



Counternarcotics Strategy in Colombia

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Burton, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you to discuss our counternarcotics efforts in Colombia. I sincerely appreciate the commitment that this Subcommittee has shown in fighting the international production and trafficking of illegal drugs.

As a former ambassador to Colombia, I can tell you that Colombia is not the same country it was less than 10 years ago. In partnership with President Uribe, his administration, and Colombians at all levels, we have made considerable progress against the drug lords and made their business much less lucrative than would otherwise have been the case. In Colombia, problems of every variety are linked to drug trafficking, including deep-seated political conflicts, social exclusion, economic inequality, endemic violence, and corruption. Today, Colombia is addressing these problems in a way that could not have been imagined just a few years ago. Nevertheless, securing the progress Colombia has made will require sustained commitment from the United States and the international community as Colombia assumes greater responsibility for its counternarcotics effort. As you have heard from Deputy Assistant Secretary Shapiro, the free trade agreement we have negotiated with Colombia will reinforce our counternarcotics strategy by generating jobs in Colombia's legitimate economy.

The Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs is confronting a number of key challenges around the globe – including in Iraq and Afghanistan. But success in Colombia is as important to U.S. security and welfare as any other challenge we face. The rate of U.S. cocaine consumption for youth, according to the Monitoring the Future Survey, has declined by 10 percent since 2001, and overall drug use by 23 percent, but cocaine use continues to extract a toll here and abroad that cannot be tolerated. According to the Interagency Cocaine Movement Strategic Estimate, between 517 and 732 metric tons of cocaine left South America for the United States in 2005, feeding addiction, fueling crime, and damaging the economic and social health of the United States. Additionally, Colombia's influence on regional security throughout the Western Hemisphere, its law enforcement and military partnerships with the U.S., and its close proximity all warrant significant U.S. attention and support.

Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia has contributed to the success of the Government of Colombia, to a greater extent than I expected when I was sent there as Ambassador in 2000. It has helped establish security in the countryside, contributed to strong economic growth, and fostered public confidence in Colombian governmental institutions. Since 2001, Colombia's cocaine production has declined by 22 percent, and seizures of cocaine bound for the United States have increased by two thirds, to 178 metric tons in 2006. As Acting Assistant Secretary Shapiro has explained, in the past five years, kidnappings have fallen by 76 percent, terrorist attacks by 61 percent, and homicides by 40 percent, and poverty has also been reduced.

There is no question that Colombia's USG-supported aerial eradication program halted and reversed the rapid growth in coca cultivation that occurred through 2001. While Colombian coca cultivation more than doubled between 1996 and 2001, from 67,200 hectares to 169,800 hectares, between 2001 and 2004, that cultivation declined by 33 percent, to 114,100 hectares by 2004.

The traffickers, however, are not giving up easily. In 2005, we saw a 26 percent rise in the estimated cultivation, as they implemented measures to counter our efforts and moved into different planting zones. It is worth noting that the 2005 estimate differs from previous years' estimates. Surveying 81 percent more of Colombia than before, it improves our understanding of where and how much coca is grown in Colombia.

Our efforts have had an even greater impact on opium poppy production. Cultivation has dropped from a high of 6,540 hectares in 2001 to a current point where our spray planes can no longer locate substantial poppy plantings in Colombia.

But our assistance to Colombia can be measured in more than just quantities of drugs seized or illicit crops eradicated. We support a variety of Colombian efforts that strengthen institutions, develop alternatives to illicit crop cultivation, improve the justice system, and provide security and government presence in many areas once controlled by Colombia's terrorist groups. Joint USG and GOC efforts are encouraging farmers to abandon the production of illicit crops.

Strategy for Strengthening Democracy and Promoting Social Development

Colombia is at a critical moment in its history. For the first time in two generations, Colombians can envisage the possibility of real peace, and the Government of Colombia is seeking to make this possibility a reality through its "Strategy for Strengthening Democracy and Promoting Social Development," a six-year plan (2007-2013) that builds on the success of Plan Colombia and responds to new challenges.

Plan Colombia's comprehensive approach recognized that economic growth, social equality, poverty reduction and strong political and social institutions depend on ensuring security, defeating illegal armed groups, and choking off narcotics trafficking. The "Strategy for Strengthening Democracy and Promoting Social Development" continues the successful counter-terror, counter-drug, democracy, human rights, alternative development, and humanitarian policies developed and implemented under Plan Colombia. It places increased emphasis on consolidating state presence and continuing economic development through sustainable growth and trade. The strategy recognizes the need to expand programs in remote rural areas, especially those emerging from conflict. It emphasizes increased security, social services, and assistance to vulnerable groups, such as the Afro-Colombian population on Colombia's coasts, as well as indigenous groups and displaced persons. The Colombian strategy also gives high priority to job creation and economic opportunities, and focuses on building the capacity of the Colombian government so it can sustain programs begun with U.S. support.

The Administration supports the strategy. Our support emphasizes economic and social programs and integration of military, police and civilian efforts. It stresses job creation, education, and social programs in areas where Colombians have re-established a state presence. In this new phase, we expect to maintain U.S. assistance for social and economic development, justice sector reform, humanitarian programs and promotion of human rights, while gradually decreasing assistance for eradication and interdiction programs. To help these efforts prosper, continued U.S. support to counternarcotics programs remains critical. Economic and social development is impossible without the security which Colombia's counternarcotics and counterterrorism efforts have increasingly provided for the Colombian people.

Colombia has already begun to assume more responsibility for USG-funded counter-narcotics programs, thus allowing the U.S. to scale back its role in the coming years. The United States provided \$4 billion in assistance during 2000-2005, while Colombia spent nearly \$7 billion on Plan Colombia programs during that period. Colombia's funding in 2006 for the military and police totaled \$4.48 billion, a real increase of more than 30 percent since 2001 that now accounts for 11.6 percent of the overall national budget. Additionally, Colombia's recently enacted "wealth tax" will raise an estimated \$3.7 billion over the next four years to carry out President Uribe's

Democratic Security goals.

Colombia has put more than money on the line to ensure its security. In July 2002, at the end of the Pastrana administration, 181,000 uniformed military and 97,000 police were active. By February 2007, those ranks had grown to 251,000 military and 134,000 police, for an increase of 38 percent during the Uribe administration. For the next stage of consolidation, Colombia plans to add over 16,000 army, navy and air force personnel and 20,000 police.

The Colombian government's "Shared Responsibility" campaign, led by Vice President Santos starting in late 2006, seeks to increase European support. Programs funded by other donor countries in Colombia are primarily focused on alternative development, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and good governance. According to the GOC's Acción Social records, European and other international donors provided over \$200 million in development assistance to Colombia in 2005. We welcome their participation. This month, EU Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner announced plans to grant Colombia over 160 million Euros, about \$217 million, between now and 2013. Countries in Latin America are also involved in a more limited fashion, such as in-kind support to the OAS mission in Colombia. For our part, U.S. officials regularly encourage other donor countries to support Colombia and the region at every opportunity.

Nationalization

It is our task to work with Colombia as it takes on greater responsibility for the counternarcotics program while ensuring that the overall level of effort is sustained. Nationalizing programs before Colombia is ready to manage and support them could jeopardize Colombia's ability to implement the new Strategy and possibly result in losing hard-won ground. We plan to help the Government of Colombia gradually assume greater control and responsibility for funding of counternarcotics programs, and we have begun detailed discussions that aim at concrete reductions in U.S. assistance.

The Air Bridge Denial (ABD) program, for example, will be completely nationalized in FY 2008. It has been one of our most successful programs. It completed its third year of operations in 2006, and the number of illegal flights over Colombia has decreased significantly. In 2003, there were 637 suspected and known illegal flights over Colombia. In 2006, there were only 171, a decrease of 73 percent. Colombia now controls its own airspace, denying drug traffickers an important means of transporting drugs, cash, and materials.

For FY 2008, the Administration has requested funding for Colombian counternarcotics and counterterrorism programs comparable to past years. To make our intentions and plans for nationalization more clear in discussion with our Colombian counterparts, we have developed a notional plan for USG program funding through 2013. The outlines of that plan are included in the Report on U.S. Assistance Programs in Colombia that we will soon submit to the Congress. That plan illustrates our intention to reduce interdiction and eradication support year by year between 2009 and 2013. For institutional, social, and economic development programs, the plan is to initially increase funding and then hold that investment essentially flat. The result over time will be a greater percentage of U.S. assistance supporting soft-side programs.

Eradication and Interdiction

I want to address an issue I know is of concern to this committee and to many others: has the counternarcotics program in Colombia really been successful? Is it worth the substantial investment that we have made? I believe it has succeeded and has been worth our investment, and I want to take a few minutes to tell you why.

The eradication programs in Colombia, which sprayed or manually eradicated over 200,000 hectares of coca in 2006, kept about 320 metric tons of cocaine from reaching the United States and Europe. Coupled with the seizure of 178 metric tons of Colombian cocaine and cocaine base in the same time period, and calculating an average price within Colombia of \$1,700 per kilo, our joint efforts have taken about \$850 million in one year out of the hands of drug trafficking organizations. Aerial eradication alone accounted for slightly more than half of that value. This may help explain why the FARC are reportedly under financial pressure and slow in paying their coca growers.

When I was in Colombia, there was a perverse fear among Colombians that if we were successful in reducing drug income to the FARC and right-wing paramilitaries, other types of violence, particularly kidnapping, would increase. In fact, the opposite has been true: violence is sharply down throughout Colombia. The government has reestablished its presence throughout the country and is now providing increasingly effective governance to large parts of the countryside. This success has driven both the FARC and the coca cultivators out of their comfortable surroundings and has lessened the FARC's access to revenue through extortion, roadblocks, kidnapping, cattle stealing, and similar crimes. In a growing number of municipalities, for the first time in decades, government presence is allowing sustainable development to take place in a reasonably secure environment.

These successes are no secret to the Colombian people. Polls taken in major cities since 1995 show that 60 to 80 percent of the population approve of President Uribe's management of drug trafficking issues. In a February 2007 poll, 72 percent approved of Plan Colombia, 73 percent felt the Uribe administration respects human rights, and 71 percent felt the country was more secure than a year ago. 76 percent held a positive view of the Colombian military forces, and 69 percent approved of the National Police -- a tie with the Catholic Church.

Without eradication, we know that cultivation will soar. The best example of this is the new growth in cultivation along the Ecuadorian border. In 2005, the GOC agreed temporarily not to eradicate within 10 kilometers of the border. In less than a year, the drug traffickers had taken full advantage of this reprieve, and coca bushes six feet high were growing in that area. Working with the Colombians, we eradicated 12,000 hectares in that border zone last year.

More than 93 percent of cocaine destined for the United States is smuggled by maritime transport, but unfortunately U.S. and Allied surveillance capability in the region has been reduced due to structural problems in the aircraft themselves and competing global priorities. Interdiction needs more attention and more resources. Even with excellent operational intelligence, the lack of maritime patrol aircraft limits our ability to detect, monitor and target go-fast boats leaving the Colombian coast. In last year's supplemental, Congress appropriated funds for the purchase of a maritime patrol aircraft for the Colombian Navy. We agree that, with additional maritime patrol capacity, the Colombian Navy could build upon its already impressive record of interdiction. We are prepared to assist the Navy in this effort, provided that adequate funding remains available.

Social and Alternative Development Successes

INL continues to work closely with USAID and the Department of Justice to strengthen Colombian democratic institutions that provide economic and social development and justice. We have helped fund the establishment of police units in 158 new municipalities, many of which had not seen any government presence in decades. Today, for the first time in the country's history, all 1,099 of Colombia's municipalities, equivalent to county seats, have a permanent government presence, an important step forward for the people of Colombia. To enhance the rule of law, USAID projects have assisted the Government of Colombia in establishing 45 Justice Houses, which provide access to justice and social services for poor Colombians. So far, these Justice Houses have handled almost three million cases, easing the burden on an over-taxed judicial system.

Another indication of progress is Colombia's ongoing transition from its outmoded written justice system to the oral, accusatory model. The new system has proved to be more efficient and effective and is gaining the confidence of the public at large. The new procedures are now in place in Bogota, Medellin, Cali, and seven other municipalities. Criminal cases in those areas are being resolved more quickly and with a higher percentage of convictions. This effort is instilling greater confidence in the justice system.

Through the Justice Sector Reform Program (JSRP) and rule of law assistance, the USG is helping reform and strengthen the criminal justice system in Colombia. The Department of Justice, USAID, and other USG agencies have provided training, technical assistance, and equipment to enhance the capacity and capabilities of the Colombian justice system and to make it more transparent and credible. To date, the JSRP has provided training to more than 53,260 prosecutors, judges, criminal

investigators, and forensic experts in Colombia.

We are working closely with the Government of Colombia to extradite drug traffickers to the U.S. to bring them to justice. Extradition is one of the legal tools most feared by drug traffickers. Colombia has extradited more than 400 persons to the U.S. over the last four years, including leaders of the Cali Cartel and members of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the GOC has already surpassed 50 extraditions in 2007.

The United States is also assisting Colombians in regions that have been most ravaged by the drug trade. In total, 264 municipalities have benefited, and 156 of those municipalities received assistance in delivering public services, including water, sewage, and electricity. To date, the U.S. has provided non-emergency support for over 2.7 million Colombians internally displaced by narcotics terrorism, including aid for over 3,200 former child soldiers. The Colombian Rural Police or "Carabineros" are providing basic security in areas formerly under the control of narcoterrorists.

USAID alternative development projects complement interdiction and eradication programs by opening up new, legal economic opportunities instead of growing coca and poppy. Close to one third of the Colombia counternarcotics budget is spent on alternative development and related developmental programs. Joint U.S. and Government of Colombia efforts are encouraging growers to abandon the production of illicit crops. U.S.-financed programs have supported the cultivation of over 102,000 hectares of legal crops and completed 1,117 social and productive infrastructure projects in the last five years. More than 81,700 families in 17 departments have benefited from these programs. In addition, to ensure that Colombians are provided with alternatives, the United States has worked with Colombia's private sector to create an additional 53,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

Demobilization has weakened the Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Colombia has two programs for demobilization: collective and individual. Under the 2005 Justice and Peace Law, the Presidential Advisor for Reintegration oversees the collective demobilization program, which to date has applied only to the AUC. The individual demobilization or deserter program applies to the FARC, the AUC, and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Since 2002, the GOC estimates over 42,000 persons have demobilized - 11,000 under individual desertion program and over 31,000 AUC under the collective program. AUC members who chose not to demobilize, as well as those who do not qualify for the demobilization program, will continue to be investigated and prosecuted under normal Colombian law. We will send a Congressional Notification to you shortly to provide more resources for Colombia's prosecutor's office to investigate these cases. From 2005 to 2006, FARC desertion increased by 37 percent, to 1,558 combatants; and as of April 19 of this year, 911 FARC members had already deserted. The FARC has been put on the defensive in the wake of GOC's Democratic Security Initiative and Plan Patriota. We remain highly concerned with FARC activity, but the organization's ability to operate effectively and project its military force is being increasingly challenged by the Colombian military. The U.S. is now supporting a new reintegration process to help demobilized persons become active members of civil society.

Human Rights

Colombian government connections to paramilitaries highlight both Colombia's progress and the challenges that it still confronts. The reforms implemented by President Uribe to combat drug traffickers and terrorists have brought these connections to light and have led to the arrest of prominent figures. Colombian institutions like the Supreme Court and the Prosecutor's Office have played an important role. We value the transparency and determination of the Government of Colombia in confronting this situation.

My own view, and Administration policy, is that there can be no refuge for those who commit human rights abuses, and those who break the laws against abuses must be held accountable. We will not tolerate any kind of complicity with drug trafficking or paramilitarism. The Colombian government and its uniformed services must thoroughly investigate and prosecute all such cases in a timely manner or jeopardize USG funding and support.

To address some of our human rights concerns, Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) funds, as well as part of the FY 2006 emergency supplemental, are being used to strengthen the demobilization process and assist in investigation of crimes committed by paramilitaries. For example, we are providing support to the Organization of American States' (OAS) mission to verify the efficacy of demobilization on the ground.

Ongoing Challenges

The United States and Colombia understand that major challenges remain. For example, drug traffickers never lack for aggressive and innovative measures to counter our efforts. Knowing that traffickers are pruning and replanting coca destroyed by our eradication campaign, the United States and Colombia have established a scientific research station to help us better understand the characteristics of coca plants and the methods of coca farmers. We expect that the findings of this research will help improve the reliability of our cultivation estimates.

Traffickers continue to shift routes and methods to avoid detection and interception, and, while our detection and monitoring capacity has improved, there are simply not enough USG or host nation assets available to respond to all of the actionable targets.

As the traffickers keep changing tactics, we must be flexible in our response. We are now discussing a pilot program with the GOC which would concentrate sufficient resources to establish firm security in one limited area, for example the Department of Nariño, make the vicinity uncomfortable for narcotics production and trafficking; and provide government services and foster alternative development projects. We would enhance the use of manual eradication and use law enforcement techniques like seizing property and equipment used in growing coca. This approach would be more comprehensive than previous Colombian efforts which counted only on military participation and had the military objective of defeating the FARC.

Of course, our support to Colombia has an impact in the region. While cultivation has apparently not spilled over into Colombia's neighbors, Ecuador and Venezuela, we have seen an upswing in trafficking of Colombian drugs through those countries. We have seen worrisome reports of increased activity by Mexican and Colombian drug trafficking organizations in Peru and Bolivia. The finished product remains difficult to interdict once it reaches the transit zone, and illicit proceeds have already been paid to the growers, producers, and transit agents by the time it is seized. Our best counter to this illicit activity is still to stop the cultivation of drug crops at their source and to interdict shipments before they leave the source country. In order to succeed, we have to build capacities and support law enforcement efforts of other countries in the region to the maximum extent possible.

Conclusion

President Bush and Secretary Rice have reaffirmed to President Uribe our commitment to support Colombia in its efforts to combat narcoterrorism. Plan Colombia worked, and U.S. support has been critical. The political, military, economic, and counternarcotics landscape in Colombia has changed in the last six years. Colombia is a safer and stronger partner today because of our combined efforts to combat drugs and terrorism, but there is work still to be done, and we must not abandon our successful joint efforts with one of our closest partners in either Hemisphere.

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