

DECEMBER 2002

A WOLA BRIEFING SERIES

## Collateral Damage: *U.S. Drug Control in the Andes*

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

As the world's largest consumer of illicit drugs, the United States also confronts a multitude of problems stemming from illicit drug abuse and drug-related violence. The policy response developed in Washington, however, is largely driven by domestic political considerations and a desire to be "tough" in combating the illegal drug trade; hence, the drug war rhetoric that prevails today. Through its diplomatic and economic leverage, the United States has, to a large extent, dictated the policies adopted by the Andean governments, often over the objections of both local governments and important segments of civil society, and at times draining scarce resources from other national priorities. Apart from breeding resentment and tensions in bilateral relations, the U.S. approach to international drug control has also left a path of "collateral damage" in its wake while failing to stem the flow of illicit drugs over U.S. borders.<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written of the range of threats to democratic consolidation in Latin America, and an array of terms has been coined to describe the uneven development of democratic systems: "fragile, hybrid regimes, unsettling, delegative, debilitating, illiberal... inchoate and many more."<sup>2</sup> While few countries face the potential threat of a return to military rule, most face serious obstacles to strengthening and deepening democratic institutions. This brief explores to what extent counternarcotics policies promoted by the U.S. government favor or hinder efforts towards democratic consolidation.

### **Tipping the balance in civil-military relations**

The U.S. government's "war on drugs" clearly hinders efforts to put civilian-military relations on a new footing. It is detrimental to efforts to reduce military roles and missions, to eliminate its role in maintaining internal public order, to enhance civilian control over military forces and to increase both the transparency and accountability of military forces. Moreover, the counternarcotics mission provides the military with a task that is likely to lead to human rights abuses while at the same time the "confidential" nature of counterdrug programs further exacerbates patterns of impunity.

A publication of WOLA's "Drugs, Democracy and Human Rights" project, which examines the impact of drug trafficking and U.S. international drug control policies on human rights and democratization trends throughout Latin America and the Caribbean

THE ANDES





Sprig of coca leaf.

The lack of accountability and transparency of the region's armed forces make rooting out the inevitable corruption that accompanies antidrug efforts even more difficult, and controlling potential human rights abuses next to impossible.

The drug war in Latin America relies on Latin American military and police forces to play the lead role in combating the illicit drug trade, and those forces receive significant injections of U.S. military training and assistance for their collaboration. With the transition to civilian elected governments in South America have come widespread efforts to reduce the power of local security forces, limiting their authority to the control of national borders, and to enhance the control of civilian elected governments over local militaries and intelligence services.

Washington, its claims to the contrary notwithstanding, erodes these efforts by providing the resources, training and doctrinal justification for militaries to play a significant role in domestic counternarcotics operations, a law enforcement function reserved in most democracies for civilian police. In so doing, the U.S. government legitimates Latin American security forces in a fundamental internal security role, now directed at “new enemies,” and confirms them as actors in domestic politics. More often than not, U.S. support is provided prior to any meaningful institutional reforms that would ensure greater civilian control or respect for human rights.

U.S. officials often justify the embrace of local militaries as necessary to confront the firepower of drug traffickers, especially in the context of rampant corruption within police forces. Yet the long-term consequences of this approach may be even more detrimental than drug trafficking itself to prospects for democratic consolidation and regional stability. Nor is bringing in the military any guarantee that local governments will be able to circumvent the very real problem of corruption. As Bolivian president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada once said during his first presidential term: “When you have a corrupt chief of police, you fire him. When you have a corrupt chief of the army, he fires you.” The lack of accountability and transparency of the region's armed forces make rooting out the inevitable corruption that accompanies antidrug efforts even more difficult, and controlling potential human rights abuses next to impossible.

Through its drug policy, the United States has forged alliances with militaries that have deplorable human rights records. In Bolivia, U.S. drug policy pits coca farmers against the Bolivian police and army, generating conflict, violence and human rights abuses. In Peru, the U.S. government provided antidrug aid to the Peruvian National Intelligence Service (SIN), responsible for death squad activity and the significant setbacks to democracy in that country between the April 1992 *autogolpe*, or presidential coup, and Fujimori's dramatic fall from power almost nine years later. Perhaps most disturbingly, in the name of fighting drugs, the U.S. government has become directly involved in Colombia's escalating counterinsurgency campaign and is providing millions of dollars in assistance and training to Colombian military forces, some sectors of which are allied with the right-wing paramilitary groups responsible for the majority of human rights abuses committed in that country today.

## The illicit drug trade flourishes

The Andean region is the source of the bulk of illicit drugs which ultimately wind up on U.S. city streets. Cocaine, derived from the leaf of the coca plant, is produced primarily in the Andean countries of Colombia, Bolivia and Peru. The coca leaves are mixed with easily obtainable chemicals and other products to make coca paste, which is then transported to laboratories and processed into powdered cocaine. Colombia has also become the principal supplier of heroin to the United States. A broad network of

dealers and transportation routes is in place to export these illicit drugs to the United States and other areas of the world.

The areas under coca cultivation, drug trafficking cartels and trafficking routes have proliferated since the drug war was launched. Coca production can be compared to a balloon – squeezing it in one area merely causes it to pop up somewhere else. In Peru, for example, coca production used to be confined to the upper Huallaga valley. Coca eradication efforts and the mysterious spread of a fungus in coca-growing regions led to new production regions in the lower and middle Huallaga, the Apurimac river valley, and other areas. As coca production in Peru fell, coca production in Colombia exploded.

A similar phenomenon has occurred with cocaine production and trafficking. Following the crackdown on Colombia's Medellín cartel, the Cali cartel quickly replaced it. Once most of the Cali leadership was behind bars, a decentralization of the drug trade in Colombia took place, as smaller, regionally-oriented networks of drug traffickers – much more difficult to infiltrate and dismantle – took root around the country. No longer confined to Colombia, drug mafias proliferated in Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela and Brazil, and traffickers have proven adept at quickly adapting to drug control strategies, developing new methods and routes to circumvent detection.

*Fortune* magazine once described the cocaine trade as “probably the fastest-growing and unquestionably the most profitable” industry in the world.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the illicit drug trade has become an escape valve for Andean economies, which have fared poorly over the last two decades. Particularly in the boom years of the mid to late-1980s, when the cocaine trade took off, coca and cocaine dollars helped alleviate Peru and Bolivia's severe balance-of-payments problems and at least partially compensated for the lack of new loans and investments. As the gap between rich and poor widened following a decade of free market reforms, for many of the region's poor, coca production became a means of survival. Likewise, rampant unemployment and underemployment in urban areas have ensured a steady supply of recruits for other stages of the drug industry, from those who transport coca paste to others higher up the drug trafficking ranks.

In Bolivia, following neo-liberal reforms which devastated the tin industry and led to widespread factory shut-downs, people flocked to the Chapare coca-growing region. But in recent years, as coca eradication efforts succeeded in reducing overall coca production in Bolivia, the local economy in the Cochabamba area bottomed out and malnutrition and related diseases skyrocketed in the Chapare – clear indicators of the population's dependence on the revenues derived from the coca trade.

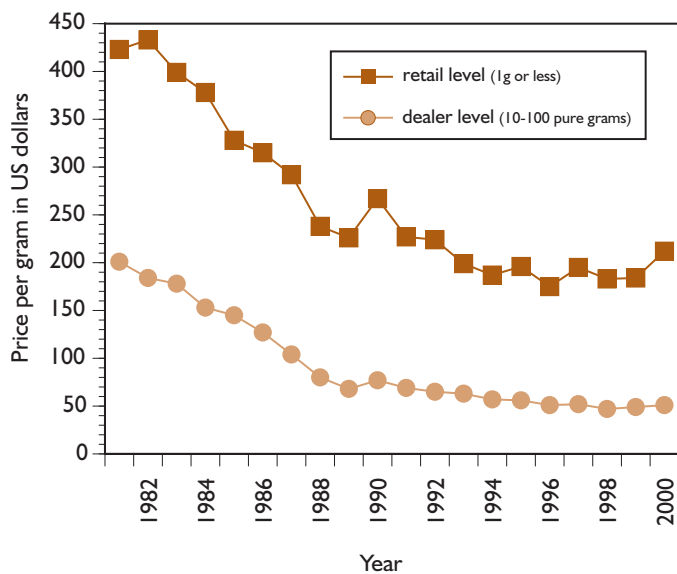
Even in Colombia, with the largest economy of the three, the drug trade has helped lubricate the economy and provides substantial employment opportunities, albeit risky ones. Peasants forced off their land as a result of political violence and poor urban dwellers with no prospect of legal employment have made their way to the southern coca-growing regions, either to plant coca or work as *raspachines*, or harvesters of the coca leaves. There are simply too many poor people, and too much land suitable for coca production, to put a lid on illicit coca production.

## **The evolution of U.S. international drug control policy**

As a result, the U.S. government made the Andean region its frontline in the war on drugs. Successive U.S. presidents have sought to target the “source” of production: the coca leaf, a traditional crop among Andean peasant communities. While the roots of the drug war go back to the Nixon administration, the launching of the Andean

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## Average Price of Cocaine in the United States 1981–2000



Source: The White House, *National Drug Control Strategy*, February 2002, Table 33: Average Price and Purity of Cocaine and Heroin in the United States, 1981-2000. 2000 data are preliminary, based on first two quarters of data.

**Figure 1.** This chart shows the drop in the price of cocaine, both at dealer and street levels, since the early 1980s.

front-loaded in the five-year plan. The Andean Initiative was centered on a dramatic escalation of support for military and police forces in the region, promotion of a direct hands-on role for both local and U.S. military forces in combating drug trafficking and production, and an enhanced role for some local intelligence services in domestic intelligence-gathering operations.

President Clinton followed the path laid out by his predecessor and the Andean Initiative. Initially, the Clinton administration did adopt a different rhetoric, promising to focus on treatment on demand for drug users and education at home. Administration officials largely dropped the use of war metaphors and paid greater lip service to promoting democratic institutions and economic development in drug-producing countries. The emphasis on these objectives was, however, short-lived. Over the course of the first Clinton administration, approximately sixty-five percent of the federal drug control budget continued to be allocated annually for supply-side efforts, at home and abroad, and the Andes remained the centerpiece of U.S. international drug control policy.

By the mid-1990s, the Clinton administration – backed by the Republican-controlled Congress – had dramatically increased funding for international counternarcotics assistance, and that assistance has continued to increase ever since. Colombia quickly became the third-largest recipient of military assistance in the world. As the 2000 presidential and congressional elections approached, Congress approved another major infusion of aid for international drug control efforts. In addition to nearly \$300 million approved through the normal appropriations procedure, an emergency supplemental aid package for the newly-proposed Plan Colombia was legislated. The aid package totaled \$1.3 billion over a two-year period; while the vast majority was destined for Colombia,

Initiative by President Bush in 1989 focused attention on source-country efforts. The stated objectives of the five-year strategy were to strengthen the political will and institutional capabilities of the Andean governments to combat drugs, increase the effectiveness of local law enforcement and military antidrug activities, and work with these countries to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations. The thrust of the source-country approach is to make the illicit drug trade more dangerous and costly, thereby driving down production and availability, driving up prices, and ultimately discouraging U.S. citizens from buying and using illicit drugs.

A final objective of the Andean strategy was to strengthen and diversify the legitimate economies of the Andean countries so that they could overcome the destabilizing effect of eliminating coca and cocaine as a major source of income. However, economic assistance was originally to be provided only *after* success was obtained in significantly disrupting the coca and cocaine trades.

Security assistance, on the other hand, was

some funding was also provided for counternarcotics efforts in Bolivia and Peru and for “forward operating locations,” or FOLs, military bases used to refuel sophisticated U.S. aircraft involved in aerial surveillance of the region to gather counternarcotics intelligence. Nearly one billion dollars was allocated for the Colombian armed forces and police – almost two million dollars a day for a two-year period.

With the advent of the George W. Bush administration, U.S. drug policy has come full circle. In the spring of 2001, the new administration presented its Andean Regional Initiative, another nearly one-billion-dollar aid package for fiscal year (FY) 2002 that is remarkably similar to former President Bush’s Andean Initiative.<sup>5</sup> While still targeting Colombia, the latest program is designed to address the spillover effects of the U.S. drug war in Colombia by providing increased assistance to its neighbors, including Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama. The U.S. Congress approved \$625 million for the Andean Regional Initiative for FY2002 and shortly thereafter began considering a request for FY2003 of over 700 million dollars.<sup>6</sup>

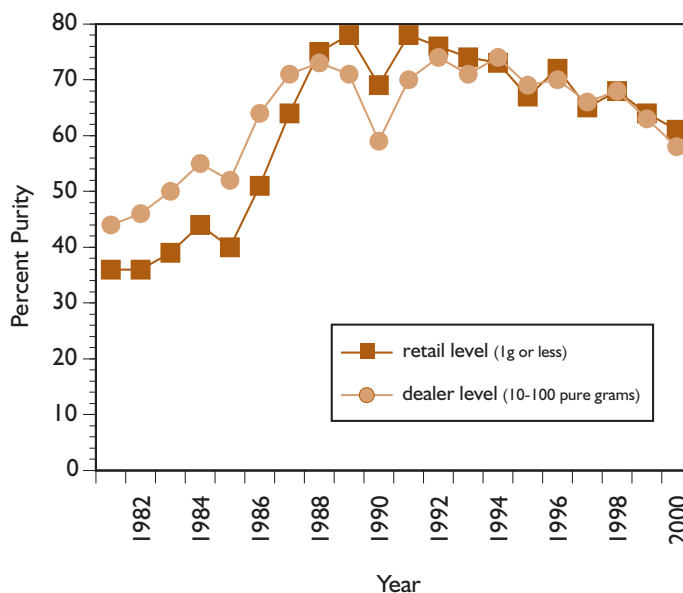
In short, several billion dollars have been allocated to Andean counterdrug efforts in recent years. Yet hardly a dent has been made in overall coca production, and cocaine and heroin are just as cheap and readily available on U.S. city streets as they were when the first Andean Initiative was launched. Washington is losing its self-proclaimed war on drugs in the Andean region, but with no “enemy” to claim formal victory, the war continues unabated at a high cost to U.S. taxpayers and, most significantly, for the people of the Andean region.

## The Pentagon’s role

Security assistance – aid to local military and police forces – is one of the principal tools for U.S. agencies waging the drug war abroad. While the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is the primary agency engaged in on-the-ground counternarcotics activities overseas, in 1989 the U.S. Congress designated the Defense Department (DOD) as the “single lead agency” for the detection and monitoring of illicit drug shipments into the United States and expanded its funding for training and equipping local security forces.

In addition to the provision of military hardware, the U.S. military runs an array of counternarcotics-related training programs. U.S. training programs take on many different forms, and training teams can be as small as a single officer or as large as an entire platoon. In FY1998, for example, the U.S. Southern Command (SouthCom) carried out at least 2,265 “deployments for training” in Latin America and the Caribbean, involving over 48,000 U.S. personnel.<sup>7</sup> In addition, U.S. Special Forces also carry out

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**Figure 2.** The purity levels of cocaine rose sharply throughout the 1980s and then dropped only slightly through mid-2000.



Rows of coca planted in Bolivia's Yungas region.

The U.S. military's role in counternarcotics efforts was met with some resistance in the Pentagon. Many officials were concerned about becoming involved in a mission which was seen as deviating from the U.S. military's traditional role and which could be potentially detrimental to military readiness in other areas of the world.

their own training activities, often numbering in the hundreds per year. In-country training is supplemented by instruction at U.S. military facilities. Among the U.S.-based facilities used for counternarcotics instruction is the former School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia.<sup>8</sup> It offers officers an eleven-week course that provides instruction in planning, leading and executing drug interdiction operations, including infiltration and surveillance techniques, patrolling, demolition, and close-quarters combat.<sup>9</sup> In 1999, the last year for which figures are available, the United States trained a total of about 13,000 Latin American military and police, either in the region or on U.S. bases.<sup>10</sup>

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

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

However, SouthCom embraced the drug mission enthusiastically. In the wake of the cold war, the drug war provided the rationale for maintaining SouthCom's budget and troop levels as other areas of the world rose in importance on the Pentagon's agenda. SouthCom officials also viewed the drug war as converging with their previous roles and mission – the low-intensity conflict strategies honed during the years of conflict in Central America were quickly adapted to the carrying out of its new mandate. Perhaps most importantly, the drug war provided SouthCom with a means of not only maintaining, but expanding, military-to-military relations throughout the hemisphere.

## Expanding military missions

Counternarcotics training, whether conducted in-country or at U.S. facilities, is viewed by many Pentagon officials as an important opportunity to foster closer ties with the region's armed forces, one of the key goals of DOD's post-cold war strategy for

the hemisphere. In a series of interviews conducted by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) in 1990 and 1991, U.S. military officials with responsibility for U.S. security policy toward Latin America underscored the need to not only maintain, but to expand, relations with militaries across the hemisphere – a strategy they have pursued ever since. They also stressed the need to enhance military capabilities, even as civilian elected governments took hold:

*Currently, in SouthCom's view, the U.S. military's part in promoting democracy [. . .] is neither to work for a reduction in Latin American military forces nor to attempt to delimit the role of armed forces in Latin American societies. Rather, the U.S. military role is to continue to strengthen military capabilities on the assumption that democratic values will be transmitted. Enhancing host nations' capabilities appears repeatedly throughout SouthCom documents as a goal for counterinsurgency, anti-narcotics, and nation-building activities.<sup>11</sup>*

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

Some local analysts point out that by circumventing civilian institutions, the U.S. government may be undermining people's faith in those institutions at a time when democratic developments remain delicate and when curbing military autonomy remains critical to future democratization. In some Andean countries, the civilian governments' control of military forces is tenuous at best, and local militaries are increasingly flexing their muscle. For example, in Colombia – which does not have a history of military rule – the military's powers have steadily expanded as insurgency movements have grown.

In Ecuador, a popular uprising and military coup in January 2000 led to the ouster of the president and a transfer of power to the vice president. In Bolivia and Venezuela, military officials have entered power through elections. Upon assuming the presidency, this time via elections, former dictator Gen. Hugo Banzer announced his intention to elevate the Bolivian military's role in the country, paving the way for greater Bolivian military involvement in counternarcotics operations. And, once in office, aborted coup leader Hugo Chávez, president of Venezuela, liked to don his colonel's uniform and has “militarized society to a level not seen since democracy was restored in 1958,” according to one international observer.<sup>12</sup> Yet factions of the military allied with disgruntled civilian sectors nearly ousted Chávez in a failed coup attempt in April 2002. All of these examples provide a potent reminder of the extent to which military forces across the Andean region continue to see themselves as the arbiters of political power.

In Peru, former President Alberto Fujimori relied on the active support of Peru's armed forces and the SIN to consolidate his authoritarian rule. The power and political influence of the Peruvian military expanded significantly following the 1992 *autogolpe*, as was evident in its increasing role in the judicial realm, the impunity with which it operated, and its role in helping President Fujimori secure re-election in 1995 and again, via widespread fraud, in 2000. Under the control of Vladimiro Montesinos, the SIN came to function largely as Peru's political police. Until it was dismantled following Fujimori's fall, the SIN was responsible for the systematic harassment, intimidation and blackmail of the regime's perceived political opponents, carried out widespread illegal wiretapping and other surveillance, and was the principal agency involved in manipulating the courts, Congress and the electoral apparatus to favor executive branch policies.<sup>13</sup> Yet both the Peruvian military and the SIN were courted by

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A farming family fills sacks with coca leaves to sell at the market.

Andean countries initially balked at Washington's demand that local militaries play a prominent role in counternarcotics operations and at U.S. insistence that the war on drugs be made a top priority in spite of the severe economic crisis which engulfed the Andean region at the time.

U.S. officials as important allies in the drug war and received significant U.S. economic support towards that end.

In short, the allies chosen by Washington as it wages its drug war in the Andes represent some of the most dangerous elements within those societies. In this context, the drug war's collateral damage is quite clear: an enhanced role for local military and intelligence forces in domestic operations that lack sufficient mechanisms for civilian control, transparency and accountability. These forces are beefed up at the expense of the civilian institutions upon which the future of democracy in these countries depends.

## Overcoming local opposition

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

Andean countries initially balked at Washington's demand that local militaries play a prominent role in counternarcotics operations and at U.S. insistence that the war on drugs be made a top priority in spite of the severe economic crisis which engulfed the Andean region at the time. Andean leaders not only had scarce resources, but also feared that some of the political and economic challenges they faced could be deepened by a large-scale crackdown on the coca and cocaine trade.<sup>14</sup>

Even some local militaries objected to this new role. Both Peruvian and Colombian military officials, for example, repeatedly claimed that counterinsurgency objectives took precedence over counternarcotics objectives and saw the two as conflicting, rather than complementary. In the Peruvian Huallaga, the military had adopted a strategy of trying to win "the hearts and minds" of the local population in order to erode any support the Shining Path insurgency had among the local population. Eliminating their economic livelihood only risked pushing them into the hands of the subversives. As one former Peruvian military commander said, "There are 150,000 peasants growing coca in the zone. Each of them is a potential subversive. Eradicate his field and the next day he will become one."<sup>15</sup>

Despite local resistance, the U.S. government used the threat of decertification, and the significant disruptions in both aid and trade with the United States that such an action would cause, to bring local governments on board. The Andean militaries in



Colombia, Bolivia and Peru were eventually enticed with the economic and political backing offered by Washington, and like SouthCom, found in the drug war a convenient *raison d'être* for maintaining troop levels, budgets, and political influence. For the Colombian military, the benefits of adapting to the drug war rhetoric are more than obvious from the U.S. aid now flowing into their coffers. By acquiescing to Washington's drug war, they secured helicopters, training, and intelligence that were useful for their primary concern – counterinsurgency – and eventually led Washington policymakers to send direct counterinsurgency aid. More than ten years after the Andean Initiative was first launched, all of the Andean militaries are now actively engaged in the U.S. war on drugs.

## Fueling human rights violations

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

International antinarcotics accords include provisions relating to the protection of human rights. The 1990 Declaration of Cartagena, for example, requires that “the parties act within the framework for human rights” and states that “nothing would do more to undermine the war on drugs than disregard for human rights.” Bilateral agreements between the U.S. and Latin American governments often include clauses on human rights, and administration documents, such as the annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, stress the compatibility between antinarcotics programs and respect for human rights. Nonetheless, successive U.S. administrations have, at different points in time, downplayed the gravity of the human rights situation in countries such as Bolivia and Colombia in order to obtain congressional support for counternarcotics assistance.

### Bolivia

Perhaps nowhere is the direct collateral damage of the U.S. war on drugs more evident than in Bolivia. With no guerrilla groups operating in the country, no murky line between counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts blurs the picture, as in Colombia. In other words, human rights violations that result from antinarcotics operations are just that. While current abuses pale in comparison to the killings and disappearances carried out under some of Bolivia's military dictators, a disturbing pattern of killings, mistreatment and abuse of the local population prevails in Bolivia's primary coca-growing region, the Chapare. Moreover, the primary victims are not drug traffickers, but poor farmers who eke out a subsistence-level income through coca production. The counternarcotics efforts that have led to such abuses are rooted in Law 1008, adopted by the Bolivian Congress on July 19, 1989. Passed under strong U.S. pressure, Law 1008 gives the government sweeping powers to control coca production and drug trafficking. Social unrest, conflict and violence in the Chapare have clearly increased as a result of U.S. pressure on the Bolivian government to comply with Law 1008 and to meet annual coca eradication targets.<sup>16</sup>

Coca-related violence in Bolivia rises and falls according to pressures to eradicate coca and the lengths to which the Bolivian government is willing to go to ease that pressure. A period of steadily escalating protests and ensuing violent repression began in

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Man with bag of coca leaves bought at the market.

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September 2001 and continued through February 2002. During that time, ten coca growers were killed as a result of excessive use of force by security forces and four members of those forces were killed, apparently by angry coca growers. Over 350 protesters were injured or detained.<sup>17</sup> In recent months, conflict has flared when coca growers have tried to impede the destruction of coca crops by surrounding some of the eradication base camps where they were met with violence from the government's eradication forces. The cyclical patterns of violence will no doubt continue well into the future.

### Colombia

Although the Bolivian government in recent years consistently met U.S. coca eradication targets and other counternarcotics objectives, it has at times faced cuts in U.S. assistance as funds are diverted to Colombia. In Colombia, where the U.S. drug war is inextricably intertwined with the military's counterinsurgency campaign, the collateral damage of U.S. policy stems from a very real war with high costs for the civilian population. The number of victims of political violence killed on any given day in Colombia has almost doubled in recent years to twenty per day.<sup>18</sup> Over seventy percent of these killings are attributed to right-wing paramilitary groups, often allied with the country's security forces; the rest are attributed directly to the Colombian security forces and to the insurgents. The tactics of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in particular have become increasingly brutal and it is responsible for widespread killings and kidnappings. In addition, political violence has forced more than two and a half million Colombians from their homes – over 300,000 in 2000 – mostly fleeing paramilitary rampages.<sup>19</sup> Paramilitary groups have been responsible for hundreds of massacres of civilians.<sup>20</sup>

The main contact that many Colombians have with the state in the worst areas of violence is with repressive security forces that have refused to sever their ties to brutal paramilitary groups. U.S. support provided to the Colombian military comes at the expense of aid to civilian institutions and development programs that remain woefully under-funded but are ultimately the only viable means of creating a truly democratic, and peaceful, country.

As noted, in mid-2000, the U.S. Congress approved a \$1.3 billion emergency aid package for Plan Colombia, the bulk of which was geared toward shoring up the Colombian armed forces in the southern coca-growing region of the country. It included equipping and training three army counternarcotics battalions and the provision of sixty sophisticated helicopters to provide ground support for aerial herbicide campaigns.

The September 11 attacks, followed by the collapse of President Pastrana's faltering peace process in February 2002, bolstered the position of those arguing for a military approach and a direct U.S. counterinsurgency role in Colombia. The FY2003 aid package announced by the administration includes \$98 million to equip and train additional army battalions to protect oil pipelines in the northeastern part of the country. The administration then requested and later received congressional approval to eliminate restrictions on providing U.S. assistance and intelligence for counterinsurgency purposes, erasing what had been a hazy line between U.S. counternarcotics and counterinsurgency support.

## The narco-guerrilla theory

The “narco-guerrilla” theory, which first gained prominence in the early 1980s, has allowed the counternarcotics and counterinsurgency missions to blur, creating greater risks that local forces which receive U.S. counterdrug assistance become involved in human rights abuses. At a 1984 Senate hearing, federal officials warned that international terrorists were turning to drug trafficking to finance their operations. “Drugs have become the natural ally of those that would choose to destroy democratic societies in our hemisphere through violent means,” cautioned then-U.S. Customs commissioner William Von Rabb, who alleged that Cuba and Nicaragua were using the regional drug trade to finance insurgencies throughout Latin America.<sup>21</sup>

The alleged link between drug traffickers and insurgents became an implicit component of the first Andean Initiative, as administration officials depicted drug traffickers as irrevocably tied to leftist subversives. By the mid-1990s, U.S. officials pointed to Colombia as the center of narco-guerrilla activity. In hearings held by the House International Relations Committee on April 2, 1998, Rep. Gilman boldly exclaimed, “The frightening possibilities of a ‘narco-state’ just three hours by plane from Miami can no longer be dismissed.” In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the term now used most frequently is “narco-terrorist.” In the post-September 11 worldview of most Washington policymakers, the distinction between terrorists and drug traffickers operating in Colombia and other places has been obliterated. “Terrorism and drugs go together like rats and the bubonic plague,” proclaimed U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft. “They thrive in the same conditions, support each other and feed off of each other.”<sup>22</sup>

While links between drug traffickers and guerrillas clearly exist, the reality on the ground is more complex. No one disputes that in Colombia, the FARC gains significant resources from the illicit drug trade. It controls vast areas where coca plantations thrive in the departments of Guaviare, Putumayo, Caquetá and parts of Meta, providing it with a very important and steady source of income that allows it to advance militarily and to maintain a steady flow of recruits. However, the guerrillas are only one of many actors – including elements of the armed forces and right-wing paramilitary groups – involved in the lucrative drug trade. In fact, drug mafias are most closely associated with right-wing paramilitary groups, with whom they have historic ties. The leader of the paramilitary umbrella group, Carlos Castaño, admitted in his autobiography that seventy percent of his organization’s financing comes from the drug trade. This year, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft indicted three top leaders of the FARC and three top paramilitary leaders, including Castaño, on drug trafficking charges.

In the post-September 11 foreign policy-making environment, the United States’ antidrug and counterterrorism efforts appear to be melding into a single strategy. Casting it as a war against “narco-terrorism,” however, exacerbates the worst elements of the U.S. war on drugs described above and hence poses even greater risks to democratic consolidation in the Andean region.

## Intelligence services in the Andes: the case of Peru

Abusive army units are not the only ones who have benefited from U.S. largess; local intelligence services have also. During the years that military dictatorships prevailed across the Latin American region, intelligence services were often the source of the worst manifestations of state terror, and since the return to civilian rule those agencies have largely evaded reform by civilian elected governments. The character of intelligence and the uses to which it is put depend on whether those in command

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Peru's Huallaga River in the coca-producing region.

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answer to democratic civilian authority. Yet Andean intelligence services continue to operate with significant autonomy, are not accountable to the public, and often appear to continue to operate with a cold war mentality that fails to distinguish legal political activity from insurgent or criminal activity.

Perhaps the most blatant case is that of Peru, where the U.S. government provided political and economic support to Peru's intelligence service, the SIN, despite its involvement in death squad activity and the anti-democratic activities previously described. U.S. officials claimed throughout the course of the 1990s that

the SIN played an important coordinating role in counternarcotics efforts and that the U.S. thus had no choice but to support it. Washington also claimed that the SIN had been effective in its efforts. U.S. officials met publicly with SIN officials, praised their work in the press (lending political support even as the SIN's involvement in sinister activities was growing), and provided economic support via the State Department and, allegedly, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The *de facto* head of the SIN and President Fujimori's top security adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos, was long rumored to be on the CIA payroll.

This relationship appears to go back to the 1970s, when Montesinos was thrown out of the Peruvian army and spent one year in jail after an unauthorized visit to Washington, where he was suspected of selling information to U.S. agents. He then launched a lucrative law practice in Peru defending accused drug traffickers.<sup>23</sup> In 1990, Montesinos was introduced to Fujimori by the latter's campaign chief, Francisco Loayza. After helping Fujimori avoid a judicial trial for tax evasion, Montesinos quickly became Fujimori's top security advisor.<sup>24</sup> Within a short period of time he took over control of the SIN, and was put forward as the architect of the Peruvian government's war against terrorism and drug trafficking.

Although he held no formal title within the government, by the mid-1990s U.S. officials would refer to Montesinos as Peru's "drug czar." Although in other countries Washington was quick to dictate who should control narcotics policies, in the case of Peru, U.S. officials publicly lamented that they had no choice but to work with Montesinos. Privately, they pointed out that he indeed got things done – he was viewed as "Mr. Fixit."<sup>25</sup>

Throughout this period, credible allegations repeatedly surfaced linking Montesinos to unconstitutional acts, human rights violations and drug trafficking-related corruption. Montesinos is considered to be the mastermind behind the April 1992 *autogolpe* and a death squad, *Grupo Colina*, responsible for some of the worst human rights atrocities which took place during the Fujimori government. In addition, numerous individuals claimed under oath that Montesinos demanded bribes in order for drug trafficking operations to go forward unimpeded by authorities. Reports periodically surfaced regarding the wealth that Montesinos had accumulated. Yet every time these allegations arose, U.S. officials publicly stated their confidence in the integrity of Peruvian government officials and refused to back calls for investigations. The

unwillingness of U.S. officials to support investigations into allegations of wrongdoing by Montesinos provided him with crucial political support from Washington.

Shortly after Montesinos emerged as Fujimori's right-hand man, Peruvian journalist Gustavo Gorriti reported that the CIA was providing counternarcotics aid to a SIN antinarcotics unit involved in death-squad activity.<sup>26</sup> Inquiries by members of the U.S. Congress revealed that the U.S. State Department provided small but steady amounts of assistance to the antidrug unit of the SIN until the late 1990s. The CIA was also believed to have channeled aid to the SIN, although it refuses to deny or confirm such reports. Most disturbingly, the Center for Public Integrity reports that the CIA paid Montesinos at least one million dollars a year *in cash* for a ten-year period, allegedly for counternarcotics programs. That aid continued until September 2000, right up until Fujimori was forced to announce new elections in which he would not run and the dismantling of the SIN.<sup>27</sup> According to then-U.S. ambassador to Peru, John Hamilton, it was not until Fujimori's surprise announcement that all communication with Montesinos allegedly ceased and that the SIN was informed that all programs with the U.S. would be discontinued. He also acknowledged that the CIA had an "official liaison relationship" with Montesinos.<sup>28</sup>

Ironically, it now appears that Washington's "man in Peru" may also have been aiding and abetting the Colombian guerrillas. One of the scandals that provoked the fall of the Fujimori government was the revelation that high-level Peruvian military officials and Montesinos himself were allegedly involved in trafficking guns to the FARC, possibly in exchange for drugs. According to press reports, thousands of Russian-manufactured automatic weapons were legally purchased from Jordan by the Peruvian military and then secretly delivered to the FARC.

With the fall of the Fujimori government, the prosecution of dozens of officials implicated in corruption and other scandals, including Vladimiro Montesinos, more and more information is being revealed as to the corrupt practices of the Peruvian "drug czar," who appears to have amassed a multi-million-dollar fortune.

Over the course of the Fujimori government, U.S. officials consistently spoke out in defense of human rights and democracy, yet it is now clear that through the drug war, the United States was supporting the very forces undermining democratic institutions. U.S. drug policy exacerbated trends toward increased concentration of power in the hands of the president, and the steady elimination of mechanisms of transparency and accountability within government that allowed for massive official corruption to go on for years. In short, as a result of drug war politics, the U.S. government became an accomplice, albeit indirectly, of authoritarian rule.

## Conclusion: a failed strategy

The "collateral damage" of the U.S. war on drugs is far too evident to the people of Colombia, Bolivia and Peru. In Colombia, billions of dollars in U.S. counterdrug assistance is fueling the region's only significant counterinsurgency war at the present time and exacerbating the most serious human rights crisis in the hemisphere. In Bolivia, the socioeconomic and human rights crisis in the Chapare coca-growing region is a direct result of U.S. drug policy. And finally, in Peru, through its counternarcotics program Washington supported the most sinister element of the authoritarian Fujimori regime: the SIN, or national intelligence service, which came to function as Peru's political police.

The drug war's collateral damage also impacts those struggling to strengthen and consolidate democratic rule in the Andean region. In making local military forces

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strategic partners in the so-called war on drugs, Washington is expanding their role and mission precisely when they should be seeking to reduce the power and influence of the military, particularly in maintaining internal public order, a task which should correspond to the police. Through the provision of training, intelligence gathering capabilities and military hardware, the U.S. government emboldens local militaries and sometimes reduces the ability of civilian governments to exert control and effective oversight over those forces. Assigning them a task that is inherently “confidential” in nature also hinders civilian oversight, transparency and accountability.

Despite these high costs, Washington has little to show for its drug war efforts. Overall coca production in the Andean region has declined only slightly since coca eradication efforts began well over a decade ago. Colombia provides a case in point. It is the only country in the Andean region to accept the use of chemical herbicides to eradicate coca. Yet since the program got underway in 1995, coca production in that country has increased by more than 150 percent.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, cocaine and heroin are just as cheap and as readily available on U.S. city streets as they were when the Andean Initiative was launched by the first President Bush. For most analysts, there is no doubt that Washington is losing its self-proclaimed war on drugs – yet the war continues unabated at a high cost to U.S. taxpayers and, most significantly, for the people of the Andean region.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The logic behind U.S. policy is that if the supply of drugs can be interrupted, its street price in the United States will increase, and usage will then decrease. Nevertheless, prices and purity have not been significantly affected by the war on drugs, nor has usage been shown to have decreased. See United States, Office of National Drug Control Policy, *The Price of Illicit Drugs: 1981 through the Second Quarter of 2000*, NCJ 190639, PO 2965, October 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> Felipe Aguero and Jeffrey Stark, eds., *Fault Lines of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America* (University of Miami: North-South Center Press, 1998), 2.
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas Kahn, “Bolivians Fear a U.S.-Led War on Drugs,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 1991.
- <sup>4</sup> “The Drug Trade,” *Fortune*, 20 June 1998.
- <sup>5</sup> This funding was included in both the FY2002 foreign operations request and the Pentagon’s defense budget.
- <sup>6</sup> “Colombia Dominates in Aid Appropriations for Latin America,” *Cross Currents*, vol. 4, no. 1 (February 2002): 10.
- <sup>7</sup> Adam Isacson and Joy Olson, *Just the Facts: A civilian’s guide to U.S. defense and security assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: The Latin America Working Group and the Center for International Policy, 1999), 187.
- <sup>8</sup> In January 2001, it was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.
- <sup>9</sup> Peter Zirnite, *Reluctant Recruits: The U.S. Military and the War on Drugs* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Office on Latin America, August 1997), 17-20.
- <sup>10</sup> Adam Isacson, “Militarizing Latin America Policy,” a policy brief published by Foreign Policy in Focus, vol. 6, no. 21 (May 2001): 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Charles Call, *Clear and Present Dangers: The U.S. Military and the War on Drugs in the Andes* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Office on Latin America, 1991), 41.
- <sup>12</sup> Anthony Fiaola, “In Venezuela, A Revolution From the Top,” *The Washington Post*, 27 July 1999.
- <sup>13</sup> See Coletta Youngers, *Deconstructing Democracy: Peru Under President Alberto Fujimori* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Office on Latin America, 2000).
- <sup>14</sup> See, for example, Samuel Doria Medina, Embassy of Bolivia, “Hearings before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control,” 27 March 1990, 7.
- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in Peter R. Andreas, Eva C. Bertram, Morris J. Blackman, and Kenneth E. Sharpe, “Dead-End Drug Wars,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 85 (winter 1991/92): 116.
- <sup>16</sup> See Kathryn Ledebur, “Coca and Conflict in the Chapare,” *Drug War Monitor*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Washington Office on Latin America, July 2002).
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>18</sup> *The "Sixth Division": Military-Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia* (Washington D.C., Human Rights Watch, 2001), 13.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>20</sup> For more information on Colombia, see Issues 1 and 2 of WOLA's *Colombia Monitor*, March and July 2002, respectively.
- <sup>21</sup> "Drug Funds Termed Source for Terrorists," *The Washington Post*, 3 August 1984.
- <sup>22</sup> Nancy Dunne and James Wilson, "Colombia Rebels Indicted," *The Financial Times*, 19 March 2002.
- <sup>23</sup> "El Doctor: Vladimiro Montesinos," *Debate*, vol. XX, no. 3 (November/December 1998): 24–36.
- <sup>24</sup> Francisco Loayza, "Forme un Frankenstein," *Debate*, vol. XX no. 3 (November/December 1998): 36.
- <sup>25</sup> Karen DeYoung, "'The Doctor' Divided U.S. Officials," *The Washington Post*, 22 September 2000.
- <sup>26</sup> Coletta Youngers, "U.S. Drug Czar Backs Peruvian Rasputin," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, vol. XXX, no. 4 (January/February 1997): 1-2.
- <sup>27</sup> *U.S. Shrugged Off Corruption, Abuse in Service of Drug War* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Public Integrity, 12 July 2001), 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Coletta Youngers, "U.S. Policy Toward Peru as the Elections Near," memorandum released by the Washington Office on Latin America, 29 March 2001, 2–3.
- <sup>29</sup> Lesley MacKay, "The Coca Wars," *Ms. Magazine*, August/September 2001, p. 16.

## WOLA's "Drugs, Democracy and Human Rights" project

WOLA's "Drugs, Democracy and Human Rights" project, which began in 2001, examines the impact of the drug trade and U.S. international counternarcotics policy on human rights and the consolidation of democracy throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Looking at both producer and transit countries, researchers from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico and Central America will document and analyze a number of themes, including:

- ▶ whether security forces receiving U.S. funding and/or training for counternarcotics activities are committing human rights abuses, and if so, how the perpetrators are called to account;
- ▶ whether the judiciary is effectively pursuing such cases, or if they are handled by military courts;
- ▶ the definition of the military's mandate, the relationship between military and police forces, and whether antidrug funding is empowering the military to expand into activities normally reserved for the police;
- ▶ the functioning of civilian institutions, including mechanisms for oversight of counternarcotics activities through legislation and congressional committees.

A book drawing together the country and regional studies, with overview and conclusions provided by WOLA, will be published in 2004. Country or thematic briefs, such as this one, will be produced several times a year to provide on-the-ground monitoring and research.

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### Volume I, Number 2 ISBN: 092951355X

This WOLA briefing series is supported in part by grants from the Open Society Institute, the Ford Foundation and the John Merck Fund.



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