



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Washington, DC 20515

James L. Oberstar
Chairman

John L. Mica
Ranking Republican Member

David Heysfeld, Chief of Staff
Ward W. McCarragher, Chief Counsel

James W. Coon II, Republican Chief of Staff

March 9, 2009

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation

FROM: Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Staff

SUBJECT: Coast Guard Drug and Migrant Interdiction

PURPOSE OF THE HEARING

The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will convene at 10:00 a.m. on March 11, 2009, in Room 2167 of the Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony regarding the Coast Guard's drug and migrant interdiction operations.

BACKGROUND

The Coast Guard is the United States' primary maritime law enforcement agency. As such, it is the lead federal agency responsible for conducting maritime drug interdiction operations; it shares responsibility for air interdictions with the U.S. Customs Service. In fiscal year 2008, the Coast Guard removed just under 368,000 pounds of cocaine being smuggled through the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean – which was a new record for the service (surpassing the old record set in fiscal year 2007).¹ The service also removed just over 23,000 pounds of marijuana from those region in fiscal year 2008.

¹ Removals include the actual seizure of drugs through an interdiction – or the destruction (by burning or sinking) of drugs by smugglers in the presence of Coast Guard personnel (often as a reaction to an impending interdiction).

The Coast Guard is also responsible for ensuring compliance with U.S. immigration laws and international conventions against alien smuggling. The Coast Guard has interdicted more than 350,000 migrants since 1980. The majority of the migrants interdicted by the Coast Guard originate from Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. In the first quarter of 2009 alone, the Coast Guard has interdicted more than 2,700 undocumented migrants, which is 14.5 percent higher than the rate of interdictions experienced at the same time in 2008.

The Joint Inter-Agency Task Force South (JIATF-S) is a joint operations fusion center located in Key West, Florida, and led by the Department of Defense. Entities that are represented at JIATF-S include the Department of Homeland Security (Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection [CBP], and Immigrant and Customs Enforcement [ICE]), the Department of Justice (including the Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA] and Federal Bureau of Investigations [FBI]), Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Office of Naval Intelligence [ONI], National Reconnaissance Office [NRO], National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency [NGA], Naval Criminal Investigative Service [NCIS] and the Serious Organised Crime Agency [SOCA] of the United Kingdom. In addition to U.S. assets, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands provide aircraft, ships and liaison officers to JIATF-S; liaison officers are also provided by several partner nations in Latin America. JIATF-S gathers intelligence information from multiple sources to detect and monitor illegal trafficking operations and coordinates the deployment of response assets within the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean basin.

JIATF-S uses actionable intelligence to determine the location of suspected drug trafficking vessels. Such intelligence is bolstered by information collected from sensors and active assets, including patrol aircraft from CBP, DOD, Coast Guard, and international partners. Once a suspected smuggler has been identified, JIATF-S reports the location to a surface asset provided by the Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, or international partner with a Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment onboard. These assets conduct the interdiction operations, including seizing illegal drugs and arresting suspected smugglers.

Drug Interdiction

The global drug trade supplies much of the marijuana and the majority of the cocaine and heroin that flows into the United States. In addition to the harm caused in the lives of users, the drug trade poses a serious threat to national security, in part because many terrorist entities and organized crime syndicates rely on the profits of the drug trade to fund their illegal activities. In recent years, the trade has also been a contributing factor to the destabilization of governments in regions vital to U.S. interests, including previously Colombia and, more recently, Mexico.

According to the National Drug Threat Assessment published in 2009, there were more than 1.8 million drug-related arrests in the United States in 2007 covering all levels of government.² In 2009, the U.S. government will spend more than \$14 billion to combat drug flows and use by supporting interdiction operations, drug-related law enforcement activities, and drug treatment and use prevention programs.³

² National Drug Threat Assessment, 2009, page III.

³ Ibid.

Drug origins

JlATF-S projects that in 2009, approximately 67 percent of the illegal drug production from South America will flow to/through Mexico and into the U.S. Fifteen percent will flow into Caribbean nations - and the remaining production will flow into Europe and Africa.

The majority of the cocaine smuggled into the U.S. originates in South America in the countries of Columbia – which is the world’s largest supplier – and, to a lesser extent, Peru and Bolivia. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), in 2007, between 545 and 707 metric tons of cocaine left South America in route to the U.S.⁴ According to information provided by JlATF-S, 80 percent of the cocaine departing South America is initially moved via maritime conveyances; the majority of the remaining cocaine departing South America moves via the air.

According to the DEA, Columbia is also the largest single supplier of the heroine that is smuggled into the U.S. Unlike cocaine, heroine is generally smuggled in small quantities primarily by air; it is often carried by humans and/or animals – both of which can be known by the term “mule.” It is also transported in furniture, machine parts and other items loaded in containers that are shipped to the U.S.

The majority of the marijuana that is smuggled into the U.S. originates in Mexico and is trafficked by land over the southwest border. In the past few years, however, Mexican-based drug trafficking organizations have begun cultivating marijuana inside the U.S. border in an effort to reduce the risks associated with the cross-border transit and to increase profit margins by producing the drug closer to its users.⁵ Marijuana is also being smuggled into the U.S. from Canada. The quantities smuggled from Canada into the U.S. are far smaller than those smuggled from Mexico into the U.S. – but Canadian-grown marijuana is generally of a higher potency than Mexican-grown marijuana.⁶

Methamphetamines are produced in super labs in Mexico, also making Mexico the largest producer of methamphetamines destined for the U.S.⁷

Trafficking Trends

The Transit Zone is a 42 million square mile area through which drugs are smuggled into the U.S. from South America⁸. The zone includes the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and the Eastern Pacific Ocean. Interdictions within the Transit Zone are conducted through coordinated efforts conducted by the U.S. and its international partners, who patrol this large area and work to interdict traffickers crossing maritime and air routes toward the United States.

Drug smugglers use a variety of routes to cross the Transit Zone. Some routes extend up to two thousand miles offshore into the Eastern Pacific and the Western Caribbean. Over the past five

⁴ Office of National Drug Control Policy, *Cocaine Smuggling in 2007*.

⁵ Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug Control Strategy*, January 2009.

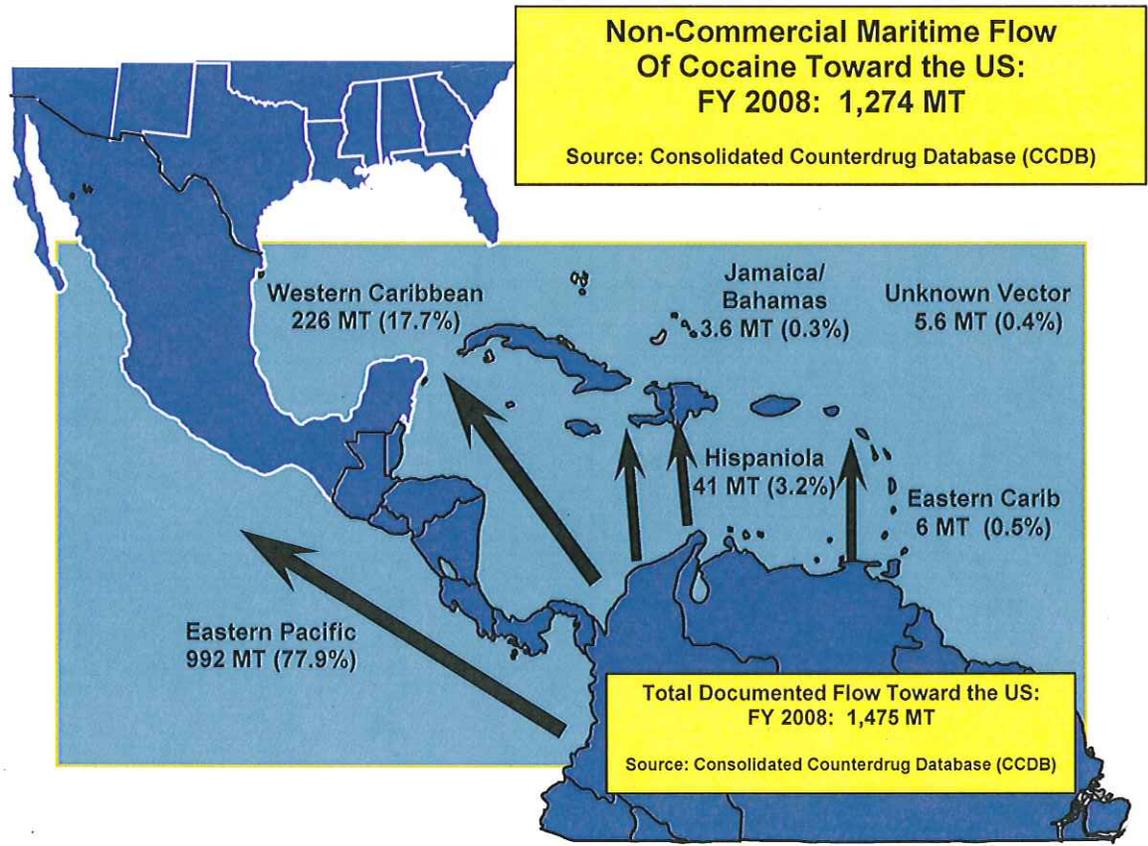
⁶ Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug Control Strategy*, January 2009.

⁷ Office of National Drug Control Policy – March 2008 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report

⁸ Congressional Research Service, *International Drug Control Policy*, RL34543, February 9, 2009.

years, the Eastern Pacific and Western Caribbean routes have accounted for nearly 90 percent of smuggled drug flow that is intended for the U.S. Of the total cocaine removed by the Coast Guard in 2009, approximately 95 percent was interdicted in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

The chart below shows the total estimated maritime flow of cocaine toward the United States originating in South America in fiscal year 2008. The chart shows that nearly 78 percent of the flow moved through the Eastern Pacific and the remaining flow moved through the Caribbean (with the majority bound for the U.S. and small amounts bound for destinations in the Caribbean).

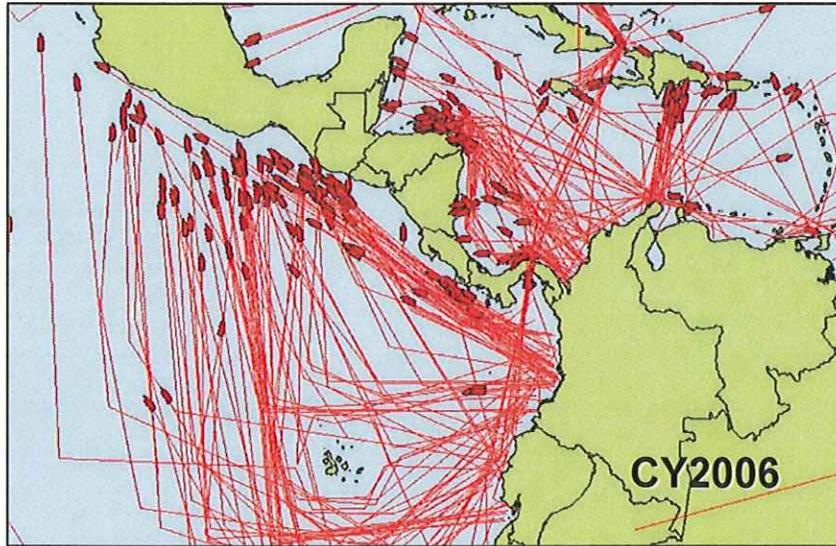


As the Coast Guard and its partner agencies succeed in interdicting drugs trafficked along one route, drug trafficking organizations change their routes and the means by which they transport drugs in an effort to elude interdiction efforts. Thus, through the use of its cutters, aircraft armed to conduct airborne use-of-force operations, small boats launched “over the horizon” from larger vessels, and fixed-wing maritime patrol aircraft, the Coast Guard has succeeded in interdicting an increasing amount of the drugs moved along routes that stretch far out into the Eastern Pacific and Western Caribbean. Smugglers have responded by increasing their use of routes that remain within the territorial seas of Central American nations close in to these nations’ coastlines (called the “littoral” areas). Such routes allow smugglers to blend in to local traffic and avoid the risks of rough weather.

The charts below compare the routes vessels taken by drug smugglers from South America en route to Mexico and Central America in 2006 and 2007. The 2006 chart shows many smugglers

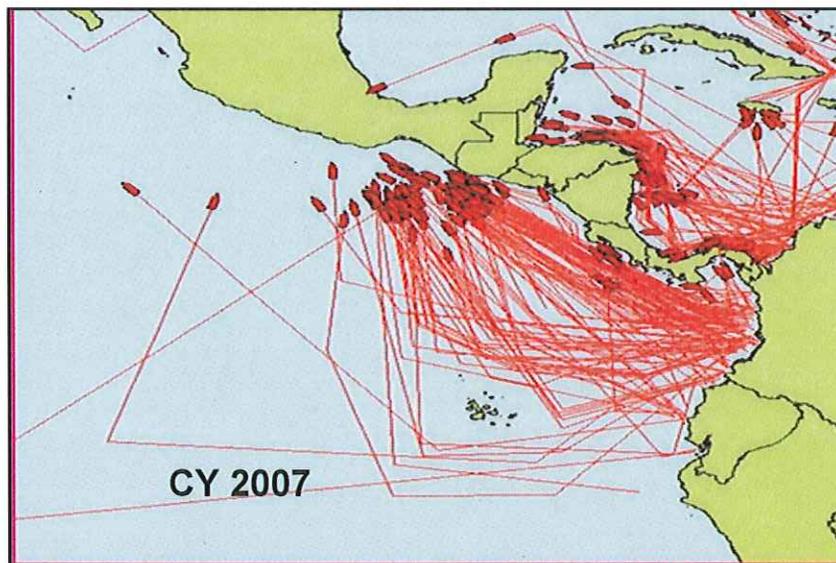
swinging into the Pacific Ocean far west of the western Coast of Central America before turning in a northern direction. The 2007 chart illustrates the increasing use of littoral routes in that year.

Trackings of Vessels Used to Smuggle Drugs in 2006



Source: U.S. Coast Guard

Trackings of Vessels Used to Smuggle Drugs in 2007



Source: U.S. Coast Guard

Smugglers often use fishing vessels (which may not be distinguishable from legitimate vessels) or “go-fast” vessels to carry drugs. Go-fasts are recreational vessels that are small in size, operate at high rates of speed with a shallow draft, and are nearly invisible to radar. Go-fasts can be used along routes that extend far out to sea as well as in the littorals. Nearly half of the drugs smuggled into the U.S. are carried by go-fast vessels. Typically, smugglers using go-fasts travel at night; however, these vessels are also practically undetectable during the day if they are stationary in the water and covered with a blue tarp which is used by go-fasts to blend into the ocean.

Drug trafficking organizations have also recently begun introducing new types of vessels designed to evade detection called self-propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) vessels. SPSS vessels ride beneath the water; they can be self-propelled or they can be towed behind other vessels. SPSS vessels are typically built in Columbia. Early models could cost up to a million dollars to produce. More recent models are typically made of fiberglass, wood or steel; they can take up to one year and cost up to two million dollars to construct. Earlier models could carry four to five metric tons of cargo; newer models can carry up to twelve tons.⁹

SPSS vessels are difficult to detect in the day time since some are painted blue and produce only a small wake; some models also have lead shielding that minimizes their heat signature making them difficult to detect at night with infrared sensors. A smuggler can travel up to 2,500 miles in two weeks in an SPSS. Some of these vessels are manned by crews of three to four people who make the journey in a four-foot high cylindrical capsule. Recently, they have begun to be equipped with scuttle valves so crews can quickly sink the vessel if it is detected, thereby destroying the evidence it contains. In January 2009 alone, the Coast Guard interdicted four SPSSs carrying a combined total of more than 51,000 pounds of cocaine.

The *Drug Trafficking Vessel Interdiction Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-407) passed by Congress last years makes it a federal felony offense for to operate a stateless submersible or semi-submersible vessel in international waters with the intent to avoid detection. The maximum penalty for violation of the Act is 15 years in prison and a one million dollar fine. Before the implementation of this Act, smugglers using SPSS vessels were usually released if no drugs were found and thus there was no evidence of smuggling activity) because the mere operation of an SPSS vessel by itself was not a crime. SPSS vessels are designed to quickly sink (scuttle) specifically to prevent the collection of drugs

Drug trade organizations have also begun carrying cocaine in a liquid form, which is diluted with diesel fuel and carried in vessel tanks. In May 2007, the Coast Guard discovered liquid cocaine on board an Ecuadorian-flagged fishing vessels. Working with DEA chemists, the Coast Guard developed a testing method that led to the positive identification and seizure of more than 3,800 gallons of liquid cocaine, which in turn led to the arrest of 17 smugglers.

Typically, whether smuggled in go-fasts, SPSS vessels, or in other types of vessels, cocaine ultimately bound for the U.S. is delivered into Mexico, where it is broken into smaller loads for transit by land across the southwest border into U.S. According to the ONDCP, approximately 90 percent of the cocaine consumed in the U.S. transits through Mexico.¹⁰

⁹ CNN.com, *Coast Guard Hunts Drug-Running Semi-Subs*, March 20, 2008.

¹⁰ Office of National Drug Control Policy, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2008.

Drug Interdiction Trends

Approximately 52 percent of total U.S. government seizures of cocaine can be attributed to the Coast Guard. In 2007, the Coast Guard removed 355,755 pounds of cocaine with an estimated street value of more \$4.7 billion. In 2008, the service surpassed the previous year's record by removing nearly 367,926 pounds of cocaine. In that year, the service also seized more than 22,000 pounds of marijuana.

Coast Guard Drug Removal Statistics – As of December 5, 2008							
FY	Events	Vessels	Arrests	Marijuana (lbs)	Cocaine (lbs)		
					Seized	Removed	Total
2009	17	7	46	20,760	29,480	3,310	32,800
2008	85	35	196	22,170	170,180	197,970	367,920
2007	65	37	188	12,380	238,040	117,710	355,750
2006	64	23	200	9,060	234,340	52,700	287,040
2005	87	66	364	10,030	303,660	34,540	338,210
2004	104	71	326	25,920	241,710	52,280	293,990

Source: U.S. Coast Guard

The amount of cocaine recorded by the Coast Guard as “seized” is the actual amount of cocaine the Coast Guard has physically captured from a vessel.

By comparison, the measure of cocaine “removed” by the Coast Guard is an intelligence-based estimate of the amount cocaine that was on board vessels pursued by the Coast Guard and that was burned, jettisoned, or scuttled by smugglers before it could be seized in an attempt to destroy evidence.

The “removal rate” measures how effective the Coast Guard is in disrupting the flow of cocaine traveling by non-commercial means to the U.S. The “removal rate” is the sum of cocaine physically seized by the Coast Guard and the amount of cocaine lost to the drug trafficking organizations due to the Coast Guard’s efforts. The chart below illustrates the Coast Guard’s removal goals and actual removal rates between fiscal year 2005 and fiscal year 2008.

Fiscal Year	Coast Guard Removal Goal	Coast Guard Actual Removal Rate
2008	28%	TBD(Aug 09)
2007	26%	32.6%
2006	22%	25.3%
2005	19%	27.3%

Source: U.S. Coast Guard

In 2007, record seizures of cocaine by U.S. forces together with record seizures by Mexican forces and disruption in the Mexican trafficking cartels associated with increased trafficking-related violence in Mexico decreased the availability of cocaine in the U.S., which appears to have caused an

increase in the price of this drug.¹¹ As reported by the ONDCP, the DEA's System to Retrieve Information on Drug Evidence (STRIDE) reported the average price per pure gram of cocaine increased from \$95.35 in January 2007 to \$136.93 in September 2007, while the average purity of the cocaine decreased by 15 percent.

Although the Coast Guard's largest seizures have been of cocaine and marijuana, the service has also seized approximately 138 pounds of heroin per year since 2004.

Coast Guard Heroin Seizures

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount of Heroin Seized (in lbs.)</u>
2004	104.4
2005	177
2006	25
2007	366
2008	18.7
Total	691.1

Source: U.S. Coast Guard

Coast Guard Assets

In the Eastern and Western Caribbean, the Coast Guard typically deploys three of its major cutters (which include 210-foot cutters, 270-foot cutters, and 378-foot cutters); these are equipped with small boats and can be deployed helicopters. The Coast Guard also typically deploys maritime patrol aircraft (which include HC-130s (Hercules) and HU-25s (Falcon) aircraft), and two law enforcement detachments (LEDETs) embarked on U.S. Navy, Dutch, or British warships. In the Eastern Pacific, the Coast Guard deploys one cutter equipped with a helicopter, three LEDETs on U.S. Navy Ships, and one HC-130 maritime patrol aircraft.

In 1998, the Coast Guard estimated it was interdicting less than ten percent of the drugs entering the U.S. by sea. Based on direction from then-Commandant James Loy, the Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) was established. Currently based in Jacksonville, Florida, HITRON's helicopters are specially armed with a rifle and a machine gun. The crew uses these armaments for self-protection and to fire warning shots to compel smugglers to stop; if required, Coast Guard crew members can also fire disabling shots that destroy the engines of non-compliant suspect vessels. The Coast Guard's HH-65 (Dolphin) and HH-60 (Jayhawk) helicopters can also be outfitted to pursue drug smugglers. When deployed, HITRON helicopters intercepted and stopped all five of the go-fasts it encountered, arrested 17 suspects, and interdicted 2,640 pounds of cocaine and 7,000 pounds of marijuana with a street value of more than \$100 million. The five-for-five success rate prompted the Coast Guard to set a new standard for enhanced future maritime drug interdiction efforts.

The Coast Guard has two Tactical Law Enforcement Teams (TACLETs): the Maritime Security Response Team located in Chesapeake, Virginia, and TACLET South, located in Miami,

¹¹ Office of National Drug Control Policy publication, *Cocaine Smuggling in 2007*.

FL. TACLETs are comprised of nine-person Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDETs). TACLETs and LEDETS are specialized maritime law enforcement units assigned to enforce U.S. laws across a wide spectrum of maritime response situations. Additionally, they provide terrorist deterrence and asset protection.

International Partnerships

The U.S. has 26 bilateral maritime counter-narcotic agreements with Central and South American and Caribbean partner nations. These agreements define the terms of cooperation among the parties. Depending on the level of cooperation, such agreements may:

- Allow Coast Guard personnel to board vessels carrying the partner nation's flag;
- Sanction ship rider programs under which nationals of the partner nation may ride on Coast Guard vessels to enforce the maritime laws of the partner nation;
- Sanction pursuit by the Coast Guard of alleged smugglers into national territorial waters (in instances in which such agreements are not in place, the Coast Guard must halt the pursuit of suspected smugglers at the start of a nation's territorial sea – typically 12 miles from shore);
- Allow the Coast Guard to enter the territorial waters of a partner nation to investigate alleged smuggling activity among individuals who are not under pursuit;
- Allow maritime patrol aircraft overflights; and
- Allow the Coast Guard to order suspected smuggler aircraft to land.

Exercising the terms of bilateral agreements, the Coast Guard has embarked ship riders onboard Coast Guard cutters from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, the Bahamas, Belize, and Palau. Ship riders have improved cooperation between the U.S. and these participating nations and maximized the Coast Guard's effectiveness in enforcing maritime law on the high seas and in the territorial waters of partner nations.

The U.S. also has a bilateral agreement with Columbia which is used on a regular basis. Under the 1997 Maritime Ship Boarding Agreement, the Coast Guard is authorized to board Colombian-flagged vessels when they are in international waters. Using these authorities, in 2007, the Coast Guard removed approximately 16 metric tons of cocaine from Colombian- flagged fishing vessels; these removals included approximately 8 metric tons of liquid cocaine removed from a single Colombian-flagged vessel.¹²

The Coast Guard's three-person Technical Assistance Field Team (TAFT) assists countries in the Eastern Caribbean's Regional Security System by providing engineering expertise, major repair contracting services and vessel assessments. The team assisted the Haitian Coast Guard by providing technical and engineering assistance, greatly improving the operations of the Haitian's small boat fleet.

The Coast Guard's International Training Division's Mobile Training Team deploys worldwide to conduct various maritime law enforcement and vessel boarding training courses to the

¹² Office of National Drug Control Policy, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2008.

maritime services of partner nations. More than 1,400 students from 43 countries were trained in fiscal year 2007.¹³

Migrant Interdiction

Each year, thousands of people attempt to make unauthorized entries into the U.S. by maritime means. The majority of these would-be immigrants approaching the U.S. by water originate from Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

In 1992, Executive Order 12807 was issued by President George H. W. Bush, which directed the Coast Guard to prevent undocumented migrants from entering the U.S. by interdicting them at sea and returning them to their country of origin or departure.

To implement and enforce immigration laws and policies, the Coast Guard works in close coordination with ICE and CBP – which are predominantly responsible for detaining undocumented immigrants – and with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which conducts legal proceedings as required to assess whether a would-be immigrant has a credible fear of return to their country of origin or departure.

The chart below shows the total number of undocumented migrants interdicted by the Coast Guard between fiscal years 2003 and 2009.

Annual Coast Guard Migrant Interdictions – as of Jan 26, 2009					
Fiscal Year	Haitian	Dominican	Cuban	Other	Total
2009	612	498	384	68	1,562
2008	1,582	688	2,199	333	4,802
2007	1,610	1,469	2,868	391	6,338
2006	1,198	3,011	2,810	867	7,886
2005	1,850	3,612	2,712	1,281	9,455
2004	3,229	5,014	1,225	1,431	10,899
2003	2,013	1,748	1,555	752	6,068

Source: U.S. Coast Guard

During the first quarter of fiscal year 2009, 692 undocumented migrants from a variety of countries of origin successfully landed in the U.S. The Coast Guard has reported an increase in the flow of Haitians and Dominicans and a decrease in migration from Cuba. The overall interdiction rate for Cubans is 44.2 percent; for Haitians, the interdiction rate is approximately 87 percent; and for Dominicans, the interdiction rate is approximately 88 percent.

The specific migration operations involving individuals originating from each of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic are discussed in more detail below.

Cuban Migrants

¹³ Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug Control Strategy*, January 2009.

For more than 50 years since the Cuban Revolution, Cubans have attempted to migrate to the U.S. by crossing the 90 miles that separate the Island from the Florida Keys. The most famous - and largest - mass migration from Cuba was the Mariel Boatlift which occurred in the 1980s. The Mariel Boatlift occurred between April and October 1980 after the Cuban government announced that anyone who wanted to leave the island could do so; the announcement was precipitated in part by declining economic conditions in Cuba. During the Boatlift, more than 124,000 Cubans departed the port of Mariel, Cuba seeking political asylum in the U.S. They traveled in a motley flotilla of mostly U.S. vessels operated by Cuban-Americans; these vessels traveled in violation of U.S. law because U.S. vessels were (and are) not allowed to enter the territorial waters of Cuba. The Coast Guard provided search and rescue assistance to vessels bound for the U.S. and interdicted U.S.-flagged vessels that were on their way to Mariel Harbor. The service also provided legal assistance to the federal agencies that investigated and prosecuted U.S. boat owners. During this time, the Coast Guard assisted 1,387 vessels. More than 124,000 Cubans made it to America as part of the Boatlift; due in large part to the efforts of the Coast Guard, only 27 died at sea.

More than 25,000 Haitians left Haiti to seek asylum in the U.S. during the time of the Mariel Boatlift. In 1981, the bodies of 30 Haitian migrants washed ashore on a beach in Florida. In response to experiences during the Mariel Boatlift and to an increase in the number of Haitian migrants seeking to enter the U.S., President Reagan issued Presidential Proclamation 4865 on September 29, 1981, which suspended the entry of undocumented migrants to the U.S. from the high seas.

Another mass migration occurred between 1991 and 1995. During that time, the Coast Guard interdicted more than 120,000 migrants from 23 countries. In 1994 alone, the Coast Guard prevented more than 63,000 migrants from entering the U.S. At the height of this mass migration, the Coast Guard stationed 17 vessels to patrol the coast of Haiti; an additional 38 vessels patrolled the Straits of Florida.

Since 1995, Cuban migration has fluctuated between approximately 1,200 and 3,000 migrants per year.

The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 was revised in 1995 to create what is today commonly known as the "wet foot, dry foot" policy. Under the terms of the policy, officially called the U.S.-Cuba Immigration Accord, anyone who flees Cuba and reaches U.S. shore is allowed to apply for residency one year after arrival. However, under an agreement reached between the Clinton Administration and the Cuban government, the U.S. has stopped admitting Cubans interdicted at sea. Any Cuban interdicted on the water between Cuba and the U.S. is either repatriated to Cuba or sent to a third country if the individual is determined to have a reasonable fear of persecution by Cuban authorities. Cubans who migrate to the U.S. through Mexico are processed in the same manner as if they arrived by maritime means.

Additionally, since 1994, the U.S. and Cuba have had a bilateral agreement under which the U.S. grants up to 20,000 immigration visas a year to Cubans.

Today, Cubans typically move through smuggling networks, which have become a multi-million dollar enterprise relying on go-fast boats to bring Cubans to Florida. Cubans can be charged up to \$10,000 each to make the voyage from Havana to Miami, which is approximately 198 nautical

miles. The estimated rate of success for migrants attempting to enter the U.S. on go-fast vessels is 85 percent; by comparison, those attempting the voyage on rafts or other more primitive vessels have a success rate of only about 50 percent.

Cuban migrants have also begun to travel across the Yucatan channel into Mexico; from there, they attempt to enter the U.S. overland across the Southwest border. In response to this trend, the governments of Mexico and Cuba agreed in 2008 to rapidly repatriate Cuban migrants interdicted by Mexican authorities.

Haitian Migrants

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. In the past, migrants have left Haiti due to deteriorating economic conditions and political violence. Today, most migrants are driven by widespread hunger, poverty, and soaring food prices – all of which are compounded by the repeated devastation caused in that country by hurricanes and tropical storms.

Some Haitians travel to the Bahamas and are then smuggled to the U.S. in go-fast boats. Others travel directly from Haiti to the U.S. in large, overloaded sail freighters or even on rafts. Haitians can be charged more than \$600 U.S. dollars by smugglers for the trip to the U.S.

The numbers of Haitians attempting to enter the U.S. in the first quarter of fiscal year 2009 has increased – particularly in the period leading up to and immediately following the transition in the U.S. presidential administrations.

Haitians who are interdicted at sea are immediately returned to Haiti. If Haitians are caught on shore, they are processed by CBP and/or ICE and deported back to Haiti.

A Coast Guard Liaison Officer is permanently stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Port au Prince, Haiti. That individual is responsible for handling various migration, counterdrug, and international engagement issues with Haiti including the repatriation of migrants.

Dominican Republic Migrants

Migrants departing from the Dominican Republic (DR) typically do so to seek economic opportunities in the U.S.; more recently, the impact of two devastating tropical storms has also spiked migration from the DR. Dominicans typically travel through the Mona Passage to Puerto Rico in a variety of vessels but most commonly in small wooden boats that can carry as few as 10 or as many as 250 migrants.

In 2003, the U.S. and Government of the Dominican Republic signed a maritime migration agreement that makes the repatriation of Dominican migrants interdicted at sea faster and easier. Since 2005, the number of migrants has decreased each year; this decrease is typically attributed to improvements in the Dominican economy and the implementation of a new biometric program established by the Coast Guard in late 2006.

The biometric program enables the Coast Guard to collect the fingerprints of interdicted migrants and send the information back to a shore-based database to determine if any of the interdicted individuals are wanted to face criminal charges. Those with outstanding warrants are

taken into custody; the remaining individuals are repatriated to the DR. The use of this biometric system also enables the Coast Guard to identify individuals who have been interdicted on repeated occasions. The Coast Guard had collected data from 99 percent of the Dominican migrants it has interdicted; approximately 23 percent of the migrants matched criminal complaints, resulting in 155 individuals being brought ashore to be prosecuted.¹⁴

Asian Migrants

Immigration by water from Asia – mostly from the People’s Republic of China – has dramatically increased in recent years. The smugglers who move migrants from Asia are typically well-organized and can be violent. Migrants are typically crowded into vessel cargo holds in unsafe and unsanitary conditions to make the Pacific crossing; they are then transferred into smaller vessels offshore to make the final trip to the U.S. or they are taken to Central American countries and smuggled into the U.S. over the Southwest border. Migrants also are smuggled into the U.S. by air through transit points outside of China; many carry fraudulent documents.¹⁵

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation has not previously held a hearing on Coast Guard drug and migrant interdiction

¹⁴ National Defense Magazine – January 2009

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice - Characteristics of Chinese Human Smugglers August 2004

WITNESSES

Rear Admiral Wayne Justice
Assistant Commandant for Capability
United States Coast Guard

Rear Admiral Joseph L. Nimmich
Director
Joint Interagency Task Force-South