

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



OPERATION SOUTHERN SPEAR



APRIL 1, 2026–JUNE 30, 2026



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On the cover: U.S. Marines fast rope from a Navy MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopter aboard the USS Iwo Jima in the Caribbean Sea, on April 24, 2026. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)



We are pleased to present this second Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to Congress on Operation Southern Spear (OSS). This report discharges our quarterly reporting responsibilities pursuant to Section 419 of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

The Department of War (DoW) initiated OSS as the U.S. mission to disrupt the flow of narcotics from Designated Terrorist Organizations in the Western Hemisphere.

This report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OSS and presents OSS-related planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the DoW OIG, State OIG, USAID OIG, and our partner oversight agencies. This report covers the period April 1 through June 30, 2026.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Platte B. Moring, III".

Platte B. Moring, III
Lead Inspector General for OSS
Inspector General
U.S. Department of War

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Arne B. Baker".

Arne B. Baker
Associate Inspector General for OSS
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of State

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Van Nguyen".

Van Nguyen
Acting Deputy Inspector General
Performing the Duties of the
Inspector General
U.S. Agency for International
Development



IN THIS REPORT

The U.S. military continued to conduct airstrikes against vessels suspected to be affiliated with designated terrorist organizations (DTOs).

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- During the quarter, the U.S. military struck at least 19 vessels, resulting in an estimated 56 individuals killed or presumed dead, according to DoW public statements. This was an increase from 12 vessels struck last quarter, which killed 40 individuals.
- Three of this quarter's strikes were in the Caribbean Sea, while the other 16 took place in the eastern Pacific Ocean.
- The U.S. Coast Guard conducted search and rescue operations following four of this quarter's strikes, but none of these operations recovered any stranded mariners.

Eight U.S. Navy and Marine vessels were deployed in support of OSS during the quarter, as were a P-8 patrol and reconnaissance aircraft squadron and the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit.

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- In late June, three of the vessels were redeployed to support the humanitarian response to the Venezuelan earthquakes.

Through the end of the quarter, the DoW has spent approximately \$820.9 million on OSS.

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- The total cost for OSS during the quarter was approximately \$173.9 million.
- This was a significant decrease from the \$527.0 million reported last quarter, which USSOUTHCOM attributed to the transition of OSS to steady state operations and the departure of a significant number of ships and personnel from the joint operations area.

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OPERATION SOUTHERN SPEAR

INTRODUCTION

On November 13, 2025, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced Operation Southern Spear (OSS) as the Department of War (DoW) operation to disrupt the flow of narcotics in the Western Hemisphere from drug cartels that the President has named as designated terrorist organizations (DTOs). OSS aims to defend the homeland, protect regional partners, and ensure stability and security across the Western Hemisphere, according to the DoW.¹ The OSS mission statement is classified.²

The U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) has conducted non-lethal drug interdictions in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific for decades. (See page 7.) In August 2025, the U.S. military began to deploy significant numbers of additional military personnel, naval vessels, and air assets to the Caribbean Sea. On September 2, the United States executed its first strike on a vessel that the DoW said was operated by a Venezuelan cartel.³

U.S. law allows the President to take military action without congressional approval in the event of “a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.”⁴ In a September 4 notification to Congress of the military action taken against drug cartels in the Caribbean Sea, President Donald J. Trump labeled the targeted cartels “terrorist organizations” and cited their “paramilitary capabilities” to threaten the United States.⁵

Joint Task Force Southern Spear, part of USSOUTHCOM, is the lead military command for OSS.⁶

STRIKES AND INTERDICTIONS

Only groups designated as a DTO are subject to strikes under OSS.⁷ The full list of DTOs and their activities is not publicly releasable.⁸ DTOs are distinct from other commonly used designations—including Other Terrorist Organization, Drug Trafficking Organization, and Transnational Criminal Organization—all of which may also be subject to DoW action, though not under OSS.⁹

Target selection: In testimony to Congress in March, the USSOUTHCOM Commander, General Francis Donovan, said that the DoW selects targets for lethal strikes based on both the specific activity in which they are engaged and whether the people on board are members of a DTO.¹⁰

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) said that since August 2025, it has realigned its intelligence collection and analysis efforts within the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility to support OSS. These efforts focus on narco trafficking routes and networks; illegal

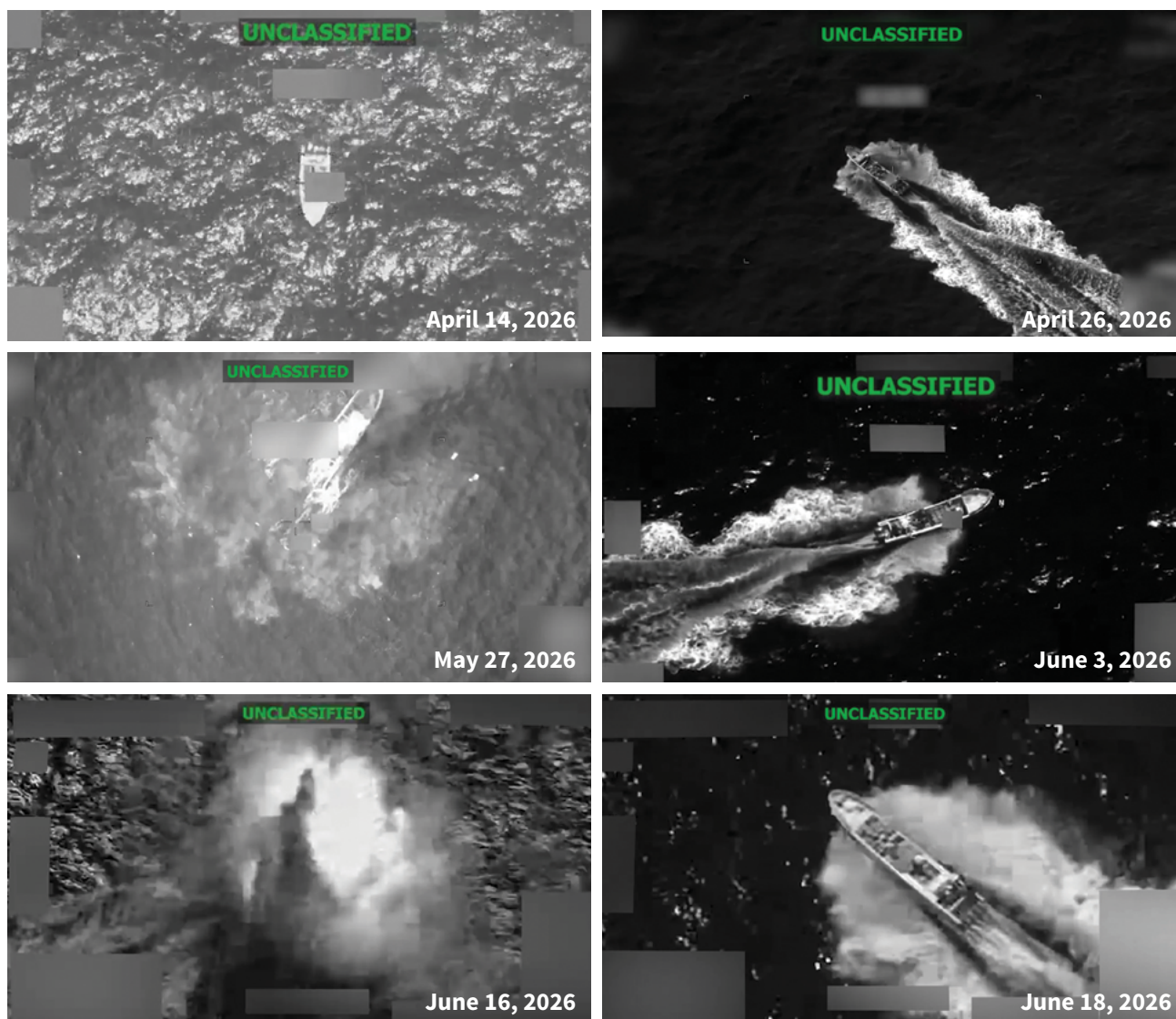
OSS aims to defend the homeland, protect regional partners, and ensure stability and security across the Western Hemisphere, according to the DoW.

migration patterns and their security implications; external state actor influences; indicators of regional instability, including governance and economic disruptions; maritime security challenges, such as illicit trafficking and illegal fishing; and counterterrorism networks with facilitation routes.¹¹

Figure 1.

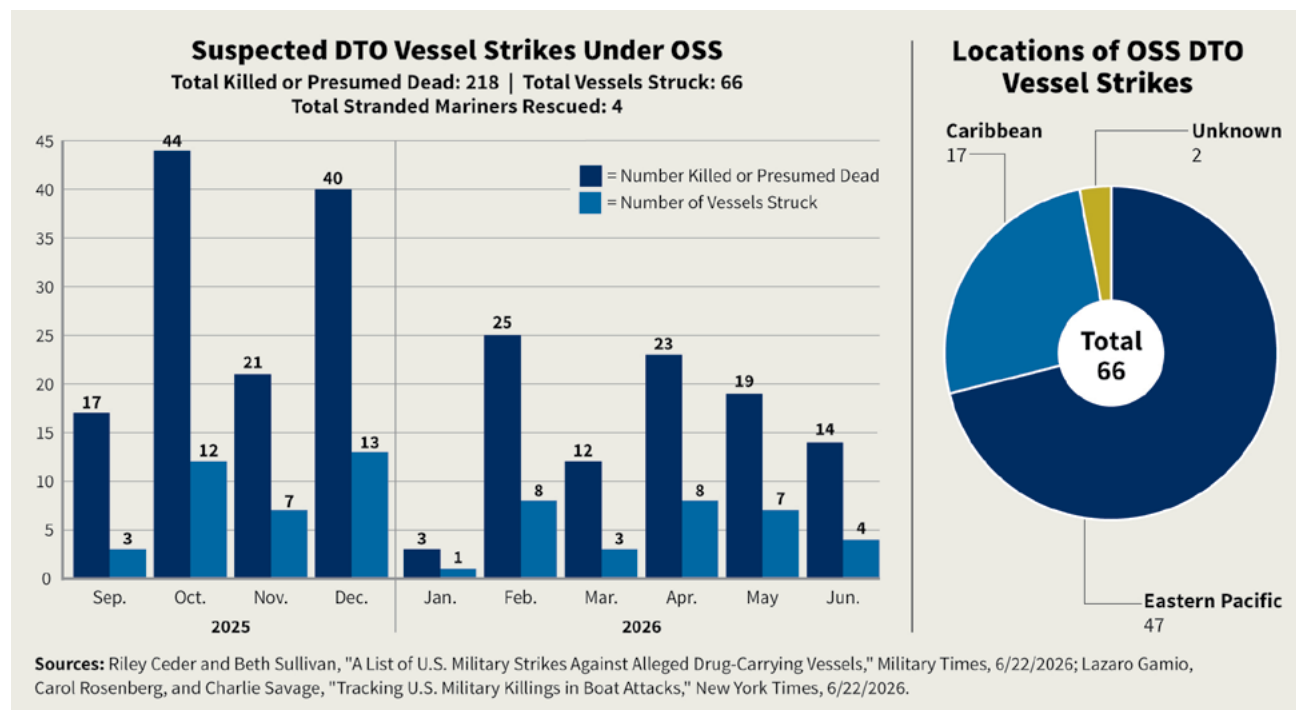
**Visual imagery
from DTO vessel
strikes under
OSS, April 1–
June 30, 2026**

This quarter, the DoW OIG announced that it would conduct an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the process by which USSOUTHCOM and its Service and subordinate commands and contractors process, exploit, and disseminate intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). The DoW OIG will conduct a separate evaluation to determine whether DoW components complied with the DoW's established six-step process for targeting enemy combatants in its strikes in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility.¹²



Sources: DVIDS; USSOUTHCOM, website.

Figure 2.

Strikes Against Suspected DTO Vessels Under OSS, as of June 30, 2026

Airstrikes against suspected DTO vessels: Analysis of U.S. Government public statements indicates that the U.S. military struck at least 19 boats that USSOUTHCOM identified as DTO vessels this quarter, resulting in an estimated 56 individuals killed or presumed dead. This represents an increase from the 12 vessels struck and 40 individuals killed last quarter. Nearly three quarters of strikes during the quarter took place in the eastern Pacific Ocean.¹³ (See Figure 2.) USSOUTHCOM said that it could not provide a publicly releasable accounting of all U.S. military strikes and interdictions conducted under OSS.¹⁴

The U.S. Coast Guard has conducted search and rescue operations following 10 strikes since October 2025, including four that occurred during the quarter. One of the 10 operations resulted in the recovery of a stranded mariner and two deceased persons. The other nine searches resulted in no people found.¹⁵

Changes in trafficking patterns: Experts on the U.S. illicit drug trade have noted that DTOs have adopted alternate smuggling methods, such as shifting to land routes through Central America or placing cocaine in container ships often hidden among legitimate goods, while absorbing the occasional loss of shipments on small boats.¹⁶

Regional reactions: Citing open source reporting, USSOUTHCOM said that South and Central American countries have been largely supportive of U.S. efforts to combat narcotics in the region. El Salvador opened bases to armed U.S. aircraft, Ecuador conducted joint operations with the United States against DTOs, and Panama allowed U.S. forces to conduct

jungle training and other exercises on its soil. Argentina, Belize, Costa Rica, and Guatemala maintain a cooperative, U.S.-friendly stance on regional security operations, according to USSOUTHCOM, citing open source reporting. However, Colombia and Nicaragua oppose U.S. tactics employed during OSS, preferring to conduct non-lethal maritime interdiction operations.¹⁷

State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs said that it did not engage with or receive requests from the DoW in support of OSS during the quarter. While State tracks DoW engagements with other governments in support of the operation, State did not engage directly with other governments in support of OSS.¹⁸

Other Counternarcotics Activity in the Region

The U.S. Government conducts other counternarcotics activities in Central and South America that are related to but distinct from the OSS mission.

Non-lethal interdiction operations: JTF Southern Spear operates alongside but separately from JIATF-South, a U.S.-led interagency and international organization that brings together military, intelligence, and law enforcement assets from across the U.S. Government and 19 partner nations to detect, monitor, and target illicit drug trafficking in the air and at sea.¹⁹ JIATF-South has always been led by a U.S. Coast Guard admiral, as the U.S. Coast Guard is the lead agency for the interdiction and arrest of drug traffickers under federal law.²⁰ Established in 1989, JIATF-South is headquartered at Naval Air Station Key West, Florida.²¹

The U.S. Coast Guard reported that it conducted 25 drug interdictions during the quarter. These interdictions resulted in the seizure of nearly 21 tons of cocaine and the detention of 45 suspected drug smugglers. The U.S. Coast Guard reported a 36 percent decrease in drug seizures during the first two quarters of FY 2026 compared to the same period in FY 2025. The U.S. Coast Guard has not changed its interdiction activities or operations since the start of OSS.²²

Inland strikes on DTOs: Apart from OSS, U.S. military forces partner with host nation governments to conduct strikes against DTOs on land. In June, a U.S. airstrike, coordinated with Venezuelan government forces, killed Héctor Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, also known as "Niño Guerrero." Guerrero Flores was the leader of Tren de Aragua, which the United States has labeled a DTO.²³ Last quarter, a combined U.S.-Ecuadorian operation struck a training camp used by the Comandos de la Frontera, a drug trafficking organization made up of former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).²⁴

Non-military activity: State, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and other U.S. Government agencies manage programs in Central and South America to strengthen local counternarcotics capacity and regional stability.²⁵ While these assistance programs and diplomatic engagements are not specifically designed in support of OSS, they actively reinforce broader, interagency U.S. counternarcotics and counterterrorism operations.

ASSETS DEPLOYED

Since the initial stages of OSS planning and execution, a significant number of U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard assets have moved through the OSS joint operations area (JOA).²⁶

The overall U.S. maritime presence in the OSS JOA was smaller this quarter compared to earlier phases of the operation, with fewer destroyers and one less cruiser than in past quarters.²⁷ (See Table 1.) While some assets in the JOA directly supported OSS, others supported separate activities; these assets included the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and two Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers that deployed in support of the Southern Seas 2026 deployment, an exercise to enhance interoperability and increase proficiency with partner forces across the maritime domain.²⁸ In late June, the USS San Antonio, USS Fort Lauderdale, and USS Billings were redeployed to support the humanitarian response to the Venezuelan earthquake.²⁹

The U.S. Coast Guard, which does not directly participate in lethal interdictions under OSS, reported that it maintained approximately two cutters per day at sea in the OSS JOA—both in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean. By comparison, the U.S. Coast Guard had an average of five cutters operating in the JOA each day in August and September 2025.³⁰

Table 1.

U.S. Assets Deployed in support of OSS this Quarter

USS Iwo Jima, an amphibious assault ship
USS Stockdale, a guided missile destroyer with embarked MH-60 helicopter capability
USS Lake Erie, a guided missile destroyer with embarked MH-60 helicopter capability
USS Gridley, a guided missile destroyer with embarked MH-60 helicopter capability
USS San Antonio, an amphibious transport dock
USS Fort Lauderdale, an amphibious transport dock
USS Billings, a littoral combat ship
MT Overseas Mykonos, an oil and chemical tanker
P-8 squadron, maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft
22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, Marines trained to conduct amphibious assaults and raids as well as extraction of forces from hostile locations

Source: USSOUTHCOM, response to DoW OIG request for information, 26.3 OSS CLAR 008, 6/30/2026.

The overall U.S. maritime presence in the OSS JOA was smaller this quarter compared to earlier phases of the operation, with fewer destroyers and one less cruiser than in past quarters.



A U.S. Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey lands aboard the USS Fort Lauderdale during deck landing qualifications while underway in the Caribbean Sea, on June 9, 2026. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

FUNDING

USSOUTHCOM reported that it obligated \$173.9 million for OSS during the quarter, a significant decrease from the \$527.0 million reported last quarter.³¹ (See Table 2.)

USSOUTHCOM attributed the sudden drop in expenditures to the transition of OSS to steady state operations and the departure of a significant number of personnel and ships from the JOA.³² The Office of the Undersecretary of War (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer reported that the DoW obligated \$211,444,290 for OSS during the quarter as of June 16.³³ USSOUTHCOM reported that cumulative costs for OSS through the end of the quarter were \$820.9 million.³⁴

Table 2.

USSOUTHCOM OSS Obligations, April 1–June 10, 2026, in \$ Millions

	Personnel	Operations	Transportation	Procurement	TOTAL
Air Force	—	\$.47	—	\$11.01	\$11.48
Navy	—	—	—	16.25	16.25
Army	—	—	2.26	—	2.26
Marines	5.70	15.08	.03	—	21.53
USTRANSCOM	—	—	123.10	—	123.10
TOTAL	\$5.70	\$15.55	\$125.39	\$27.26	\$173.90

Source: USSOUTHCOM, response to DoW OIG request for information, 26.3 OSS 016, 6/10/2026.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

About the Lead Inspector General

The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (codified at 5 U.S.C. Sections 401-424), established in section 419 the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. The Lead IG agencies are the Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of War (DoW), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Section 419 requires the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to appoint a Lead IG from among the Inspectors General of the Lead IG agencies upon the commencement or designation of a military operation that exceeds 60 days as an overseas contingency operation or receipt of notification thereof.

The Chair of the Council of the Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoW IG as the Lead IG for OSS. The Lead IG appointed the State IG to be the Associate IG for OSS.

Lead IG oversight of the operation “sunsets” at the end of the first fiscal year after commencement or designation in which the total amount appropriated for the operation is less than \$100,000,000.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out the Lead IG statutory responsibilities to:

- Submit to Congress on a quarterly basis a report on the contingency operation and to make that report available to the public.
- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.

The Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group serves as a primary venue to coordinate audits, inspections, and evaluations of U.S. Government-funded activities supporting overseas contingency operations.

The Lead IG agencies use dedicated, rotational, and temporary employees, as well as contractors, to conduct oversight projects, investigate fraud and corruption, and provide consolidated planning and reporting on the status of overseas contingency operations.

APPENDIX B

Methodology for Preparing This Lead IG Quarterly Report

To fulfill the congressional mandate to report on OSS, the Lead IG agencies gather data and information from their respective agencies and other Federal agencies about activities related to the operation. This report also draws on current, publicly available information from reputable sources, such as U.S. Government statements, think tank reports, and media reports. The Lead IG agencies use open-source information to assess information obtained through their agency information collection process and provide additional detail about the operation.

The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or from Federal agencies, and the information provided represents the view of the source cited in each instance.

The DoW IG, as the Lead IG for this operation, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoW OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG drafted the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies and then participate in editing the entire report. Once assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process of the report within its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask relevant offices within their agencies to comment, correct inaccuracies, and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review prior to publication. The final report reflects the editorial view of the DoW OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.

APPENDIX C

Completed Oversight Reports

From April 1 to June 30, 2026, the Lead IG and partner agencies completed no oversight reports related to OSS.



APPENDIX D

Ongoing Oversight Projects

Table 3 lists the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies’ ongoing oversight projects related to OSS.

Table 3.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OSS by Lead IG and Partner Agencies, as of June 30, 2026

DEPARTMENT OF WAR OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
<i>Audit of the Department of the Air Force’s Sustainment of Airfield Runways, Taxiways, and Parking Aprons Used to Support the U.S. Southern Command</i> To assess the effectiveness of the Department of the Air Force’s sustainment of airfield runways, taxiways, and aprons used to support U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) operations in the Western Hemisphere.
<i>Evaluation of U.S. Southern Command Joint Targeting Cycle</i> To determine whether DoW Components followed the established framework of the six-phase Joint Targeting Cycle when conducting targeting operations in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility.
<i>Evaluation of Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Processing, Exploitation, and Dissemination in the U.S. Southern Command</i> To assess the effectiveness of the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Processing, Exploitation, and Dissemination process for USSOUTHCOM and its Service and subordinate commands and contractors to support USSOUTHCOM ISR requirements.
DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
<i>Audit of the Implementation of the Viper Program for Cartels and Transnational Criminal Organizations at Selected U.S. Mission Mexico Posts</i> To determine whether selected U.S. Mission Mexico posts have implemented the Viper Program in accordance with requirements and in response to the designation of cartels and transnational criminal organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

APPENDIX E

Planned Oversight Project

Table 4 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies’ planned oversight project related to OSS.

Table 4.

Planned Oversight Project Related to OSS by Lead IG and Partner Agencies, as of June 30, 2026

DEPARTMENT OF WAR OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
<i>Audit of Base Operations Support to U.S. Special Operations Forces</i> To determine the adequacy of base operations support for U.S. special operations forces operating in support of geographic combatant commands.

APPENDIX F

Hotline and Investigations

HOTLINE

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority.

The Lead IG hotlines received three allegations related to OSS.

INVESTIGATIONS

The Lead IG agencies and their partners coordinate investigative activities, deconflict potential or common targets, and interact for logistical and legal support. The investigative partner agencies consist of representatives from the DoW OIG's criminal investigative component, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, Department of Homeland Security OIG, State OIG, USAID OIG, U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division, Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and Federal Bureau of Investigation.

During the quarter, investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies opened five investigations and closed two investigations. They made no referrals to the Department of Justice during the period.



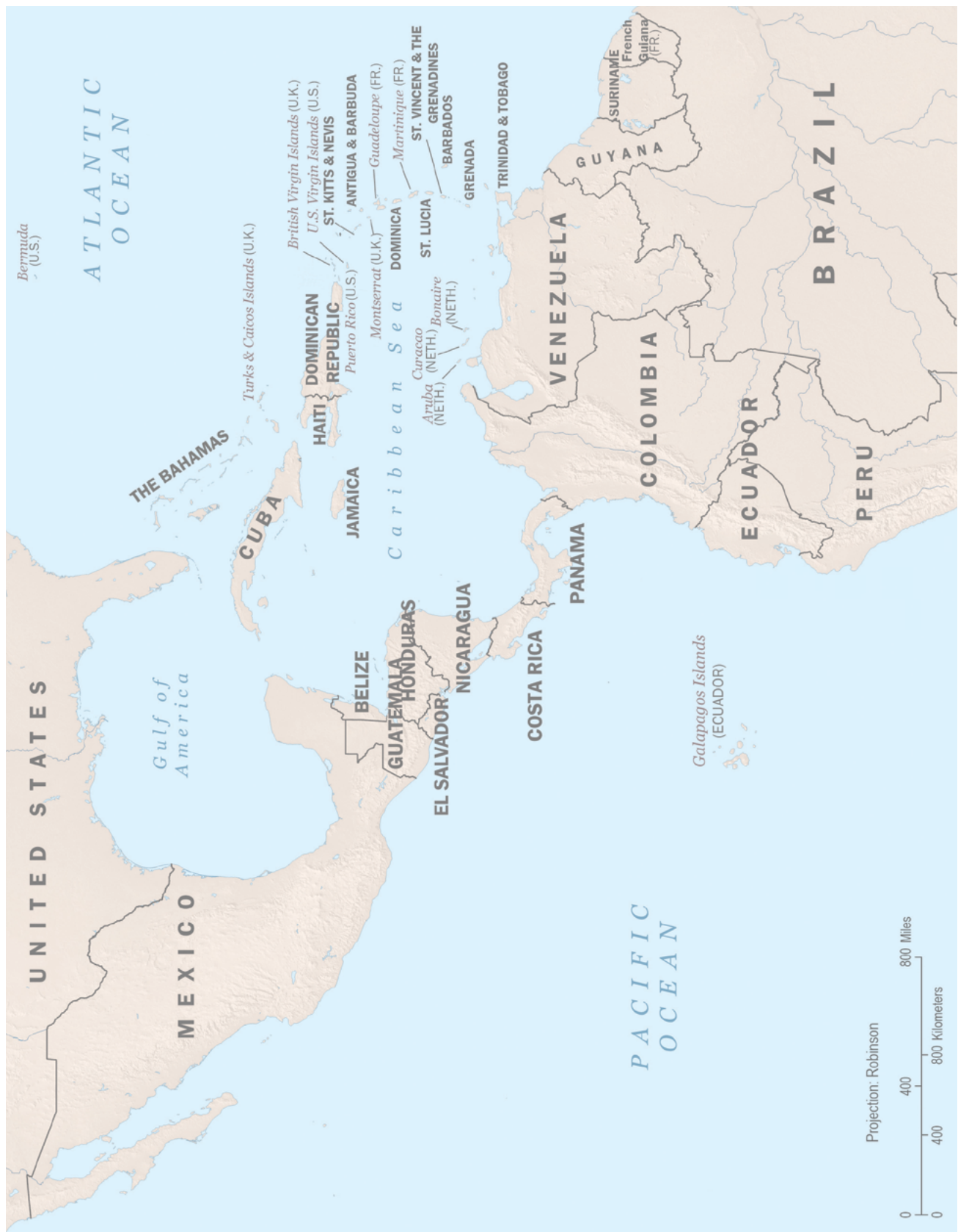
ACRONYMS

Acronym	
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoW	Department of War
DTO	designated terrorist organization
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
ISF	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JIATF-South	Joint Interagency Task Force-South
JTF	Joint Task Force

Acronym	
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OSS	Operation Southern Spear
State	Department of State
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USSOUTHCOM	The U.S. Southern Command
USTRANSCOM	The U.S. Transportation Command



Map of Central America, South America, and the Caribbean Sea



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TO REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, OR ABUSE RELATED TO
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AND PROGRAMS, CONTACT:



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www.dodig.mil/hotline

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE HOTLINE

www.stateoig.gov/hotline

1-800-409-9926 or 202-647-3320



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