

Collateral Damage: U.S. Drug Control Efforts in the Andes

Coletta A. Youngers

Senior Associate,

The Washington Office on Latin America

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The dramatic increase in drug trafficking poses real dangers to countries throughout the Western Hemisphere. Drug trafficking in the Andes breeds criminality, exacerbates political violence, and hence greatly increases problems of citizen security. It has corrupted and further weakened local governments, judiciaries and police forces and rends the social fabric, particularly in poor urban areas where both drug abuse and drug-related violence are rampant. Illicit drug abuse—a minor problem in Latin America a decade ago—has reached epidemic proportions in cities such as Caracas, Medellín and Lima. The physical and moral damage to individuals, communities and societies of the illicit drug trade is creating new challenges for Andean societies, already struggling to overcome endemic poverty and injustice.

As the world's largest consumer of illicit drugs, the United States also confronts a myriad of problems stemming from illicit drug abuse and drug-related violence. The policy response developed in Washington, however, has largely responded to domestic political considerations and a desire to be “tough” in the combating the illegal drug trade; hence, the drug war rhetoric which prevails today. Through its diplomatic and economic leverage, the United States has largely dictated the policies adopted by the Andean governments, often over the objections of both local governments and important segments of civil society and at times draining scarce resources from other national priorities. Apart from breeding resentment and tensions in bilateral relations, the U.S.

approach to international drug control has also left a path of collateral damage in its wake.

The U.S. government's "war on drugs" in Latin America relies on Latin American military and police forces to play the lead role in combating the illicit drug trade, and those forces receive significant injections of U.S. military training and assistance for their collaboration. Yet the dominant role assigned to local security forces threatens to undermine the region's fragile transitions toward more democratic societies following decades of often brutal military rule. With the transition to civilian elected governments in South America have come widespread efforts to reduce the power of local security forces, limiting their authority to the control of national borders, and to enhance the control of civilian elected governments over local militaries and intelligence services. Washington, its claims to the contrary notwithstanding, erodes these efforts by providing the resources, training and doctrinal justification for militaries to play a significant role in domestic counternarcotics operations, a law enforcement function reserved in most democracies for civilian police. In so doing, the U.S. government legitimates Latin American security forces in a fundamental internal security role, now directed at "new enemies," and confirms them as actors in domestic politics. More often than not, U.S. support is provided prior to any meaningful institutional reforms that would ensure greater civilian control or respect for human rights.

U.S. officials often justify the embrace of local militaries as necessary to confront the firepower of drug traffickers and as a result of rampant corruption among police forces. Yet the long-term consequences of this approach may be even more detrimental than drug trafficking itself to prospects for democratic consolidation and regional

stability. Nor is it clear that bringing in the military will allow local governments to circumvent the very real problem of corruption. As former Bolivian president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada once said: “When you have a corrupt chief of police, you fire him. When you have a corrupt chief of the army, he fires you.”¹ The lack of accountability and transparency of the region’s armed forces make rooting out the inevitable corruption that accompanies anti-drug efforts even more difficult and controlling potential human rights abuses next to impossible.

Through its drug policy, the United States has forged unholy alliances with militaries that have deplorable human rights records. In Bolivia, U.S. drug policy pits coca farmers against the Bolivian police and army, generating conflict, violence and systematic abuses. In Peru, the U.S. government provided counter-drug aid to the Peruvian National Intelligence Service (SIN), responsible for death squad activity and the significant set-backs to democracy in that country between the April 1992 *autogolpe*, or presidential coup, and Fujimori’s dramatic fall from power nine years later. Perhaps most disturbingly, in the name of fighting drugs, the U.S. government has become directly involved in Colombia’s brutal counterinsurgency campaign and is providing millions of dollars in economic assistance and training to Colombian military forces, some of whom are allied with the right-wing paramilitary groups responsible for the majority of human rights abuses being committed in that country today. Washington has slid down the slippery slope of increasing involvement in yet another counterinsurgency quagmire in Latin America.

¹ Thomas Kahn, “Bolivians Fear a U.S.-led War on Drugs,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 1991.

THE ILLICIT DRUG TRADE

The Andean region is the source of the bulk of illicit drugs which ultimately wind up on U.S. city streets. Cocaine, derived from the leaf of the coca plant, is produced primarily in the Andean countries of Colombia, Bolivia and Peru. The coca leaves are mixed with easily obtainable chemicals and other products to make coca paste, which is then transported to laboratories and processed into powdered cocaine. Colombia has become the principal supplier of heroin – until recently not produced in the region – to the Eastern United States. A broad network of dealers and transportation routes is in place to export these illicit drugs to the United States and other areas of the world.

The areas under coca cultivation, drug trafficking cartels and trafficking routes have proliferated since the drug war was launched. Coca production can be compared to a balloon: squeezing it in one area merely causes it to pop up somewhere else. In Peru for example, coca production used to be confined to the Upper Huallaga Valley. Coca eradication efforts and the mysterious spread of a fungus in coca growing regions has led to the spread of new production areas in the lower and middle Huallaga, the Apurimac river valley, and other areas. Just as the Peruvian Air Force and the U.S. Southern Command (SouthCom) began intercepting airplanes flying with coca paste from Peru to Colombia for refinement into cocaine, coca production in Colombia exploded.

A similar trend has occurred with cocaine production and trafficking. Following the crack-down on Colombia's Medellín cartel, the Cali cartel quickly replaced it. Once most of the Cali cartel leadership was behind bars, a "democratization" of the drug trade in Colombia took place, as smaller, regionally-oriented networks of drug traffickers --

much more difficult to infiltrate and dismantle -- took root around the country. No longer confined to Colombia, drug mafias proliferate in Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela and Brazil. Traffickers have proven adept at quickly adapting to drug control strategies, developing new methods and routes to circumvent detection.

Fortune magazine once described the cocaine trade as “probably the fastest growing and unquestionably the most profitable” industry in the world.² In fact, the illicit drug trade has become an escape valve for Andean economies, which have fared poorly over the last two decades. Particularly in the boom years when the cocaine trade took off in the mid to late-1980s, coca and cocaine dollars helped alleviate Peru and Bolivia’s severe balance-of-payments problems and at least partially compensated for the lack of new loans and investments. In recent years, as coca eradication efforts have succeeded in reducing overall coca cultivation in Bolivia, the local economy in the Cochabamba area has bottomed out and malnutrition and related diseases have sky-rocketed in the Chapare coca growing region – clear indicators of the dependence on the revenues derived from the coca trade. Even in Colombia, with by far the strongest economy of the three, the drug trade has helped lubricate the economy and provides substantial employment opportunities, albeit with risks involved.

As the gap between the rich and poor has widened following a decade of free market reforms, for many of the region’s poor coca production has become a means of survival. In Bolivia, following neo-liberal reforms which devastated the tin industry and led to widespread factory shut-downs, people flocked to the Chapare region. In

² “The Drug Trade,” *Fortune*, 20 June 1998.

Colombia, peasants forced off their land as a result of political violence and poor urban dwellers with no prospect of legal employment make their way to the southern coca growing regions, either to plant coca or work as *raspachines*, or harvesters of the coca leaves. There are simply too many poor people, and too much land suitable for coca production, to put a lid on illicit coca production. Likewise, rampant unemployment and under-employment in urban areas ensures a steady supply of recruits for other stages of the drug industry, from those who transport coca paste to others higher up the drug trafficking ranks.

U.S. INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY

As a result, the Andean region is the frontline in the U.S. war on drugs. Successive U.S. presidents have sought to target the “source” of production: the coca leaf, a traditional crop among Andean peasant communities. While the roots of the drug war go back to the Nixon administration, the launching of the “Andean Initiative” by President Bush in 1989 focused attention on source country efforts. The stated objectives of the five-year strategy were to strengthen the political will and institutional capabilities of the Andean governments to combat drugs, increase the effectiveness of local law enforcement and military anti-drug activities, and work with these countries to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations. The thrust of the source-country approach is to make the illicit drug trade more dangerous and costly, thereby driving down production and availability, driving up prices, and ultimately discouraging U.S. citizens from buying and using illicit drugs.

A final objective of the Andean strategy was to strengthen and diversify the legitimate economies of the Andean countries so that they could overcome the destabilizing effect of eliminating coca and cocaine as a major source of income. However, economic assistance was originally to be provided only after success was obtained in significantly disrupting the coca and cocaine trades. Security assistance, on the other hand, was front-loaded in the five-year plan. The Andean Initiative was centered on a dramatic escalation of support for military and police forces in the region, promotion of a direct hands-on role for both local and U.S. military forces in combating drug trafficking and production, and an enhanced role for some local intelligence services in domestic intelligence gathering operations.

President Clinton followed the path laid out by his predecessor and the Andean Initiative. Initially, the Clinton administration did adopt a different rhetoric. It promised to focus on treatment on demand for drug users and education at home, and administration officials largely dropped the use of war metaphors and paid greater lip-service to promoting democratic institutions and economic development in drug-producing countries. The new rhetoric of the first Clinton administration was, however, short-lived. Over the course of his administration, approximately 65 percent of the federal drug control budget continued to be allocated annually for supply-side efforts, at home and abroad. The vast majority of resources allocated for international drug control programs continue to be provided for law enforcement and military efforts, while economic assistance has steadily declined as foreign aid has dwindled.

Following a review of international drug control programs by the National Security Council shortly after assuming office, the Clinton administration adopted a

strategy of prioritizing Andean “source country efforts.” Funding was scaled back for interdiction efforts in the “transit countries” of Central America and the Caribbean and along the U.S. border, and additional funding was sought for coca eradication and cocaine interdiction programs in the Andean countries of Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. (Towards the end of his term, President Bush had increasingly targeted funding toward the transit countries, as source-country efforts failed to bear fruit.) Clinton’s first Drug Czar, Lee Brown, liked to use a bee analogy: “It is easier to go to the beehive than it is to get the bees as they fly across the U.S. border.”³ Throughout the Clinton administration, the Andes remained the centerpiece of his administration’s international drug control policy.

By the mid-1990s, the Clinton administration—backed by the Republican-controlled Congress—had dramatically increased funding for international counternarcotics assistance and that assistance has continued to increase ever since. Funding first surged in Fiscal Year (FY) 1997, when the budget for international drug control programs doubled from the previous year reaching \$213 million, in addition to hundreds of millions of dollars more allocated through the Pentagon. Two years later another jump in funding occurred, as Congress appropriated an immense increase just prior to the November 1998 Congressional elections. In the FY1999 foreign aid bill, the U.S. Congress approved \$270 million for international drug control efforts and then passed a supplemental spending bill which included an additional \$690 million annually over a three year period in support to local military and police forces, along with a virtual slush fund for U.S. military antinarcotics operations.

³ Lee Brown, interview with author, Washington, D.C., February 4, 1994.

By this time, Colombia was already the third largest recipient of military assistance in the world. But as the 2000 presidential and congressional elections approached, Congress approved another major infusion of aid for international drug control efforts. In addition to nearly \$300 million approved through the normal appropriations procedure, an emergency supplemental aid package for “Plan Colombia” was legislated. The aid package totaled \$1.3 billion over a two year period; while the vast majority was destined for Colombia, some funding was also provided for counternarcotics efforts in Bolivia and Peru and for “forward operating locations,” or FOLs, military bases used to refuel sophisticated U.S. aircraft involved in aerial surveillance of the Andean region to gather counternarcotics intelligence. Nearly one billion dollars was allocated for the Colombian armed forces – almost two million dollars a day over the next two years.

Put forward as a Colombian initiative, Plan Colombia was largely drawn up with the assistance of high-level U.S. policy makers. The original 1998 proposal put forward by President Andrés Pastrana presented a four-pronged approach, with funding to target peace building efforts, economic development, political reform and citizen security. The plan presented to European governments emphasized the first three elements, while the version circulated in Washington targeted the latter, with emphasis on counternarcotics control in coca growing regions. The U.S. government’s assistance for Plan Colombia is “massively skewed towards militarized counternarcotics operations,” according to analyst Winifred Tate.⁴

⁴ Winifred Tate, “Bush Announces ‘Andean Counterdrug Initiative’,” *Cross Currents*, a bimonthly bulletin published by The Washington Office on Latin America, Vol. 3 No. 2, June 2001, p. 9.

With the advent of the George W. Bush administration, U.S. drug policy has come full circle. In the spring of 2001, the new administration presented its “Andean Regional Initiative,” another nearly one billion dollar aid package for FY2002 that is remarkably similar to the former President Bush’s “Andean Initiative.”⁵ While still targeting Colombia, the latest program is designed to address the spill-over affects of the U.S. drug war in Colombia by providing increased assistance to its neighbors, including Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama. However, 55 percent of the total aid package, not yet approved by the U.S. Congress at the time of this writing, is destined for Colombia and of that, 71 percent is for the Colombian security forces.

THE PENTAGON’S ROLE

Security assistance -- aid to local military and police forces -- is one of the principal tools for U.S. agencies waging the drug war abroad. While the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is the primary agency engaged in on-the-ground antinarcotics activities abroad, in 1989 the U.S. Congress designated the Defense Department (DOD) as the “single lead agency” for the detection and monitoring of illicit drug shipments into the United States and expanded its funding for training and equipping local security forces. Although U.S. military personnel were involved in training and transporting foreign antinarcotics personnel outside the country since 1983, both Congress and the Andean Initiative opened the door to an expansion of these roles,

⁵ Of this, \$731 million was included in the FY2002 foreign operations request and the rest is within the Pentagon’s defense budget.

particularly in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia. The establishment of an FOL in Manta, Ecuador has lead to a greatly increased U.S. military presence in that country as well.

In addition to the provision of military hardware, the U.S. military runs an array of counternarcotics-related training programs. U.S. training programs take on many different forms and training teams can be as small as a single officer or as large as an entire platoon. In FY1998, for example, the U.S. Southern Command carried out at least 2,265 “Deployments for Training,” in Latin America and the Caribbean, involving over 48,000 U.S. personnel.⁶ In addition, U.S. Special Forces also carry out their own training deployments, often numbering in the hundreds per year. In-country training is supplemented by instruction at U.S. military facilities. Among the U.S.-based facilities used for counternarcotics instruction is the former School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia. (In January 2001, it was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). It offers officers an eleven week course that provides instruction in planning, leading and executing drug interdiction operations, including infiltration and surveillance techniques; patrolling; demolition and close-quarters combat.⁷ In 1999, the last year for which figures are available, the United States trained a total of about 13,000 Latin American military and police, either in the region or on U.S. bases.⁸

⁶ Adam Isacson and Joy Olson, *Just the Facts: A civilian’s guide to U.S. defense and security assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: The Latin America Working Group and the Center for International Policy, 1999), p. 187.

⁷ Peter Zirnite, *Reluctant Recruits: The U.S. Military and the War on Drugs* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Office on Latin America, August 1997), pp. 17-20.

⁸ Adam Isacson, “*Militarizing Latin America Policy*,” a policy brief published by Foreign Policy in Focus, Vo. 6, No. 21, May 2001, p. 2.

A vital part of their instruction, U.S. officials stress, is human rights training. However, training is provided regardless of the human rights record and political will for human rights-related reforms exhibited by recipient forces. Human rights groups point to other inherent problems with U.S. military counternarcotics training programs. The jungle warfare-type training that DOD provides to Latin American security forces is not well-suited for drug-control efforts, which should be oriented toward sound investigations and criminal prosecutions. Inadequate or illegally obtained evidence continues to be a major obstacle to successful prosecutions, while the killings that occur during violent drug raids often provoke controversy when potentially innocent individuals are involved, such as in the shooting of a civilian aircraft in Peru in April 2001 in which a U.S. Baptist missionary and her infant daughter were killed.

Despite the wide array of DOD counternarcotics programs in place today, the U.S. military's role in counternarcotics efforts was met with some resistance in the Pentagon. Many DOD officials were concerned about becoming involved in a mission which was seen as deviating from the U.S. military's traditional role and which could be potentially detrimental to military readiness in other areas of the world. U.S. military officials were, in short, reluctant recruits to the war on drugs.

However, SouthCom embraced the drug mission enthusiastically. In the wake of the cold war, the drug war provided the rationale for maintaining SouthCom's budget and troop levels as other areas of the world rose in importance on the Pentagon's agenda. SouthCom officials also viewed the drug war as converging with their previous roles and mission; the low-intensity conflict strategies honed during the years of conflict in Central America were quickly adapted to the carry out its new mandate. Perhaps most

importantly, the drug war provided Southcom with a means of not only maintaining, but expanding military-to-military relations throughout the hemisphere.

EXPANDING MILITARY MISSIONS

Counternarcotics training, whether conducted in-country or at U.S. facilities, is viewed by many Pentagon officials as an important opportunity to foster closer ties with the region's armed forces, one of the key goals of DOD's post-cold war strategy for the hemisphere. In a series of interviews conducted by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) in 1990 and 1991, U.S. military officials with responsibility for U.S. security policy toward Latin America underscored the need to not only maintain, but to expand, relations with militaries across the hemisphere. They also stressed the need to enhance military capabilities, even as civilian elected governments took hold. As noted in a 1991 WOLA report:

Currently, in SouthCom's view, the U.S. military's part in promoting democracy...is neither to work for a reduction in Latin American military forces nor to attempt to delimit the role of armed forces in Latin American societies. Rather, the U.S. military role is to continue to strengthen military capabilities on the assumption that democratic values will be transmitted. Enhancing host nation capabilities' appears repeatedly

throughout SouthCom documents as a goal for counterinsurgency, anti-narcotics, and nation-building activities.⁹

In so doing, the Pentagon is seeking to strengthen the very forces that many local governments are trying to keep back in the barracks after decades of military rule and that remain one of the principal obstacles to establishing effective civilian rule in the Andean region.

Some local analysts point out that by circumventing civilian institutions, the U.S. government may be undermining people's faith in those institutions at a time when democratic developments remain delicate and when curbing military autonomy remains critical to future democratization. In some Andean countries, the civilian governments' control of military forces is tenuous at best, and local militaries are increasingly flexing their muscle. For example, in Colombia -- which does not have a history of military rule -- the military's powers have steadily expanded as insurgency movements have grown. In a clear sign of defiance toward the newly-elected government of Andrés Pastrana, the military initially refused to pull its troops out of a designated demilitarization zone established by the government in order to move forward with peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas, the hemisphere's oldest insurgency. As recently as August 2001, a new law was passed and signed by President Pastrana which, according to one journalist, "allows the military to supercede civilian rule in areas declared by the president to be 'theaters of operation' and reduces the

⁹ Charles Call, *Clear and Present Dangers: The U.S. Military and the War on Drugs in the Andes* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Office on Latin America, 1991), p. 41.

chance that army troops could be subjected to thorough human rights investigations by civilian government agencies.”¹⁰

Since the Andean Initiative was first launched, military power and influence has grown in different ways throughout the Andean region. In Bolivia and Venezuela, military officials have entered power through elections. Upon assuming the presidency, this time via elections, former dictator, General Hugo Banzer, announced his intention to elevate the Bolivian military’s role in the country, paving the way for greater Bolivian military involvement in counternarcotics operations. Aborted coup leader Hugo Chavez, now President of Venezuela, likes to don his Colonel’s uniform and has “militarized society to a level not seen since democracy was restored in 1958,” according to one international observer.¹¹ Military officials are found throughout the cabinet and a wide array of other civilian posts, and soldiers are engaged in public works and development activities around the country. The popular uprising and military coup which rocked Ecuador in January 2000, leading to the ouster of the president and a transfer of power to the vice president, provided a potent reminder of the extent to which military forces across the Andean region continue to see themselves as the arbiters of political power.

In Peru, President Alberto Fujimori relied on the active support of the Peru armed forces and the SIN to consolidate his authoritarian rule. The power and political influence of the Peruvian military expanded significantly following the 1992 *autogolpe*, as was evident in its increasing role in the judicial realm, the impunity with which it

¹⁰ Scott Wilson, “Colombia Increases Military’s Power,” *The Washington Post*, 17 August 2001.

¹¹ Anthony Fiaola, “In Venezuela, A Revolution From the Top.” *The Washington Post*, 27 July 1999.

operated and its role in helping President Fujimori secure re-election in 1995 and again, via widespread fraud, in 2000. Under the control of Vladimiro Montesinos, the SIN came to function largely as Peru's political police. Until it was dismantled last year, the SIN was responsible for the systematic harassment, intimidation and blackmail of the regime's perceived political opponents, carried out widespread illegal wiretapping and other surveillance, and was the principal agency involved in manipulating the courts, congress and electoral apparatus to favor executive branch policies.¹² Yet both the Peruvian military and the SIN were courted by U.S. officials as important allies in the drug war and received significant U.S. economic support towards that end.

OVERCOMING LOCAL OPPOSITION

The Andean Initiative's potential dangers to the consolidation of civilian rule initially generated opposition among many Latin American governments. However, the U.S. Congress put its full weight behind ensuring the use of U.S. diplomatic and economic leverage to coerce cooperation from reluctant drug war partners. In 1986 it enacted a "certification" requirement for drug producing and transit countries. By March 1 of each year, the administration must "certify" to the U.S. Congress that those deemed to be drug producing or transport countries are cooperating with U.S. efforts to control drug production, trafficking and use. Countries which are not certified face a full range of sanctions, including the suspension of all U.S. foreign assistance not directly related to

¹² See Coletta Youngers, *Deconstructing Democracy: Peru Under President Alberto Fujimori* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Office on Latin America, 2000).

anti-drug programs, U.S. opposition to loans by multilateral development banks, and possible trade sanctions. While numerous countries have been granted a “national security waiver,” only Colombia has faced the full weight of U.S. sanctions as a result of “decertification.”

Andean countries initially balked at Washington’s demand that local militaries play a prominent role in counternarcotics operations and at U.S. insistence that the war on drugs be made a top priority, even in the face of the severe economic crisis which engulfed the Andean region at the time. Andean leaders not only had scarce resources, but also feared that some of the political and economic challenges they faced could be deepened by a large-scale crack-down on the coca and cocaine trade.

The Bolivian government, which has faced 182 military coups since the country gained independence in 1825, was one of the first to oppose openly the militarization of U.S. international drug control efforts and its potentially negative political consequences. One Bolivian official testified before the U.S. Congress:

Now is also the time for the government of the United States to consider granting additional cooperation to Bolivia for fiscal year 1990, which should ideally come in the form of economic, rather than military, assistance. But if it is to be military assistance, then it would help our efforts more if the emphasis is not on a new role for the army in interdiction and/or repression.¹³

¹³ Samuel Doria Medina, Embassy of Bolivia, “Hearings before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control,” 27 March 1990, p. 7.

Moreover, U.S. antinarcotics efforts in Bolivian remained unpopular amongst many sectors of Bolivian society throughout the early 1990s, and Bolivian officials often found themselves caught between the need to meet U.S. certification requirements and the desire to maintain popular support.

Even some local militaries objected to this new role. Both Peruvian and Colombian military officials, for example, repeatedly claimed that counterinsurgency objectives took precedence over counternarcotics objectives and saw the two as conflicting, rather than complementary. In the Peruvian Huallaga, the military had adopted a strategy of trying to win “the hearts and minds” of the local population in order to eliminate any support the Shining Path had among the local population. Eliminating their economic livelihood only risked pushing them into the hands of the guerillas. As one former Peruvian military commander said, “There are 150,000 peasants growing coca in the zone. Each of them is a potential subversive. Eradicate his field and the next day he will become one.”¹⁴ Colombian military officials expressed similar reservations, only changing their position later in the 1990s as they sought increased U.S. financial and technical support.

Despite local resistance, the U.S. government used the threat of decertification and the significant disruptions in both aid and trade with the United States that such an action would cause to bring local governments on board. The Andean militaries in Colombia, Bolivia and Peru were eventually enticed with the economic and political backing offered by Washington, and like SouthCom, found in the drug war a convenient

¹⁴ Peter R. Andreas, Eva C. Bertram, Morris J. Blackman, and Kenneth E. Sharpe, “Dead-End Drug Wars,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 85, Winter 1991/92, p. 116.

raison d'être for maintaining troop levels, budgets and political influence. For the Colombian military, the benefits of adapting to the drug war rhetoric are more than obvious from the U.S. aid now flowing into their coffers. More than ten years after the Andean Initiative was first launched, all of the Andean militaries are now actively engaged in the U.S. war on drugs.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE “NARCO-GUERRILLA” THEORY

Among those militaries are those responsible for the worst human rights violations in the hemisphere today. As a result, another unintended consequence of the U.S. war on drugs is that Washington is at least indirectly fueling human rights violations and, in Colombia, contributing to the region's most brutal counterinsurgency campaign. U.S. support for abusive forces is taking place even as overall levels of human rights violations have declined markedly across the region, and most countries have significantly improved human rights records.

International antinarcotics accords include provisions relating to the protection of human rights. The 1990 Declaration of Cartagena, for example, requires that “the parties act within the framework for human rights” and states that “nothing would do more to undermine the war on drugs than disregard for human rights.” Bilateral agreements between the U.S. and Latin American governments often include clauses on human rights, and administration documents, such as the annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, stress the compatibility between antinarcotics programs and respect for human rights. Nonetheless, both the Bush and Clinton administration have, at different

points in time, downplayed the gravity of the human rights situation in countries such as Peru and Colombia in order to obtain Congressional support for counternarcotics assistance.

The “narco-guerrilla” theory, which first gained prominence in the early 1980s, has allowed the counternarcotics and counterinsurgency missions to blur, creating greater risks that local forces which receive U.S. counter-drug assistance become involved in human rights abuses. At a 1984 Senate hearing, federal officials warned that international terrorists were turning to drug trafficking to finance their operations. “Drugs have become the natural ally of those that would choose to destroy democratic societies in our hemisphere through violent means,” cautioned then-U.S. Customs Commissioner William Von Rabb, who alleged that Cuba and Nicaragua were using the regional drug trade to finance insurgencies throughout Latin America.¹⁵

The alleged link between drug traffickers and insurgents became an implicit component of the Andean Initiative, as administration officials depicted drug traffickers as irrevocably tied to leftist subversives, including the “old” enemies along with the “new” in the war on drugs. In their joint report to Congress in February 1991, the Departments of State and Defense refer explicitly to narco-guerrillas: “...we cannot lose sight of the fact that in Colombia and Peru the insurgents are involved in narcotics and, along with traffickers, have created a militarized situation.”¹⁶ Today, U.S. officials point to Colombia as the center of narco-guerrilla activity. In an April 2, 1998 statement, Rep.

¹⁵ “Drug Funds Termed Source for Terrorists,” *The Washington Post*, 3 August 1984.

¹⁶ Call, *op cit.*, p. 49.

Gilman boldly exclaimed, “The frightening possibilities of a ‘narco-state’ just three hours by plane from Miami can no longer be dismissed.”

While links between drug traffickers and guerrillas clearly exist, the reality on the ground is more complex. No one disputes that in Colombia, the FARC gains significant resources from taxing and protecting coca growers and facilitates shipments of coca and cocaine. The FARC has virtual territorial control of vast areas where coca plantations thrive in the departments of Guaviare, Putumayo and Caquetá and parts of Meta, providing it with a very important and steady source of income that allows it to advance militarily and to maintain a steady flow of recruits; however, no evidence links the guerrillas to a significant role in international drug trafficking. In a study carried out in the mid-1990s at the request of former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Myles Frechette, the DEA clearly stated that neither the FARC nor the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) were engaged in international drug trafficking.¹⁷ Moreover, no evidence has been presented that members of the FARC are enriching themselves personally through the drug trade. On the contrary, the drug money finances its war machine.

The guerrillas are one of many actors -- including elements of the armed forces and right-wing paramilitary groups -- involved in the lucrative drug trade. Traffickers maintain an array of alliances, with local military and police forces and government officials as well as guerrilla forces. In Colombia, drug mafias are most closely associated with right-wing paramilitary groups, with whom they have historic ties. These in turn

¹⁷ Ambassador Myles Frechette, interview with author, Bogotá, Colombia, 15 November 1996.

often have close ties to members of the Colombian security forces. The implications for U.S. policy are formidable.

In Colombia, the U.S. war on drugs is inextricably intertwined with the military's counterinsurgency campaign. The number of victims of political violence killed on any given day in Colombia has doubled in recent years to almost twenty per day. At least 70 percent of these killings are attributed to right-wing paramilitary groups, often allied with the country's security forces. In addition, political violence has forced more than one million Colombians from their homes -- over 300,000 in 2000 -- mostly fleeing paramilitary rampages. This year a surge in politically-motivated massacres (defined as the killing of four or more individuals) by paramilitary groups is taking place, with 529 massacres in the first four months of 2001 alone (almost reaching the total of 548 committed the previous year).

In a particularly brutal incident, on April 12 paramilitary forces killed at least 40 peasants in the town of Alto Naya, dismembering them with chainsaws. Just weeks before, UN officials based in Colombia told the military that an attack appeared imminent. Yet no action was taken until five days after the massacre. Despite periodic pledges on the part of the Colombian government to combat paramilitary activity, the Colombian armed forces have failed to take adequate steps toward reining it in. Apart from a handful of high-profile cases where significant international pressure was brought to bear, the Colombian military has failed to prosecute and punish members of its ranks implicated in paramilitary activity and other human rights atrocities. Moreover, the military high command has punished those who have spoken out against collaboration with paramilitary groups and has promoted those who have fostered paramilitary activity.

The new law referred to above provides even greater assurances that the pattern of entrenched impunity for complicity with paramilitary activity and other human rights violations will remain unaltered.

SUPPORTING PERU'S INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Abusive army units are not the only ones who have benefited from U.S. largess; local intelligence services have also. During the years that military dictatorships prevailed across the Latin American region, intelligence services were often the source of the worst manifestations of state terror, and since the return to civilian rule those agencies have largely evaded reform by civilian elected governments. The character of intelligence and the uses to which it is put depend on whether those in command answer to democratic civilian authority. Yet Andean intelligence services continue to operate with significant autonomy, are not accountable to the public, and often appear to continue to operate with a cold war mentality that fails to distinguish legal political activity from insurgent or criminal activity.

Perhaps the most blatant case is that of Peru, where the U.S. government provided political and economic support to Peru's intelligence service, the SIN, despite its involvement in death squad activity and the anti-democratic activities previously described. U.S. officials claimed throughout the course of the 1990s that the SIN played an important coordinating role in counternarcotics efforts and that hence the U.S. had no choice but to support it. (Indeed, *The Miami Herald* reported that in 1992 the SIN raided the offices of the police counternarcotics intelligence unit, carting off its files, and has

held this “leadership” role ever since.¹⁸) Washington also claimed that the SIN had been effective in its efforts. As a result, U.S. officials met publicly with SIN officials, praised their work in the press (and lending political support even as the SIN’s involvement in sinister activities was growing), and provided economic support via the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The *de facto* head of the SIN and President Fujimori’s top security adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos, was long rumored to be on the CIA payroll.

This relationship appears to go back to the 1970s, when Montesinos was thrown out of the Peruvian army and spent one year in jail after an unauthorized visit to Washington, where he was suspected of selling information to U.S. agents. He then launched a lucrative law practice defending accused drug traffickers. (Peru’s President Fujimori once argued that this experience provided Montesinos with first-hand knowledge of the drug trade, thereby increasing his effectiveness at combating it.) In 1978, he defended Colombian drug kingpin, Evaristo Porras Ardila, a former member of the Medellín cartel. The following year he defended Jaime Tamayo, another Colombian trafficker. During the trial it was revealed that Montesinos had served as guarantor for rental contracts on two houses utilized by Tamayo as cocaine laboratories. Later, Montesinos defended one of Peru’s most notorious drug traffickers, Reynaldo Rodríguez Lopez, known as *El Padrino*.

In 1990, Montesinos was introduced to Fujimori by his campaign chief, Francisco Loayza. After helping Fujimori avoid a judicial trial for tax-evasion, Montesinos quickly

¹⁸ Sam Dillon, “Dark Past of Peru’s Drug Czar,” *The Miami Herald*, 30 May 1992.

became Fujimori's top security advisor. Within a short period of time he took over control of the SIN, and was put forward as the architect of the Peruvian government's war against terrorism and drug trafficking. Although he held no formal title within the government, by the mid-1990s U.S. officials would refer to Montesinos as Peru's "drug czar." Although in other countries Washington was quick to dictate who should control narcotics policies, in the case of Peru, U.S. officials publicly lamented that they had no choice but to work with Montesinos. Privately, they pointed out that he indeed got things done – he was viewed as "Mr. Fixit."¹⁹

Throughout this period, credible allegations repeatedly surfaced linking Montesinos to unconstitutional acts, human rights violations and drug trafficking-related corruption. Montesinos is considered to be the mastermind behind the April 1992 *autogolpe* -- when Fujimori shut down the Peruvian congress and judiciary, suspended the country's constitution and subsequently adopted draconian anti-terrorist legislation – and a death squad (known as *Grupo Colina*), responsible for some of the worst human rights atrocities which took place during the Fujimori government. In addition, numerous individuals claimed under oath that Montesinos demanded bribes in order for drug trafficking operations to go forward unimpeded by authorities. In addition, periodically reports surfaced regarding the wealth which Montesinos had accumulated. In December 1999, local journalists discovered that Montesinos' bank account in Lima contained 275 times the annual income of a high-level government adviser. Yet every time these allegations surfaced, U.S. officials publicly stated their confidence in the integrity of Peruvian government officials and refused to back calls for investigations. The

¹⁹ Karen DeYoung, "'The Doctor' Divided U.S. Officials," *The Washington Post*, 22 September 2000.

unwillingness of U.S. officials to back calls for investigations into allegations of wrongdoing by Montesinos provided him with crucial political support at the times when the overwhelming power he accumulated was most vulnerable.

Shortly after Montesinos emerged as Fujimori's right-hand man, Peruvian journalist Gustavo Gorriti reported that the CIA was providing counternarcotics aid to a SIN antinarcotics unit involved in death-squad activity, including two cases which received widespread international condemnation: the 1991 Barrios Altos massacre and the killing of nine students and a university professor from the La Cantuta University in 1992.²⁰ Inquiries by members of the U.S. Congress revealed that the U.S. State Department provided small but steady amounts of assistance to the anti-drug unit of the SIN until the late 1990s. The CIA was also believed to have channeled aid to the SIN, although it refuses to deny or confirm such reports. Most disturbingly, the Center for Public Integrity reported in July of this year that the CIA paid Montesinos at least one million dollars a year in cash for a ten year period, allegedly for counternarcotics programs. That aid continued until September 2000, right up until Fujimori was forced to announce new elections in which he would not run and the dismantling of the SIN.²¹ According to the U.S. Ambassador to Peru, John Hamilton, it was not until Fujimori's surprise announcement that that all communication with Montesinos allegedly ceased and

²⁰ Coletta Youngers, "U.S. Drug Czar Backs Peruvian Rasputin," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Volume XXX, No. 4, January/February 1997, pp. 1-2.

²¹ *U.S. Shrugged Off Corruption, Abuse in Service of Drug War* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Public Integrity, 12 July 2001), p. 1.

the SIN was informed that all programs with the U.S. would be discontinued. He also acknowledged that the CIA had an “official liaison relationship” with Montesinos.²²

In short, Washington maintained ties to Montesinos and to the SIN long after serious and credible allegations of his link to the drug trade and to human rights violations were put forward and months after their role in stealing the 2000 presidential elections became evident. Ironically, it now appears that Washington’s “man in Peru” may also have been aiding and abetting the Colombian guerrillas. One of the scandals that provoked the fall of the Fujimori government was the revelation that high-level Peruvian military officials and Montesinos himself may have been involved in trafficking guns to the FARC, possibly in exchange for drugs. According to press reports, thousands of Russian manufactured automatic weapons were legally purchased from Jordan by the Peruvian military and then secretly delivered to the FARC.

With the fall of the Fujimori government, the prosecution of dozens of officials implicated in corruption and other scandals, and the subsequent capture of Vladimiro Montesinos, more and more information is being revealed as to just who the U.S. government was allied with in Peru in its war on drugs. It increasingly appears that to run drugs in Peru, traffickers had to pay off Montesinos or run the high risk of being busted by the DEA or Peruvian anti-drug police. Montesinos himself amassed a fortune of more than \$260 million through various forms of corruption, including illicit arms deals. Hundreds of Peruvians are in jail or under investigation for corruption, human rights violations or subversion of the constitution. The question remains as to what the

²² Coletta Youngers, “U.S. Policy Toward Peru as the Elections Near,” Memorandum released by the Washington Office on Latin America, 29 March 2001, pp. 2 –3.

U.S. government knew and when it knew it. To date, surprisingly little debate has taken place on Capitol Hill on the implications of U.S. ties to Montesinos and the SIN for U.S. drug policy more broadly.

FUELING VIOLENCE IN BOLIVIA

Perhaps nowhere is the collateral damage of the U.S. war on drugs more evident than in Bolivia. With no guerrilla groups operating in the country, no murky line between counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts blurs the picture, as in Colombia. In other words, human rights violations that result from antinarcotics operations are just that. While current abuses pail in comparison to the killings and disappearances of some of Bolivia's military dictators—including General Hugo Banzer—a disturbing pattern of detentions, mistreatment and abuse of the local population prevails in Bolivia's primary coca growing region, the Chapare. Moreover, the primary victims are not drug traffickers, but poor farmers who eke out a subsistence level income through coca production. The antinarcotics efforts that have led to such abuses are rooted in Law 1008, adopted by the Bolivian Congress on July 19, 1989. Passed under strong U.S. pressure, Law 1008 gives the government sweeping powers to control coca production and drug trafficking. Social unrest, conflict and violence in the Chapare have clearly increased as a result of U.S. pressure on the Bolivian government to comply with Law 1008 and to meet annual coca eradication targets.

The Bolivian antinarcotics police, Unidades Móviles de Patrullaje Rural or UMOPAR, are trained and funded by the U.S. government, which provides everything

from uniforms to the cost of feeding UMOPAR detainees in some police prisons. The UMOPAR commit a litany of abuses: arbitrary searches and arrests, theft, and mistreatment of detainees during interrogations. A 1997 study conducted by the Andean Information Network (AIN), a non-governmental organization based in Cochabamba, Bolivia, revealed startling statistics: 60 percent of those detained stated that they were threatened by the police during their arrest and 44 percent affirmed that they had been tortured and/or beaten.²³ Bolivian officials implicated in abuses are rarely, if ever, sanctioned.

Massive sweeps, where hundreds may be detained at one time, often lead to arbitrary detentions. Detainees are typically held for several days and then released without being charged or presented before judicial authorities. Often, they are not allowed to notify family members of their detention. Other detentions are not indiscriminate, but target those actively opposing coca eradication activities. Following two investigative missions to Bolivia, Human Rights Watch/Americas concluded that antinarcotics police carry out arrests “intended to suppress peaceful and lawful protest activity” and detain coca grower federation leaders in order “to secure advantage in negotiations with them over government policy.”²⁴

In one prominent case, the UMOPAR arrested David Herrera Tenorio, a leader of the main coca grower’s federation, on September 18, 1995. Arrested on suspicion of having participated in a dynamite attack on an UMOPAR truck in July of that year, he

²³ Washington Office on Latin America, memorandum on Bolivia, June 3, 1997, pp. 1-2.

²⁴ *Bolivia Under Pressure: Human Rights and Coca Eradication* (New York, N.Y.: Human Rights Watch/Americas, May 1996), p. 2.

was then charged with operating a maceration pit (to process coca into coca paste) on the land of a neighbor. He was ultimately acquitted. The ruling stated that “no material evidence had been collected, that the witnesses’ testimony was vague and unsubstantiated, and that two of the key witnesses had been threatened and bribed into testifying against Herrera.”²⁵

The violent repression of protests organized by coca growers and increasingly violent coca eradication operations take a high toll in human lives. Violence often ensues when the Bolivian government nears deadlines to meet U.S. coca eradication targets. In 1995, conflict erupted as the Bolivian government faced a U.S. ultimatum to eradicate more coca (among other measures) or face decertification. The result was seven dead, including a thirteen-year old girl and a six-month old baby, who died of tear gas inhalation. Scores were wounded and dozens arrested. Again in 1997, violent clashes between peasant protesters and state forces led to six deaths and 90 injuries, as well as hundreds of illegal detentions.

One woman, Albertina Orellana, a 45-year old farmer and mother of seven children, appears to have been killed by a gunshot wound at close range. According to forensic reports, she was killed by a bullet that could be used in an M-16, which is the gun commonly used by UMOPAR agents. Eye witnesses claim that the shooting occurred during a forced eradication operation and that Mrs. Orellana was shot while on her knees before the police pleading that they not take away her only source of income.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Bolivian officials failed to complete investigations into the killing, and no charges were ever filed.

Over the course of 1998, the situation in the Chapare worsened as President Banzer launched a plan to eliminate all illicit coca within his five year term in office and brought the army into on-the-ground operations to carry out his mandate alongside local police forces. Violence in the Chapare erupted in April of that year, during a general strike called by the national labor federation, the *Central Obrero Boliviano*, or COB. Over the course of the next several months, fourteen people were reported killed, including two policemen, and over sixty wounded in violent confrontations between the army and police forces carrying out forced coca eradication and local residents.²⁶

In May 1998, President Banzer announced the transfer of the Armed Forces High Command to Cochabamba, the city closest to the Chapare, for geopolitical reasons. Approximately five-thousand army troops moved into the area, mostly young conscripts with no experience in diffusing face-to-face conflicts or social protests and who were unprepared for the severe living conditions of the tropics.²⁷ The soldiers' presence led to greatly increased tension and a sharp increase in violent confrontations. Now, with U.S. financial support, the Bolivian military is reinforcing its existing infrastructure in the Chapare region to house and train its troops, ensuring military control of the region for the foreseeable future.

²⁶ Lee Cridland, "Violence Escalates in the Bolivian Chapare," Andean Information Network memorandum, 22 June 1998, p. 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 4.

As Banzer pursued his “zero coca” policy, the situation in the Chapare continued to deteriorate, culminating in a massive protest in September and October of 2000. Coca growers blocked the main roads in and out of the region for nearly one month. Food supplies rotted on the trucks and all other commerce ceased. The military responded with its strongest use of force yet, firing indiscriminately into the crowds of protesters. The Andean Information Network, which monitored the situation on the ground in the Chapare, reported that two civilians were killed, 78 wounded, 48 illegally detained, and 16 tortured. Five members of the security forces and one soldier’s wife were also found dead in the rain forest. No serious official investigations of abuses by state forces have gone forward, though coca farmers are on trial for the other killings.²⁸

Last December, the Bolivian government declared victory in its “zero coca” strategy. Yet eradication has continued and more than 5,000 hectares in “new plantings” have been eradicated since that date, according to U.S. government reports. Local coca growers reported that despite these claims, coca plantings continued to be disbursed throughout the region but are harder to detect now. To avoid eradication, in recent years coca growers have planted more coca in with other plants and under trees, where it cannot be detected via aerial surveillance. While accurate statistics are not available on coca production in the Chapare, it is clear that coca is being replanted at a rapid rate. The lack of effective alternative development efforts and pervasive poverty not just in the Chapare but throughout the country ensure that coca will continue to be grown despite the military presence. The cyclical patterns of violence that have developed in the Chapare will no doubt continue well into the future.

²⁸ See AIN’s website: www.scbbs-bo.com/ain

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN COLOMBIA

Although Bolivia under the Banzer government has consistently met U.S. coca eradication targets and other counternarcotics objectives, it has at times faced cuts in U.S. assistance as funds are diverted to Colombia, which has become the U.S. government's top foreign policy concern in the hemisphere. U.S. policy toward Colombia underwent important changes beginning in mid-1997. The Clinton administration began to move beyond a narrow focus on drug trafficking in Colombia to take into greater account the devastating impact of political violence. Colombian guerrilla activity around the October 1997 municipal elections received widespread coverage in the U.S. media. That combined with a series of military victories on the part of the FARC sparked significant concern in Washington. Growing U.S. recognition of the insurgent threat turned Colombia into a top national security priority and the role of the U.S. government in combating the guerillas, or "narco-guerrillas" for some, became an issue of heated discussion among U.S. policymakers and in the U.S. press. Over the course of 1998 and 1999, political support among U.S. policy-makers for a more direct U.S. role in the Colombian counterinsurgency effort grew considerably.

In mid-2000, the U.S. Congress approved, after nearly a year of debate, the \$1.3 billion emergency aid package for Plan Colombia described previously. The bulk of the package is geared toward shoring up the Colombian armed forces in their war against the FARC. Its centerpiece is the "Push Into Southern Colombia," designed to wrest control of the southern coca-growing region of the country from the FARC and thereby dealing a fatal blow to both the guerrillas and the drug trade simultaneously. Toward that end, Washington is equipping and training three army counternarcotics battalions, including

the provision of sixty sophisticated helicopters, to provide ground support for aerial herbicide campaigns.

Even prior to the approval of the emergency aid package, the United States had become deeply involved in the Colombian conflict. Indeed, Colombia was already receiving more U.S. security assistance than any other country in the Western Hemisphere and had become the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid in the world. Over time, the Clinton administration's argument that U.S. aid was being provided solely for counternarcotics programs has worn thin; the line between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency has become blurred at best in coca-growing regions and some would argue that it has been erased all-together.

During the congressional debate on the emergency aid package, Clinton officials claimed both that the aid would only be used for counternarcotics purposes (attempting to appease liberal Democrats wary of another El Salvador-style involvement) and that it was essential to reigning in the FARC (attempting to sway conservative Republicans wary of another foreign policy boondoggle). The confusion generated by these competing arguments has raised serious questions regarding the ultimate goals and objectives of the mission and what "exit strategy" will be employed. As noted by Senator Patrick Leahy (D – VT) in February 2000 hearings: "Nothing in the materials I have seen describes the Administration's goals with any specificity, what they expect to achieve in what period of time, at what cost, and what the risks are."²⁹ The lack of a clear exit strategy was again a

²⁹ Quoted in Adam Isacson, "Plan Colombia: Military Response Fails to Address Social Problems," *Colombia Update*, Volume 12, No. 1, Summer/Fall 2000, p. 5.

key issue of debate in recent months as Congress moves toward approving the FY2002 foreign aid budget.

In addition to the provision of assistance, SouthCom was already carrying out a range of training and assistance programs that appear to go well beyond counternarcotics support, including training, manning radar sites and intelligence gathering. According to a 1998 investigation by Diana Jean Schemo and Tim Golden of *The New York Times*:

Government documents and interviews with dozens of officials here indicate that the separation Washington has tried to make between those two campaigns—one against drug trafficking, the other against the guerrillas—is breaking down. Officials say more United States training and equipment are going to shore up basic deficiencies in the tactics, mobility and firepower of the Colombian military, rather than for operations directed at the drug trade.³⁰

Even Pentagon officials themselves admit that their training to date has gone well beyond a counternarcotics focus. According to a March 1998 statement by Raul Duany, spokesman for the U.S. Southern Command in Miami, “as of this week, the United States had 223 military personnel stationed around Colombia to provide training and technical assistance, including counterinsurgency instruction, to the Colombian army and police,”³¹ That number has clearly grown. Present U.S. legislation “limits” the on-the-ground U.S.

³⁰ Diana Jean Schemo, and Tim Golden, “Bogotá Aid: To Fight Drugs or Rebels?” *The New York Times*, 2 June 1998.

³¹ Todd Robberson, “U.S. Policy on Colombia May Face Revision,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 18 March 1998.

presence to 500 U.S. military trainers and 300 civilian contract personnel at any given time.

In late 1998, U.S. Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, and the Colombian Minister of Defense, Rodrigo Lloreda, announced stepped-up military collaboration and the formation of a defense bilateral working group, intended to facilitate increased U.S. training, sharing of aerial and satellite intelligence data, and U.S. support for the restructuring and modernization of the Colombian armed forces. According to press reports at the time, then-SouthCom Commander, General Charles Wilhelm, stated that the agreement highlights the close relations between the two militaries, that U.S. assistance is not restricted in any way, and that it could be used to combat both drug trafficking and guerrillas.³² General Wilhelm himself claimed that he had become a “crucial adviser” to the Colombian high command³³ and was assisting with an ambitious reorganization of the Colombian armed forces.³⁴ Wilhelm appears to take his relationship with his Colombian colleagues very seriously, claiming, “This is not a one night stand. It is a marriage for life.”³⁵

The growing role of the U.S. military in Colombia has evoked concerns of increasing U.S. involvement in another counterinsurgency quagmire. Moreover, human rights conditions included in the legislation to prevent U.S. complicity with human rights

³² “U.S. Wields Carrot and Stick in Colombia,” *Reuters*, 3 December 1998.

³³ Adam Isacson, “U.S. Drug War and Military Aid to Colombia: An Overview,” *Colombia Update*, Spring/Summer 1998, p. 15.

³⁴ Schemo and Golden, *op. cit.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

abuses or paramilitary activity have failed to put a brake on the aid package. Eager to provide assistance prior to his first trip to Colombia and unable to assert that the conditions had been met, President Clinton issued a waiver in August 2000. In so doing, he sent a dangerous message to the Colombian armed forces that Washington is willing to turn a blind eye to atrocities, even if these may in fact be detrimental to other U.S. policy objectives.

Some of Colombia's neighbors have become alarmed at the escalating U.S. involvement in Colombia and the potential "spill-over affects" of U.S. military aid. Ecuador in particular has raised two issues: the potential environmental impact from dumping large quantities of herbicides into the fragile Amazonian eco-system and the potential flood of refugees fleeing political violence and human rights violations as the conflict intensifies. According to Winifred Tate:

Already, tensions between the Andean governments have increased, and political violence, tens of thousands of refugees, and illicit drug production have dispersed to other parts of Colombia, and beyond its national borders into Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama. Colombia's neighbors have in turn moved troops and helicopters to the border region, and appealed to Washington for assistance in dealing with the spill-over affects.³⁶

The aerial eradication program funded by the U.S. government has also generated significant controversy within Colombia due to the potentially devastating health and

³⁶ Tate, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

environmental consequences of spraying toxic herbicides on a massive scale and because of the government's failure to provide adequate economic alternatives for those growing coca. In September 1996, the Guaviare and other coca growing regions of Colombia became the scene of widespread social protest, when an estimated 241,000 people participated in massive marches -- one of the largest peasant mobilizations in Colombian history -- to protest aerial eradication, lack of government support for economic development and the counterinsurgency tactics being used by the Colombian military. More recently, the governors in the areas most affected by the aerial spraying have actively campaigned -- in Colombia and in Washington -- against the program. In July of this year, a judge ordered a halt to aerial eradication in indigenous communities in southeastern Colombia until further impact studies are completed. While the ruling does not affect most areas of coca production, it could set an important precedent for the future. Finally, some members of the Colombian Congress have presented a draft law which, if enacted, would ban aerial spraying of coca crops.

The eradication program tends to target small coca farmers, while *raspachines*, or coca leaf harvesters, are one of the primary victims of drug sweeps on the ground. The Guaviare and other coca-growing regions have become a melting pot of people from all over Colombia: those fleeing right-wing paramilitary or leftist guerrilla violence, peasants forced off their land, and young men with no prospects for employment in urban shantytowns. With no other economic alternative, they are willing to face the jungle region's harsh living conditions in order to eke out a subsistence level wage through the Guaviare's main economic activity: coca. Coca, in other words, is an economic necessity

for many. As bluntly stated by one local Bishop, Belarmino Corea: “The people fear that if they stop growing coca, they will die of hunger.”³⁷

When their coca crops are eradicated, as in the case of the small farmers, or they are forced off coca fields, as in the case of the *raspachines*, there are three options: go deeper into the jungle to grow more coca, become farmhands of drug traffickers who manage large coca plantations in more remote areas, or join the ranks of the FARC. In an area where virtually the only significant state presence is the fumigation program, the Colombian government is further marginalized and stigmatized, while the guerrillas remain firmly entrenched. Increased military assistance to Colombia threatens to exacerbate these existing trends.

CONCLUSION: A FAILED STRATEGY

In other words, U.S. coca eradication efforts in Colombia are clearly counter-productive. Colombia is the only country in the Andean region that has accepted the use of chemical herbicides to eradicate coca. Yet since the program got underway in 1995, coca production in Colombia has increased by more than 150 percent.³⁸ As succinctly stated by the former U.S. Drug “Czar,” General Barry McCaffrey, back in August 1998:

³⁷ Bishop Belarmino Corea, interview with author, San José del Guaviare, Colombia, May 6, 1997.

³⁸ Lesley MacKay, “The Coca Wars,” *Ms. Magazine*, August/September 2001, p. 16.

Last year, there was over \$100 million in U.S. support for Colombia. It was the dominant (recipient) of U.S. counter-drug aid on the face of the Earth. And in the last two years, we have watched Colombia become the No. 1 grower...of coca and...more than 60 percent of the heroin seizures last year in the United States were of Colombian heroin.³⁹

Overall coca production in the Andes has not fared any better. U.S. officials state that the “success” of coca eradication efforts in Bolivia led to increased production in Colombia. After spending billions of dollars on the war on drugs in the Andean region alone, overall coca production has declined by a mere 16 percent. Most importantly, cocaine and heroin are just as cheap and as readily available on U.S. city streets as they were when the Andean Initiative was first launched. There is no doubt that Washington is losing its self-proclaimed war on drugs in the Andean region. Yet with no “enemy” to declare formal victory, the war continues unabated at a high cost to U.S. taxpayers and, most significantly, for the people of the Andean region.

³⁹ Juanita Darling, “New Colombian Leader Facing Policy Conflict,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1998.