

Attempts to Coordinate

- 1988—ONDCP created.
 - 1989—ONDCP recommended NDIC.
 - 1993—NDIC expected to be operational.
-

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 replaced the Policy Board with ONDCP. As a policy office, ONDCP issues the annual National Drug Control Strategy and certifies agency drug budgets but cannot direct agency program actions. ONDCP, along with others, is responsible for ensuring that information is available to support the national drug control program.

In 1989, ONDCP recommended an NDIC to ensure that information is available to assist policy makers. The NDIC is expected to be operational by summer 1993 and will coordinate and identify priorities for the collection and production of intelligence. Law enforcement officials, however, have questioned the NDIC's management structure while some are unclear on its mission. A senior level ONDCP official told us he believes that, properly instituted, the NDIC could help resolve coordination and duplication problems.

ROLE OF ONDCP

Role of ONDCP

- ONDCP
 - establishes intelligence priorities and encourages agency coordination,
 - makes recommendations to president on organization of agencies,
 - does not have authority to direct agency intelligence activities.
-

The 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act gave ONDCP responsibility for establishing policies, objectives, and priorities for the National Drug Control Program but does not authorize ONDCP to direct agencies' intelligence activities. As part of its overall responsibilities, ONDCP establishes priorities for intelligence and encourages agencies to coordinate and share information. ONDCP also is to coordinate and oversee the implementation of its policies by agencies, including doing program and performance audits.

The director of ONDCP has the authority to recommend to the president changes in the organization, management, and budgets of federal departments and agencies engaged in drug enforcement. The act gives ONDCP responsibility to review agency drug control budgets and certify in writing whether those budgets adequately reflect priorities established in the annual National Drug Control Strategy.

ONDCP also attempts to resolve conflicts between federal counternarcotics agencies. It has established national and regional committees and working groups consisting of members representing all of the agencies involved in reducing the supply of illegal drugs. These groups meet regularly to create joint policies and provide direction. According to ONDCP, this has resulted in significant improvements in interagency communication and cooperation.

The act authorizes ONDCP to monitor implementation of the drug control program through program and performance audits and evaluations. To date, ONDCP has not done any audits to determine the success of its coordinative attempts. According to an ONDCP official, ONDCP does, however, visit the intelligence centers at least annually to determine how well coordination is working.

LIST OF FEDERAL COUNTERNARCOTICS
INTELLIGENCE CENTERS BY ORGANIZATION

The 15 centers that gather and analyze primarily time-sensitive information used in effecting investigations and interdiction are indicated with an asterisk. The four remaining centers generally produce information on long-term trends and patterns. To varying degrees, however, centers gather and analyze information used to support both purposes as well as to support criminal prosecutions.

Organization	Intelligence Center
Department of Defense	Joint Task Force Four* --established 1989 Key West, FL
	Joint Task Force Five* --established 1990 Alameda, CA
	Joint Task Force Six* --established 1989 El Paso, TX
	North American Aerospace Defense Command Tactical Intelligence Cell* --established 1989 Cheyenne Mountain AFB, CO
Defense Intelligence Agency	National Military Joint Intelligence Center* --established 1967 Arlington, VA
	Tactical Fusion Group* --established 1989 Arlington, VA
Drug Enforcement Administration	El Paso Intelligence Center* --established 1974 El Paso, TX

LIST OF FEDERAL COUNTERNARCOTICS
INTELLIGENCE CENTERS BY ORGANIZATION
(CONTINUED)

Organization	Intelligence Center
Drug Enforcement Administration	Intelligence Division --established 1992 (formerly Office of Intelligence, established 1973) Arlington, VA
Federal Bureau of Investigation	Drug Intelligence Unit --established 1988 Washington, D.C.
U.S. Coast Guard	Intelligence Coordination Center --established 1984 Washington, D.C.
	Maritime Intelligence Center* --established 1990 Miami, FL
U.S. Customs Service	Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Center, West* --established 1988 Riverside, CA
	Customs National Aviation Center* --established 1989 Oklahoma City, OK
U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Customs Service	Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Center, East* --established 1987 Miami, FL
	Blue Lightning Operations Centers --established 1986* Miami, FL --established 1987* Gulfport, MS

LIST OF FEDERAL COUNTERNARCOTICS
INTELLIGENCE CENTERS BY ORGANIZATION
(CONTINUED)

Organization	Intelligence Center
Southwest Border Committee	Project NORTH STAR* --established 1990 Buffalo, NY
Department of Treasury	Financial Crimes Enforcement Network* --established 1990 Washington, D.C.
Central Intelligence Agency	Counter narcotics Center ^a --established 1989 Washington, D.C.

^aBecause we limited our scope primarily to domestic law enforcement and DOD agencies we did not include the Counter narcotics Center in our review. However, we have included it in this list to provide a more complete picture of the population of intelligence centers.

CHRONOLOGY OF COORDINATIVE ATTEMPTS

YEAR	ENTITY	ROLE
1968	Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs	Merged the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (Treasury) and Bureau of Drug Abuse Control (Health, Education, and Welfare). Gave Justice Department primary responsibility for drug investigations.
1971	Cabinet Committee on International Narcotics Control	Charged with developing a strategy to check the illegal flow of drugs to the U.S. and coordinating efforts abroad by involved federal agencies to implement that strategy. Chaired by secretary of state. Abolished in 1977.
1971	Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention	Responsible for coordinating all federal drug prevention, education, treatment, training, and research programs. Considerable debate also over whether the Office should also have authority over drug LEAs.
1972	Strategy Council on Drug Abuse	Primary responsibility to develop a comprehensive federal strategy for the prevention of both drug abuse and drug trafficking.

CHRONOLOGY OF COORDINATIVE ATTEMPTS (CONTINUED)

YEAR	ENTITY	ROLE
1973	DEA	Abolished the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the Office for Drug Abuse Law Enforcement, and the Office of National Narcotics Intelligence. Assigned responsibility to DEA for investigating all drug law enforcement cases under federal drug law.
1974	EPIC	DEA created EPIC as a multiagency center to provide complete intelligence on drug movement throughout the world.
1976	Office of Drug Abuse Policy	Responsibility to oversee all organizational and policy issues for drug abuse and drug trafficking prevention, coordinate the performance of drug abuse functions by federal departments and agencies, and recommend and implement resource priorities. Abolished in 1977.
1977/82	Drug Abuse Policy Office	Reorganizations under Presidents Carter and Reagan resulted in this Office, with the functions of the earlier Office of Drug Abuse Policy.
1983	National Narcotics Border Interdiction System	Operated under the authority of the vice president and charged with coordinating federal drug interdiction activities.

CHRONOLOGY OF COORDINATIVE ATTEMPTS (CONTINUED)

YEAR	ENTITY	ROLE
1984	National Drug (Enforcement) Policy Board	Overall responsibility to facilitate coordination of U.S. operations and policy with regard to illegal drug law enforcement. Chaired by the attorney general.
1988	ONDCP	The National Narcotics Leadership Act established ONDCP and terminated the Policy Board, the White House Drug Abuse Policy Office, and the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System. ONDCP is responsible for establishing policies, objectives, and priorities for the National Drug Control Program and coordinating and overseeing its implementation by national drug control agencies.
1993 expected	NDIC	Will coordinate intelligence collection and promote information sharing by law enforcement agencies. NDIC would focus on strategic intelligence while EPIC focused on tactical intelligence. NDIC will be under the supervision of the attorney general and is expected to be operational about July 1993.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS BRIEFING REPORT

GENERAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Weldon McPhail, Assistant Director, Administration of Justice
Issues

Samuel A. Caldron, Assignment Manager

Lou V. B. Smith, Evaluator

DETROIT REGIONAL OFFICE

Henry Malone, Regional Assignment Manager

M. Christine Dobrovich, Evaluator-in-Charge

Keith Landrum, Evaluator

(186751)

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