

STATEMENT
OF
REAR ADMIRAL PAUL A. YOST, JR.
CHIEF OF STAFF, U. S. COAST GUARD
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

21 MARCH 1983

Madame Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Rear Admiral Paul A. Yost, Jr., Chief of Staff of the Coast Guard. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to report on the Coast Guard's involvement in international drug control.

First, I would like to go over some background on the nature of maritime drug trafficking, and at the same time update trends that are being noted.

The Coast Guard's role in our nation's five-pronged Federal Strategy for prevention of drug abuse and drug trafficking is focused on the interdiction of drugs bound for the U. S. from foreign source or transit nations. Estimates for 1982, the latest figures available from the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumer's Committee (NNICC), show that about 85% of the annual supply of marijuana in the United States was grown in foreign soil. Most of this amount was shipped by sea. A small, but increasing percentage is imported by air. NNICC also states that all cocaine consumed in the United States is foreign-produced. Most is smuggled into the U. S. by air, but we note a growing trend of cocaine shipments intermingled with bulk shipments of marijuana.

During 1983 our overall efforts have provided an increased deterrent value by denying easy access to the U. S. via traditional maritime routes, and by increasing the cost of doing business for drug traffickers. Our seizures in fiscal 1983 were 37% lower than in 1982, which is a function of our deterrent effect and smaller 1982 crop in Colombia.

Most maritime drug traffic destined for Florida and the Atlantic and Gulf Coast regions of the United States departs from South

American or Caribbean staging areas. Marijuana from the Guajira Peninsula on the north coast of Colombia is the prime example of this. As seaborne smugglers proceed north, they normally pass through one of the four inter-island channels we call "choke points". It is in these areas that Coast Guard resources are most effectively employed. Smugglers that successfully transit these choke points head for the Bahamas, Florida or the Gulf Coast. Some vessels attempt to avoid the increased law enforcement pressure off Florida by transiting the Eastern Caribbean and offloading further north along the Mid-Atlantic or the New England seacoasts. There has also been some increase in drug smuggling on the West Coast, which could be a further reaction to the increased enforcement pressure in the Caribbean. We have noted that as law enforcement pressure in the maritime region has increased, there has been a shift to other modes and methods of transportation. There has been a significant increase in air smuggling. Also, the use of hidden shipboard compartments, and attempts to navigate around our placement of interdiction resources have been noted. We believe these tactics confirm the fact that we are having a noticeable effect on maritime smuggling, since these elusive efforts make smuggling more difficult and expensive for the trafficker. The operational effort to stem the overall flow of drugs has become more effective through the coordination of all law enforcement agencies' interdiction and intelligence gathering activities.

Coast Guard drug interdiction operations concentrate on large motherships which deliver contraband to smaller, faster contact boats well offshore. In addition to carrying marijuana, our intelligence sources indicate that many also carry quantities of hard drugs (primarily cocaine). We are seldom able to seize these higher value low volume hard drugs however, because they are usually disposed of prior to the at-sea boarding of the vessel. We have observed actions that confirm this. Analysis

shows that while we must keep pressure on all facets of the maritime drug scenario, interdiction of motherships has the greatest potential for disrupting the maritime flow of drugs. In addition to removing other contraband (including hard drugs), one mothership seizure may remove as much marijuana from the market as would many contact boat seizures closer to shore.

Since the mid 1970's the Coast Guard, in cooperation with local, state and other federal agencies, has increasingly employed our resources in an attempt to stem the flow of drugs into the United States. Special operations were conducted specifically for narcotics interdiction, and as our experience grew, so did the Coast Guard's success rate. In the early 80's, the Administration embarked on an aggressive campaign to reduce the availability and use of illicit drugs, and in January 1982, the President created the South Florida Task Force on crime as a result of the concerns expressed by the citizens of Florida. The Coast Guard responded to this effort by reprogramming resources and adding to the inventory of Coast Guard cutters, planes, equipment and personnel based in Florida.

During the past several years we have significantly increased the number of cutter patrol days expended for drug interdiction off the coast of Florida, in the Caribbean, and in the choke points. Our air operations have also been stepped up. In 1982 two large Coast Guard cutters were relocated to Florida from other regions of the United States to increase their ability to respond quickly to sightings and other intelligence. The Coast Guard now averages about six of our larger cutters on patrol at all times in waters off the Southeastern United States and in the Caribbean. We have also reprogrammed some of our helicopter assets to make our flight-deck equipped cutters more effective. Additionally, we formed a Surface Effect Ship squadron of three vessels in Key West, which became fully operational in 1983.

In 1982 Congress passed legislation clarifying statutory restrictions on the use of Department of Defense resources for law enforcement purposes. As a result, the Department of Defense now has greater freedom to support federal law enforcement agencies. DOD resources have been playing an important role in the federal drug interdiction program by providing surveillance and support services, such as using aircraft to search for smugglers and Navy ships to tow or escort vessels seized by the Coast Guard to the nearest U. S. port. Additionally, Navy ships now also deploy with Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Teams (TACLETS) or Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDETS) aboard. These teams or detachments conduct boardings of suspect vessels from their Navy hosts in the same manner as boarding parties operate from Coast Guard vessels.

To increase further the number of surface assets available for interdiction, the Coast Guard has been routinely deploying LEDET personnel on Navy Pegasus-class PHMs operating out of Key West. These hydrofoils are being used as "pouncer" vessels to interdict fast drug smuggling contact boats. We will conduct a joint evaluation with the Navy later this year to verify the effectiveness of pouncer operations, and to see if this concept is also useful in the Gulf of Mexico.

Since 1982, the Navy has assisted us in the seizure of 18 vessels, the arrest of 166 suspected smugglers, and the interdiction of 500 thousand pounds of marijuana and 46 pounds of cocaine.

The cooperation we receive from foreign governments is good. We routinely deal with the governments of Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico, Honduras, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, as well as British, French,

and Dutch island dependencies in the Caribbean. Our contact with them is coordinated through the Department of State, and usually starts with a request for a registry confirmation of a vessel intercepted by one of our cutters at sea. Prior to taking any action against a vessel on the high seas, we must verify its claimed national affiliation to insure it is legitimate. If the vessel's claim is confirmed by its flag state, the U. S. Embassy then negotiates with that government to permit the U. S. government to board and search the vessel. If contraband is found, we then seize it either on behalf of the nation we are dealing with, or for violation of U. S. law. If the purported flag state refutes the vessel's claim of registry, we then follow established procedures to declare the vessel stateless. The High Seas Convention permits any nation to exert its jurisdiction over a stateless vessel, thus, we can exert U. S. jurisdiction to board and search. Close cooperation of other governments is absolutely crucial during this process. Their ability to rapidly verify claims of registry at any time of day or night, and their willingness to enter into cooperative arrangements with us to facilitate searches and seizures on the high seas are key elements of our maritime interdiction program.

A review of our records indicates that we have seized 12 Panamanian, five Honduran, two Haitian, and six U.K. Flag vessels since January 1, 1983 using this process. In addition, we have seized one vessel each from the following countries during the same time frame: Canada, the Cayman Islands, Colombia, West Germany, Mexico, and Sweden. We have also seized 17 vessels claiming foreign registry which were eventually declared stateless. These seizures netted a total of over 1.4 million pounds of marijuana. Since the beginning of 1983, we have contacted foreign governments 66 times to confirm claims of registry. Internal procedures vary widely from country to country, as do registry systems so the time required for responses also varies

widely from country to country. We, the State Department, and the involved Embassies, strive to minimize the time required to complete this process so that valuable cutter time is not unnecessarily wasted while the registry check, or the negotiations for the special arrangement are completed.

The Coast Guard is also operationally involved with foreign governments. We have engaged in joint operations with Jamaica, the Bahamas, Haiti, Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica. We plan to continue operations with friendly governments in the future.

In closing, I would like to state that we continue to receive excellent cooperation from those governments of the Central, South American, and Caribbean nations we routinely deal with, and depend on, for the daily conduct of our at-sea interdiction operations. I have no reason to doubt that the open and cordial relations we have established with these countries will continue. I certainly hope this remains the case. They are vital to our interests in this important mission.

This concludes my prepared testimony, ^{Madam?} Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions you or the members of the committee may have.