



## U.S. Narcotics Control Initiatives in Colombia

**Paul E. Simons, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs**

Testimony Before the Senate Drug Caucus  
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC  
June 3, 2003

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator Biden, and members of the Caucus. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the current narcotics situation in Colombia, and the Department of State's response to that situation. Because of the importance of our efforts in Colombia, I am especially pleased to meet with this Caucus, which is a key stake-holder in this process.

### I. Overview

#### Situation in Colombia

Colombia is of great importance to the United States. It is a vibrant democracy and a country with extraordinary promise, facing an extraordinary threat. Colombia has four times the land area of California and a population of over 40 million. Its gross domestic product is more than \$90 billion a year. Colombia has important reserves of petroleum, natural gas and coal.

Unfortunately, Colombia is also a center of the illicit narcotics industry. In recent years, Colombia has been responsible for over 70 percent of the world's coca cultivation. Ninety percent of the cocaine entering the United States is either produced in or passes through Colombia. Colombia is also a significant source of heroin for the U.S. market.

The drug trade has a terrible impact on the United States. There are 50,000 drug-related deaths yearly in the United States -- with 19,000 directly attributable to drugs. This is six times the loss of life on September 11, and it happens every year. The drug trade also has devastating consequences in Colombia. Not only is that society rife with drug-related violence, its unique eco-system and environment are increasingly threatened by the slash-and-burn cutting of tropical forest for coca cultivation and the indiscriminate dumping of toxic chemicals used in drug processing.

Directly linked to the illicit drug trade is the scourge of terrorism that plagues Colombia. Colombia is home to three of the four U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) in this hemisphere, and has suffered a four-decade cycle of violence and conflict. Terrorism in Colombia both supports and draws resources from the narcotics industry. Nefarious narco-terrorist organizations also rely on kidnapping and extortion -- including threats to U.S. citizens and economic interests -- to support themselves. Colombia's terrorist groups have kidnapped 138 American citizens since 1980, and killed 11. Since February, three DOD contractors have been held hostage by the FARO and one of their colleagues was assassinated upon capture.

The country's 40-year-old internal conflict -- among government forces, several leftist guerrilla groups, and a right-wing paramilitary movement -- intensified during 2002. The internal armed conflict, and the narcotics trafficking that both fueled it and prospered from it, were the central causes of violations of international humanitarian law. In a 2001 report, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that all sides in the conflict failed to respect the principles of humanitarian law. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the paramilitaries are the principal perpetrators of these human rights violations. The Colombian Army is charged with committing very few of the human rights violations alleged in 2002.

Violence by the three FTOs -- the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) -- caused the deaths of thousands of civilians in 2002, including combat casualties, political killings, and forced disappearances.

Kidnapping continues to be a major source of revenue for both the FARC and ELN. The FARC continued to kidnap persons in accordance with its so-called "Law 002," announced in March 2000, which requires persons with more than the equivalent of \$1 million in assets to volunteer payments to the FARC or risk detention. The Free Country Foundation, a Colombian NGO, reported that guerrillas committed 75 percent of the 2,986 kidnappings reported during the year in which a perpetrator was identified. The Foundation reported that the FARC kidnapped 936 persons and the ELN 776. In addition, the FARO often purchased victims kidnapped by common criminals and then negotiated ransom payments with the families.

Additionally, the ongoing terrorist offensive against democratic institutions and civil society has had tragic costs for Colombia. Each year the AUC, ELN and FARC kill more than 3,000 persons. Their victims have included judges and prosecutors, journalists, labor union leaders and human rights workers, soldiers, police, and ordinary citizens. Even clerics and Red Cross workers are not exempt from the violence.

The narco-terrorist threat is among the greatest the United States and Colombia face, and success against the drug trade and terrorism in Colombia will improve security in both countries, and in the Andean region as a whole. The ongoing internal strife that Colombia has suffered has hampered its economic progress, severely strained both military and civil institutions, and wreaked havoc on the civilian population who must live with the constant threat of terrorist violence. It has also resulted in a flood of illicit drugs into the United States.

What is occurring in Colombia matters to the United States. We stand in solidarity with the people of Colombia who, like us, know first-hand the scourge of terrorism. Although Afghanistan and Iraq currently receive more public attention, our important partnership with Colombia is yet another front in the war on terrorism, and remains a priority of this Administration. With the support of the U.S. Congress, the Administration has devoted considerable monetary resources and personnel to this effort.

#### Commitment of President Uribe

The recent visit of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, and President Bush's renewed pledge to support him in his efforts against the narco-terrorists, underscore the high value we place on our relationship and the importance of this struggle.

Since taking office, President Uribe has demonstrated unwavering commitment to countering the narco-terrorists. In spite of at least 15 assassination attempts, both before and after his election, he continues to implement policies that will give Colombia back to Colombians.

During his meetings in Washington April 30 to May 2, with the Executive Branch and many members of this Caucus, President Uribe emphasized his commitment to complete elimination of Colombia's coca crops by the end of his term of office.

President Uribe is an avid supporter of aerial eradication and alternative development programs. During his tenure, eradication programs have reduced coca cultivation by more than 15 percent and opium poppy production by 25 percent from 2001 levels. President Uribe is working to strengthen the presence of the Colombian state and to ensure the primacy of the rule of law and respect for human rights throughout Colombian territory. He is also making the tough fiscal decisions that will allow him to fund these policies and reforms. He has increased government security expenditures for military and police activities from 3.50 of GDP in 2001 to a goal of 5.80 of GDP by the end of his term.

President Uribe's national security strategy includes commitments to respect human rights, to dedicate more resources to the Colombian Armed Forces, and to reform the conscription laws to make military service universal and fairer. He is eager to ensure the effectiveness of joint efforts with the United States government to achieve our common goals in combating narcotics trafficking and terrorism, and has proven an effective partner in the war on terrorism. Since the lifting of the ban against extraditing nationals in December 1997, Colombia has extradited more than 100 of its nationals charged with high-level narcotics trafficking, drug-related money laundering, hostage taking, and the murder of a retired New York City policeman. We have no better extradition partner.

### **United States Policy Toward Colombia**

Beyond the struggle against the narco-terrorists, there are broad and important U.S. national interests in Colombia that include stability in the Andean region, trade, immigration, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and protection of the environment.

U.S. policy toward Colombia supports the Colombian government's efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions, promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, intensify counter-narcotics efforts, foster socio-economic development, address immediate humanitarian needs, and end the threats to democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Our support reinforces, but does not substitute for, the broader efforts of Colombian government and society.

In implementing these programs, the Administration and Congress increasingly came to understand that the terrorist and narcotics problems in Colombia are intertwined and must be dealt with as a whole. Working with Congress, the Administration sought and Congress enacted new authorities in the 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 107-206) that would help address this combined threat. These provisions were renewed in the FY 2003 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-7).

Since 2000, the United States has provided Colombia with over \$1.7 billion in economic, humanitarian and security assistance to support these efforts, with another \$600 million appropriated for FY 2003.

The U.S. counter-drug objective in Colombia is to reduce illegal drug production and trafficking. We use both eradication and interdiction programs in this effort. Through programs to eradicate coca leaf and opium poppy and to interdict their movement and that of precursor supplies, cash or final products, we expect to reduce the amount of cocaine and heroin entering the United States. Maintaining effective demand reduction programs will also be key.

Additional pressure can be brought against the illegal drug industry by more effectively controlling transportation corridors across the Andes that are used to import chemicals, supplies and cash into the growing areas, or to move illegal drug products out. If the drug-producing areas are isolated from markets and necessary supplies, the costs and risks of moving narcotics products will increase.

Interdiction of cocaine and heroin at sea and in the air is another important element of drug-market disruption. With U.S. assistance, technology, intelligence support, and law-enforcement training, the Government of Colombia should be able to increase pressure on drug warehousing sites and go-fast boat movements, and increase seizures of cocaine and heroin.

Importantly, as a result of the ongoing Colombian criminal justice reform, including United States training of specialized task force units as well as prosecutors and police, and the bilateral cases developed with U.S. law enforcement, more and more seizures and arrests are leading to convictions and dismantling of narco-terrorist organizations.

### **II. FY 2003 Budget**

In 2003, Congress funded \$700 million of a requested \$731 million for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative account. Of that amount, more than \$433 million will go to Colombia, with \$284 million for eradication/interdiction support and \$149.2 million for alternative development, support for the rule of law, and institution building. Programs include the following:

The \$284 million for eradication/interdiction will go towards support for the Colombian military (pending the Secretary of State's certification that the conditions in section 564(3) of the FY 2003 Foreign Operations Appropriations, Act (P.L. 108-7) have been met), including its Army Counter Drug Brigade (CD BDE) and Army Aviation. These funds will also support a renewed Air Bridge Denial Program (after necessary legal steps and inter-agency coordination are completed), coastal interdiction and continued support for the Colombian National Police, to include aviation support and eradication and interdiction programs.

Funding for alternative development and institution-building (\$149.2 million) will fund programs which support the rule of law, such as the DOJ-supported specialized task force units on Human Rights, Anti-Corruption, Money Laundering/Asset Forfeiture and Narcotics, criminal code reform, judicial and witness protection programs and prosecutorial and police training; bomb squad; human rights reform and drug awareness and demand-reduction projects; and the GOC "carabinero" program which will establish permanent police stations and begin rural patrols in areas that have no government presence and are under virtual control of drug-trafficking and insurgent organizations. Funding is also targeted for USAID's "Support for Democracy" and alternative development projects, and USAID and PRM programs to support vulnerable groups and internally displaced persons.

In addition, Congress appropriated \$34 million to the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) in the FY 2003 Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-11) for Colombia, and the Administration is allocating an additional \$37 million in FMF funding from the Supplemental. These funds will go towards presidential security; bomb-squad support; increasing police presence in remote areas; support for internally displaced persons; and aerial eradication programs.

In FY 2003, \$93 million in regular FMF funding will support the infrastructure security program for the area of the Cano-Limon pipeline and stop terrorist attacks on this important source of revenue for Colombia. It will improve the professionalism, technical competence and human rights performance of the Colombian Armed Forces through a variety of military educational training courses.

### III. Returns on Investment

Our years of effort, and the money that we have invested in Colombia, are beginning to pay off. This year, we have turned the corner on coca and opium poppy cultivation. Nationwide coca hectareage was down by more than 15 percent in 2002 to 144,000 hectares, with additional declines in the first quarter of 2003. Key southern coca cultivation (Putumayo/Caqueta) declined by over 50 percent (82,300 to 40,550 hectares) in 2002. In the first five months of 2003, we sprayed approximately 64,000 hectares of coca, well on our way to meeting our goal of spraying all remaining coca this calendar year. Opium poppy cultivation has likewise decreased, with a 25-percent decline in 2002. The CNC estimates that there are currently 4,900 hectares yearly (2,450 hectares counted twice to account for two distinct crops) of opium poppy remaining. Our aim is to spray opium poppy three times during calendar-year 2003. Through May, we have sprayed approximately 1,650 hectares of opium poppy, well on our way to meeting our target of spraying all remaining opium poppy in 2003.

At the same time, we have strengthened our commitment to pursuing an environmentally sound aerial eradication program. In September 2002, the Department switched to a more benign glyphosate formulation -- one with decreased risk of eye irritation compared to the former mixture. We have evaluated the toxicity of the spray mixture and have also increased environmental training for our spray pilots, conducted toxicological reviews or medical investigations of each health concern brought to the attention of the Embassy, trained Colombian specialists who now conduct soil and water analysis, and coordinated with the OAS in its long-term monitoring of the spray program.

Beyond the achievements in eradication, U.S. programs have helped strengthen democratic institutions, protect human rights, assist internally displaced persons, and foster socio-economic development. Specifically, we have succeeded in the following areas:

- deployment of Colombia's first Counternarcotics Brigade which has moved aggressively against drug labs and other illegal facilities and has expanded its interdiction efforts beyond southern Colombia;
- support for the police Anti-Narcotics Directorate (DIRAN) which destroyed 61 HC1 labs and 401 coca-base labs in 2002, and seized thousands of kilos of cocaine;
- support for police presence in rural areas, which has increased significantly with the addition of permanent police units to 79 municipalities that previously had no police presence;
- over 22,000 families have benefited from the alternative development program;
- 24,549 hectares of licit crops are being supported;
- 16,673 hectares of illicit crops have been manually eradicated by alternative development communities;
- 31 Justice and Coexistence Centers have been opened; these provide cost-effective legal services to Colombians who have previously not enjoyed access to the country's judicial system; over 1.6 million cases have been handled by the centers;
- USAID programs have provided protection to 2,731 human rights activists, journalists and union leaders;
- USAID has provided assistance to 774,601 Colombians displaced by violence;
- USAID is funding a program to rehabilitate former child soldiers, including those captured by the army or those who have deserted from the illegal armed groups. Some 733 children have received treatment, education and shelter;
- an Early Warning System (EWS) is helping Colombia avert massacres and violations of international humanitarian law; to date, over 194 warnings have identified threats to communities across Colombia, and have resulted in 154 responses by the military, police and/or relief agencies;
- the PRM bureau supports international and non-governmental organizations working in Colombia that provide food, temporary shelter, basic health and sanitation, education and other emergency humanitarian assistance to displaced people. PRM also supports the dissemination of information on international humanitarian law to the Colombian military and police, local civilian authorities, and illegal armed groups;
- DOJ-sponsored justice-sector reform programs have helped the Government of Colombia to reform its judicial system and strengthen local government capacity; implement a comprehensive program to investigate and prosecute kidnapping and extortion offenses; trained a cadre of professional prosecutors; enhanced maritime enforcement capabilities; and improved witness and judicial protection programs;
- DOJ support to the Prosecutor General's Office has helped in establishing dedicated human rights satellite units arrayed throughout the country to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of human rights abuses.

Additionally, our focus on human rights is having an impact on Colombian institutions. President Uribe is working to end collusion between the Colombian military and the paramilitary AUC terrorist organization. Last year, 168 paramilitaries were killed, 764 captured and 20 turned themselves in. In the past two months, the GOC has increased its crackdown on illegal paramilitary groups. In four major operations, Colombian security forces detained an Army officer paramilitary collaborator, arrested a major paramilitary leader and apprehended large groups of illegal combatants.

The Department takes very seriously the human rights record of the Colombian military. For example, on January 3, we suspended assistance to a Colombian Air Force unit (CACOM-1) due to lack of responsiveness and progress on an important human rights case. The suspension will remain effective until the Colombian government provides a credible account of what occurred at Santo Domingo and takes appropriate action consistent with the facts.

The State Department carefully monitors the human rights record of the Colombian Armed Forces. Pursuant to the "Leahy Amendment," we regularly vet units of the security forces and do not provide assistance to units for which there is credible evidence (as determined by the Secretary) that they have committed gross violations of human rights.

In addition, the Department is moving ahead toward rapid resumption of the Air Bridge Denial program. The U.S. and Colombia have signed a bilateral agreement which lays out the safety procedures for the program. Our goal is to ensure that we have adequate procedures in place for the protection of innocent life, while at the same time providing a credible deterrent to aerial trafficking of drugs.

Recently, a certification team visited Colombia to review whether the Colombians would be able to discharge their responsibilities to operate the Air Bridge Denial Program in accordance with the safety procedures agreed upon between Colombia and the United States. If the team recommends that Colombia's procedures meet the requirements of the bilateral agreement, which would be a major step toward facilitating the initiation of the program, Department officials will be on the Hill this week to seek congressional advice. If the president signs a determination, the Air Bridge Denial program can

recommence. We are hoping this will happen in the near future.

I would like to note that we have achieved all this while conforming to the limits on U.S. personnel in Colombia in connection with support of Plan Colombia -- 400 U.S. civilian contractors and 400 U.S. military personnel -- established by Congress.

If present programs are sustained, then Plan Colombia's original goal of reducing coca cultivation in Colombia by 50 percent by the end of 2006 should be achieved. President Uribe has called for a more ambitious target: eradication of all coca by the end of his term of office in 2006.

If these eradication and interdiction objectives are achieved, we would expect to see a major reduction in the amount of cocaine available for the United States, with corresponding impacts on cocaine price and purity in the U.S. market. Reductions in Colombian heroin availability might not produce comparable effects because of the availability of heroin supplies from other parts of the world.

#### **IV. Challenges to Our Programs**

In addition to our success, many challenges also confront us in Colombia.

First and foremost among these is safety of our personnel. The terrorist organizations operating in Colombia are ruthless killers, and the aerial spray operations, particularly of opium poppy, are perilous. This weekend, another spray plane was destroyed when it hit a tree while spraying coca; fortunately, the pilot survived. Recently, we lost a U.S.-citizen spray pilot during low-level application of herbicide to opium poppy. There was no evidence that the plane had been hit by ground fire; rather, it appears that pilot error -- in the difficult terrain of the high Andes -- was the cause of the crash.

This latest tragedy brings to three the number of U.S.-citizen civilian State Department pilot contractors who have died in Colombia since 1998. Two perished on July 27, 1998, in an aviation accident when their T-65 aircraft crashed during a training flight.

Colombia is a high-risk assignment and the U.S. military personnel, U.S. civilian contractors and the permanent and temporary U.S. government personnel assigned to Colombia are well aware of this. Our personnel and official facilities maintain a high state of alert, take every possible precaution, and are very proactive in matters regarding safety. The Department continually strives to improve the already-strong safety record of our spray program.

We are currently instituting additional safety procedures, including improved intelligence exchange, increased armed helicopter escorts, and joint operations that employ Counter Drug Brigade ground troops on interdiction operations in areas where increased hostile fire is expected.

#### **V. The Road Ahead**

Full realization of U.S. policy goals will require a concerted Colombian strategy and effort -- backed by sustained U.S. assistance -- to establish control over its national territory, eliminate narcotics cultivation and distribution, end terrorism, and promote human rights and the rule of law. We urge Members to support full funding of our 2004 budget request of \$731 million, of which \$463 million is for Colombia.

This budget reflects our continued support of the Uribe Administration's courageous anti-narcotics and anti-terror agenda. The progress described earlier needs to be cemented if we are to achieve our long-term goals of improvements in all areas of Colombian life and reduction in illegal drug cultivation and terrorism.

First, we would stress that the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) is a regional effort. It will require full support in Congress if it is to succeed. Among the goals we have set for ourselves is to ensure that accomplishments in Colombia do not reverse our gains in Bolivia or Peru. We also aim to prevent spillover into Brazil, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela.

We are making significant progress in our eradication efforts, but will require continued support for eradication and alternative development in order to eliminate remaining cultivation and replanting and to deter permanently the coca growers from pursuing this illicit business. Our budget request balances law enforcement with sustainable long-term development.

In Bolivia, we need to provide the GOB with strong incentives to reinforce counter-narcotics programs, particularly in light of increasing political pressure to stop eradication and increase licit coca cultivation. In Peru, the democratic government is experiencing unprecedented unrest and resistance in hardcore coca-cultivation regions. We should not turn our backs on these partners when they most need our political and financial support to cement earlier eradication gains.

Specifically, our 2004 ACI programs are intended to do the following:

- Combat illicit drugs and terrorism, defend human rights, promote economic, social and alternative development initiatives, reform and strengthen the administration of justice, and assist the internally displaced;
- Enhance counter-terrorism capability by providing advice, assistance, training and equipment, and intelligence support to the Colombian Armed Forces and the Colombian National Police through ongoing programs as well as by implementing the new authorities and the pipeline protection program;
- Promote economic growth and development through support for market-based policies, including negotiation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and implementation of the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA) as amended by the Andean Trade Program and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA);
- Reduce the production and trafficking of cocaine and heroin from Colombia by strengthening counter-narcotics eradication programs; advise, train, and assist counterdrug organizations and units; dismantle drug trafficking organizations; disrupt the transportation of illegal drugs, precursor and essential chemicals, trafficker supplies, and cash; address major cultivation regions; and respond rapidly to shifts in cultivation regions; eliminate any remaining coca and opium cultivation, to include replanting of these crops;
- Increase institutional development, professionalization and enlargement of Colombian security forces to permit the exercise of governmental authority throughout the national territory while ensuring respect for human rights; and
- Reform and strengthen the criminal justice system by enhancing the capabilities of the police investigators and prosecutors as the country moves in transition from an inquisitorial to a more accusatorial system with oral and open trials to increase effectiveness and build public confidence.

Along with ACI funding, Colombia assistance will include \$110 million in FMF funding, to include maritime interdiction support -- a priority of President Uribe and one that meshes with U.S. counter-narcotics goals.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

Finally, I would like to thank you again for this opportunity to update you on the status of our counter-narcotics policy and programs. The Administration is committed to supporting the Uribe Administration and to working with our other partners in the Andean region and beyond to stem the flow of illicit narcotics into our country and to check the influence of terrorist organizations wherever they reside.

These are important and costly missions -- both in terms of financial and human resources. But they are worthy missions which require the continued support of our congressional partners. We thank you for the tremendous support and counsel you have provided in the past, and look forward to our continued partnership.



Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.