

STATEMENT BY
THOMAS W. O'CONNELL
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND LOW
INTENSITY CONFLICT

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COUNTERNARCOTICS IN COLOMBIA

Chairman Davis, Representative Waxman, and distinguished members of the Committee, it is my honor to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Defense programs and policy that support for National Drug Control Strategy and to provide a current assessment of this strategy's effectiveness in Colombia. The Department appreciates that the support Congress provides is critical to our efforts in fighting narcoterrorism in Colombia.

DoD'S Role in the National Drug Control Strategy

The Office of Counternarcotics is the focal point for DoD's counterdrug activities, which support the National Drug Control Strategy. The Department's counternarcotics missions include detection and monitoring, demand reduction, support to domestic and host nation law enforcement and/or military forces. The Department carries out these activities by acting as the lead federal agency to detect and monitor the aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs toward the United States; collecting, analyzing and disseminating intelligence on drug activity; and providing training for U.S. and foreign drug law enforcement agencies and foreign military forces with drug enforcement responsibilities.

In the international arena, the Department of Defense provides much of its counternarcotics support through deployments and programs to train, equip and furnish intelligence and operational support for drug detection, monitoring, and interdiction operations conducted by partner counterdrug forces. These countertrafficking methods aim directly at disrupting the terrorist drug trade and finance networks and includes

cooperative military-to-military programs in which countries grant access to our military operators and enable access to target areas.

We are increasingly aware of linkages between terrorist organizations, narcotics trafficking, weapons smuggling, kidnapping rings, and other transnational networks. Some terrorist groups, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Colombia, partially finance their operations with drug money. The Department of Defense, with our counterparts in the Department of State and other government agencies, seeks to systematically dismantle drug trafficking networks, both to halt the flow of drugs into the United States, and to bolster the broader war on terrorism effort.

Colombia

Over 75 percent of the world's coca is grown in Colombia and nearly all of the cocaine consumed in the United States is produced and shipped from Colombia. This coca is primarily grown in remote areas of Colombia where there has been little government control. Colombian narcoterrorists receive a large majority of their funds from protecting, "taxing" and engaging in this illegal drug trade. These narcoterrorists seek to overthrow the freely elected Colombian government, the oldest democracy in Latin America.

The aggressive leadership of President Uribe offers Colombia a unique window of opportunity to preserve Colombian democracy. Under President Uribe's heroic leadership, Colombia is regaining control of areas long held by narcoterrorists. The Colombian military has made exceptional progress in fighting drug trafficking and terrorism while improving respect for human rights. Colombian security policies have

diminished the National Liberation Army (ELN), put the FARC on the defensive, and pushed the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) to come to the negotiating table. The Colombian government and its people are more committed now than ever before to save their country.

This Administration supports President Uribe's continued struggle against the FARC and other narcoterrorists by providing resources in support of Colombia's Plan Patriota. In Fiscal Year 2004, Congress provided expanded authority to support the momentum President Uribe had obtained through successes against the counternarcoterrorist targets. Expanded authority has been crucial to leverage our resources both against narcotics and terrorism. We thank Congress for supporting our request to extend that expanded authority to Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006 in the Fiscal Year 2005 Defense Authorization bill.

We request your continued support in addressing the troop cap limit. The current troop cap limits the U.S. presence in Colombia to 400 military personnel and 400 contractors. SOUTHCOM manages this on a daily basis, often canceling or postponing personnel travel to Colombia. However, in the coming year as the Colombian military will be conducting full-scale operations across the country, the personnel cap will begin to have a deleterious effect on the mission. While U.S. personnel will not be on the front lines, more US-sponsored training and planning assistance will be required for the Colombian military - - who will be directly engaged on a broader front than in previous years in order to defeat the narcoterrorists. We should support this effort with manning that bolsters increasing Colombian military needs. Consequently, the Administration has

requested an increase to the personnel cap to 800 military and 600 contractor personnel. The Administration's request of 800 military personnel and 600 civilian contractors is part of a well-defined, phased plan. This plan was developed with the Government of Colombia to maximize the impact of its Plan Patriota. The Department urges that the Administration's request be supported.

The Secretary of Defense has promised Colombian President Uribe increased support to the Colombian counter-narcoterrorist effort. Using expanded authority and acting within the congressionally approved personnel ceilings, the Department of Defense has provided United States military assistance teams to help the Colombians fuse intelligence and operations, and we intend to expand this program this year. In general, we focus our joint programs on developing, equipping, and training of strategically-focused units within the Colombian military. These units include the Colombian Counternarcotics Brigade, the Rapid Deployment Force (FUDRA), the National Urban Assault Unit, the Marine Riverine Units, and the LANCERO and COMMANDO Battalions of the Special Operations Command.

The Counternarcotics Brigade provides security for eradication operations and conducts raids on drug labs and facilities. This unit has been extremely successful in the Southern region of Colombia and has now expanded their operations throughout the country. Last year, Colombian eradication efforts resulted in coca cultivation estimates showing a 33% reduction from the peak growing year of 2002. This is the lowest level of coca production in the Andes since 1986, when our coca crop estimates began. Opium

poppy in Colombia also dropped last year by more than 10%, building upon a 25% reduction in 2002.

The other Colombian units have been similarly successful. The Colombian Rapid Deployment Force conducts immediate offensive operations as the situation in Colombia dictates, and will be a key combat unit in Plan Patriota. The National Urban Assault Unit is a highly trained anti-terrorism force that conducts hostage rescue and apprehends personnel in urban and semi-urban areas. It is directed by the Colombian Joint Chiefs of Staff. Riverine Combat Elements patrol the vast river network in Colombia that is used for drug trafficking. US military training of the Counter Narcotics Brigade, as well as the COMMANDO Battalion, to pursue enemy leadership has already produced results.

Department of Defense - funded infrastructure allows these specially trained units to deploy forward and to apply their training and equipment directly against narcoterrorists. In order to support these new forces, we are assisting both the Colombian Army and Air Force by providing them with aviation training, logistics, and maintenance support. Department support for the Colombian C-130 Air Force fleet has increased their operational readiness by over 60%. Training continues for helicopter pilots and mechanics, and is supporting a coordinated nationalization plan. This year, we will be consolidating the Colombian helicopter logistics and maintenance under a joint program, allowing the Colombian military to increase their operational readiness by having a centralized repair parts inventory and a pool of qualified mechanics. We also have increased support to the Colombian Navy by providing infrastructure, interceptor boats, and fuel. We provided a command and control system, linking the Colombian Navy,

Marines, Police, and U.S. law enforcement personnel along the north coast of Colombia. We plan on replicating this system along Colombia's west coast.

President's Budget for FY 2005

To accomplish this and other missions, the Defense Department's portion of the President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2005 includes \$853 million for Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities. A total of \$366.9M will support efforts in the SOUTHCOM AOR, including detection and monitoring operations to assist U. S. law enforcement agencies to counter the flow of drugs in transit into the United States, and supporting nations (such as Colombia) in their fight against narcoterrorism. A total of \$173.0 million is for detection and monitoring platforms and assets; \$142.5 million is for operational Support; and \$51.4 million is for AOR command and control support, including Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S).

Also, the Department asked Congress for reprogramming authority of \$50 million during this current fiscal year. I am pleased to report that the Department was able to increase our efforts in Colombia in FY05 by \$43 million.

Conclusion

Almost half-way into his four-year term, President Uribe has made Colombia safer and more stable economically. Under his leadership, the Army is helping to regain control of urban neighborhoods long since held by narcoterrorists. President Uribe has raised taxes to provide greater resources to his nation's security forces. Though much remains to be done, I believe we are on the right path in Colombia. Our continued support to President Uribe is critical. If we do not keep up the pressure and momentum

we will lose the progress that has already been made. Although there are many pressing concerns in other regions of the world, we must keep in mind that Colombia is a close ally within this hemisphere.

The Department appreciates Congress' continued support of our counter-narcoterrorism initiatives in Colombia. The initiatives you support play a great role in our efforts to aid a key ally in their fight against narcoterrorism. I thank you, Chairman Davis, Representative Waxman, and the members of the Committee for the tremendous support you have provided. I look forward to answering your questions.