



Plan Colombia: Major Successes and New Challenges

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Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lantos, members of this distinguished Committee, I want to first express our appreciation for your leadership and ongoing interest in our policy toward Colombia and your steadfast support. Your willingness to receive Colombian government officials here, and your continued interest in sending Congressional delegations to Colombia, is a crucial foundation for our Colombia strategy. I would be remiss if I did not also express our appreciation for the many contributions Speaker Hastert has made.

U.S. policy toward Colombia supports the Colombian government's efforts to defend and strengthen its democratic institutions, promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, intensify counter-narcotics efforts, foster socio-economic development, and address immediate humanitarian needs. We seek to help Colombia end the threats to its democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism.

The success of our policy is due in no small measure to the continuing bipartisan support we have received from the Congress for our programs in Colombia.

My colleagues Jonathan Farrar and Adolfo Franco will be addressing in detail our counter-narcotics, alternative development and judicial sector reform policies in Colombia. I would like to offer a brief update on the successes that Plan Colombia is having in these areas and offer my perspective on the challenges that still face us.

While there has been steady progress towards our goals, it has also come at a cost in both American and Colombian lives, with Colombians from all sectors of society paying a high price for their determination to end the scourges of narcotics trafficking and terrorism and to build a better society. We recognize this.

Last February 13 marked the two-year anniversary of the seizure by the FARC of three American contractors after their plane crashed, as well as the murder of their American pilot and Colombian colleague. We appreciate the continued efforts made by the Colombian government for their recovery. Our hostages' safe recovery remains a high priority for both governments.

I must also mention a serious matter that is still unfolding. We continue to monitor the investigation by Colombian and U.S. authorities into developments last week in which U.S. military trainers on temporary duty in Colombia were alleged to be involved in trafficking in ammunition. All affected agencies take these allegations very seriously; we recognized what is at stake. We and the Colombian government intend to get to the bottom of it.

Colombia is a successful democracy that is increasingly taking control of its own future. Its success in doing so is making it a force for progress and stability in the troubled Andean region. Despite Colombia's many security problems, it is a vibrant democracy, whose legitimacy is unquestioned and which serves as a model for what can be achieved under adverse conditions. In spite of continued violence, there is no question that the country's democratic traditions are solid and widely-respected. Our investment supporting Plan Colombia has contributed to this and is increasingly paying off.

All who have met with President Uribe in Washington or Bogotá, including members of this Committee, know the great progress he has brought about and also recognize the unique, reliable partner we have in him. His strength of character, courage, and vision have provided the foundation for this success.

The news from Colombia over the past three years is a story of steady progress in several key areas. Violent crime is at the lowest level in 16 years. Statistics for 2004 indicate that compared with 2002, homicides have fallen by 30 percent, massacres (the killing of 3 or more persons at one time) by 61 percent, kidnappings by 51 percent, and acts of terrorism by 56 percent. If public safety is a measure of well-being, most Colombians are better off today.

Drug crop eradication, narcotics interdiction, and related arrests are at record-high levels. The aerial eradication program in Colombia sprayed a record 136,551 hectares (more than 300,000 acres) of coca and over 3,000 hectares (7,000 acres) of opium poppy in 2004. Over 170 metric tons of cocaine were interdicted in Colombia and at sea, and more than 200 cocaine hydrochloride labs destroyed during 2004.

USAID-managed alternative development projects are providing economic incentives for individuals and communities to abandon illicit crops. Other programs support institutional development and humanitarian assistance, and are helping the Government of Colombia to reinforce the core functions and values that strengthen civil society. Justice Department programs are helping Colombia strengthen and modernize its judicial system through code reform, support for human rights units, and training for prosecutors, judges and police investigators.

President Uribe shares our commitment to bringing any terrorist or criminal to justice who has been, or may be, indicted for crimes against the United States and U.S. citizens. He has pledged to take no action that precludes extradition of such leaders. Indeed, extraditions are at record levels. Since President Uribe took office in August 2002, his administration has extradited 217 fugitives for large-scale narcotics trafficking, drug-related money laundering, racketeering, murder and terrorism offenses.

In spite of impressive progress and real successes, there are still continuing challenges.

Human rights are central to our policy in Colombia and remain an area where there are still serious problems. We have not been reticent in making those concerns known. While there is no question that there has been significant improvement in the human rights performance of the Colombian military overall, we still need to see more progress on the specific human rights criteria which Congress has asked the Secretary of State to review and certify. We are presently reviewing the five statutory criteria related to human rights and severing ties with paramilitaries to determine if certification can be made.

Colombia is a key trade partner for the United States and our ties will only expand as we conclude negotiations for an Andean Free Trade Agreement. Negotiations are progressing but have not yet finished. We are addressing those issues that remain, including the treatment of agricultural products.

The Colombian government's efforts to undertake peace initiatives with the illegal armed groups are critical to sustained success. An ambitious demobilization effort has removed approximately 5,000 paramilitaries from combat. In close consultation with Congress we have released \$1.75 million in FY 2004 funds to provide support for the monitoring of demobilized paramilitaries, orientation and reference centers for the reintegration process, strengthening of the judicial processing, and inter-institutional coordination throughout the demobilization process.

We will ensure that any further support is consistent with the law, and we will consult with Congress on any such plans.

We expect that these legal concerns will be resolved satisfactorily, and we will then be better positioned to both review and determine our overall policy on supporting Colombian demobilization and reintegration, as well as to consult more fully with Congress on our programs.

During her April 27 visit to Colombia, the Secretary of State noted that we have agreed to explore with the Colombians options to improve the already excellent defense relationship that exists. We expect that our cooperative and vigorous follow-up to recent incidents involving U.S. military personnel will contribute to maintaining that positive relationship.

Where do we go from here?

Strong, bipartisan support from the Congress has been an integral part of our shared success with Colombia. Our future assistance will center on solidifying the gains Colombians have made, with our support, under "Plan Colombia."

Secretary Rice's visit highlighted our close working relations with Colombia and the unusually complex series of issues that exist with Colombia and its neighbors. With over 40 million people, Colombia is South America's second most populous country. It is facing up to long-standing political, security, social, and economic problems, exacerbated by the explosive growth of coca and opium poppy cultivation during the late 1990's in which guerrilla and paramilitary forces became deeply involved. There is no single explanation for the wide range of Colombia's troubles, but they are rooted in the traditionally limited government presence in large areas of the interior, a history of civil conflict and violence, and deep social inequities.

To address these problems, the Colombian government announced its Plan Colombia in 1999, a six-year program with a balanced and wide-ranging strategy. The Uribe Administration (which took office in 2002) confirmed its full commitment to the goals of Plan Colombia.

Plan Colombia, by all measurements including those already cited above, has had exceptional success in pursuing the goals it established, with support from the United States and the international community, but the job is not finished and we need to ensure that the progress made so far in counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism continues. Efforts to address the deeper causes of Colombian problems must continue. We must staunch the flow of cocaine to our shores, and that means targeting the suppliers as well as the consumers. Arguably, our interests in Colombia are even greater now than they were six years ago, at the start of Plan Colombia. Not only is the GOC our counternarcotics and counterterrorism partner, it also is our valued ally to maintain stability in the region, particularly in the face of external, anti-democratic forces. Colombia must remain strong, and become even stronger to resist the anti-democratic forces which threaten to emerge in the 21st century.

The Colombian Government has not yet announced a continuation for Plan Colombia. Nevertheless, anticipating its sunset in late 2005, the GOC has begun planning a follow-on strategy that would build on and consolidate the progress achieved to date in four major areas:

- (a) Combating terrorism, narcotics trafficking and international organized crime;
- (b) Economic and social reactivation;
- (c) Strengthening institutions and the justice system; and
- (d) Peace negotiations, demobilization and reintegration of illegal armed groups.

The United States agrees with these priorities and has told the Colombian government that we will seek continued support from Congress through the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) and other funding vehicles as Colombia determines its future plans. We have made no decisions about specific funding assistance levels beyond FY 2006, but will continue working with the Congress as planning is further developed.

Three of the four areas described by the Colombian government represent a continuation of programs we are already supporting. The fourth, that of "peace negotiations, demobilization and reintegration of illegal armed groups," is the result of progress made by Plan Colombia. Because of the pace at which peace negotiations with the paramilitaries have developed, the role of the United States in the process has not yet been fully determined and, as already noted, with resolution of outstanding legal concerns, will be the subject of further consultations with Congress.

Our assistance in support of Colombia's counter-narcotics and counter-terror operations has strengthened the government's hand, but the Uribe Administration has clearly taken responsibility and ownership in both areas and is substantially increasing the resources committed to them, while maintaining social and economic development funding. President Uribe has made good on his promise to President Bush to devote a greater share of his budget to security. Overall, real spending on defense has increased every year. According to the most recent Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Finance figures, Colombian spending on defense grew over 30 percent between 2001-2004, and will continue to grow in 2005.

It is important to also describe the increasing success we have had in obtaining European support for Colombian counter-narcotics, alternative development and justice sector reform programs. A detailed report is being sent to the Congress, including to this Committee, that confirms significant European Union and individual European countries' assistance, not only to Colombia but also to the entire Andean region.

We had, of course, all hoped that by now the United States could begin to decrease the funding needed for Colombia. But in truth, the Uribe Administration offers an unexpected opportunity to consolidate and continue progress. The Administration has presented an FY06 budget -- the first for post-Plan Colombia -- that reflects our commitment to continued support and essentially seeks funding at the same level as in FY05, the last year of Plan Colombia, for ACI and a somewhat reduced amount in FMF.

Secretary of State Rice, speaking in Bogota on April 27, 2005 said it very clearly. "You don't stop in midstream on something that has been very effective." Plan Colombia's ending must not signal the end of our support for Colombia.

Many of Colombia's challenges do not stop at Colombia's borders and require a regional solution. We have supported Colombia's successful efforts to secure UN Security Council and OAS resolutions condemning terrorism and calling on member states to crack down on terrorists operating out of their own countries, as we have supported Colombia's efforts to improve security of its borders.

Even though we have seen no serious "balloon effect" due to the success of Plan Colombia, we also recognize the increasing regionalization of narcotics trafficking. Beyond narcotics trafficking, there are common problems across the Andes that require a broad approach, but we also understand that problems manifest themselves differently in each country. We are developing an approach through the ACI recognizing these challenges, as well as the broader issues of the need for sustained support for democratic institutions, including social and economic progress.

We will work with Colombia's neighbors, and especially Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Panama, as we build on current programs. Overall goals will include support for programs that help countries to consolidate democracy, assert control over their entire national territories and extend government services to their citizens; eliminate drug production, trafficking and terrorism; and support human rights, the rule of law and provide sustainable alternatives to illicit drugs including increased trade, investment and economic growth.

Thank you again for your interest, and for your commitment to help us help Colombia confront the daunting challenges it still faces. If the recent past provides a guide to Colombia's future, the country's long-term prospects are excellent. Our near-term task is to help consolidate the significant gains made and help Colombians face the challenges that remain. This is for the greater good of the United States, as well as for the good of all Colombians, and all other countries in the region. This concludes my formal statement, and I am ready to answer your questions.

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