

NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL STRATEGY CARIBBEAN BORDER COUNTERNARCOTICS STRATEGY

THE WHITE HOUSE
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OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL STRATEGY





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Introduction

Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and other criminals operating throughout the Caribbean exploit the region’s vulnerabilities to further their illegal activities. In addition to other unlawful acts, they smuggle illegal drugs such as heroin, illicitly manufactured fentanyl, methamphetamine, marijuana, MDMA (ecstasy), and cocaine to the United States, Europe, and other countries.ⁱ They also smuggle weapons and utilize the region’s weak financial regulatory environment to launder the illicit proceeds of their activities.ⁱⁱ The “Caribbean Border” of the United States consists of the main island of Puerto Rico, which includes its six Ports of Entry (POEs) and approximately 748 miles of coastline; the islands of Vieques and Culebra; and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), which includes the main islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. The Caribbean Border’s proximity to South America makes it both a destination and a transshipment zone for the trafficking of illicit drugs to Florida, the East and Gulf Coasts of the United States, and to points throughout Europe and Africa.

The approaches to our Caribbean Border include broad swaths of ocean and international airspace, which link major drug producing countries in South and Central America to the United States and with transshipment countries in Central America. TCOs readily exploit the limited number of natural geographic chokepoints in the Caribbean and the short distances between landmasses, primarily Caribbean island nations. In addition to their central location, Puerto Rico’s “customs-free” access and the USVI’s direct access to the continental United States via mail, express consignment, commercial shipping, and air make these islands attractive initial entry and transshipment points for those attempting to smuggle drugs to the continental United States.

Although drug trafficking in the Caribbean represents only a portion of the total amount of illegal drugs moving to the United States, the associated crime and drug use in Puerto Rico and the USVI, including violence between TCOs operating in the region, create additional security risks for the citizens of these territories. Historically, the murder rates in the two territories have been among the highest in the United States.^{iii,iv} Many, if not most, of the homicides and other violent crimes are connected to TCOs and the illegal drug trade. According to law enforcement agencies, approximately 60 percent of all murders on the island of Puerto Rico may be drug-related.^v

Insufficient port security is a major vulnerability in the Caribbean, where the lack of resources, collusion of port personnel with TCOs, corruption, and sophisticated concealment methods create significant law enforcement challenges.^{vi} TCOs in the Caribbean primarily use maritime methods to traffic illegal drugs, but air transport and commercial shipment are increasing in frequency and volume. “Go-fast” boats, low-profile vessels, semi-submersible vessels, fishing vessels, luxury yachts, and sailboats are often built, bought, or stolen for the sole purpose of transporting drug shipments throughout the region.^{vii} With greater frequency, TCOs are hiding large quantities of drugs on ferries, cruise ships, aircraft, and in legitimate containerized cargo consignments, making interdiction extremely difficult without advanced intelligence and the cooperation of foreign customs, law enforcement, and port operators.^{viii}



Further complicating interdiction efforts across the region, the ongoing political instability of the government of Venezuela continues to generate new opportunities for the unfettered movement of illegal drugs. Beyond providing a permissive smuggling environment for TCOs, Venezuela's corrupt political and security infrastructure enables officials to participate in, and profit from, these illicit activities, including by providing smugglers unfettered access to drug trafficking routes through Venezuela, which TCOs willingly exploit.^{ix}

The *Caribbean Border Counternarcotics Strategy (Strategy)* articulates the United States Government framework for reducing the threats associated with drugs along our Caribbean Border. The *Strategy* further refines the *National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (NICCP)* and the *National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS)* by establishing the Biden-Harris Administration's strategy to prevent the illegal trafficking of drugs across the Caribbean Border.

Strategic Objective

This *Strategy* focuses on achieving one overarching strategic objective:

Reduce the supply of illicit drugs smuggled across the Caribbean Border and into the United States that contribute to addiction and overdose as well as fuel crime and violence. This will be done by strengthening interdiction and law enforcement capabilities, countering criminal networks, leveraging illicit finance efforts, and targeting drug transportation routes and modalities to aggressively reduce illicit drugs crossing the Caribbean Border.

This *Strategy* consists of three interrelated elements; strengthening interdiction and law enforcement capabilities, countering criminal networks, and targeting drug transportation routes and modalities, designed to achieve the *NDCS* goal of reducing the supply of illicit drugs in the United States. The federal government must work not only with its domestic partners, but also with governments in the Caribbean and other international partners to prevent illicit drugs from ever reaching North America or the United States, especially in light of historic rates of overdose deaths in the United States. Strategic Assumptions

The *Strategy* requires National Drug Control Program Agencies (NDCPAs), along with other relevant federal agencies and departments, to develop and coordinate their counterdrug efforts in order to maximize the effectiveness of interdictions in support of the *NDCS's* and *NICCP's* supply reduction efforts. The *Strategy* makes several key assumptions:

- Reducing the supply of illicit drugs in the United States by disrupting the illicit drug supply chains will allow our historic to develop an addiction prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery infrastructure to take hold, thereby increasing the potential for sustainable success over time.
- Aggressive and versatile drug trafficking organizations will respond to sustained pressure placed upon them by disruption, dismantlement, interdiction efforts, and judicial/



prosecutorial efforts, and they will adapt their production and trafficking methods to minimize risk and maximize profits.

- TCOs are vulnerable to interdiction efforts by the United States and partner nations at all points along their transportation, delivery routes, and financial flows.
- Interdiction of illicit drugs, precursor chemicals, drug proceeds, and weapons, and implementing financial sanctions against TCOs and their affiliates, disrupts and degrades the ability of TCOs to deliver illicit drugs and profit from them.
- Interdictions directly support coordinated multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction criminal enterprise investigations and prosecutions, which are the most effective means to disrupt and dismantle TCOs and seize illicit assets.
- Fulsome and appropriate information and intelligence sharing among and between the NDCPAs, other relevant agencies and departments, and foreign partners will maximize the effectiveness of our collective efforts by expanding and de-conflicting criminal investigations and better informing interdiction efforts and financial investigations.
- The United States and like-minded domestic and international partners will continue to work to enhance operations through extensive law enforcement collaboration including risk assessment and analysis, incident management, and coordinated messaging.

Strategy Implementation

This *Strategy* articulates the President’s priorities and policies for the interdiction of illicit drugs along the Caribbean Border and sets the strategic direction for the Administration to reduce the supply of drugs transiting to and across the Caribbean Border. It also provides the strategic direction NDCPAs and other federal departments and agencies need to develop their own drug control plans and strategies, and it ensures programming and resource decisions about federal drug control budget dollars are allocated in a manner consistent with the NDCS, NICCP, and Administration priorities.

NDCPAs should leverage their complete authorities, maximize the performance and effectiveness of existing capabilities, programs, and resources, and develop additional capabilities, focusing on emerging technologies, to drive effective and coordinated outcomes that are in keeping with the *Strategy*. Each plan shall give priority to disrupting and dismantling those DTOs identified as presenting the most significant drug trafficking threats to the United States. Plans and strategies shall be designed to promote, not hinder, legitimate trade and travel. Additionally, as TCOs continue to adapt, so too must our plans and strategies to counter their deleterious effects. As part of their plans and strategies, NDCPAs Agencies and departments shall continuously and rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of their approach and identify gaps and changes needed to accomplish the *Strategy’s* supply reduction mission. Resource requirements needed to address identified gaps should be submitted for consideration through the President’s budget development process. Gaps and changes in approaches that cannot be solved through the budget development process should be communicated in writing to the Director of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).



Strengthening Interdiction and Law Enforcement Capabilities

To secure the Caribbean Border, the United States will continue to improve domestic and international interdiction and law enforcement capabilities across the Caribbean. The United States must bolster maritime, air, and cyberspace domain awareness through the employment of emerging technologies, augmenting the fusion of investigative information and law enforcement intelligence. Moreover, the United States must improve access to intelligence among federal, state, territorial, local, and Tribal law enforcement agencies to enhance the collective understanding of the effect that Caribbean border security and enforcement activities are having on generating counterdrug cases for prosecution throughout the United States. Furthermore, the United States must continue to refine real-time coordination procedures and domain awareness information sharing with international partner interdiction agencies to eliminate safe havens for drug trafficking vessels and aircraft. Finally, the United States must continue to enhance the processes and technology at domestic and international POEs to scan cargo, passengers, vessels, and aircraft arriving in the Caribbean and moving throughout the Caribbean region destined for the United States, and encourage and support partner nations to do the same.

Improve Information and Intelligence Sharing to Drive Targeted Interdictions (Treasury, DOS, DOD, DOJ, DHS, USPIS, DOL)

To increase the frequency and effects of targeted interdictions, which can reduce the violence associated with drug trafficking, federal law enforcement will continue to expand both domestic and international partnerships by developing relationships with relevant federal, state, territorial, local, Tribal, and international agencies, as well as private sector and nonprofit partners to bring additional authorities and resources to the counter-drug effort. The United States must develop and integrate technical and non-technical law enforcement intelligence collection capabilities in accordance with existing authorities and work to institutionalize information sharing among federal, state, territorial, local, and Tribal partners. These agencies must continue to refine and standardize processes, expand capabilities, and maximize the use of existing intelligence resources among the interagency to support targeted tactical operations more effectively to maximize their effects in reducing drug flows to the United States.

Develop More Effective Detection Technologies and Capabilities (DOD, DOJ, DHS)

The United States will sustain its multi-layered deterrence and detection capabilities, to deter illegal drug trafficking in the region. Analytic capabilities will exploit information and intelligence to identify and stop the flow of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals before they cross the Caribbean Border into the United States. NDCPAs shall continue to identify and develop new technologies and capabilities to counter emerging threats that can be shared and scaled with both domestic and international partners.

Expand the Use of Deterrence Technologies and Capacities (DOD, DHS)

The United States must continue to enhance its multi-disciplinary border security initiatives. Federal departments and agencies will continue to increase joint and combined operations with



state, territorial, local, Tribal, and international law enforcement partners throughout the Caribbean by providing information and resources to support local efforts within the air and maritime domains. To increase border security, federal departments and agencies will enhance operational and information coordination, corroborate intelligence requirements, and improve response capabilities. These efforts, guided by strategic intelligence, will help to reduce the corrosive effect that trafficking has on their citizens and burden on U.S. domestic law enforcement. The United States will continue to support targeted training and other capacity-building assistance for foreign partner counter narcotics units to increase foreign partners' interdiction of drugs and to disrupt and dismantle TCO operations in host countries. The United States will work with international partners to better align and integrate processes and technology at POEs to jointly scan and review persons, vessels, cargo, and aircraft bound for and departing the United States through the Caribbean Border. Sustained monitoring for these efforts and pragmatic assessment of their costs and performance against present and emerging illicit drug trends will be necessary to proactively adjust counterdrug resourcing for maximum effect.

Countering Criminal Networks

To combat TCOs and the criminals who exploit our Caribbean Border effectively, the federal government shall continue to improve information sharing processes, procedures, and technology among federal, state, territorial, local, Tribal, and international partners in order to expand the scope, quality, and timeliness of actionable tactical and strategic information to enable successful prosecutions of criminals and directly target TCOs. To eliminate the advantages that corrupt officials provide to TCOs, the United States will expand the use of visa restrictions and ineligibilities against known corrupt officials and drug traffickers, and work to support host-nation judicial and prosecutorial infrastructure to identify and prosecute cases of corruption. Additionally, the United States will continue to share law enforcement information with its international partners to enable countries to gain a more complete understanding of the tactical, operational, and strategic environments they operate in, and the resources needed to disrupt and dismantle TCOs, and their illicit financial support systems, within their own borders and, in partnership with other nations throughout the Caribbean.

Expand the Use of Multi-Agency, Multi-Jurisdiction Law Enforcement Task Forces (Treasury, DOD, DOJ, DHS, USPIS)

Successful investigations of sophisticated TCOs are best achieved when departments, agencies, and jurisdictions leverage their full range of law enforcement and regulatory authorities and capabilities. Sufficient actions must be taken to optimize the use of all available federal resources and authorities to complement the efforts of state, local, territorial, Tribal, and international partners throughout the Caribbean to reduce illicit narcotics flows and the violent crime associated with the illegal drug trade and to conduct coordinated investigations and prosecutions of criminals and TCOs. Our efforts must optimize scarce law enforcement resources and prosecutorial capacities, continue to support existing federal task force programs to share information and to de-conflict and expand investigations, and identify priority drug trafficking threats and pathways to the United States.



Integrate International Partners into Multi-Agency Law Enforcement Task Forces (DOD, DOJ, DHS, DOL, DOS)

The United States must continue to build and strengthen intelligence and information-sharing relationships with its international partners and to coordinate transnational criminal investigations and prosecutions. Coordination between domestic and international partner agencies is especially critical in the Caribbean region where geography and foreign partner situational awareness and capacity deficits work to the advantage of drug trafficking organizations. Federal law enforcement agencies will expand information and criminal intelligence exchanges and enhance operational coordination arrangements with international partners in order to neutralize drug production in source countries; reduce illegal drug trafficking and associated activities; address corruption to conduct financial investigations; pursue money laundering charges and asset forfeiture as appropriate; seize illicit proceeds of crime; and de-conflict law enforcement operations while expanding investigations. As resources allow, departments and agencies will provide a variety of training, technical assistance, and capacity-building initiatives, to enhance both United States and international partner interdiction and prosecution efforts.

Connect Interdictions to Criminal Enterprise Investigations (DOJ, DHS)

The intelligence, law enforcement, and national security communities shall continue to develop a more thorough understanding of the TCOs that threaten the Caribbean Border. The United States will continue analysis on such organizations and provide tipping and cueing information to both foreign and domestic partners in order to provide focus to patrol areas and improve response outcomes. Additionally, the United States will ensure the coordination of investigative evidence collection mechanisms, such as surveillance capabilities and document and media exploitation, to provide the information and intelligence needed to drive more effective and efficient interdiction operations and to integrate information derived from interdictions into ongoing priority target investigations in a timely manner.

Targeting Specific Drug Transportation Routes and Modalities

TCOs regularly attempt to violate and operate adjacent to U.S. borders in the Caribbean. Effective coordination among federal, state, territorial, local, and Tribal agencies, and their international partners is key to establishing a comprehensive approach to securing the Caribbean Border. Every day, law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, territorial, local, and Tribal level interdict narcotics that have entered the United States. The United States must analyze seizures across the continental United States, Puerto Rico, and the USVI to identify trafficking patterns and their nexus to gaps in border security and to develop better targeting criteria for frontline officers and agents. As such, the United States must continue to work closely with international partners to exchange information, identify targets, and coordinate and conduct operations against the specific transportation modalities being used by traffickers.



Conduct Outbound Interdiction of Currency, Weapons, and Illicit Drugs (DHS, Treasury)

To neutralize TCO drug trafficking resources and expand intelligence-driven operations at the Caribbean Border, the United States will improve law enforcement intelligence and information collection and sharing to identify, investigate, and prosecute money laundering networks. Furthermore, the federal government shall improve law enforcement intelligence and information collection and sharing for out-bound illegal weapons trafficking, currency smuggling, and drug trafficking. To mitigate the money laundering risk, the United States will continue to assist partner Caribbean nations in strengthening their anti-money laundering regimes, share intelligence with collaborative countries about illicit finance threats, target illicit financial networks with sanctions and financial measures, and support partner nation prosecutions. The United States must also strengthen the supervision and oversight of Puerto Rico-based financial institutions, such as international banking entities (IBEs) and international financial entities (IFEs).

Disrupt the Transportation of Illicit Drugs via Maritime and Air Conveyances (DOD, DHS, DOS, Treasury)

The United States will continue to cooperate with international partners to assist them in facilitating legitimate commerce and the movement of goods and people through their domestic seaports and airports while curtailing the illicit flow of drugs, weapons, and illicit proceeds. The United States will encourage partner nations to invest in infrastructure and technology to strengthen and modernize their border security in both seaports and airports. Agencies will increase cooperation with our international partners to enhance the capabilities of their law enforcement and judicial systems, transfer new skills to the foreign law enforcement and customs agencies managing the seaports and airports, enhance information sharing, and encourage them to acquire enhanced technologies to assist in the detection of illicit drugs and other criminal activities. The United States will also build partner nation justice sector capacity to prosecute and adjudicate trafficking and maritime crime more broadly and will continue to identify and apply data analytics to support more efficient use of law enforcement, regulatory, and other interagency resources and authorities. This includes the detection of and understanding trends in bulk cash smuggling and trade data to aid in Trade-Based Money Laundering (TBML) investigations.

Goals and Budget Projections

Goals

Because this *Strategy* is nested under the *NDCS* and *NICCP*, and focuses on outlining a high-level approach rather than cataloging all the key tasks and activities that organizations at the federal, state, territorial, local, and Tribal levels must take to reduce the supply of illicit drugs trafficked across our Caribbean Border, it is important to employ some broad goals to guide the *Strategy's* implementation and ensure its alignment with the *NDCS* and *NICCP*. This will ensure that the broader policies, priorities, and objectives of NDCAs and interagency partners support



the *Strategy*, are adequately aligned with the *NDCS* and *NICCP*, and help identify where a refinement of the *Strategy* may be necessary.

Projections for National Drug Control Program and Budget Priorities

The 2022 *NDCS* set policy goals and objectives for the Nation, along with associated performance measures and targets to achieve those goals and objectives. ONDCP considers the *NDCS*'s projections for policy priorities to be the budget priorities because they indicate to the NDCPAs what the Administration's long-term priorities are, and those agencies are expected to provide resources for those priorities over the course of the Administration. ONDCP's funding guidance also establishes the budget priorities—for the current and future years—for NDCPAs to meet the performance targets and achieve the policy goals and objectives of both the *NDCS* and *NICCP*.

Budget and Performance Summary

The FY 2022 Budget and Performance Summary was published in July 2021. The Budget Summary contains information on the President's FY 2022 drug control budget and the enacted and actual funding levels for FY 2021 and FY 2020, by NDCPA and subordinate elements, as well as historical funding levels by function. The Budget Summary provides a description of each agency's mission, program descriptions, and significant changes in the FY 2022 request compared to the FY 2021 enacted amount. The FY 2022 Budget Summary also contains details of each agency's program performance metrics.

Conclusion

With their coastal borders and close proximity to South America and other Caribbean Islands, Puerto Rico and the USVI are a gateway for international drug trafficking and the laundering of illicit drug proceeds on both a national and international level. The illicit drugs trafficked in this region are an endemic, persistent threat that poses major challenges to law enforcement and interdiction operations and jeopardizes the national security of the United States and partner countries, and the health of our citizens. Instability created by the government of Venezuela and the intertwined violent crimes linked both directly and indirectly to the drug trade further complicate the complex counter-drug environment. By enhancing the long history of partnerships among federal, state, local, territorial and Tribal agencies and our international law enforcement partners, and building on current effective programs, and focusing on incorporating emerging technologies and operations, the United States and its international partners in the Caribbean will reduce the flow of illicit drugs in the region.



Endnotes

- ⁱ Drug Enforcement Administration. *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice; March 2021. Report No. DEA-DCT-DIR-008-21: 79.
- ⁱⁱ Drug Enforcement Administration. *2019 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice; December 2019. Report No. DEA-DCT-DIR-007-20: 119.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Drug Enforcement Administration. *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice; March 2021. Report No. DEA-DCT-DIR-008-21: 81.
- ^{iv} Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Crime in the United States, 1995 - 2019*. <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr/publications>. Accessed on July 8, 2021.
- ^v Drug Enforcement Administration. *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice; 2021. Report No. DEA-DCT-DIR-008-21.
- ^{vi} Drug Enforcement Administration. *2018 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice; 2018. Report No. DEA-DCT-DIR-032-18: 132.
- ^{vii} Drug Enforcement Administration. *2019 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice; December 2019. Report No. DEA-DCT-DIR-007-20: 112-113.
- ^{viii} Drug Enforcement Administration. *2018 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice; 2018. Report No. DEA-DCT-DIR-032-18: 132.
- ^{ix} Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, March 2021: 14.