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THE DRUG WAR

Colombia Is Implementing
Antidrug Efforts, but Impact Is
Uncertain

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our recent report on the progress and problems that U.S. and Colombian agencies have experienced in implementing U.S. antidrug programs in Colombia between fiscal years 1990 and 1992. This report is a follow-up to our initial report that was issued in September 1991.¹

In August 1989, President Bush approved the Andean Strategy, a major component of the U.S. national drug control strategy, which is designed to help reduce the supply of illegal drugs being shipped to the United States.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

In the 3 years since the Andean Strategy was announced, Colombia has demonstrated its commitment and political will by taking action to support U.S. counternarcotics objectives. It has applied pressure against drug-trafficking activities through law enforcement and military actions and has disrupted drug-trafficking activities in Colombia and, as a result, U.S. officials believe these programs are effective. The effectiveness of Colombia's efforts and U.S. programs could not be determined however, because U.S. officials lack the data needed to make such an assessment--specifically the amount of cocaine being shipped from Colombia to the United States.

My testimony point out that various obstacles have hindered the implementation and effectiveness of U.S. efforts in Colombia. These obstacles included the limited ability of some Colombian agencies to plan and implement effective programs, increased insurgency and narcoterrorist activities, the expansion of drug trafficking activities into opium cultivation, corruption within the Colombian government, and the lack of effective antidrug programs in other neighboring countries. Further my testimony describes certain U.S. management problems that have hindered the planning and implementation of U.S. antidrug programs in Colombia.

-- The State Department reduced the funding for military and law enforcement programs because of budgetary constraints. These constraints have impeded and will continue to impede programs that U.S. Embassy officials believe are needed to enhance Colombia's antidrug capabilities. U.S. Embassy officials stated, however, that even if the enhancement programs were fully funded, they did not know whether these programs would fulfill U.S. antidrug objectives or whether more funds would be needed. We believe that it will be difficult to determine what funding levels are needed to fully meet U.S. antidrug objectives

¹Drug War: Observations on U.S. Counternarcotics Aid to Colombia (GAO/NSIAD-91-296, Sept. 30, 1991).

because the cartels are flexible and can easily adjust their operations to elude law enforcement efforts, and are expanding their activities in Colombia and elsewhere.

We also note that poor coordination among U.S. agencies has resulted in the inefficient use of resources, and weaknesses in inventory and financial management practices affecting Colombian national police programs are hindering program effectiveness.

Regarding the oversight of U.S. programs, U.S. military officials have been slow to implement end-use monitoring plans and U.S. Embassy officials cannot provide assurance that U.S. policies regarding the use of aid and human rights are being met. Our recent report makes recommendations to the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy regarding the need to reevaluate antidrug programs in Colombia and throughout the Andean region and to the Secretary of State to improve the management and oversight of U.S.-provided aid.

BACKGROUND

In August 1989, President Bush approved the Andean Strategy, a major component of the U.S. national drug control strategy, which is designed to help reduce the supply of illegal drugs, including cocaine and heroin, being shipped to the United States. Under that strategy, the United States provides increased levels of military, law enforcement, and economic aid to Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru to assist them to disrupt drug-trafficking activities. The United States places special emphasis on Colombia because it is the leading source country for processed cocaine. Furthermore, Colombia is the home of two major cartels, Medellin and Cali, that are responsible for most of the drug-related activity.

Simply put, the goal of U.S. counternarcotics programs in Colombia is to assist that government in its efforts to disrupt and ultimately dismantle drug-trafficking activities within its borders. Between fiscal years 1990 and 1992, the United States agreed to provide about \$504.3 million worth of aid to assist the Colombian government to achieve this goal. Of this amount, the United States agreed to provide Colombia with \$397.2 million worth of military and law enforcement aid and guaranteed loans from the Export-Import Bank to improve the capabilities of law enforcement and military organizations to disrupt drug-trafficking activities. The remaining \$107.1 million was economic aid designed to improve Colombia's balance of payments, strengthen its judiciary and economy, and support poppy eradication operations of the police.

PROGRAMS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED, BUT IMPACT IS UNCERTAIN

The United States and Colombia are undertaking a variety of programs and initiatives to meet U.S. counternarcotics objectives

for Colombia. Colombia has increased efforts designed to disrupt some drug-related activities of the major cartels. Although U.S. officials admit that these efforts have not significantly reduced the availability of cocaine in the United States, they believe that the efforts are effective and should be continued. However, we do not believe that the effectiveness of these efforts can be assessed because U.S. officials lack the data needed to make such a determination. Furthermore, the potential impact that U.S. programs are having on drug-related activities are affected by various obstacles in and around Colombia.

Antidrug Programs Are Being Implemented

U.S. aid is being used to implement various programs designed to meet U.S. antidrug objectives in Colombia. For example:

- The first objective is to strengthen the institutional and political will of the Colombian government to take action against drug-trafficking activities. Improving the judicial system is a high priority of this objective. In 1990, the U.S. Agency for International Development began developing a 6-year, \$36 million program designed to improve Colombia's judicial system. We found that progress is beginning to be made on improving that system.
- The second and third objectives relate to improving the capabilities that are needed for the Colombian government to conduct counternarcotics operations against drug-related activities. Most of the \$397.2 million in military and law enforcement aid and guaranteed loans have provided the Colombian law enforcement and military organizations with the equipment, training, and support needed to improve their capabilities.
- The fourth objective is to strengthen Colombia's economy. As of April 1992, the United States had provided about \$41 million in Economic Support Funds to reduce Colombia's debt to the United States and multilateral lenders. This allowed Colombia to use its own funds to soften the impact of reducing the role of illicit drugs in the economy, financing alternative development projects, and supporting drug awareness programs.

Colombia Is Taking Action to Disrupt Drug-Trafficking Activities

Our review indicated that Colombia's actions are disrupting drug-trafficking activities. Between calendar years 1990 and 1992, the Colombian government seized 177 metric tons of cocaine, destroyed 737 labs, and destroyed over 13,000 hectares of opium poppy.

Both the United States and Colombia made law enforcement operations against the Medellin cartel, headed by Pablo Escobar, their initial priority because of the cartel's dominant role in cocaine

production and terrorism. In March 1993, the Drug Enforcement Administration reported that these efforts have resulted in disrupting many of the cartel's activities. In addition, Pablo Escobar turned himself into the government for trial in 1991. Although he escaped from prison in mid-1992, U.S. officials believe that his power has substantially declined.

The Colombian government has also begun to take law enforcement action against the Cali cartel. One operation resulted in the seizure of more than \$54 million from bank accounts maintained in five countries.

Despite Colombia's efforts to disrupt drug-trafficking activities, U.S. officials admitted that cocaine remains readily available to U.S. users. However, these officials believe that U.S. programs in Colombia should continue to be funded because they are effective in disrupting drug-trafficking activities and in meeting U.S. counternarcotics goals.

Data to Measure Program Impacts and Contributions Are Lacking

We do not believe that U.S. officials can determine the impact of efforts to disrupt drug-trafficking activities or their contribution to reduce the supply of cocaine being shipped from Colombia to the United States because they lack the data to make this assessment. U.S. officials recognize that problems exist with the data that is being used to measure effectiveness.

Statistics such as seizures, labs destroyed, number of arrests, or changes in the prices and availability of cocaine are frequently used as measures of effectiveness. However, these data by themselves cannot be used to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. For example, while increased seizures are generally viewed as an indicator of success, a decrease in seizures does not necessarily mean that a program is less effective than it was previously. Furthermore, estimates used to determine drug availability and consumption are generally not designed to measure the effectiveness of individual U.S. interdiction programs.

To evaluate the impact of Colombia's antidrug efforts to disrupt drug-related activities or reduce the supply of cocaine being shipped from Colombia to the United States, U.S. officials would need information on the amount of cocaine being shipped into the United States, the deterrent effect that these efforts have on drug-related activities, and the effectiveness of interdiction alternatives. This data is not available. Without this data it is difficult to determine the impact and contribution that programs in Colombia are making in meeting U.S. antidrug goals. For example, without knowing the amount of cocaine being shipped out of Colombia into the United States, neither the percentage of cocaine being

interdicted nor the effectiveness of antidrug operations in reducing the amount of cocaine can be easily determined.

Long-Term Commitment Is Needed

Even though U.S. officials recognize that they lack the data needed to determine program success, they believe that the national drug strategy's goals of disrupting drug-trafficking activities and reducing the supply of cocaine entering the United States will require a long-term commitment on the part of the United States and Colombia to continue law enforcement efforts.

According to U.S. officials, Colombia's efforts against the cartels are similar to U.S. law enforcement efforts against organized crime, which has existed for many years. In fact, these officials stated that Colombia faces even more significant obstacles than the United States does because it has limited resources and technologies available to fight the cartels and the cartels are as powerful or more powerful than many criminal organizations in the United States.

Obstacles Hinder U.S. Programs

Various obstacles in and around Colombia are hindering the effectiveness of U.S. programs in Colombia. They include the following:

- Colombia's ability to plan and implement effective counternarcotics programs has weaknesses. Various U.S. reports show that some civilian agencies as well as the police have not been effective in planning or implementing programs.
- Increased active insurgency and narcoterrorism activities in large sections of Colombia hinder the government's efforts to maintain the presence needed to sustain counternarcotics pressure. Two guerilla groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, are reportedly involved in drug-trafficking activities in Colombia.
- The cartels are expanding their activities into heroin. U.S. estimates show that in less than 2 years, poppy cultivation in Colombia has expanded from about 2,500 to about 32,700 hectares. In early 1992, the Colombian government formally approved an aerial eradication program to supplement its manual program because it was concerned about this expansion. Under the program, the police are using helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft originally provided by the United States for cocaine operations for aerial poppy eradication. As a result, cocaine operations have declined, while poppy eradication operations have increased. Current plans show that increases in aid will be needed to continue operations against cocaine interdiction and poppy eradication.

- Various U.S. Embassy reports show that corruption exists throughout the government. Corruption was a primary reason why Pablo Escobar, head of the Medellin cartel, escaped in mid-1992 from prison to avoid prosecution.
- Colombian programs will not succeed unless other regional antidrug programs are effective. We have reviewed programs in Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, and Mexico.² Our reports show that significant obstacles have also impeded the effectiveness of these programs. U.S. officials stated that even if Colombia were successful in eliminating drug-trafficking activities within its borders, the trafficking would spill over into other countries, especially countries that were not aggressive in interdiction efforts.

U.S. MANAGEMENT DIFFICULTIES HINDER IMPLEMENTATION OF COUNTERNARCOTICS PROGRAMS

Both the U.S. Embassy and the Defense Department reported numerous problems in planning and implementing counternarcotics programs in Colombia. For example the U.S. Embassy had numerous problems in procuring equipment for the police in a timely, efficient, and effective manner.

We also found several problems that affected the ability of the United States to implement programs in a timely, efficient, and effective manner. These problems included the inability of the State Department to provide funding levels needed to implement programs that U.S. officials believe are needed to meet U.S. antidrug objectives, the lack of effective coordination between the Departments of State and Defense, and inventory and financial management.

Budgetary Constraints Limit Available Funding to Support Programs

To implement the counternarcotics strategy in Colombia, the United States has primarily relied on two funding sources--the Foreign Military Financing Program (FMFP) and the International Narcotics Control Program, both managed by the State Department. Since 1992, the State Department has not allocated the funding needed to support the programs that U.S. officials in Colombia believe are needed to meet U.S. counternarcotics objectives.

²The Drug War: U.S. Programs in Peru Face Serious Obstacles (GAO/NSIAD-92-36, Oct. 21, 1991); The Drug War: Extent of Problems in Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela (GAO/NSIAD-92-226, June 5, 1992); The War on Drugs: Narcotics Control in Panama (GAO/NSIAD-91-233, July 16, 1991); and Drug Control: Revised Drug Interdiction Approach Is Needed in Mexico (GAO/NSIAD-93-152, May 10, 1993).

In fiscal years 1992 and 1993, U.S. officials in Colombia estimated that \$116 million worth of FMFP aid would be needed to implement various programs to improve the capabilities of the police and military organizations involved in counternarcotics operations. However, because of budget constraints, the State Department allocated only \$73 million. As a result many of the counternarcotics requirements for law enforcement and military organizations could not be funded.

In fiscal years 1992 and 1993, the U.S. Embassy estimated that law enforcement programs funded under the International Narcotics Control Program would need about \$62.1 million worth of aid to support several existing projects. However, because of budgetary constraints, the State Department provided only about \$45.4 million, which was not considered to be adequate to fully support even one of the several projects.

Budgetary constraints may continue to affect the U.S. ability to provide the funds that may be needed to meet additional requirements that U.S. officials believe Colombia needs to fight drug-related activities. In early 1992, the U.S. Embassy recognized that additional requirements, not included in original plans, would be needed to strengthen the counternarcotics capabilities of both law enforcement and military organizations. In reviewing an enhancement plan developed by the U.S. Embassy, the executive branch decided that before any funding would be provided, two criteria would have to be met. First, requirements had to meet critical needs, and second, the Colombian government had to be able to absorb the equipment. Based on its analysis, the executive branch identified about \$12 million worth of additional aid to provide. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, this aid was delivered in April and May 1993. Even though the U.S. Embassy believes that additional requirements are needed, the executive branch has not included more funding for the plan in fiscal years 1993 and 1994.

U.S. Embassy officials stated that these actions will affect implementation of the enhanced programs in Colombia. However, they admitted that even if all the requirements identified in the enhancement plan were fully funded, they did not know whether the funding would be adequate to fully meet U.S. antidrug objectives or whether additional funds would be needed.

We believe that it is difficult to determine what funding levels will be needed to achieve U.S. antidrug objectives in Colombia because the cartels are flexible and can easily adjust their operations to elude law enforcement efforts. Also, they are expanding their activities (i.e. relocating activities in sections of Colombia where the government cannot maintain control and diversifying operations into opium-related drug-trafficking activities) within Colombia and elsewhere.

Coordination and Management of Inventory and Finance Difficulties

Our review also indicated that the Departments of State and Defense were not effectively coordinating some of their programs. This lack of coordination has led to an inefficient use of resources. For example, reports indicated that the Colombian air force could not use some U.S.-provided equipment because it was either the wrong type or was missing parts. We also found that various offices within the U.S. Embassy had not effectively implemented a police helicopter training course. As a result, the program was charged a cancellation fee of \$297,000 when the police did not send students to the course in January 1992.

We also found that, because of ineffective inventory and financial management practices, the State Department could not provide adequate logistics support in a timely manner. The resulting lack of spare parts hindered U.S. ability to meet its goal of maintaining a 70-percent availability rate for police aircraft. Various administrative financial management problems also exist. For example, contractors were not paid in a timely manner for services performed, which has led to difficulties in supporting the antidrug programs and has had a detrimental effect on antidrug operations.

OVERSIGHT OF U.S. PROGRAMS IS LACKING

U.S. military officials have been slow to implement the monitoring plans that they believe are needed to provide adequate assurances that U.S. aid is being used as intended. Although U.S. officials informed us in 1991 that such plans were being implemented, they had not been fully implemented at the time of our review. Furthermore, U.S. officials did not have procedures or the data to determine whether units involved in human rights abuses had received U.S. aid. We found two instances where individuals reportedly involved in human rights abuses belonged to particular units that had received U.S. aid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because (1) U.S. officials lack the data needed to evaluate program effectiveness, (2) various obstacles impede program implementation, (3) additional resource requirements have been identified to meet the expanding drug trade, and (4) U.S. budgetary constraints will continue, we have recommended that the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, in conjunction with other agencies, reevaluate U.S. antidrug programs in Colombia and throughout the Andean region to determine what the U.S. antidrug objectives should be for each country. We also recommended that the Director evaluate what types of programs should be included, what funding would be necessary to support these programs, and whether this funding would ensure that the programs could significantly disrupt

drug-trafficking activities and reduce the supply of cocaine being shipped to the United States. As part of this reevaluation, a quantitative baseline should be established to evaluate progress that U.S. antidrug programs in Colombia and the other Andean countries are having on meeting established U.S. antidrug objectives and goals.

Our report also includes other recommendations to the Secretary of State that are designed to improve the management and oversight of U.S.-provided aid to ensure that it is used in an efficient and effective manner and in accordance with U.S. policies.

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This concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions you or the Subcommittee may have regarding our review.

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