



Colombia's Progress in Fighting Narcoterrorism

Marc Grossman, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Letter to the Chicago Tribune
Washington, DC
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I must take issue with your October 12 editorial "Sliding into Colombia's Morass." Colombians are fighting to defend their democracy against narcoterrorism, and the U.S. Government is proud to help them.

Your analysis is inaccurate on several counts. First, it is because of success in Colombia--not because this is a "failing enterprise"--that Congress approved an increase in the maximum number of U.S. personnel who could be sent to Colombia to 800 military and 600 civilian. Violence in Colombia is at the lowest level in decades, while drug crop eradication, interdiction and drug-related arrests are at record high levels.

The Colombian economy grew by 3.7% in 2003, and is expected to grow by 3.8% in 2004.

Second, you say that increasing the cap on U.S. personnel constitutes "mission creep." In fact the mission for these personnel is unchanged: Help the Colombian government confront the threats to democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism, and promote respect for human rights and the rule of law. U.S. personnel are there in a supporting role, and do not engage in combat operations.

Third, your editorial claims that the designation of the FARC, ELN, and AUC as foreign terrorist organizations in Colombia only took place in 2003. In fact the U.S. first designated the FARC and the ELN as FTOs in 1997 and the AUC in 2001.

There is still much to be done in Colombia--by Colombians--to create a safe, prosperous society that respects human rights. With our help, I believe they will succeed.

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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