

June 2003

DRUG CONTROL

Specific Performance Measures and Long-Term Costs for U.S. Programs in Colombia Have Not Been Developed



G A O

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Highlights of [GAO-03-783](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States has been providing assistance to Colombia since the early 1970s to help reduce illegal drug activities. In fiscal years 2000-03 alone, the United States provided over \$2.5 billion. Despite this assistance, Colombia remains the world's leading producer and distributor of cocaine and a major source of the heroin used in the United States.

The report discusses the status of U.S. counternarcotics assistance to the Colombian Army and for a U.S.-supported Colombian police aerial eradication program. It also addresses challenges Colombia and the United States face in sustaining these programs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, establish clear objectives, including developing specific performance measures, and estimate future U.S. funding requirements for the programs with the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-783.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford, (202) 512-4268, FordJ@gao.gov.

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Specific Performance Measures and Long-Term Costs for U.S. Programs in Colombia Have Not Been Developed

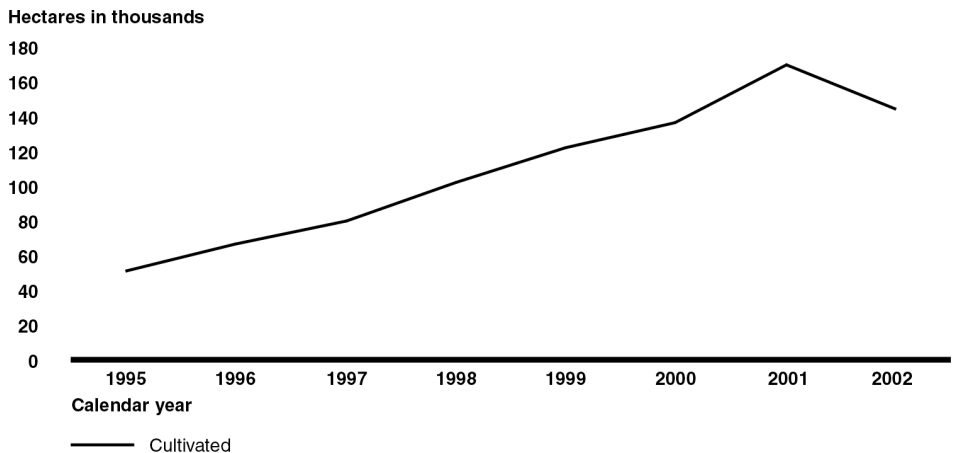
What GAO Found

In fiscal years 2000-03, the United States provided about \$640 million in assistance to train and equip a Colombian Army counternarcotics brigade and supply the army with 72 helicopters and related support. Nearly all this assistance has been delivered and is being used for counternarcotics operations. However, the Colombian Army cannot operate and maintain the U.S.-provided helicopters at current levels without U.S. support because it does not yet have sufficient numbers of qualified pilots and mechanics. U.S. officials estimate that up to \$150 million a year is needed to sustain the ongoing programs.

In recent years, the Colombian National Police aerial eradication program has had mixed results. Since 1995, coca cultivation rose in every year until 2002 and opium poppy cultivation remained relatively steady until 2001. But, for 2002, the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy reported that net coca cultivation in Colombia decreased 15 percent, and net opium poppy cultivation decreased 25 percent—the second yearly decline in a row. U.S. officials attributed this success primarily to the Colombian government's willingness to spray coca and poppy plants without restriction. These officials estimate that about \$80 million a year is needed to continue the program at its current pace.

Although the U.S.-backed counternarcotics program in Colombia has begun to achieve some of the results originally envisioned, Colombia and the United States must deal with financial and management challenges. As GAO noted in 2000, the total costs of the counternarcotics programs in Colombia were unknown. Nearly 3 years later, the Departments of State and Defense have still not developed estimates of future program costs, defined their future roles in Colombia, identified a proposed end state, or determined how they plan to achieve it. Colombia's ability to contribute more is limited, and it continues to face challenges associated with its long-standing insurgency and the need to ensure it complies with human rights standards and other requirements in order for U.S. assistance to continue.

Net Hectares of Coca under Cultivation in Colombia, 1995-2002



Source: Cultivation figures are from the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, Crime and Narcotics Center.

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Abbreviations

EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
NAS	Narcotics Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Bogotá
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

June 16, 2003

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Chairman
The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Foreign Operations,
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley, Chairman
Caucus on International Narcotics Control
United States Senate

The United States has been providing assistance to Colombia since the early 1970s to help reduce illegal drug production and trafficking activities. Despite this assistance, Colombia remains the world's leading producer and distributor of cocaine and a major source of the heroin used in the United States. Recognizing that illicit drug activities are a serious problem in Colombia, the Colombian government in October 1999 announced a \$7.5 billion plan, known as Plan Colombia, which among other things proposed reducing the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by 50 percent over 6 years.¹ In fiscal years 2000 through 2003, the United States provided over \$2.5 billion to Colombia for counternarcotics assistance.² For fiscal year 2004, the administration has proposed an additional \$700 million in assistance to address many of the same purposes. However, insurgent groups involved in illicit drug activities control more than 40 percent of Colombia's territory, making Colombian government and U.S. interdiction and eradication operations immensely difficult and

¹Although the government of Colombia announced Plan Colombia in 1999, U.S. funding for counternarcotics purposes was not approved until July 2000, leading to some uncertainty about when the 6-year goal was to be achieved. The current Colombian government has announced that it intends to eliminate coca cultivation by August 2006.

²For a more complete explanation of U.S. assistance originally planned for Plan Colombia, see our report titled *Drug Control: U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results*, [GAO-01-26](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 17, 2000).

dangerous and leaving illicit-drug growers with few legal alternatives to earn a living.³

A key component of the Colombian-U.S. counternarcotics strategy was forming a Colombian Army 2,285-man counternarcotics brigade and providing it with helicopters to move the troops around southern Colombia where much of the coca was being grown.⁴ The brigade's primary mission was to plan and conduct interdiction operations against cocaine producers and traffickers. Closely allied with the brigade's objective was the Colombian National Police's goal to significantly reduce, if not eliminate, coca and opium poppy cultivation through aerial eradication.⁵ In some of the insurgent-controlled areas of the country, the brigade was supposed to provide security for the eradication program. Various components of the Department of Defense—primarily with funding from the Department of State—provided the training and equipment for the counternarcotics brigade conditional on the Colombian military's respect for human rights. State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs has supported the police aerial eradication program.

You expressed concern that U.S. counternarcotics assistance provided to the Colombian Army was slow to arrive and has not been used as originally envisioned and that the aerial eradication program has little to show for its efforts. In response to your concerns, we determined (1) the status of U.S. counternarcotics assistance provided to the Colombian Army in fiscal years 2000-03, and how this assistance is being used; (2) what the U.S.-supported Colombian National Police aerial eradication program has accomplished in recent years; and (3) what challenges Colombia and the United States face in sustaining these programs.

³The United States has supported alternative development programs in Colombia, but because of the lack of security in the illicit-drug growing regions, these efforts have been slow to get started. See our report titled *Drug Control: Efforts to Develop Alternatives to Illicit Crops in Colombia Have Made Little Progress and Face Serious Obstacles*, [GAO-02-291](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 8, 2002).

⁴The leaves of the coca plant are the raw ingredient of cocaine, and opium poppy is used to produce heroin.

⁵The aerial eradication program involves spraying the coca and poppy plants from low-flying airplanes with an herbicide that attacks the root system and kills the plant.

To address these objectives, we reviewed pertinent planning, implementation, and related documentation and met with cognizant U.S. officials at the Departments of State and Defense, Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Southern Command headquarters, Miami, Florida; and the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, Colombia. In Colombia, we interviewed Colombian military, police, and government officials and visited Colombian Army bases at Larandia, Tolemaida, and Tres Esquinas and aerial eradication operational sites in the primary coca-growing regions of Colombia. In addition, we observed a Colombian Army counternarcotics brigade airlift operation and several aerial eradication missions.

Results in Brief

In fiscal years 2000-03, the United States provided about \$640 million in assistance to train and equip a Colombian Army counternarcotics brigade and supply the army with 72 helicopters and related training, maintenance, and operational support. Nearly all this assistance has been delivered and is being used for counternarcotics operations. However, some problems were encountered. For example,

- After having a successful first year of operations during 2001, the counternarcotics brigade's success trailed off in 2002. According to U.S. and Colombian officials, this was due in part to the coca growers and producers moving out of the brigade's range. In late 2002, the Colombian Army, with U.S. assistance, reorganized the brigade and gave it authority to operate anywhere in the country rather than just in its formerly limited area of responsibility in southern Colombia.
- The United States delayed the start of entry-level helicopter pilot training nearly 6 months due to uncertainty over who would conduct the training and how it would be funded. To resolve the issue, Defense used \$20 million from other counternarcotics projects to pay for the training.
- The delivery of 25 UH-II helicopters was delayed 5 months while the Colombian military considered using a different engine from the one usually installed. After numerous discussions, Colombia decided to use the more common engine.
- U.S. funds for the brigade were not available for a total of about 5 months in 2002 because State did not meet congressional deadlines for reporting on Colombia's progress in addressing human rights violations. This slowed the brigade's operations and helicopter pilot training.

-
- The Colombian Army cannot operate and maintain the U.S.-provided helicopters at current levels without continued U.S. contractor support because it does not yet have sufficient numbers of qualified pilots and mechanics. U.S. Embassy Bogotá officials estimate that up to \$150 million a year is needed to sustain the ongoing programs; additional assistance may be needed for other recently initiated efforts.

In recent years, the Colombian National Police aerial eradication program has had mixed results. Since 1995, net coca cultivation rose in every year until 2002 and net opium poppy cultivation remained between 6,100 to 7,500 hectares. But, in recent months, the Office of National Drug Control Policy reported that

- net coca cultivation in Colombia decreased 15 percent in 2002, from 169,800 hectares to 144,450 hectares, and
- net opium poppy cultivation in Colombia decreased 25 percent in 2002, from 6,500 hectares to 4,900 hectares—the second yearly decline in a row.

U.S. Embassy Bogotá officials attributed this recent success primarily to the current Colombian government's willingness to spray coca and poppy plants without restriction in all areas of the country. They also noted that the number of spray aircraft available had increased from 10 in July 2001 to 17 in January 2003, and a U.S. contractor began helping the Colombian National Police to, among other things, maintain its aircraft, resulting in greater availability for spray missions. These officials estimate that about \$80 million a year is needed to continue the program at its current pace.

Although the U.S.-backed counternarcotics program in Colombia has recently begun to achieve some of the results envisioned in 1999-2000, Colombia and the United States must continue to deal with financial and management challenges. As we reported in 2000, the total costs and specific programs required to meet Plan Colombia's counternarcotics goals were unknown, and a significant reduction in illicit drug production and trafficking activities would likely take years.⁶ Nearly 3 years later, Colombia and the United States have not established specific performance measures for assessing progress and time frames for achieving stated objectives nor have they identified sources of funding for sustaining ongoing programs. Until recently, Colombia had not provided any significant new funding for its defense needs, and anticipated international assistance for Plan Colombia—apart from that provided by the United States—did not materialize as envisioned.⁷ Because of economic problems, the government of Colombia's ability to contribute more is limited. Moreover, Colombia faces continuing challenges associated with its long-standing insurgency and the need to ensure it complies with human rights standards and other requirements in order for U.S. assistance to continue.

We are recommending that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, establish clear objectives, including developing specific performance measures, and estimate future U.S. funding requirements for the programs with the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police.

⁶GAO-01-26.

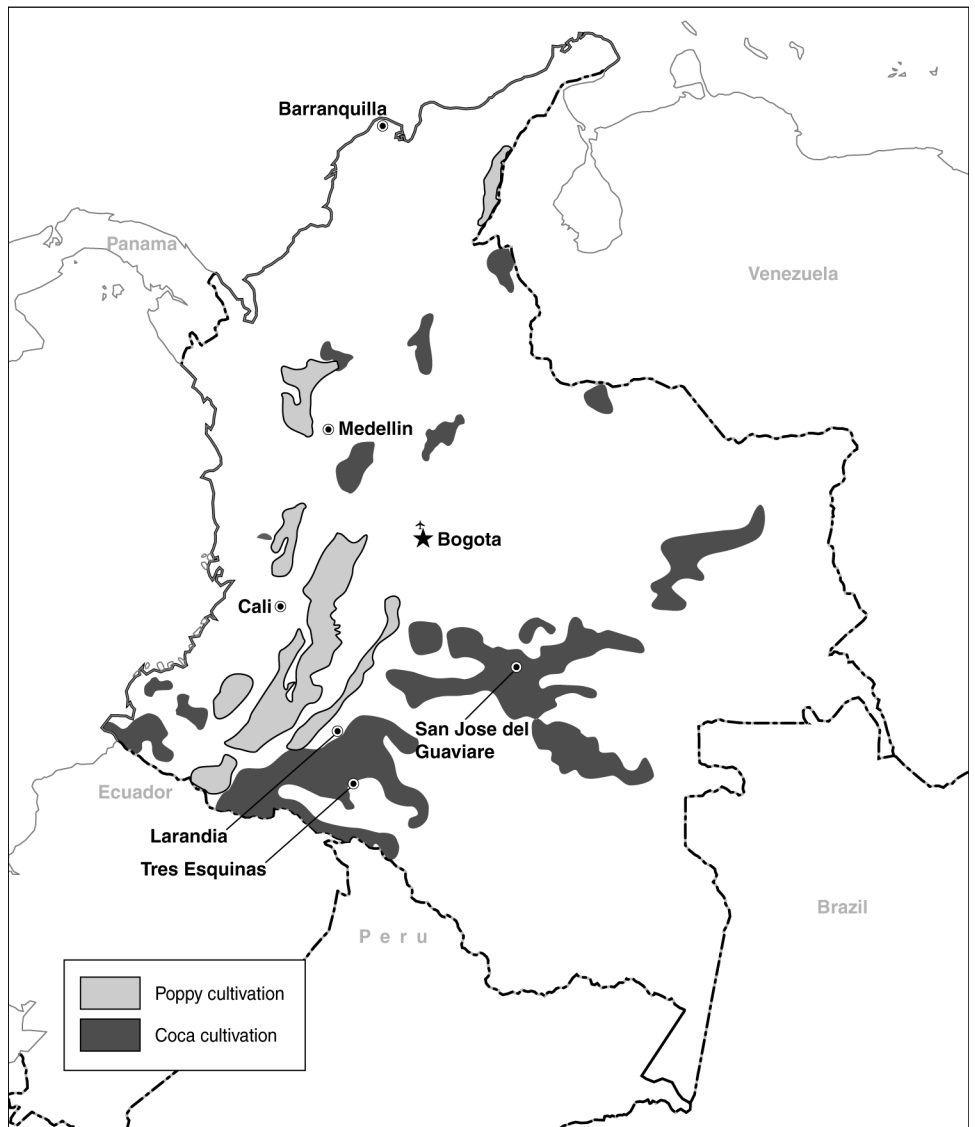
⁷Under the original concept of Plan Colombia, the Colombian government pledged \$4 billion and called on the international community to provide \$3.5 billion.

Background

The United States has supported Colombia's efforts to reduce drug-trafficking activities and stem the flow of illegal drugs entering the United States for more than 2 decades. Despite Colombian and U.S. efforts to disrupt drug-trafficking activities, the U.S. government has not reported any net reduction in the processing or export of refined cocaine to the United States.⁸ According to State, Colombia provides 90 percent of the cocaine and approximately 40 percent of the heroin entering the United States. To further complicate matters, the country's two largest insurgent groups—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army—and paramilitary groups have expanded their involvement in drug trafficking. According to a State official, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia are involved in every facet of narcotics trafficking, including cultivating, processing, and transporting. The insurgents exercise some degree of control over 40 percent of Colombia's territory east and south of the Andes—which, as illustrated in figure 1, includes the primary coca-growing regions of Colombia. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, several billion dollars flow into Colombia each year from the cocaine trade alone. This vast amount of drug money has made it possible for these organizations to gain unprecedented economic, political, and social power and influence.

⁸Estimates of the amount of cocaine produced in Colombia have almost tripled since 1995—from 230 metric tons to 730 metric tons in 2001.

Figure 1: Coca- and Poppy-Growing Areas in Colombia, 2001-02^a



Source: Created by GAO from information provided by the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, Crime and Narcotics Center.

^aThe growing areas for coca are based on 2002 estimates; the growing areas for poppy are based on 2001 estimates.

In an effort to address the influx of cocaine and heroin from Colombia, the United States has funded a counternarcotics strategy in Colombia that includes programs for interdiction, eradication, and alternative development which must be carefully coordinated to achieve mutually reinforcing results. Besides assistance for the Colombian Army counternarcotics brigade and the Colombian National Police aerial eradication program, the United States has supported Colombian efforts to interdict illicit-drug trafficking along rivers and in the air and alternative development, judicial sector reform, and internally displaced persons programs.

State and Defense have provided most of the counternarcotics funding and State, through its Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) in the U.S. Embassy Bogotá, oversees the program. In addition, the Military Group in the U.S. Embassy Bogotá manages much of the assistance to the Colombian military. Since the introduction of Plan Colombia in fiscal year 2000, the United States has provided more than \$2.5 billion in assistance. (See table 1.)

Table 1: U.S. Counternarcotics Assistance to Colombia, Fiscal Years 2000-03

Dollars in millions

Agency	Fiscal years				Total
	2000 ^a	2001	2002	2003 ^b (estimated)	
State	\$774.9	\$48.0	\$275.4	\$452.0	\$1,550.3
Defense	128.5	190.2	119.1	149.9	\$587.7
USAID ^c	123.5	0	104.5	151.0	\$379.0
Total	\$1,026.9	\$238.2	\$499.0	\$752.9	\$2,517.0

Source: Departments of State and Defense and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

^aIncludes funds appropriated for Plan Colombia through the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, Fiscal Year 2000 (Division B of P.L. 106-246).

^bIncludes \$93 million in Foreign Military Financing funds appropriated in the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Appropriations Act, 2003 (Division E, Title III of P.L. 108-7); \$34 million appropriated to State and \$34 million appropriated to Defense in the Supplemental Appropriations Act to Support Department of Defense Operations in Iraq for Fiscal Year 2003 (P.L. 108-11); and \$37.1 million for Foreign Military Financing allotted from fiscal year 2003 supplemental appropriations.

^cIn fiscal years 2000-03, State transferred \$375 million to USAID for alternative development, judicial sector reform, and internally displaced persons programs.

In response to increased violence in Colombia during early 2002 and the recognition that the insurgents and illicit drug activities are inextricably linked, the Congress provided “expanded authority” for the use of the U.S. assistance to Colombia. This authority enables the government of Colombia to use the U.S.-trained and -equipped counternarcotics brigade, the U.S.-provided helicopters, and other U.S.-provided counternarcotics assistance to fight groups designated as terrorist organizations as well as to fight drug trafficking.⁹ Similar authority was provided for fiscal year 2003¹⁰ and is being sought for fiscal year 2004. For fiscal year 2004, the administration has requested about \$700 million in funding for Colombia.

U.S. Assistance to the Colombian Army Has Been Delivered, but Problems Were Encountered

During fiscal years 2000-03, the United States provided about \$640 million in assistance to the Colombian Army for initial training and equipment for the counternarcotics brigade and for 72 helicopters and related operational, maintenance, and training support. These helicopters were intended to transport the counternarcotics brigade on counternarcotics missions. Nearly all this assistance has been delivered and is being utilized by the counternarcotics brigade in conducting operations. However, both the United States and the Colombian Army experienced some unanticipated problems that delayed the operational use of the helicopters. In addition, U.S. support will be needed for the foreseeable future to sustain operations.

Status of the Brigade

The United States originally agreed to provide training and equipment for a Colombian Army counternarcotics brigade made up of three battalions and a headquarters staff with a total of about 2,285 professional and conscripted soldiers. The battalions became operational in December 1999, December 2000, and May 2001, respectively. The counternarcotics brigade was assigned to the Colombian military’s Joint Task Force-South, which

⁹The 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act for Further Recovery From and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States (P.L. 107-206, Aug. 2, 2002). Similar language was included in the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 (P.L. 107-306, Nov. 27, 2002) for intelligence assistance provided in fiscal years 2002 and 2003 as well as any unobligated funds available to the intelligence community for prior fiscal years.

¹⁰Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2003 (P.L. 108-7, Feb. 20, 2003).

was headquartered at Tres Esquinas in Caqueta—one of the principal coca-growing regions of Colombia. The task force comprised units from the Colombian Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps and was tasked with the overall military mission of regaining government control over southern Colombia, primarily in the Putumayo and Caqueta departments.

The United States provided the counternarcotics brigade with about \$45 million in training and equipment—from weapons and ammunition to rations, uniforms, and canteens. The brigade’s primary mission was to plan and conduct interdiction operations against drug trafficking activities, including destroying illicit drug-producing facilities, and, when called upon, to provide security in insurgent-controlled areas where aerial eradication operations were planned.

Although the Colombian Army’s counternarcotics brigade has achieved some success, the Colombian military has not regained control over large parts of the country where coca and opium poppy are grown. According to U.S. and Colombian officials, the counternarcotics brigade was highly effective during 2001 but somewhat less effective during 2002. For example, during 2001 the brigade destroyed 25 cocaine hydrochloride laboratories while in 2002 it destroyed only 4 laboratories.¹¹ U.S. embassy officials stated that the brigade became less effective because the insurgents moved their drug producing activities, such as the laboratories, beyond the reach of the brigade. In addition, according to these officials, the brigade became more involved in protecting infrastructure, such as bridges and power stations, and performing base security. Moreover, the aerial eradication program did not call on the brigade to provide ground security on very many occasions, essentially planning spray missions in the less threatening areas.

In August 2002, U.S. embassy and Colombian military officials agreed to restructure the brigade to make it a rapid reaction force capable of making quick, tactical strikes on a few days’ notice. As part of this restructuring, the Colombian Army designated the brigade a national asset capable of operating anywhere in Colombia rather than just in its prior area of responsibility in southern Colombia. The newly restructured brigade consists of three combat battalions and a support battalion with a total of about 1,900 soldiers, all of whom are professional. Two of the combat

¹¹Hydrochloride laboratories are used in the final stages of processing coca into cocaine and are considered high-value targets.

battalions have been retrained. The third combat battalion should be retrained by mid-June 2003. This change, according to NAS, Military Group, and Colombian Army officials, will improve the brigade's ability to conduct operations against high-value, drug-trafficking targets, such as laboratories containing cocaine and the leadership of insurgent groups involved in drug-trafficking activities. One of the retrained battalions has been operating in Narino department since early May.

Status of the Helicopters

A key component of U.S. assistance for Plan Colombia was enhancing the air mobility of the counternarcotics brigade. To accomplish this, the United States provided the Colombian Army with 33 UH-1N helicopters, 14 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, and 25 UH-II helicopters.¹² The helicopters were provided to give the brigade the airlift needed to transport its personnel in the Joint Task Force-South's area of responsibility in southern Colombia. Both the UH-1Ns and the UH-60 Black Hawks are operational; the UH-IIs are scheduled for full operations later this year. However, the Colombian Army continues to need U.S. assistance and contractor pilots and mechanics to fly the aircraft.

UH-1Ns

In September 1999, State and Defense initiated a plan to provide the Colombian Army with 33 UH-1N helicopters that State had purchased from Canada to support the counternarcotics brigade. The helicopters were intended to serve as interim aircraft until the UH-60 and UH-II helicopters funded by the United States as part of Plan Colombia were delivered. The UH-1N helicopters were delivered in various stages between November 1999 and March 2001.¹³ According to the U.S. embassy, the helicopters flew their first mission in December 2000. Since then, the helicopters have flown 19,500 hours in combat and have supported more than 430 counternarcotics operations for the brigade. Although Colombian Army personnel are qualified as pilots and mechanics, many of the experienced pilots and mechanics who operate and maintain the helicopters are provided through a U.S.-funded contractor. For example, 20 contractor personnel serve as pilots-in-command when flying operations.

¹²Of the 33 UH-IN helicopters, 28 remain available for use by the counternarcotics brigade. One crashed on a mission and four were transferred to support the aerial eradication program.

¹³State sent 18 helicopters prior to the approval of U.S. assistance for Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia provided \$60 million to complete the delivery and support of the remaining 15 helicopters.

UH-60s

With the \$208 million provided as U.S. assistance under Plan Colombia for UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, State and Defense procured 14 helicopters, a 2-year spare parts package, and a 1-year contractor support package. The helicopters were delivered between July 2001 and December 2001. However, the helicopters did not begin to support operations of the counternarcotics brigade until November 2002 because of the lack of Colombian Army pilots who met the minimum qualifications needed to operate the helicopters. Forty-two Colombian Army personnel have completed the minimum UH-60 pilot training, 13 have qualified as pilot-in-command. U.S.-funded contract pilots fill in as pilots-in-command. In addition, a U.S.-funded contractor continues to maintain the helicopters and provide maintenance training.

UH-119s

With the \$60 million provided as U.S. assistance under Plan Colombia for UH-119 helicopters, State procured 25 aircraft. The original plan was to deliver the UH-119 helicopters to the Colombian Army between November 2001 and June 2002. However, the 25 helicopters were delivered between March 2002 and November 2002. This 5-month delay occurred because the Colombian military considered using a different engine than the one usually installed because it may have been easier to maintain. After numerous discussions, Colombia decided to use the more commonly used engine.

According to NAS officials, although some of the UH-119 helicopters are being used for missions, all the helicopters will not be operational until June 2003. As of January 2003, 25 Colombian Army pilots had completed their initial training and 21 of these pilots are completing the training needed to qualify for operational missions. However, contractor pilots continue to supplement Colombian Army pilots and a U.S.-funded contractor continues to provide maintenance support.

Problems in Training Helicopter Pilots and Mechanics

Although all the U.S.-provided helicopters are in Colombia, a number of unanticipated problems were encountered in training Colombian Army pilots and mechanics to operate and maintain the helicopters. Some of these problems continue to limit the Colombian Army's ability to operate and maintain the aircraft. Primarily, the Colombian Army will have to continue to rely on contractor support because it will not have enough trained pilots-in-command and senior mechanics for the foreseeable future.

Funding for Initial Training Was Not Provided

When the United States agreed to provide the UH-60 and UH-119 helicopters for the Colombian Army in July 2000, the assistance for Plan Colombia did not include any funds to train the Colombian pilots and mechanics needed to operate and maintain the helicopters. In October 2000—about 3 months after passage of U.S. assistance for Plan Colombia—State reported that, although the Colombian military had qualified pilots and support personnel, it did not have the numbers of personnel required to field and operate the new helicopters. State requested that Defense provide the training needed for the pilots and mechanics. Although Defense agreed to provide the training, it took an additional 3 months to decide that the U.S. Army would be responsible and to identify a funding source. In February 2001, Defense reported that it would transfer up to \$20 million from other counternarcotics projects in Colombia for this training.

Training Has Not Been Completed

A training plan was approved in mid-2001. Although the plan provided training for Colombian Army personnel to meet the minimum qualifications for a pilot and mechanic, it did not include the additional training necessary to fly missions in a unit or to become a senior mechanic. Basic training for 117 helicopter pilots—known as initial entry rotary wing training—began in November 2001 and is projected to be completed by December 2004. This training is intended to provide a pool or pipeline of pilots for more advanced training to fly specific helicopters. In addition, according to NAS officials, a new pilot takes an average of 2 to 3 years to progress to pilot-in-command.

- Specific UH-60 pilot training for 42 personnel began in August 2001 and was completed in September 2002.
- Specific UH-119 pilot training for 75 personnel began in May 2002 and is projected to be completed in December 2003.

In addition, according to NAS and U.S. contractor officials, 105 out of 159 Colombian Army personnel have completed the basic UH-60 and UH-119 maintenance training and are taking more advanced training to qualify as senior mechanics. These officials told us that the remaining 54 personnel will receive the contractor-provided basic training in the near future, but they did not know when it would begin. NAS and U.S. contractor officials also told us that it typically takes 3 to 5 years for mechanics to gain the experience necessary to become fully qualified on specific helicopter systems, in particular the UH-60 Black Hawks.

Colombian Army Support Is Limited

The Colombian Army Aviation Battalion is responsible for providing helicopters and other aircraft and personnel for all Colombian Army missions with an aviation component, including counternarcotics and counterinsurgency operations throughout Colombia. Information provided by the Colombian Aviation Battalion shows that it is staffed at only 80 percent of its required levels and, over the past several years, it has received between 60 percent to 70 percent of its requested budget for logistics and maintenance. According to Colombian Army personnel, current plans indicate that the missions the battalion needs to support will be expanding, but they do not know if they will have sufficient resources to meet these demands.

The decision by the Colombian military to continue using the UH-1N helicopters in addition to the UH-60 and UH-1H helicopters will make it more difficult for the Aviation Battalion to provide the numbers of personnel needed to operate and maintain the helicopters. State originally intended that the UH-1N helicopters would only be used by the counternarcotics brigade until the UH-60 and UH-1H helicopters were available to support operations. However, in 2002, the Colombian military requested and received approval from the United States to continue using these helicopters. NAS and Military Group officials stated that this means the number of pilots and mechanics needed to operate all the aircraft increases the total requirement for the Aviation Battalion. For example, the battalion will have to have a total of 84 additional Colombian Army personnel qualified to serve as pilots-in-command (42) and co-pilots (42). Even though the U.S.-funded contractor has trained Colombian Army personnel since the UH-1N's initial delivery in 1999, only 61 Colombian Army personnel remain in the program.

Trained Personnel Were Not Available

According to bilateral agreements between Colombia and the United States, the Colombian Army must ensure that pilots and mechanics who receive U.S. training be assigned to positions using their training for a minimum of 2 years. This has not always been the case. For example,

- According to U.S. embassy data, at least 105 Colombian Army personnel have completed the basic helicopter maintenance course. As of January 2003, 65 of these individuals were scheduled to receive additional training that would enable them to become fully qualified mechanics who can perform maintenance without U.S.-contractor oversight. Of these, 22 had not reported for training. Neither the Military Group nor the Aviation Battalion could provide us the location of these individuals.

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- According to U.S. contractor personnel, at least 10 pilots-in-command should be available to fly missions.¹⁴ Although 19 Colombian Army personnel were qualified to serve as pilots-in-command on UH-1N helicopters, as of January 2003, only one pilot was assigned to serve in this position. The remaining nine pilots-in-command were provided by the U.S. contractor. Again, neither the Military Group nor the Aviation Battalion could provide us the location of these individuals.

Operations and Training Slowed for 5 Months

Of the funds appropriated for fiscal year 2002, \$140 million was used to support Colombian Army counternarcotics efforts. Most of this went to support U.S.-provided helicopter operations, maintenance, logistical, and training support. However, not all the funding could be released until the Secretary of State certified, in two separate reports to appropriate congressional committees,¹⁵ that the Colombian military was making progress meeting certain human rights conditions. According to U.S. embassy political section personnel, they encountered difficulties developing the information required to make the human rights determination and certification. Because State was late in providing these reports, the U.S. embassy could not use this funding for operations and

¹⁴Although 14 helicopters are available for operations during a given time period, 10 or fewer are typically used to support an operation.

¹⁵Section 567 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2002 (P.L. 107-115). Specifically, the act provided that not more than 60 percent of the funds could be obligated until after the Secretary of State made a determination and certification that the Colombian Military was (1) suspending members of the Colombian Armed Forces who have been creditably alleged to have committed gross violations of human rights, (2) cooperating with civilian prosecutors and investigators, and (3) severing links between the Armed Forces and paramilitary groups. In addition, the remaining 40 percent of the funds could be obligated only after June 1, 2002, and after the Secretary of State made a second determination and certification with respect to the same conditions.

training on two occasions for a total of about 5 months during 2002.¹⁶ According to NAS, these delays resulted in fewer counternarcotics operations and limited the training and experience Colombian Army pilots could obtain to qualify as pilots-in-command.

Continued U.S. Support Needed to Sustain Operations

U.S. assistance to support the helicopters provided as part of Plan Colombia was originally planned to end in 2006 with the Colombian Army taking over these responsibilities. However, NAS, Military Group, and Colombian Army officials stated that a continued level of U.S. contractor presence will be needed beyond this date because the Aviation Battalion is not expected to have the personnel trained or the resources necessary. Although Military Group officials stated that they have not officially estimated what this assistance level will be, they tentatively projected that it would cost between \$100 million and \$150 million annually to sustain the U.S.-supported counternarcotics programs. Moreover, other recently initiated U.S. programs will likely require U.S. assistance and contractor support, but the long-term costs of sustaining such programs are not known.

Infrastructure Units

In 2002, the United States agreed to provide \$104 million in training and equipment to Colombian Army units whose primary mission is to protect important infrastructure but whose initial mission is to minimize terrorist attacks along 110 miles of the Cano Limon pipeline in the Arauca department. The units will focus on patrolling, reconnaissance, and immediate reaction in the area of the pipeline and key facilities.

Of the \$104 million, \$6 million is for ongoing U.S. Special Forces training and \$98 million is for procuring 2 UH-60 and 4 UH-1H helicopters and associated training and ground support. NAS and Military Group officials indicated that some level of contractor support will likely be needed for the foreseeable future because the Colombian Army Aviation Battalion does not have sufficient numbers of trained pilots and mechanics to operate and maintain the helicopters.

¹⁶The first report was issued on May 1, 2002—almost 2 months later than State's target date. The second report was issued on September 9, 2002—almost 3 months later than State's target date.

Commando Battalion

In 2002, the Colombian military decided to form a Commando Battalion whose mission will be to conduct operations against high-value targets including the capture of high-level leaders of insurgent and paramilitary units. The United States has agreed to provide the battalion with training and equipment. Although the costs of training are not readily available, Military Group officials estimated that the United States will provide about \$5 million in equipment, including weapons and ammunition, communication equipment, night-vision devices, and other individual equipment.

Planning Assistance Teams

Also in early 2003, the United States began assigning U.S. military personnel to selected Colombian military units for up to 179 days. These personnel advise the commander and help plan attacks on drug trafficking and related insurgent targets. Military Group officials did not know when—or if—personnel or funds would be approved for all the planned teams because of other priorities, such as deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq. According to Military Group officials, these teams could cost about \$8 million annually if all become operational.

Colombia's Aerial Eradication Program Has Had Mixed Results

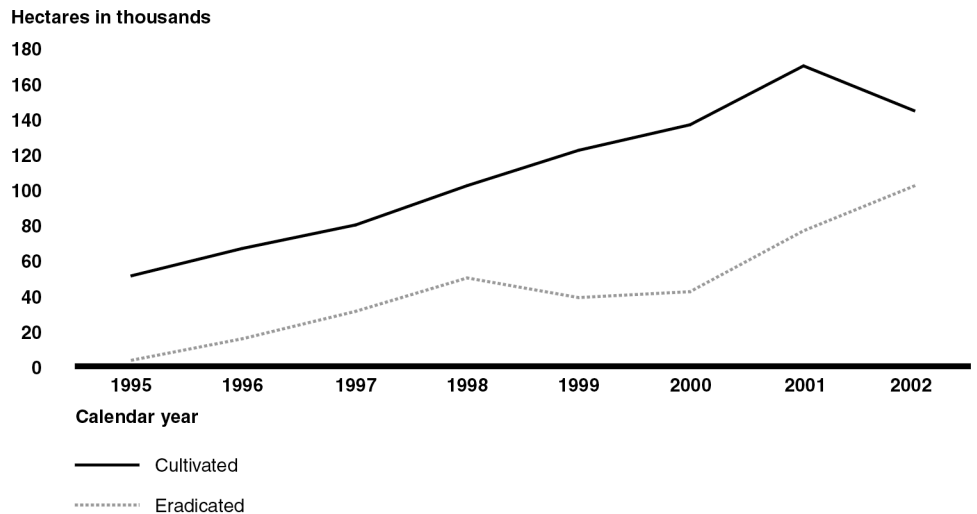
Since the early 1990s, State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (through the U.S. Embassy Bogotá NAS and the bureau's Office of Aviation) has supported the Colombian National Police's efforts to significantly reduce, if not eliminate, the cultivation of coca and opium poppy. However, for the most part, the net hectares of coca under cultivation in Colombia continued to rise until 2002, and the net hectares of opium poppy under cultivation remained relatively steady until 2001-02.¹⁷ In addition, the U.S. Embassy Bogotá has made little progress in having the Colombian National Police assume more responsibility for the aerial eradication program, which requires costly U.S. contractor assistance to carry out.

¹⁷The estimates of net hectares of coca and opium poppy under cultivation are prepared annually by the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, Crime and Narcotics Center. See also our report *Drug Control: Coca Cultivation and Eradication Estimates in Colombia*, [GAO-03-319R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 8, 2003).

Recent Progress in Reducing Net Cultivation of Coca and Poppy

As shown in figure 2, the number of hectares under coca cultivation rose more than threefold from 1995 to 2001—from 50,900 hectares to 169,800 hectares—despite substantially increased eradication efforts.¹⁸ But in 2002, the Office of Aviation estimated that the program eradicated 102,225 hectares of coca—a record high. In March 2003, the Office of National Drug Control Policy reported for the first time since before 1995 a net reduction in coca cultivation in Colombia—from 169,800 hectares to 144,450 hectares—a 15 percent decline.

Figure 2: Net Hectares of Coca under Cultivation and Hectares Eradicated in Colombia, 1995-2002



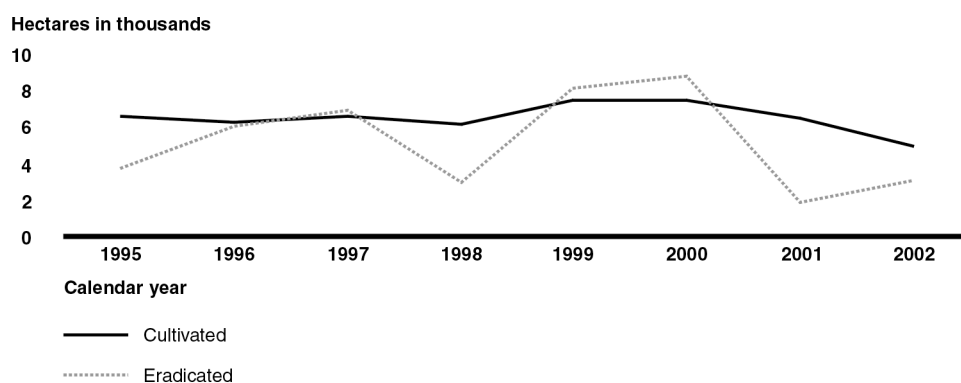
Source: Cultivation figures are from the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, Crime and Narcotics Center. Eradication figures are from U.S. Department of State, Office of Aviation.

As shown in figure 3, the net hectares of opium poppy under cultivation varied between 6,100 and 6,600 for the period 1995-98 but rose to 7,500 hectares in 1999 and 2000. In 2001, the net hectares of poppy estimated

¹⁸The number of hectares eradicated is provided by the Office of Aviation and is based on the number of net hectares sprayed multiplied by an estimated “kill rate.” Although many thousands of hectares of coca and poppy are killed, coca and poppy farmers often replant in the same or other areas, which helps explain why the number of hectares under cultivation often does not decline.

under cultivation declined to 6,500 and, in 2002, further declined to 4,900—nearly a 35 percent reduction in net cultivation over the past 2 years.

Figure 3: Net Hectares of Poppy under Cultivation and Hectares Eradicated in Colombia, 1995-2002



Source: Cultivation figures are from the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, Crime and Narcotics Center. Eradication figures are from U.S. Department of State, Office of Aviation.

NAS and Office of Aviation officials attributed the recent unprecedented reductions in both coca and poppy cultivation primarily to the current Colombian government's willingness to allow the aerial eradication program to operate in all areas of the country. They also noted that

- the number of spray aircraft had increased from 10 in July 2001 to 17 in January 2003;
- recently acquired spray aircraft can carry up to twice the herbicide as the older aircraft; and
- as of January 2003, aircraft were flying spray missions from three forward operating locations—a first for the program, according to NAS officials.

The ability to keep an increased number of spray aircraft operating out of three bases was made possible, at least in part, because NAS hired a contractor to work with the Colombian National Police to, among other things, help maintain their aircraft. As a result, the availability of the police aircraft needed for the spray program increased. Moreover, in August 2002, the Colombian government allowed the police to return to a higher strength herbicide mixture which, according to NAS officials, improved the spray's effectiveness.¹⁹ NAS officials project that the aerial eradication program can reduce the amount of coca and poppy cultivation to 30,000 hectares and 5,000 hectares, respectively, by 2005 or 2006, assuming the police continue the current pace and can spray in all areas of Colombia.

Colombian National Police Have Not Assumed Control over Aerial Eradication Operations

As we reported in 2000,²⁰ beginning in 1998, U.S. embassy officials became concerned with the rising U.S. presence in Colombia and associated costs of the aerial eradication program. At the time, the embassy began developing a 3-year plan to have the Colombian National Police assume increased operational control over the program. But for various reasons, the police never agreed to the plan. Since then, contractor involvement and the associated costs have continued to rise and the Colombian National Police are not yet able to assume more control of the aerial eradication program.

As shown in table 2, in fiscal year 1998, the Office of Aviation reported that the direct cost for the U.S. contractor providing aircraft maintenance and logistical support and many of the pilots was \$37.8 million. In addition, NAS provided \$10.7 million for fuel, herbicide, and related support for a total of \$48.5 million. For fiscal year 2003, the comparable estimates for contractor and NAS-provided support were \$41.5 million and \$44.8 million, respectively, for a total of \$86.3 million. Most of this increase occurred between fiscal years 2002 and 2003 to support the additional spray aircraft, multiple operating locations, and the anticipated continuation of spray operations throughout Colombia. According to NAS and Office of Aviation officials, these costs are expected to remain relatively constant for the next several years.

¹⁹In March 2002, the previous Colombian government reduced the strength of the spray mixture because of environmental concerns.

²⁰[GAO-01-26](#).

Table 2: U.S. Support for the Aerial Eradication Program, Fiscal Years 1998-2004

Dollars in millions

State office	Fiscal years							Total
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003 (estimated)	2004 (proposed)	
Office of Aviation	\$37.8	\$36.8	\$52.5 ^a	\$38.0	\$38.2	\$41.5	\$45.0	\$289.8
Narcotics Affairs Section	10.7	14.1	20.9	11.1	17.6	44.8 ^b	44.2	\$163.4
Total	\$48.5	\$50.9	\$73.4	\$49.1	\$55.8	\$86.3	\$89.2	\$453.2

Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and the Office of Aviation.

^aIncludes \$20 million for additional spray aircraft.

^bIn addition, NAS paid \$38.8 million for a contractor to support the Colombian National Police Aviation Service. NAS could not readily identify the proportion of this contract that is related to aerial eradication. NAS officials stated that they expect this expenditure to continue for the next 2 years and possibly up to 4 years.

The Colombian National Police do not provide funding per se for the aerial eradication program and, therefore, the value of its contributions are more difficult to quantify. In recent years, the police have provided helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft for spray mission support and the use of many of its facilities throughout Colombia. In addition, the police have about 3,600 personnel assigned to counternarcotics missions and estimate that 84 are directly supporting the aerial eradication program.

U.S. Efforts to Improve Police Capacity for Aerial Eradication

To help the Colombian National Police increase its capacity to assume more responsibility for the aerial eradication program, NAS has initiated several efforts. In addition to hiring a contractor to help with the Aviation Service's operations, NAS has initiated a program to train T-65 spray plane pilots and plans to begin training search and rescue personnel so they can accompany the aerial eradication missions. NAS officials stated that the contractor presence should decline and the police should be able to take over more of the eradication program by 2006, when NAS estimates that coca and poppy cultivation will be reduced to "maintenance levels"—30,000 hectares and 5,000 hectares, respectively.

Aviation Service Operations

In February and March 2002, the Office of Aviation conducted an Aviation Resource Management Survey of the Colombian National Police Aviation Service.²¹ According to Office of Aviation officials, these surveys are intended to provide a stringent on-site assessment of flight operations from management and safety to logistics and maintenance. The study noted that the Aviation Service has some unique circumstances that have made its operations difficult to manage. In particular, it grew from 579 personnel in 1995 to 1,232 in 2002 and operates 8 different types of rotary-wing and 9 different types of fixed-wing aircraft. Nevertheless, the team made a number of critical observations. For example,

- The Aviation Service's organizational structure, lines of authority, and levels of responsibility were not clear. In most cases, only the commanding general was allowed to commit resources and make operational decisions. This reliance on an overly centralized command structure resulted in unnecessary delays and, NAS officials told us, the cancellation of some planned aerial eradication missions because the commanding general could not be reached.
- The Aviation Service did not have a formal flying hour program. A flying hour program is used to forecast budgetary requirements. It takes into account the operational use and training requirements for each aircraft and the various missions it performs and equates each flight hour to a cost average for fuel and spare parts, which constitute the majority of an aviation organization's annual expenses. The lack of a flying hour program has prevented the police from more accurately forecasting budgetary requirements. Moreover, according to NAS, maintenance scheduling is enhanced when the number of flight hours can be projected, which contributes to higher aircraft availability rates.
- About 35 percent of the maintenance staff were inexperienced. According to the survey team, this could result in improper maintenance procedures being performed, which could adversely affect flight safety and endanger lives. In addition, all locations the team visited had deficiencies in standard maintenance procedures and practices. For example, the survey team found that a UH-60 Black Hawk with gunshot

²¹At about the same time, State began an investigation into a reported diversion of \$2 million in U.S. funding for the police. According to NAS officials, the police had resisted having the Aviation Resource Management Survey done until news of the alleged diversion became public.

damage to a fuel cell was used in several local area flights. While fuel cells are self-sealing to enable an aircraft to return to base for repairs after sustaining damage, aircraft are not supposed to be routinely flown in this condition.

- Management of items needing repair and control of spare parts was deficient. The survey team found 236 items awaiting repair—some from August 1998. The team also found more than \$4 million in UH-1H helicopter blades and parts stored outside and unprotected.
- The Aviation Service's safety program did not have formal risk management practices to ensure that all risk factors—such as weather, crew experience, and mission complexity—are taken into account. In addition, the team observed a majority of helicopter gunners failing to take basic safety precautions, such as ensuring that their machine guns and mini-guns were rendered harmless when personnel were around the aircraft, especially during refueling and rearming operations.

To help correct these and other deficiencies, the survey team made numerous recommendations for specific improvements. Overall, the team rated the Aviation Service's operational and maintenance procedures as poor but concluded that it had an excellent chance for improvement over the next 2 to 3 years due to the dedication of its young officers.

As a result of the survey, in July 2002, a NAS contractor (a \$38.8 million, 1-year contract with options for 4 additional years) began providing on-the-job maintenance and logistical training to the Aviation Service and helping the police address many of the issues raised by the Aviation Resource Management Survey team. NAS officials already noted that a more formal flying hour program has improved the availability rates of many of the aircraft in the Aviation Service's inventory. For example, the availability rate of the Aviation Service's UH-1H helicopters—often used to support aerial eradication missions—increased from 67 percent in January 2002 to 87 percent in December 2002. Similar improvements also occurred for other Aviation Service aircraft, such as UH-60 Black Hawk and Bell 212 helicopters. According to NAS, the improved availability rates made it easier to schedule and conduct spray missions.

T-65 Pilot Training

According to NAS officials, the police managed the T-65 pilot program prior to July 2002, but the police repeatedly violated Office of Aviation standard operating procedures by requiring pilots to fly without adequate rest and in poor weather. As a result, NAS took tighter control of the program in April

2003. As currently planned, the program will train 21 Colombian pilots, 4 of whom will eventually be hired to fly the T-65s. The training will enable pilots to fly T-65 spray missions in both flat and mountainous areas.

Search and Rescue Training

NAS is also planning to initiate a program in mid-2003 to standardize and modernize the police's search and rescue capabilities. Currently, the Office of Aviation contractor provides all search and rescue coverage for the aerial eradication program. The training will make it possible for the police to provide search and rescue coverage for some spray missions by standardizing its operating procedures to make them compatible with the Office of Aviation's. The program will also allow the police to replace much of its current equipment, which is antiquated or not standard. According to NAS officials, the program should be fully operational in about a year and self-sufficient in about 3 to 5 years.

Financial and Management Challenges Continue to Complicate Efforts to Reduce Illicit Drug Activities

The U.S.-supported counternarcotics program in Colombia has recently begun to achieve some of the results envisioned in 1999-2000. However, Colombia and the United States must continue to deal with financial and management challenges. In addition, Colombia faces continuing challenges associated with its long-standing insurgency. Moreover, for U.S. assistance to continue, Colombia needs to ensure that the army and police comply with human rights standards, that the aerial eradication program meets certain environmental conditions, and that alternative development is provided in areas subject to aerial eradication.

Performance Measures and Specific Time Frames Have Not Been Developed

In 2000, we noted that the Colombian government had not finalized plans for funding, sequencing, and managing activities included in Plan Colombia and that State and Defense had not completed their implementation plans to support Plan Colombia. We concluded that if Colombia or the United States did not follow through on its portion of Plan Colombia, including identifying sources of funding, Plan Colombia could not succeed as envisioned.²² Nearly 3 years later, Colombia and the United States still have not defined performance measures or identified specific time frames for completing ongoing counternarcotics programs.

²²GAO-01-26.

After the new Colombian administration was inaugurated in August 2002, it drafted a National Security Strategy to define Colombia's vital interests, principal threats, and short- and long-term objectives. According to State officials, as of April 2003, the National Security Strategy had not been finalized and was being held up while the Colombian military and police complete their strategy for dealing with the insurgents, including reclaiming the insurgent-controlled areas of Colombia and stemming illicit drug activities.

As for the United States, we were told that in 2002, the President tasked State to prepare a comprehensive, fully integrated political-military implementation plan to reflect appropriate U.S. support for Colombia's National Security Strategy. The plan is supposed to include a statement of the overall mission, goals, objectives, performance standards, timelines, measures of effectiveness, and desired end state and outcomes. However, according to State officials, development of this plan has not begun because Colombia has not released its National Security Strategy and the related military and police strategy.

Colombian Financial Resources Are Limited

Under the original concept of Plan Colombia, the Colombian government pledged \$4 billion and called on the international community to provide \$3.5 billion. Until recently, Colombia had not provided any significant new funding for Plan Colombia and, according to U.S. embassy and Colombian government officials, anticipated international assistance for Plan Colombia—apart from that provided by the United States—did not materialize as envisioned. But because of overall poor economic conditions, the government of Colombia's ability to contribute more is limited.

Since 1999, a combination of domestic and foreign events has limited Colombia's economic growth. Domestically, insurgent and paramilitary organizations remained active and derailed the peace process. According to the International Monetary Fund, the insurgency's threats and attacks displaced thousands of people, hindered investment, affected oil production, and forced the government to increase military expenditures. Externally, the price of coffee—a traditionally major Colombian export—reached historically low levels, trade with some neighboring countries fell as their economies under performed, and foreign private financing to Colombia was limited by the continuing insurgency and political developments in the region during 2002. By mid-2002, Colombian finance officials estimated that Colombia's economic growth was below 2 percent

and its combined public sector deficit would likely exceed 5 percent of gross domestic product.

In August 2002, the new Colombian administration announced a series of decrees and proposals to increase defense expenditures and strengthen the overall economy. Initially, the administration issued a decree establishing a one-time tax on wealth that was supposed to raise about \$860 million. According to State, about \$320 million of this amount would likely be spent on the military. To help maintain this increased revenue, the administration also submitted to the Colombian Congress a package of economic and administrative reforms. Most were approved in December 2002, but some reforms also require approval through a public referendum planned for later in 2003. The overall reform program calls for tax measures to raise revenues and a freeze on most current expenditures for 2 years. In addition, structural reforms, particularly changes in the government pension system and organizational streamlining, are planned to reduce expenditures.²³

However, passage of the reforms subject to referendum is far from certain and, according to U.S. Embassy Bogotá and Colombian government officials, Colombia's ability to provide additional funding to sustain the counternarcotics programs without a greatly improved economy is virtually nonexistent.

**Insurgency and Human
Rights Conditions
Complicate
Counternarcotics Efforts**

The Colombian government has stated that ending the civil conflict is central to solving Colombia's problems—from improving economic conditions to stemming illicit drug activities. A peaceful resolution to the long-standing insurgency would help stabilize the nation, speed economic recovery, help ensure the protection of human rights, and restore the authority and control of the Colombian government in the coca-growing regions. The continuing violence limits the government's ability to institute economic, social, and political improvements.

²³Colombia also entered into an arrangement with the International Monetary Fund in January 2003. The fund agreed to provide \$2.1 billion in stand-by credit through 2004 based on the reforms taken and proposed. However, Colombian finance officials said they do not intend to draw on these funds.

The Colombian government has stated that it is committed to protecting the human rights of its citizens. State and Defense officials reiterated that they will not assist those who violate the basic tenets of human rights, and State officials said they will apply the strictest human rights standards before approving the provision of assistance to Colombian military and police units. Nevertheless, human rights organizations continue to allege that individuals in the Colombian armed forces have been involved with or condoned human rights violations and that they do so with impunity. If this is the case, Colombia's failure to adhere to U.S. human rights policies could delay or derail planned counternarcotics activities.

The appropriations act for fiscal year 2003 makes \$700 million available for Colombia and other Andean ridge countries, but it imposed some restrictions on the availability of 25 percent of the funds provided for the Colombian armed forces until the Secretary of State makes certain certifications. The Secretary of State must certify that Colombia's armed forces are making progress in meeting human rights standards and, among other things, executing orders to capture paramilitary leaders to lift the restriction on 12.5 percent of the funds. To obligate the remaining 12.5 percent, the Secretary must certify after July 31, 2003, that Colombia continues to make progress in meeting the conditions in the initial certification.²⁴

Environmental and Alternative Development Conditions May Limit Aerial Eradication Efforts

The appropriations act for fiscal year 2003 also requires that the aerial eradication program meet certain environmental conditions in its use of herbicide and that alternative development programs be available in the areas affected by the spray program. Otherwise, funds provided in the act that are used to purchase herbicide for the aerial eradication program may not be spent. State officials are still trying to determine the ramifications of the restrictions, but State and NAS officials are concerned that these requirements could delay funding needed to purchase herbicide and result in a temporary suspension of the program, making it more difficult for the program to achieve its ambitious goals. Such a suspension would also likely undermine the progress made in 2002 by allowing the coca and poppy farmers to reestablish their fields.

²⁴P.L. 108-7, the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003.

The 2003 appropriations act's environmental conditions require the Secretary of State, after consultation with the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to certify that (1) the herbicide mixture is being used in accordance with EPA requirements, the Colombian Environmental Management Plan, and any additional controls that EPA may recommend; (2) the mixture does not pose unreasonable risks or adverse effects to humans or the environment; and (3) complaints of harm to health or licit crops are evaluated and fair compensation is paid for meritorious claims.²⁵ According to NAS and Office of Aviation officials, similar conditions in the fiscal year 2002 appropriations act almost resulted in a suspension of the aerial eradication program in October 2002 because of delays in finalizing the required reports. The program was able to continue operations by using prior-year funds but, at one point, had only a 10-day supply of herbicide available.

The 2003 appropriations act's alternative development conditions require that, in areas²⁶ where security permits, USAID, Colombian government, or other organizations implement alternative development programs for small growers whose coca and poppy plants are targeted for spraying. According to State, NAS, and USAID officials, alternative development programs are not being implemented in all the specific areas sprayed because of concerns about physical security and the economic feasibility of implementing such programs in some locations.

As of March 31, 2003, USAID reported accrued expenditures of about \$51.6 million for alternative development projects and projected that expenditures for April through June 2003 would exceed \$13.5 million. USAID officials also said that the agency had 247 alternative development projects benefiting more than 22,800 families in 9 departments where coca or opium poppy are grown.

²⁵In addition, the conference report accompanying the legislation directs the Secretary of State to submit a report, no later than 90 days after enactment, describing (1) the steps the department is taking to enhance environmental safeguards of the fumigation program, including implementing the recommendations of the EPA in a separate fiscal year 2002 fumigation report; (2) the department's plan to conduct an independent, long-term program to monitor the health and environmental effects of the fumigation program, including conducting soil and water tests in areas sprayed, toxicity tests on the spray formulation, and ground verification missions to evaluate over spray; and (3) steps taken to implement environmental training programs for spray pilots.

²⁶The term "areas" is not defined in the legislation. State is in the process of creating guidelines for implementing and complying with the act.

Conclusions

Colombia is a long-time ally and significant trading partner of the United States; therefore, its economic and political stability is important to the United States as well as the Andean region. Colombia's long-standing insurgency and the insurgents' links to the illicit drug trade complicate its efforts to tap its natural resources and make systemic economic reforms. Solving these problems is important to Colombia's future stability.

Colombia and the United States continue to face financial and management challenges in implementing and sustaining counternarcotics and counter-insurgency programs in Colombia. Neither the Colombian Army nor the Colombian National Police have the capacity to manage ongoing counternarcotics programs without continued U.S. funding and contractor support. Colombia's financial resources are limited and its economy is weak and thus will need U.S. assistance for the foreseeable future. According to U.S. embassy officials, these programs alone may cost up to \$230 million per year, and future costs for some recently initiated army and police programs have not been determined. In addition, we note that this estimate does not include future funding needed for other U.S. programs in Colombia, including other aerial and ground interdiction efforts; the police Aviation Service's U.S.-funded contractor; and alternative development, judicial sector reform, and internally displaced persons programs.

In recent years, world events—from the global war on terrorism to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—have diverted scarce U.S. resources and made it paramount that the United States fully consider the resources committed to its overseas assistance programs. As we noted in 2000, the total costs of the counternarcotics programs in Colombia were unknown. Nearly 3 years later, the Departments of State and Defense have still not developed estimates of future program costs, defined their future roles in Colombia, identified a proposed end state, or determined how they plan to achieve it.

Recommendation for Executive Action

Because Colombia continues to face serious obstacles in substantially curtailing illicit narcotics activities and resolving its long-standing insurgency, we recommend that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, examine the U.S. assistance programs to the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police to (1) establish clear objectives for the programs reflecting these obstacles and (2) estimate future annual funding requirements for U.S. support. This analysis should designate specific performance measures for assessing progress, define the

roles of U.S. personnel and contractors, and develop a timeline for achieving the stated objectives. The Secretary should provide this information to the Congress for consideration in the fiscal year 2005 appropriations cycle.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

State and Defense provided written comments on a draft of this report. See appendixes I and II, respectively.

Both concurred with our recommendation. State said it very much agreed with the overall findings and, in particular, the recognition that continued U.S. programs will be needed for the foreseeable future to sustain operations in Colombia and achieve U.S. foreign policy goals. It further said that the time is appropriate for a comprehensive review of U.S. programs with the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police and intends to address our recommendation for providing key program information to the Congress beginning in the fiscal year 2005 appropriations cycle. Defense stated that it would work with State to establish clear objectives and would coordinate with State and other agencies involved to develop performance measures. Defense added that, once performance measures are established, it would augment staff at the U.S. Embassy Bogotá Military Group to collect information for measuring progress.

Scope and Methodology

To determine the status of U.S. counternarcotics assistance provided to the Colombian Army in fiscal years 2000-03, and how this assistance has been used, we reviewed pertinent planning, implementation, and related documentation and met with cognizant U.S. officials at the Departments of State and Defense, Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Southern Command headquarters, Miami, Florida; and the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, Colombia. We also met with U.S.-funded contractor representatives at various Colombian Army bases; the Colombian Army Aviation Battalion commander and his staff at Tolomaidá; and the counternarcotics brigade commander and his staff at Larandia and Tres Esquinas. In addition, we observed a Colombian Army counternarcotics brigade airlift operation.

To determine what the U.S.-supported Colombian National Police aerial eradication program has accomplished in recent years, we reviewed pertinent documentation and met with cognizant officials at the Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs in Washington, D.C., and the Office of Aviation

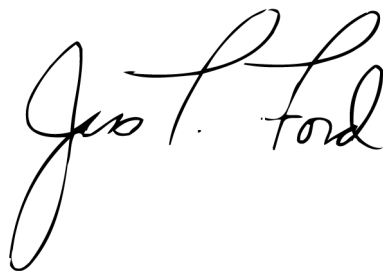
headquarters office at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida. In Colombia, we met with Office of Aviation officials and contractor representatives at the Office of Aviation headquarters office at the El Dorado International Airport in Bogotá; the Colombian National Police base at Guaymaral; and operational sites at Larandia, San Jose del Guaviare, Santa Ana, and Villa Garzon in the primary coca-growing regions of Colombia. We also met with the Colombian National Police deputy commander and other police officials. In addition, we observed several aerial eradication operations—from loading the herbicide and refueling the spray planes to the actual spray missions.

To determine what challenges Colombia and the United States face in sustaining these programs, we met with numerous U.S. and Colombian officials to obtain their views on the issues discussed in this report. In Colombia, we interviewed U.S. embassy officials, including the Ambassador; Deputy Chief of Mission; and others from the Narcotics Affairs Section, the Military Group, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. We also interviewed Colombian Army, police, and other government officials, including officials from the Colombian Ministries of Defense and Finance and Colombia's National Planning Department.

We conducted our work between July 2002 and May 2003 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the interested congressional committees and the Secretaries of State and Defense. We will also make copies available to others upon request. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please call me at (202) 512-4268 or contact me at FordJ@gao.gov. An additional contact and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix III.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jess T. Ford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J" and a distinct "T" and "F".

Jess T. Ford, Director
International Affairs and Trade

Comments from the Department of State



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

JUN 10 2003

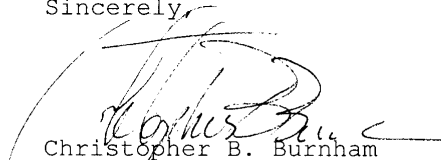
Dear Ms. Westin:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "DRUG CONTROL: Specific Performance Measures and Long-term Costs for U.S. Programs in Colombia Have not Been Developed," GAO-03-783, GAO Job Code 320135.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Stuart Lippe, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, at (202) 647-4208.

Sincerely,



Christopher B. Burnham
Assistant Secretary and
Chief Financial Officer

Enclosure:

As stated.

cc: GAO/IAT - Al Huntington
State/OIG - Luther Atkins
State/WHA - J. Curtis Struble
State/INL - Paul E. Simons

Ms. Susan S. Westin,
Managing Director,
International Affairs and Trade,
U.S. General Accounting Office.

Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report
DRUG CONTROL: Specific Performance Measures and Long-
term Costs for U.S. Programs in Colombia Have not Been
Developed, (GAO-03-783, Job Code 320135)

We appreciate having had the opportunity to meet with the GAO team led by Mr. A. H. Huntington and to review your draft report: Drug Control: Specific Performance Measures and Long-term Costs for U.S. Programs in Colombia Have not Been Developed, (GAO-03-783, GAO Code 320135). That report assesses developments since the October 2000 GAO report Drug Control: U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results, (GAO Job Code 711503).

The Department of State very much agrees with the overall findings, and, in particular, the recognition that continued U.S. programs will be needed for the foreseeable future to sustain operations to support Plan Colombia and achieve U.S. policy goals.

Those policy goals were described in the Department's December 3, 2002, report to Congress on "United States Policy Towards Colombia and Other Related Issues" as:

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

That report also described the challenges Colombia faces and some of the progress achieved, as well as benchmarks to be accomplished.

In a dynamic and challenging situation such as that confronting Colombia, the development of program plans and funding requirements is an evolving process. With that in mind, our performance measures and cost expectations have been shared with Congress. Since the beginning of U.S. support to Plan Colombia in 2000, the Department of State, through reports such as that described above, as well as the annual budget processes, required Congressional

Appendix I
Comments from the Department of State

Notifications, formal testimony, and numerous briefings, has sought to keep the Congress informed of plans and requirements to achieve our policy goals and to work closely to include and address Congressional concerns and desires. The Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary and the Under Secretary for Political Affairs and appropriate Assistant Secretaries have been active in responding to Congress and providing information on planned future programs and their costs.

Nearly three years into our support for Plan Colombia, it is now appropriate for a more comprehensive review, just as GAO recommends. The Department of State concurs with the GAO's recommendation, that "the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, establish clear objectives, including developing specific performance measures, and estimate future U.S. funding requirements for the programs with the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police." It is our intention to provide this information on a multi-year basis to the Congress for consideration beginning in the fiscal year 2005 appropriations cycle.

Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

SPECIAL OPERATIONS/
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

JUN -3 2003

Mr. Jess T. Ford
Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Ford:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, "Drug Control: Specific Performance Measures and Long-term Costs for U.S. Programs in Colombia Have not Been Developed," dated May 15, 2003 (GAO Code 320135/GAO-03-783).

The DoD reviewed the draft report and concurs with the recommendations. Specific comments for each recommendation are enclosed. My action officer for this is Mr. Robert Vierkant, (703) 697-5752, robert.vierkant@osd.mil.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "André D. Hollis".

André D. Hollis
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for
Counternarcotics

Enclosure:
As stated

**GAO DRAFT REPORT - DATED MAY 15, 2003
GAO CODE 320135/GAO-03-783**

**“DRUG CONTROL: SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND
LONG-TERM COSTS FOR U.S. PROGRAMS IN COLOMBIA HAVE NOT
BEEN DEVELOPED”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DoD) COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATION**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of State (DoS), in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, examine the U.S. assistance programs to the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police to:

Establish clear objectives for the programs reflecting the obstacles of substantially curtailing illicit narcotics activities and resolving its long-standing insurgency. (Page 33 of draft report).

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. DoD is prepared to work with DoS to establish clear program objectives. The Government of Colombia is working on a National Security Strategy, which should be the base document from which program objectives can be produced. Once clear objectives have been established, DoD will fully coordinate with DoS and the interagency on establishing performance measures for counternarcotics programs in Colombia. DoD will also establish an augmentee at the Military Group in Bogota to collect performance measures, once established.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, examine the U.S. assistance programs to the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police to:

Estimate future annual funding requirements for U.S. support. (Page 33 of draft report).

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. DoD does estimate future annual funding requirements for support to Colombia. An additional \$25M has been identified to support the sustainment of Colombia programs in FY2004 through 2009. A team from the United States Southern Command travels to Colombia several times a year to assess future funding requirements with the Country Team. From this assessment and other information, DoD develops a funding plan.

Over the past two years, DoD coordinated Colombia funding requirements with DoS. Coordination meetings with DoS are held quarterly to review Colombia program funding requirements. The last meeting was held April 21, 2003 and reviewed DoD counternarcotics funding, DoS/INL funding, and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Colombia through FY05. We will continue this funding estimate and coordination process.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

A.H. Huntington, III (202) 512-4140

Acknowledgments

In addition to the above named individual, Jocelyn Cortese, Allen Fleener, Ronald Hughes, Jose Pena, George Taylor, Kaya Taylor, and Janey Cohen. Rick Barrett and Ernie Jackson provided technical assistance.

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