

BRIAN E. SHERIDAN
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT
UNITED STATES SENATE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

April 4, 2000

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify before this Committee to discuss the Department of Defense's perspective on the growing Colombian drug threat as well as our integrated programs designed to assist the Government of Colombia in its efforts to address this scourge.

As you are aware, drug abuse is an undeniable threat to our national security that is measured in thousands of lives lost and costing our country billions of dollars annually. Reducing the supply of drugs on our streets is an integral component of our National Drug Control Strategy and the Department of Defense (DoD) plays a key supporting role in creating the opportunity for law enforcement agencies, both our own and those of foreign nations, to interdict the flow of drugs into our country. DoD is committed to this counterdrug mission. The programs I will outline today were developed in conjunction with US Southern Command, our interagency partners and the Government of Colombia, and form the core of a sound, responsive, and timely

assistance package that will significantly enhance Colombia's ability to conduct effective counterdrug operations.

Over the past two years Colombia, specifically the area east of the Andes, has become the center of the cocaine trade, largely as a result of successful interdiction and eradication efforts in Peru and Bolivia. The remoteness of eastern Colombia and the lack of government control in large areas of this region has precluded Colombian interdiction operations to the point that the expansion of coca growing areas, especially in the Putumayo Department, has progressed virtually unchecked. Most of the world's coca is now grown in Colombia and over eighty percent of the cocaine consumed in the US is manufactured in Colombia. The United States, the nation with the greatest cocaine demand, currently consumes over 200 metric tons annually from the Andean region.

Source Zone Programs

To disrupt illegal cocaine cultivation and production throughout the source zone, DoD, working with host nations and our interagency partners, has developed and selectively implemented a threat based, intelligence driven, counterdrug interdiction strategy which has focused on air, riverine/coastal, and ground programs. DoD has worked closely with source zone nations to improve their organic air interdiction capability by funding upgrades to their aircraft that conduct counterdrug missions. To support the detection and monitoring (D&M) of airborne traffickers, the Department has fielded Relocatable Over-the-Horizon Radars (ROTHR), and deployed ground based radars along with airborne tracker aircraft equipped with air-to-air radars.

Our counterdrug riverine and littoral efforts have provided equipment and training support to source zone nations, thereby facilitating effective operations along the vast river networks of the Amazon basin, a major supply route for precursor production chemicals. Finally, DoD's ground interdiction assistance has concentrated on training selected military units – those which have been vetted for human rights compliance -- in the light infantry tactics they require to support law enforcement interdiction and eradication operations. These source zone programs have been enhanced through the development of intelligence and command and control networks. These efforts, in conjunction with law enforcement and eradication programs, have proven to be successful in both Peru and Bolivia, however, the conditions necessary to implement a coordinated response throughout the Colombian cultivation and cocaine production regions have not been met – until now.

Plan Colombia

Colombian President Andres Pastrana has developed a comprehensive and integrated approach to address Colombia's current problems. This plan, known as "Plan Colombia," would strengthen the Colombian economy and democracy while fighting narcotics trafficking. Further, this plan demonstrates that Colombia is moving forward aggressively, exercising its political will to address, and ultimately solve, domestic problems that have persisted for decades. The US has a vital material interest in the success of this plan. We must now step forward with the Government of Colombia by enhancing our current strategy, based on proven source zone interdiction programs. This effort is responsive to *Plan Colombia* and consistent with current US policy.

Colombian Supplemental Source Zone Enhancements

The proposed fiscal year 2000 supplemental request will provide the resources necessary to promote essential facets of the Department's assistance to Colombian interdiction efforts. We feel that the supplemental is a balanced and executable plan -- not without challenges which I will address later -- that is necessary to attack the strategically vulnerable aerial cocaine transportation network while expanding ground interdiction and eradication operations into the densest coca cultivation areas of the Putumayo region. Let me outline for you how this supplemental funding would enhance each of our baseline counterdrug programs in Colombia in support of our overall source zone strategy.

Air Interdiction

Colombia requires aircraft that can track drug traffickers engaged in aerial smuggling. The supplemental will fund the installation of air-to-air radars in two Colombian aircraft. These radars will provide the Colombian Air Force the organic ability to conduct terminal aerial intercepts of drug smugglers. Aerial intercepts are intricate operations and require adequate ground based coordination. Therefore, the supplemental will also fund the upgrade of the Colombian Air Force radar command and control center as well as additional ground based radars to assist in detecting and sorting aircraft operating in eastern Colombia. Critical to this air interdiction effort are supplemental initiatives, under State Department authority, that will upgrade Colombian Air Force counterdrug aircraft for the air intercept mission. The

supplemental also requests funding for US Customs Service airborne early warning aircraft upgrades to ensure that these crucial platforms will continue to be available for the source zone interdiction mission.

Basing airborne D&M aircraft, as well as aerial intelligence collection platforms, close to the historical airborne smuggling routes is of the utmost importance to the successful implementation of the integrated strategy in Colombia. For this reason, funding for the forward operating location (FOL) at Manta, Ecuador, is included in the supplemental. General Wilhelm will expound on the operational requirements; however, I want to ensure that you understand that the Department views the completion of the site upgrades to the Manta FOL as a critical component of the overall source zone effort.

Ground Interdiction

The supplemental funding focuses extensive resources on improving Colombia's counterdrug ground interdiction programs. The Department has completed training of a counterdrug battalion that is now operational in the Putumayo region. The supplemental will support the training and equipping of two additional counterdrug battalions which will be operational by the end of this calendar year. Funding, if appropriated, will also be used to develop a suitable counterdrug brigade headquarters to oversee the operation of the three counterdrug battalions.

The Colombian National Police (CNP) will be conducting counterdrug interdiction and eradication missions in remote regions of the country where the coca growing fields are located. Therefore, the counterdrug battalions will require adequate airlift to move troops to support the CNP. The required helicopter lift is provided for under State Department authority, however, DoD will use proposed supplemental funding to establish the necessary Colombian Army aviation support infrastructure. Enhanced counterdrug intelligence collection efforts are also required to develop and plan counterdrug operations. Consequently, the supplemental will provide sufficient funding in this area to further enhance the intelligence programs that already serve as a foundation for our source zone strategy.

All these programs that I just outlined build on our current strategy – no change in DoD policy is required to execute the programs funded by this supplemental. There is nothing new here for DoD. However, there will be challenges to confront in the course of our efforts to attack the center of the cocaine industry in eastern Colombia. It will not be easy, but it is worth the effort. Let me share with you my concerns.

DoD Concerns

Colombian Military Organization

First, the Colombian military, by their own admission, is not optimally structured and organized to execute sustained counterdrug operations. They are heavy on “tail” and short on “tooth.” They need to better coordinate operations between the services and with the CNP. The

military has limitations based on resources, training practices, lack of joint planning and operations. The restructuring of the military is essential if Colombia is to have continuing operational success against the drug threat. The Colombian Congress has given President Pastrana authority to implement a number of reform measures now under review by the Ministry of Defense; those reforms will make the Colombian military a more modern, professional and effective force. The measures being considered include the elimination of the legal provision prohibiting conscripts with high school diplomas (*bachilleres*) from serving in combat units. The Colombian military needs help and we plan to use a small portion of supplemental funding towards this end.

Human Rights

I am also concerned, as are many members of Congress, about human rights. The human rights practices and procedures that the US government has put in place, in response to legislative enactments, and the example set by the small number of our troops training Colombian forces has had an impact, as have President Pastrana's reforms. Human rights violations imputed to the armed forces have dropped by 95% over the last five years, to fewer than two percent of the total in 1999. Armed forces cooperation with the civilian court system in prosecuting human rights violations committed by military personnel has improved. Some military officers accused of collaboration with or tolerance of illegal self defense force activities have been dismissed, while others face prosecution. The armed forces have demonstrated greater aggressiveness recently in seeking out and attacking illegal self defense forces. Clearly, the Colombian Armed Forces have come a long way, yet no one would argue that more must be done. While we must remain

vigilant, and there is undoubtedly room for improvement, I am concerned that if extensive conditional clauses are included in the supplemental appropriations language, that we could inhibit or mitigate the overall effectiveness of US assistance to Colombia. We need to work together, Congress and the Administration, to address this concern. I am also alarmed by the reported dramatic increase in human rights violations attributed to both the paramilitaries and insurgents – this is symptomatic of Colombia’s crisis in general and, as I see it, a call to action. The Colombian government needs the resources and training to address this problem and the supplemental represents a significant contribution on the part of the US.

Counterdrug vs. Counter Insurgency

Lastly, let me address the “targets” of this supplemental package, and our source zone strategy as a whole. The targets are the narco-traffickers, those individuals and organizations that are involved in the cultivation of coca and the subsequent production and transportation of cocaine to the US. The Colombian military will use the equipment and training that is provided by this supplemental request, in conjunction with the assistance that has already been delivered, to secure perimeters around CNP objectives -- coca fields and cocaine labs -- so that the CNP can safely conduct counterdrug interdiction and eradication operations. Only those armed elements that forcibly inhibit or confront these joint military and CNP counterdrug operations will be engaged, be they narco-traffickers, insurgent organizations, or paramilitaries.

I know that many are concerned that this aid package represents a step “over the line,” an encroachment into the realm of counterinsurgency in the name of counternarcotics. It is not. The

Department has not, and will not, cross that line. While I do not have the time to elaborate on all of the restrictions, constraints, and reviews that are involved in the approval of the deployment of US military personnel on counterdrug missions, in Colombia and elsewhere, it suffices to say that it is comprehensive. I personally look not only at who is deploying and what they are doing, but at the specific locations to which they are going. Furthermore, each and every deployment order states, in no uncertain terms, that DoD personnel are not to accompany host nation personnel on operational missions. This will not change. As I have said, this supplemental does not require a change in US policy. Is there risk to US personnel providing counterdrug support? Yes there is. Is the risk increased as a result of the programs being enhanced by the supplemental? The answer is no.

The Department of Defense enthusiastically supports this supplemental. US Southern Command and my office participated extensively in its formulation. It integrates fully our source zone strategy, affording the opportunity to enhance those counterdrug programs that have proven successful in Peru and Bolivia. President Pastrana has asked for international support to address an internal problem that has international dimensions -- fueled in part by our country's demand for cocaine. It is time to move forward and, I hope, with congressional support, that we can do so soon.