

GAO

Fact Sheet for the Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Government  
Information, Justice, and Agriculture,  
Committee on Government Operations,  
House of Representatives

September 1988

# BORDER CONTROL

## Drug Interdiction and Related Activities Along the Southwestern U.S. Border



**RESTRICTED**—Not to be released outside the General  
Accounting Office except on the basis of the specific approval  
by the Office of Congressional Relations.

---

---



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

---

General Government Division

B-203099

September 12, 1988

The Honorable Glenn English  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Government  
Information, Justice, and Agriculture  
Committee on Government Operations  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This fact sheet provides information on additional law enforcement personnel and equipment assigned to the southwest border area and drug seizures made along the border since July 1, 1986. You requested this information after we briefed your office on October 30, 1987, about Operation Alliance.

Operation Alliance is an ongoing multiagency effort to interdict drugs and other contraband smuggled across the southwestern border. (See app. I for a listing of organizations involved.) Its operations take place roughly within 150 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border and in the coastal waters adjacent to the Texas and California borders with Mexico. Initiated in July 1986, Operation Alliance reflects an Administration strategy to enhance and better coordinate federal, state, and local drug enforcement and related activities along the southwestern border.

As discussed with the Subcommittee, we could not clearly distinguish Operation Alliance activities from other existing law enforcement activities along the southwestern border. Participating federal agencies support Operation Alliance through their normal operating budgets, which do not specifically identify personnel, equipment, or expenditures associated with Operation Alliance. Similarly, drug seizures also cannot be separately attributed to Operation Alliance. Thus, our information on staffing, equipment, and drug seizures describes activities and results along the southwestern border that may be attributable to many law enforcement efforts, including Operation Alliance.

The information contained in this report was obtained through interviews and, where appropriate, reviews of agency records at the Southwest Border Committee of the National Drug Policy Board; the Operation Alliance Coordinating Center; the Department of the Treasury's U.S. Customs Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Internal Revenue Service; and the Department of Justice's Drug Enforcement

Administration (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation, Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys, and the U.S. Border Patrol within the Immigration and Naturalization Service. We did our work from August 1987 through April 1988. Appendix II further describes our scope and methodology.

INCREASED PERSONNEL ALONG  
THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER

About 1,090 additional law enforcement personnel from the Federal Bureau of Investigation; DEA; Immigration and Naturalization Service's Border Patrol; U.S. attorney offices in the southwestern border states; Customs Service; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and Internal Revenue Service were placed in the four states adjoining the U.S.-Mexico border between approximately July 1986 and October 1987. (See app. III.) At least 750 of the new staff were assigned within about 150 miles of the border. Because all but one of the agencies have multiple missions, personnel may have participated in Operation Alliance full-time, part-time, or not at all.

INCREASED EQUIPMENT ALONG  
THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER

Additional equipment for use in drug interdiction and related law enforcement activity has been placed along the border since July 1, 1986. However, Operation Alliance's Coordinating Center staff said that Customs is the only federal law enforcement agency to obtain significant amounts of this new equipment since July 1986.

Air Interdiction Related Equipment

Customs placed 11 additional interdiction aircraft, an increase of 85 percent, in the southwestern border area from July 1986 to October 1987. (See app. IV.) The Omnibus Drug Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1987, which provided at least some of the 11 aircraft, does not directly mention the southwestern border or Operation Alliance. However, an October 15, 1986, conference report<sup>1</sup> said that "it is absolutely essential to increase and improve the ability of the U.S. Customs Service to conduct comprehensive drug interdiction surveillance along the drug-prone southwest border."

---

<sup>1</sup>Making Continuing Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1987, Report 99-1005, 99th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1987).

In fiscal years 1985 through 1988, Congress appropriated about \$21.6 million for Customs for an aerostat. In October 1987, this radar balloon was installed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. By February 1988, it was being tested. According to the Director, Customs' Air Operations West, the aerostat was fully operational as of June 1, 1988.

#### Marine Equipment

Customs placed 12 boats, an increase of 63 percent, along the Texas Gulf and southern California coasts from July 1986 to October 1987 for use in interdiction-related activities. (See app. V.)

To coordinate marine operations, Customs officially opened its Southwest Region Tactical Operations Center in Houston, Texas, on February 4, 1987. This center receives signals from remote marine radar installations along the Gulf coast. Four of seven planned Customs marine radar installations began operating along the Texas Gulf coast in February 1987. The fifth installation began operating in October, while the sixth began in November 1987. According to a Customs contractor, the seventh radar installation was fully operational as of August 2, 1988.

#### DRUG SEIZURES MADE ALONG THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER

The combined efforts of law enforcement agencies resulted in 3,842 seizures of marijuana, cocaine, and heroin in the southwestern border area from July 1986 through December 1987. The seizures consisted of 199,196 kilograms of marijuana, 15,526 kilograms of cocaine, and 100 kilograms of heroin. (See app. VI.)

During our October 30, 1987, briefing, we agreed to verify drug seizure statistics for the year preceding and following the July 1986 initiation of Operation Alliance in order to determine whether the number and quantity of seizures changed under Operation Alliance. We provided initial statistics to you by letter dated January 21, 1988. We obtained the statistics from DEA's El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), which collects seizure data to develop indicators of drug movement. However, EPIC officials said that DEA and the Border Patrol had not reported all seizures in the year preceding Operation Alliance. Since January, we have analyzed underreporting of seizures by DEA. Due to the degree of underreporting we found during this analysis, we

B-203099

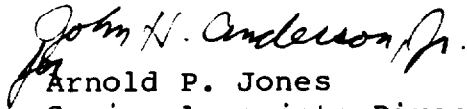
concluded that meaningful comparisons can not be made for seizures before and after Alliance began.

- - - - -

As arranged with the Subcommittee, unless you publicly announce the contents of this document earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will make copies available to each agency mentioned in the fact sheet and to interested parties who request it.

If you have any questions regarding this fact sheet, please call me on (202) 275-8389.

Sincerely yours,



Arnold P. Jones  
Senior Associate Director

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
LETTER	1
APPENDIX	
I	6
II	8
III	10
IV	11
V	12
VI	13

ABBREVIATIONS

DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
EPIC	El Paso Intelligence Center

PARTICIPANTS IN OPERATION ALLIANCE

<u>Department/organization</u>	<u>Agency/component</u>
Office of the Vice President	National Narcotics Border Interdiction System <sup>a</sup>
Department of the Treasury	Internal Revenue Service <sup>a</sup>
	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms <sup>a</sup>
	Secret Service
	Customs Service <sup>a</sup>
Department of Justice	Federal Law Enforcement Training Center
	Immigration and Naturalization Service's Border Patrol <sup>a</sup>
	Drug Enforcement Administration <sup>a</sup>
	Marshals Service <sup>a</sup>
	Federal Bureau of Investigation <sup>a</sup>
Department of Transportation	U.S. Attorney Offices (along the southwestern U.S. border) <sup>a</sup>
	U.S. Coast Guard
	Federal Aviation Administration



Department of Defense

Army

Navy

Air Force

Marine Corps

National Guard

Department of State

State and local law  
enforcement agencies  
from Arizona, California  
New Mexico, and Texas

<sup>a</sup>GAO interviewed officials from these agencies.

Source: Identified by the Attorney General in announcing  
Operation Alliance.

OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objective was to provide information on personnel, equipment, and drug seizures along the southwestern border since July 1, 1986, as requested by the Chairman, Subcommittee on Government Information, Justice, and Agriculture, House Committee on Government Operations. To provide this information, we did the following:

- We interviewed officials from 9 of the 19 federal organizations participating in Operation Alliance. We also interviewed an official from the Southwest Border Committee of the National Drug Policy Board and officials from the Operation Alliance Coordinating Center. Generally, these organizations were the most involved in assisting Operation Alliance in drug enforcement and other border control activities. (See app. I for organizations we contacted.)
- We requested information on the number of full-time law enforcement personnel stationed in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California as of July 1, 1986, and the most recently available information as of October 1987. We obtained this information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation; DEA; the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Border Patrol; the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys; Customs; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and the Internal Revenue Service. We selected these agencies because they had increased law enforcement staffing along the border after Operation Alliance began, according to congressional testimony by the Operation Alliance Senior Tactical Coordinator in August 1987.

As agreed with the Subcommittee, we did not determine whether (1) personnel changes directly resulted from Operation Alliance or (2) additional personnel were used mainly for law enforcement activities, such as alien apprehension, not related to Operation Alliance.

- We obtained information on equipment used in drug interdiction from the Operation Alliance Coordinating Center and from Customs. As agreed with the Subcommittee, we did not determine whether equipment increases were a direct result of Operation Alliance.
- We obtained drug seizure statistics from reports generated by the automated data processing systems at EPIC. Among other things, these systems account for drug seizures made

from land, air, and maritime conveyances along the southwestern border.

After analyzing the information, we verified the results of our analysis with the providing agencies.

SEVEN AGENCIES' LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL STATIONED IN  
TEXAS, NEW MEXICO, ARIZONA, AND CALIFORNIA

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Staffing level</u>		<u>Change</u>	<u>Percent change</u>
	<u>1986<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>1987<sup>b</sup></u>		
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms	197	220	23	12
Federal Bureau of Investigation	1,479	1,593	114	8
Internal Revenue Service	538	627	89	17
DEA	527	641	114	22
Border Patrol	2,838	2,847	9	0
Customs Service				
Nonair operations	1,980	2,656	676	34
Aviation <sup>c</sup>	45	45	0	0
Total Customs	<u>2,025</u>	<u>2,701</u>	<u>676</u>	<u>33</u>
U.S. Attorney Offices	<u>414</u>	<u>479</u>	<u>65</u>	16
TOTAL	<u>8,018</u>	<u>9,108</u>	<u>1,090</u>	14

<sup>a</sup>Agency reporting dates varied from June 30 to August 6, 1986.

<sup>b</sup>Agency reporting dates varied from August 1 to October 7, 1987.

<sup>c</sup>Headquarters and field staff.

Source: Developed by GAO from information provided by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Internal Revenue Service; DEA; Border Patrol; Customs; and Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys.

CHANGE IN U.S. CUSTOMS SERVICE AIRCRAFT DEPLOYMENT ALONG  
THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER FROM JULY 1986 THROUGH OCTOBER 1987

Type of aircraft	Texas						Total Increase/ decrease	Percent
	Houston Increase/ decrease	San Antonio Increase/ decrease	Corpus Christi Increase/ decrease	New Mexico Albuquerque Increase/ decrease	Arizona Tucson Increase/ decrease	California San Diego Increase/ decrease		
Detection			6		-2		4 <sup>a</sup>	200
Interception						-1	-1	-33
Tracking	1	1		1	1	1	5 <sup>b</sup>	125
Apprehension (Blackhawk helicopters)	1			1	2	-1	3 <sup>c</sup>	75
Subtotal (Interdiction aircraft)	2	1	6	2	1	-1	11	85
Support aircraft	-2		1	-3	0	2	-2	-6
Total Aircraft	0	1	7	-1	1	1	9	20

<sup>a</sup>The number of detection aircraft was increased by the addition of two E-2Cs and two P-3As on loan from the Navy.

<sup>b</sup>The number of tracking aircraft was increased by the addition of five Piper Cheyenne IIAs purchased by the Customs Service in 1985.

<sup>c</sup>The number of apprehension aircraft was increased by the addition of three Blackhawk helicopters on loan from the Army.

Source: Developed by GAO on the basis of data provided by the U.S. Customs Service, Washington, D.C.

CHANGE IN U.S. CUSTOMS SERVICE BOAT  
DEPLOYMENT ALONG THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER  
BETWEEN JULY 1986 AND OCTOBER 1987

<u>Interdiction- related boats</u>	Texas Gulf coast (Increase/ decrease)	Los Angeles area (Increase/ decrease)	San Diego area (Increase/ decrease)	Totals (Increase/decrease)	
				<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Interception	3		1	4	80
Radar platform	1	-1		0	0
Utility <sup>a</sup>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	-	<u>8</u>	89
TOTALS	<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>12</u>	63

Note: These statistics represent boats deployed along the Texas and southern California coasts.

<sup>a</sup>Utility boats, 18- to 27-foot vessels, are used in a support capacity and also for interdiction operations and marine patrols in intercoastal waterways.

Source: Developed by GAO on the basis of data provided by U.S. Customs Service, Washington, D.C.

DRUG SEIZURES FROM LAND, AIR, AND  
MARITIME CONVEYANCES ALONG THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER,  
JULY 1, 1986, THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 1987

	<u>Number of seizures</u>	<u>Kilograms seized<sup>a</sup></u>
Marijuana	3,285	199,196
Cocaine	259	15,526
Heroin	<u>298</u>	<u>100</u>
TOTAL	<u>3,842</u>	<u>214,822</u>

Note 1: Data include seizures made by federal, state, and local agencies.

Note 2: Land seizure statistics generally include seizures made within 150 miles of the Mexican border. Land seizures made in the Los Angeles metropolitan area were excluded, unless it was specifically reported that the drugs seized were known or suspected to have crossed the Mexican border by land. Marijuana plants were excluded because they are assumed to have been domestically grown. (Other marijuana products were not subject to this exclusion.) Air seizure statistics include those seizures made within California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas involving drugs known to have been transported by private aircraft. Maritime statistics include seizures made in the Pacific Ocean or Gulf of Mexico of drugs believed to have passed through Mexico and to have been destined for the Texas and southern California coasts.

<sup>a</sup>One kilogram equals 2.2046 pounds.

Source: Developed by GAO from data supplied by EPIC, which gathers statistics on drug movement.

(264290)









---

**Requests for copies of GAO reports should be sent to:**

**U.S. General Accounting Office  
Post Office Box 6015  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877**

**Telephone 202-275-6241**

**The first five copies of each report are free. Additional copies are \$2.00 each.**

**There is a 25% discount on orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address.**

**Orders must be prepaid by cash or by check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents.**

---

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

Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300

First-Class Mail  
Postage & Fees Paid  
GAO  
Permit No. G100

---