
Andean Counterdrug Initiative

By

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We asked for \$731 million in fiscal year 2003 for this program and we in turn owe you a discussion and demonstration that this is a wise investment that will be well-spent. As a Vietnam veteran, I consider it crucial to start off with this point: this is not our war. It is not our war in the sense that we have no intention of putting American soldiers, sailors, airmen or Marines into combat in the war on drugs. The Byrd Amendment does give us the ability to have up to 400 military and 400 civilian personnel in the field at any given time, and as of July 2002, we had 170 U.S. military personnel and 228 U.S. civilian contractors in Colombia in support of Andean Counterdrug Initiative. These individuals are providing advice, support, and training of human-rights vetted military units and that is all.

Make no mistake, this is our war in the sense that it is the U.S. domestic appetite for illegal drugs that helps sustain the Andean region's misery. According to Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), Americans consumed about 259 metric tons of cocaine and 13 metric tons of heroin at a cost of more than 45 billion dollars in the year 2000. Almost 90 percent of the cocaine and over half of the heroin trafficked to the United States that year came from Colombia alone. We have a responsibility to address our own substance abuse problem in this country, but we also have a responsibility to address the problems our people help create in the Andean countries that are the major sources of supply. And the problems are serious and extensive. The narcotics trade imposes a very high cost on the ordinary citizens of the region, particularly in Colombia. Moreover, the cost to ordinary citizens has risen dramatically as organized, armed groups have joined the drug trade.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and also to a lesser extent the National Liberation Army (ELN) may bill themselves as opposition or anti-guerrilla movements, but over the last decade they have increasingly made the leap into criminal activity. These are narcotics traffickers, plain and simple. We estimate that the FARC and the AUC derive as much as 70 percent of their income from the drug trade whether it is protection money paid by cocoa leaf growers or direct involvement in cultivation and sales. And these groups use terror as a tactic to keep the money flowing and the population and politicians in line. They have earned the label this nation has given them as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

Having said that, I do not mean to suggest that these groups are terrorist organizations with global reach; they are not. This is not al Qaeda or Hizballah. But the reach of their drugs is certainly global, and their nefarious means and ends to protect that trade are consistent with the methods of other terrorist groups. And it is the civilian population that has borne the brunt of these methods. Last year, more than 3,000 Colombians lost their lives in the crossfire; another 3,000 were kidnapped and held for ransom, including children. A far greater number by more than a factor of ten fled the violence and left their homes, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Of course, the FARC and the AUC have singled out politicians for special intimidation the FARC has threatened to kill every mayor in the country. But consider what the actions of this group mean to ordinary citizens: all it takes is to be in the wrong place at the wrong time to become a victim in Colombia. It is not safe to drive down the roads outside of any city you can be kidnapped anywhere, at any time. It is not safe to be in the same city as a political leader: last month, the FARC fired mortar shells in an attempt to assassinate President Uribe at his inauguration; all missed the mark and killed 21 people in a poor neighborhood of Bogota. It is not safe to live in your own town: in May, a FARC-fired mortar shell landed on the roof of a church in Bojaya, killing 119 villagers who had taken refuge there in an attempt to escape the fighting.

It is understandable that the people in the region are tired of this, and no place more so than in Colombia. So it follows that in the last elections, the people of Colombia gave Alvaro Uribe and his party a large margin of victory and a strong mandate for change. The United States, in turn, needs to give President Uribe the opportunity and the tools to be successful not because we owe it to him or because we like him, but because success is our goal.

In turn, the Government of Colombia has to meet its own obligations. Quite simply, U.S. funds cannot be a substitute for a commitment on the part of the people of Colombia. And indeed, the government of Colombia has put in place key reforms and spent or mobilized \$3 billion dollars-worth of projects in support of Plan Colombia, everything from building roads to providing humanitarian assistance to supporting local eradication efforts.

Of course, Colombia's misery is fungible; if we concentrate solely on fixing the problem in Colombia, we will see the narcotics trade relocating to greener pastures across the region. And tacit support or the failure to combat traffickers by other states in the region helps keep these criminals in business. The Andean Counterdrug Initiative is in part meant to use United States funds as leverage to motivate and sustain a region wide commitment to the counternarcotics fight. Bolivia, for example, has achieved a 70 percent reduction in cocoa cultivation over the last six years that is the sort of success we will be looking for.

The United States should not stand alone in the international community in providing such support. And indeed, we see some consensus in principle European nations, the European Commission, Canada, Japan and the United Nations have pledged up to \$600 million to the Andean counternarcotics effort. Unfortunately, their disbursements are not matching their generous intent. Another major priority for the Department of State will be to work with these like-minded nations to ensure that commitments made are commitments delivered.

Having said that, I want to tell you how we are spending U.S. money. There are three major goals for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative: eradication, interdiction, and alternative development. In the first six months of this year, we sprayed a herbicide on some 90,000 hectares of cocoa fields in Colombia that exceeds the total sprayed in the previous year. In 2003, our goal is to spray 200,000 hectares. For opium poppy, we have already sprayed 1,837 hectares this year, which is a significant portion of the total land under cultivation for this crop some 6,500 hectares, according to the CIA. The Environmental Protection Agency and the USDA have provided us with extensive background and research on the safety of the herbicide we are using, which is also used domestically in the United States. We have solid evidence that the spraying is not hazardous to human health, and no credible evidence that spraying has caused any damage to people or the environment in Colombia.

As for interdiction efforts, most of our involvement has been to train and equip military and police forces in the region. This year, Colombian police already have seized tons of cocaine, opium and other drugs, destroyed scores of labs, and arrested more than 11,000 people. Military forces have also seen key successes, particularly in protecting oil pipelines. In 2001, rebel groups

attacked the second largest pipeline in the country 170 times. In the first half of 2002, effective surveillance and enforcement by Colombian armed forces and police has dramatically decreased the number of attacks and led to the arrests of 42 terrorists only three people had been arrested for such attacks in the previous 15 years. U.S. training and equipment has a key role to play in locking in this success. Our assistance is especially important when you consider that the attacks on the pipelines not only cost the government of Colombia current income, but also investor confidence which is especially cruel in the today's economic climate in South America.

As I have mentioned, cruelty is the stock in trade of these terrorist organizations. On the other hand, however distasteful we may find it, many of these groups have some public support, particularly in rural areas. In Bolivia, 20 percent of the voting public supported a cocoa grower for President in their last elections. Why? Is that of necessity a vote for lawlessness, kidnapping and murder? I don't think so. I believe it is, for the most part, a protest vote an unmistakable challenge for the government of Bolivia to meet the needs of her people. Certainly the same forces are at work in Colombia.

And this points to the importance of alternative development, which helps us to get at the underlying conditions that allow these groups to attract public support, new recruits, and hiding places. Alternative development, a program we have developed in cooperation with the government of Colombia, is aimed at voluntary eradication, public works projects, income generation, and improving local governance. The specific projects, whether it is building a well or a micro-enterprise, are shepherded by AID and local non-governmental organizations. In the fifteen months that we have had this program in place, local communities have voluntarily destroyed more than 8,000 hectares of illicit crops in order to participate. We have a direct interest in seeing that the people in these areas, often remote and sparsely populated, have a better way to support themselves.

We also have an interest and, indeed, a responsibility in seeing that there are basic protections for the rights of all citizens of the Andean region. This is a serious concern for us in Colombia, in particular. This year, we are satisfied that the Colombian armed forces met the rather narrow requirements of the law, as I certified on September 9th. But I also recognize that meeting these criteria is not in itself sufficient. These conditions are the minimum requirement for us to be able to proceed at all. Military and paramilitary collaboration already have been a focus of our dialogue with President Uribe and will continue to be not just a point of discussion, but potentially a point of departure. The answer to the problems of narcotics trafficking and terrorism lie in promoting the rule of law and professional armed forces.

In order for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative to succeed in the long run, this commitment to democratic institutions will be crucial. But the U.S. also needs to contribute strong support to enforcement and alternative development programs now and for the immediate future. We cannot have one at the expense of the other if we want anything other than a trophy to put on the mantle, a short term victory with no lasting effect. We can wipe out all the crops and jail all the farmers we want, but as long as it is the sole source of income in rural areas, cocoa will continue to grow like a fungus.

And I want to close by reassuring this Caucus that our ultimate goal is actually to put ourselves out of business. This initiative was never meant to be a permanent feature of our foreign policy; but rather a capital investment in a long-term struggle. We aim to help our partners regain control of their territory and then give them the tools to maintain this control. When you consider that the American public spends something like \$45 billion dollars on cocaine and heroin every year plus the costs in health care and crime that result from that consumption \$731 million is actually a modest proposal.