

GAO

Report to the Honorable Charles E.
Grassley, Chairman, Caucus on
International Narcotics Control, U.S.
Senate

July 2004

DRUG CONTROL

Aviation Program Safety Concerns in Colombia Are Being Addressed, but State's Planning and Budgeting Process Can Be Improved



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Highlights of [GAO-04-918](#), a report to the Honorable Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of State supports foreign governments' efforts to eradicate illicit drug crops. In recent years, State's Office of Aviation has maintained aircraft and provided support for the aerial eradication program of the Colombian National Police. However, eradication aircraft are often shot at from the ground requiring helicopter gunships and a search and rescue helicopter to accompany each mission. In 2003, the Office of Aviation fumigated more than 132,000 hectares of coca, a record amount. GAO examined (1) how the threat to the spray planes has changed since 2001, (2) what actions State has taken to address any operational safety concerns, and (3) what resources State provided for the expanding program during fiscal years 2001-04 and how it planned and budgeted for the program's growth.

What GAO Recommends

To help ensure that the aerial eradication program in Colombia and other State aviation programs have the resources needed, GAO is recommending that the Secretary of State develop a strategic planning and budgeting process that accounts for all of the Office of Aviation's program requirements. In commenting on a draft of this report, State agreed that a more comprehensive long-term planning and budgeting process is needed and has taken some initial steps to this end.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-918.

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

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Aviation Program Safety Concerns in Colombia Are Being Addressed, but State's Planning and Budgeting Process Can Be Improved

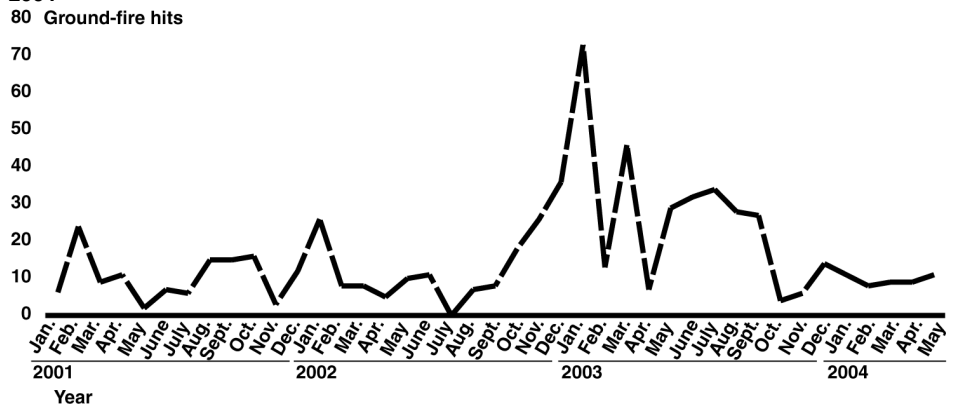
What GAO Found

In 2001 and most of 2002, the number of ground-fire hits on spray aircraft averaged fewer than 10 per month. But in late 2002 and during 2003, the number of hits increased—peaking at 73 in January 2003 and averaging more than 26 per month—and, in 2003, two spray aircraft crashed and two were forced to land because of ground fire. Moreover, the number of flying hours for spray aircraft more than doubled—from about 5,450 hours in 2001 to over 11,300 hours in 2003. In general, this meant the aircraft were exposed more frequently to the threat of ground fire, although other factors came into play.

In response to the increased number of ground-fire hits, the Colombian National Police began providing two or three helicopter gunships for each eradication mission; this was in addition to the two Office of Aviation gunships that already accompanied every mission. Also, since January 2003, State has taken several actions to help reduce exposure to the threat of ground fire by making greater use of information about armed insurgents' proximity to spray targets.

Since fiscal year 2001, State has significantly increased resources for the aerial eradication program in Colombia. Funding for the program doubled from about \$49 million in fiscal year 2001 to \$100 million for fiscal year 2003. In addition, from fiscal year 2001 to May 2004, personnel in Colombia who were directly involved with the program increased from 179 to 298, and the number of aerial eradication aircraft increased from 22 to 35. However, State does not prepare budgets that address all of the Office of Aviation's program requirements. Consequently, State often moves funds from one program to another, which may adversely affect those programs. In addition, State does not plan for the long-term costs of the aerial eradication program, such as aircraft replacement. As a result, State has postponed requesting funds for new aircraft.

Number of Ground-Fire Hits Incurred by Spray Aircraft per Month, January 2001 through May 2004



Sources: State (data), GAO (analysis).

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

July 29, 2004

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Since the early 1970s, the United States has supported Colombia's efforts to reduce drug trafficking activities and stem the flow of illegal drugs, principally cocaine and heroin, entering the United States. Recognizing the severity of illicit drug activities and the links between drug trafficking, the cultivation of coca and opium poppy,¹ and the violence affecting Colombia, the Colombian government announced a \$7.5 billion plan in October 1999, known as Plan Colombia. This plan proposed, among other things, to reduce the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by 50 percent over 6 years.² To assist Colombia's efforts, the United States has substantially increased funding and material support to Colombia since 2000, providing more than \$3.3 billion through fiscal year 2004.³

The Department of State supports foreign governments' efforts to locate and eradicate illicit drug crops through its Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (State/INL); its Narcotics Affairs Sections (NAS) in particular countries; and the Office of Aviation, which oversees a contract with DynCorp Aerospace Technology. In recent years, the Office of Aviation, with DynCorp's assistance, has maintained and

¹The leaves of the coca plant are the raw ingredient of cocaine, and opium poppy is used to produce heroin.

²Although 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.

³For a more complete explanation of U.S. assistance for Plan Colombia, see our reports titled *Drug Control: U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results*, [GAO-01-26](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 17, 2000); *Drug Control: Specific Performance Measures and Long-Term Costs for U.S. Programs in Colombia Have Not Been Developed*, [GAO-03-783](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 2003); and *Drug Control: U.S. Nonmilitary Assistance to Colombia Is Beginning to Show Intended Results but Programs Are Not Readily Sustainable*, [GAO-04-726](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 2, 2004).

operated aircraft and provided logistical and training support for the aerial eradication program of the Colombian National Police.⁴

In 2003, the Office of Aviation fumigated more than 132,000 hectares of coca, a record amount, and 2,987 hectares of opium poppy. Largely as the result of these efforts, the estimated number of hectares under coca or opium poppy cultivation in Colombia has declined by about one-third over the past 2 years. However, the program operates in a hostile environment—eradication aircraft are often shot at from the ground—that requires helicopter gunships and a search and rescue helicopter to accompany each eradication mission. In August 2003, the Director of the Office of Aviation expressed his concern that the increased operational tempo had strained the resources and staffing available and he could not continue to ensure the operational safety of the aerial eradication program.⁵

You requested that we determine (1) how the threat to the aerial eradication spray planes has changed since 2001, (2) what actions State has taken to address any operational safety concerns, and (3) what resources State provided for the expanding program during fiscal years 2001-04 (through May 2004) and how it planned and budgeted for the program's growth. To address these objectives, we reviewed overall program and budgeting documents and interviewed cognizant officials at State/INL in Washington, D.C. We also interviewed Office of Aviation and DynCorp officials about operational procedures and reviewed relevant documents, including site inspections and accident reports, at the Office of Aviation's main operating base, Patrick Air Force Base, Florida; the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, Colombia; and the Office of Aviation and DynCorp office at El Dorado Airport in Bogotá. We also discussed operational procedures with NAS, Office of Aviation, and DynCorp personnel in Bogotá and met with managers, pilots, and mechanics and observed eradication operations at three sites in Colombia. We also reviewed how the data provided to us by State and DynCorp were compiled and determined that they were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. We conducted our review from November 2003 through June 2004 in accordance with generally accepted government accounting standards. (See app. I for a more complete discussion of our scope and methodology.)

⁴The 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.

⁵The Director has since retired from government service.

Results in Brief

In 2001 and most of 2002, the number of ground-fire hits on spray aircraft averaged fewer than 10 per month.⁶ But in late 2002 and during 2003, the number of ground-fire hits reported increased significantly—averaging more than 26 per month—and in 2003, for the first time, two spray aircraft crashed and two were forced to land because of ground fire. Moreover, the operational tempo more than doubled—from about 5,450 flying hours for spray aircraft in 2001 to over 11,300 hours in 2003. In general, this meant the spray aircraft and accompanying helicopters were exposed more frequently to the threat of ground fire; although other factors also came into play, such as the proximity of eradication target areas to insurgent locations. According to U.S. Embassy/Bogotá officials, the increased number of ground-fire hits occurred, at least in part, because the illicit drug producers were responding more vigorously to the success of the increased aerial eradication program.

In response to the increased number of ground-fire hits, the Colombian National Police began providing two or three helicopter gunships for each eradication mission, which were in addition to the two Office of Aviation gunships that already accompanied every mission. In addition, since January 2003, State/INL and NAS have taken several actions to help reduce eradication aircraft exposure to the threat of ground fire by making greater use of information regarding insurgent locations and their proximity to spray targets. These actions have included the following:

- In January 2003, State/INL approved two additional personnel positions for NAS to collect and share intelligence information with NAS, Office of Aviation, DynCorp, and appropriate Colombian military and police officials to plan aerial eradication operations. They began work in August 2003.
- In early 2003, the U.S. Embassy began reviewing its protocol for sharing intelligence information to help ensure that aerial eradication mission planners have the best available. The revised protocol was approved in June 2003.

⁶The number of ground-fire hits is the total number of bullet holes in an aircraft. For example, if an aircraft receives two or more bullet holes on a mission, the Office of Aviation reports that the aircraft received two or more ground-fire hits.

-
- In September 2003, in accordance with the revised intelligence protocol, the NAS Director began requiring that all eradication missions have her prior approval.

In addition, the eradication aircraft have always had armor to help protect the pilots and vulnerable fuel and oil lines from ground fire. Some of the newer spray planes are undergoing additional modifications to further protect the pilot.

During fiscal years 2001-03, State/INL significantly increased resources for the aerial eradication program in Colombia. Funding more than doubled from \$49.1 million in fiscal year 2001 to \$100.4 million for fiscal year 2003; funding estimated and proposed for fiscal years 2004 and 2005, respectively, continue this upward trend. In addition, from the end of fiscal year 2001 through May 2004, Office of Aviation and DynCorp personnel in Colombia who were directly involved with aerial eradication increased from 179 to 298, and the number of aerial eradication aircraft increased from 22 to 35. However, State/INL and the Office of Aviation do not plan for or prepare budgets that address all of the Office of Aviation's program requirements. Consequently, State/INL often moves funds from one program to another to support the aerial eradication program, which may adversely affect those programs. In fiscal year 2003, for example, State/INL reprogrammed more than \$5 million from counternarcotics programs in Bolivia, Peru, and Pakistan for Office of Aviation activities in Colombia. In addition, State/INL does not plan for the long-term costs of maintaining the aerial eradication program, such as preparing an aircraft replacement and acquisition plan. As a result, State/INL has delayed requesting funding for additional spray aircraft until it develops the supporting documentation. State/INL acknowledges the weaknesses in its planning and budgeting process and recently initiated an internal study to address the problems.

To help ensure that the Office of Aviation has the resources needed to carry out its programs, including the aerial eradication program in Colombia, we are recommending that the Secretary of State direct the Assistant Secretary for State/INL to develop a strategic planning and budgeting process that accounts for all of the Office of Aviation's program requirements. In commenting on a draft of this report, State noted that a more comprehensive long-term planning and budgeting process for the Office of Aviation is needed and has taken some initial steps to this end.

Background

Colombia is the source of 90 percent of the cocaine and 40 percent of the heroin entering the United States. To assist the Colombian government in its efforts to implement Plan Colombia and reduce the cultivation and trafficking of illegal drugs, the United States has pursued a strategy emphasizing interdiction, aerial eradication, and alternative development. The strategy has resulted in a 33 percent reduction in the amount of coca cultivated in Colombia over the last 2 years—from 169,800 hectares in 2001 to 113,850 hectares in 2003; similarly, opium poppy cultivated also declined by 33 percent—from 6,540 hectares in 2001 to 4,400 hectares in 2003.⁷ Nevertheless, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration, cocaine prices nationwide have remained relatively stable—indicating that cocaine is still readily available—and Colombia dominates the market for heroin in the northeastern United States.

Despite improvements in Colombia's security situation in 2003—for example, according to statistics compiled by the Colombian government, the murder rate declined 20 percent that year—insurgent and paramilitary groups still control large parts of the countryside. According to State, the insurgents exercise some degree of control over 40 percent of Colombia's territory east and south of the Andes. As illustrated in figure 1, this area includes the primary coca-growing regions of Colombia. These groups—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the National Liberation Army, and paramilitary forces such as the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia—are involved in every facet of narcotics trafficking and are on State's list of terrorist organizations.

⁷In 2003, the Office of Aviation sprayed over 132,000 hectares of coca—a record number.

Figure 1: Coca- and Poppy-Growing Areas in Colombia, 2003



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

State has supported foreign governments throughout the world to locate and eradicate illicit drug crops. In recent years, State's efforts have focused on the aerial eradication program of the Colombian National Police, although it provides logistical support to Bolivia and Peru and may be called upon to support drug eradication efforts in Afghanistan.

NAS at the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá oversees and manages the Colombian program. The Office of Aviation, which has a main operating base at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, implements the program with contractor assistance from DynCorp. DynCorp personnel at Patrick provide administrative support, perform major maintenance on aircraft, and give initial pilot training. In Colombia, the Office of Aviation and DynCorp maintain a headquarters office at El Dorado International Airport in Bogotá and up to three operational sites at various Colombian police or military bases around the country. From these sites, three types of spray aircraft—the OV-10, the T-65, and the AT-802—fly missions to fumigate the coca and poppy fields in Colombia. DynCorp provides pilots, mechanics, and other operations and maintenance personnel.

The aerial eradication program operates in an often-hostile environment that requires helicopter gunships and a search and rescue helicopter to accompany each aerial eradication mission. Eradication spray planes and the supporting helicopters are often shot at from the ground. Missions have been canceled or redirected because NAS, Office of Aviation, or government of Colombia officials considered the targeted locations too dangerous.

U.S. officials have had long-standing concerns about the threat posed to aerial eradication activities and, in particular, the safety of operations in Colombia. In August 2000, the Office of Aviation requested an independent evaluation of its aviation operations and safety by the Inter-Agency Committee for Aviation Policy.⁸ Based on its review of operations at two forward operating locations in Colombia and the offices in Bogotá and at Patrick Air Force Base, the committee concluded that the Office of Aviation program was safe but made numerous suggestions and recommendations to enhance safety and security. In September 2001, we

⁸This committee is under the aegis of the General Services Administration. The committee formulates aviation policies for the various civilian federal departments and agencies that maintain aircraft. The committee also helps to ensure that agency aircraft fleets are maintained properly and are operationally safe through on-site reviews. The committee appoints a team of aviation experts from various federal agencies to perform these reviews.

reported that the Office of Aviation had taken action on or implemented most of the committee's suggestions and recommendations.⁹ We also made recommendations for improvement, which State acted on.

Nevertheless, in March 2002, the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá reported that in spite of all of the embassy's precautions, a contractor, possibly an American, will inevitably be hurt or killed.¹⁰ In June 2003, the Director of the Office of Aviation noted that the Office of Aviation was performing a very difficult mission in an increasingly hostile environment. In September 2003, a spray aircraft crashed because of ground fire and, for the first time, the pilot was killed. In total during 2003, one helicopter and four spray aircraft either crashed or were severely damaged because of ground fire. In an October 2003 report, DynCorp noted that the threat to the program's aircraft and pilots was causing increasing concern about pilot safety and personnel morale.

Another key component of the Colombian-U.S. counternarcotics strategy was forming a Colombian Army Counternarcotics Brigade. Although the brigade's primary mission is to plan and conduct interdiction operations against cocaine producers and traffickers, the brigade also is supposed to provide security for the eradication program in some of the insurgent-controlled areas of the country. As part of its contract, DynCorp trains pilots and mechanics and helps maintain and operate the U.S.-provided helicopters for the Colombian Army Aviation Brigade, which supplies the airlift capability for the counternarcotics brigade.

Ground-Fire Hits on Spray Aircraft Increased Significantly in 2003

Although the Office of Aviation has reported ground fire on its aerial eradication aircraft for years, the number of ground-fire hits began to increase in late 2002. In 2001 and most of 2002, the number of ground-fire hits on spray aircraft averaged fewer than 10 per month. But the number of ground-fire hits reported from October 2002 through 2003 increased significantly to an average of more than 26 per month. The number of hits

⁹U.S. General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: State Department Provides Required Aviation Program Oversight, but Safety and Security Should Be Enhanced*, [GAO-01-1021](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 14, 2001).

¹⁰Furthermore, in August of 2002, a DynCorp contract employee was killed in an accident on the tarmac of an operational site. At the time, based on on-site inspections by his staff, the Director of the Office of Aviation reported that he had full confidence in the contractor's ability to meet State/INL-mandated safety commitments.

peaked at 73 in January 2003, and 46 hits were reported in March 2003. Although the number of monthly ground-fire hits generally declined after March 2003, the total number for 2003 was more than the previous 2 years combined—313 versus 288 in 2001 and 2002. During the first 5 months of 2004, the total number of hits declined considerably to 48 compared with 168 during the same period in 2003. Figure 2 shows the number of ground-fire hits on spray aircraft from January 2001 through May 2004.

Figure 2: Number of Ground-Fire Hits Incurred by Spray Aircraft per Month, January 2001 through May 2004

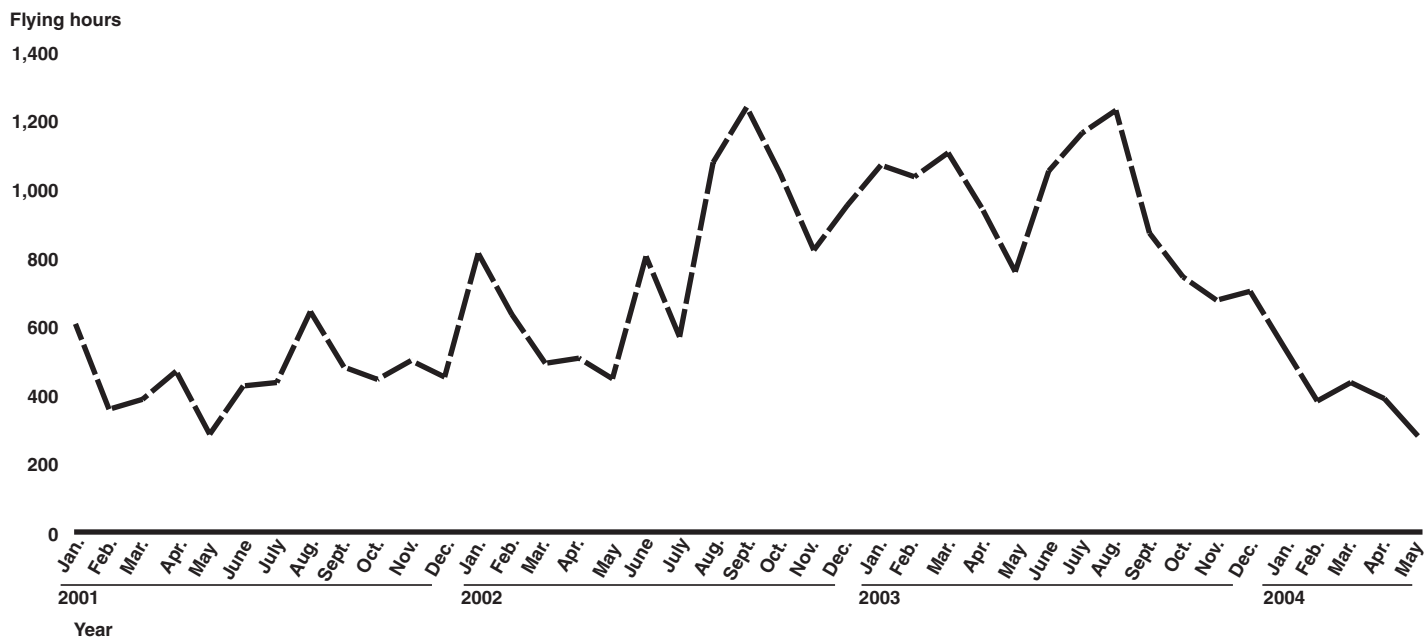


Sources: NAS and Office of Aviation (data), GAO (analysis).

In addition, during the period 2001-03, the operational tempo of the aerial eradication program more than doubled in terms of flying hours for the spray aircraft. In general, this meant the spray aircraft and accompanying helicopters were exposed more frequently to the threat of ground fire; although other factors also came into play, such as the proximity of eradication areas to insurgent locations. According to the Office of Aviation, spray aircraft flew about 5,450 hours in 2001, nearly 9,400 hours in 2002, and more than 11,300 in 2003. The increase in flying hours in 2002 and 2003 largely occurred as the Colombian government, headed by President Uribe, took a more aggressive approach to aerial eradication. In the

19 months prior to President Uribe’s inauguration in August 2002, spray aircraft flew about 9,700 hours or 510 hours per month. From August 2002 through May 2004, the eradication program’s spray aircraft flew more than 18,450 hours, or about 839 hours a month—during 2003 alone, the program averaged more than 940 flying hours a month. During the first 5 months of 2004, the pace slowed—spray aircraft flew about 2,000 hours compared with about 4,900 hours during the same period in 2003. Nevertheless, Office of Aviation officials report that the number of hectares of coca sprayed in 2004 remains high—62,000 through mid-June—because the spray aircraft are based close to large coca fields and the AT-802 spray planes, which are capable of carrying more herbicide than the OV-10,¹¹ have flown more frequently than during the first 5 months of 2003. Figure 3 illustrates the spray aircraft’s monthly flying hours for January 2001 through May 2004.

Figure 3: Number of Flying Hours by Spray Aircraft Per Month, January 2001 through May 2004



Sources: NAS and Office of Aviation (data), GAO (analysis).

¹¹The AT-802 standard load is 300 to 400 gallons of herbicide versus a maximum of 300 gallons for the OV-10.

According to U.S. Embassy/Bogotá and Colombian officials, the primary reason for the increase in ground-fire hits in late 2002 was the aerial eradication program's success in reducing the illicit drug producers' ability to cultivate coca and opium poppy. To combat this success, U.S. Embassy/Bogotá officials reported that the insurgents began

- organizing and massing ground fire in front of the spray aircraft's flight path to force the planes to fly through a barrage of bullets and
- using a greater variety of weapons against aerial eradication aircraft, including some larger caliber weapons capable of penetrating armor and hitting the aircraft at higher altitudes.¹²

State Has Taken Several Actions to Address Operational Safety Concerns

State/INL and NAS have taken several actions to reduce the risk to the aircraft on aerial eradication missions. Since January 2003, these actions have primarily focused on improving the processes and procedures for collecting and analyzing intelligence information that the U.S. Embassy collects on insurgent locations and capabilities. Other actions include coordinating spray operations more closely with the Colombian Army and the Colombian National Police and ensuring that eradication aircraft are protected to the extent possible from ground fire.

In response to the increased number of ground-fire hits on aerial eradication aircraft in late 2002 and early 2003, the Colombian National Police began providing two or three helicopter gunships for each eradication mission; this was in addition to the two Office of Aviation gunships that already accompanied every mission,¹³ and the NAS Director directed spray operations away from areas where the hits were occurring. In addition, throughout 2003 and early 2004, State/INL and NAS took several actions to make greater use of intelligence information regarding the ground threats to the eradication aircraft.

- In January 2003, State/INL approved a NAS request to hire two personnel as intelligence/security advisors. Their duties include

¹²According to the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá, insurgents were using 7.62 automatic weapons and, for the first time, .50 caliber machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, and aerial mines to fire on eradication aircraft.

¹³Colombian National Police personnel man and control the guns.

collecting and sharing threat information with U.S. Embassy, DynCorp, and appropriate Colombian National Police and military officials to plan aerial eradication operations. These two individuals began work in August 2003. However, they did not have all the necessary security clearances to handle certain U.S. Embassy intelligence information. Nevertheless, they collected information from a variety of Colombian military and police sources that was used in planning operations. To address their lack of security clearances, in September 2003, the NAS Director tasked another NAS employee to coordinate intelligence within the U.S. Embassy until the two individuals receive their security clearances.

- In early 2003, the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá began reviewing its protocol for gathering, utilizing, and sharing intelligence information to help ensure that aerial eradication mission planners have the best available threat assessment information. A revised protocol was approved in June 2003. It defines intelligence requirements and sources, frequency of intelligence updates, intelligence dissemination, and the use of intelligence in planning missions at forward operating locations. According to NAS and other U.S. Embassy personnel, the revised protocol improved information sharing within the embassy and among the embassy, DynCorp, and the Colombian military and police.
- In September 2003, in accordance with the revised intelligence protocol, the NAS Director began approving the areas where eradication missions are planned. She reviews the intelligence information available and will not allow missions in areas where insurgents are thought to be or where large caliber weapons have been reported. Missions are not flown in those areas until intelligence information reports that the areas are relatively safe.
- In October 2003, the Office of Aviation authorized DynCorp to hire six personnel to gather and analyze intelligence for use in planning eradication missions. According to DynCorp officials, they experienced delays in filling these positions because of uncertainties regarding its contract with State/INL.¹⁴ The first position was filled in March 2004, and, as of June 2004, all six positions had been filled.

¹⁴State/INL is in the process of awarding a new contract and does not expect to make a decision until later this year.

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- In November 2003, Colombian military and police at one operational site instituted daily threat briefings before the next day's aerial eradication missions. According to U.S. Embassy and DynCorp officials, DynCorp obtained the briefings primarily because the eradication unit was collocated with the Colombian military. At the time of our visit in January 2004, the DynCorp site manager said that eradication aircraft flying missions from this site had not incurred any ground-fire hits for 2 months.

In addition, in late 2003, the NAS Director also approved an annual eradication program plan showing when and where eradication missions will occur throughout 2004 and what aircraft will be used on each of the missions. For each target area, the plan details when intelligence on the threat posed by insurgents and others should be collected, and when the Colombian Army Counternarcotics Brigade may be needed to conduct ground operations in support of eradication missions. According to NAS and other U.S. Embassy officials, the plan was coordinated with the Colombian military to complement its planned military actions for 2004 and, as a result, has strengthened the Colombian Army's commitment to support the aerial eradication program.¹⁵

Moreover, to enhance the spray airplanes' ability to withstand ground fire, the Office of Aviation has ensured that the aircraft are protected to the extent possible. All the spray aircraft have always had protective armor around the cockpit and covering vulnerable fuel and oil lines. In addition, State activated the ejection seats in the OV-10 when it acquired the aircraft from the Department of Defense.¹⁶ The AT-802 spray planes are undergoing additional modifications to further protect the pilot. Finally, the helicopters also have added armaments to better protect them from ground fire.

To further reduce risks, NAS, Office of Aviation, and DynCorp officials told us that eradication mission planners, site managers, or individual pilots can cancel flights at any time without fear of reprisal if they feel the particular

¹⁵According to the current NAS Director and the most recent former Director, the Colombian Army has never turned down a request to assist with the eradication program. The assistance usually consists of establishing a presence in a targeted eradication area to keep the insurgents from operating freely and possibly targeting eradication aircraft.

¹⁶The T-65 and AT-802 do not have ejection seats. Rather, the cockpit is designed to protect the pilot in the event of a crash.

mission may not be safe because of possible ground fire, maintenance problems, or other safety concerns. During our visits to three operational sites, we attended meetings with DynCorp pilots and mechanics where NAS and Office of Aviation officials emphasized this point. Further, in separate discussions with some of the pilots and mechanics, they confirmed to us that they could opt out of a flight at any time without fear of reprisal.¹⁷

Resources for Aerial Eradication Increased, but State's Planning and Budgeting Process Does Not Provide for All Needs

As the aerial eradication program in Colombia grew, State/INL substantially increased the resources it provided. Funding for the aerial eradication program in Colombia increased from about \$49 million in fiscal year 2001 to over \$100 million in fiscal year 2003. Estimated funding for fiscal year 2004 and proposed funding for fiscal year 2005 continue this upward trend. In addition, the number of personnel directly associated with the program, particularly in Colombia, increased; and the number of available spray aircraft and helicopters also increased. However, State/INL does not plan for the long-term costs of maintaining the aerial eradication program and does not prepare a specific budget for the Office of Aviation that accounts for all of its program needs. Nevertheless, Office of Aviation and DynCorp managers said that the resources for day-to-day operations provided during the period were sufficient, and that safety was never compromised.

Program Funding Increased

Funding provided through the Office of Aviation and NAS for the aerial eradication program in Colombia has risen every year since 2001. As shown in table 1, funding provided through the Office of Aviation increased 10 percent from 2001 to 2003, from \$38 million to \$41.8 million, and is planned to increase an additional 20 percent for fiscal year 2005. Overall, the Office of Aviation funds are used for the direct costs of DynCorp, which provides aircraft maintenance and logistical support and many of the pilots for the eradication program. NAS funds for the aerial eradication program increased more than fivefold, from about \$11 million in fiscal year 2001 to more than \$58 million in fiscal year 2003. NAS provides funds to support DynCorp operations and for aircraft fuel, herbicide, and related support. Most of this increase occurred to support the increased flying hours, additional eradication aircraft, and multiple operating sites. Such increases

¹⁷In connection with our prior report regarding the Office of Aviation ([GAO-01-1021](#)), pilots and mechanics told us the same thing in April 2001.

are planned to continue in fiscal years 2004 and 2005, as funding proposed for fiscal year 2005 rises to more than \$70 million.

Table 1: U.S. Support for the Aerial Eradication Program in Colombia, Fiscal Years 2001-05

Dollars in millions

Department of State office	Fiscal year					Total
	2001	2002	2003	2004 (estimated)	2005 (proposed)	
Office of Aviation	\$38.0	\$38.2	\$41.8	\$48.0	\$50.4	\$216.4
NAS ^a	11.1	17.6	58.6	67.4	70.7	225.4
Total	\$49.1	\$55.8	\$100.4	\$115.4	\$121.1	\$441.8

Source: State/INL.

^aIn 2003, NAS began paying a contractor \$38.8 million a year 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 they expect this expenditure to continue through fiscal year 2004 and possibly through fiscal year 2006.

Program Staffing Increased

Office of Aviation and DynCorp staff in Colombia directly associated with the aerial eradication program increased from 179 at the end of fiscal year 2001 to 298 at the end of fiscal year 2003. The former NAS Director told us that he supported increasing the number of Office of Aviation staff in Colombia because doing so allowed more direct oversight of the program as operations significantly expanded. The Office of Aviation Director also stated that increasing the staff in Colombia allowed the office to better ensure the safety and security of program operations and enhanced its ability to oversee contractor operations. Table 2 illustrates the number of staff assigned to the Office of Aviation by location.

Table 2: Office of Aviation Staffing by Location, Fiscal Years 2001-04

Location	Staffing by fiscal year (as of September 30)			Staffing as of May 31, 2004
	2001	2002	2003	
Patrick Air Force Base ^a	15	21	14	18
Colombia	3	5	10	11
Total	18	26	24	29

Source: Office of Aviation.

^aIncludes staff at Patrick Air Force Base and two or three staff in Washington, D.C., who provide administrative support. These staff support aerial eradication and other programs in Colombia, as well as other Office of Aviation programs in Bolivia, Peru, and Pakistan.

During fiscal years 2001-03, the number of DynCorp personnel supporting the Office of Aviation at Patrick Air Force Base increased from 159 to about 190. DynCorp officials were unable to provide exact numbers of staff who were part of the eradication program versus those who supported other Office of Aviation programs because many personnel are involved in more than one program.

As illustrated in table 3, the number of DynCorp staff in Colombia directly supporting the aerial eradication program increased from 176 in 2001 to 281 staff in 2003 and has further increased to 287 staff as of May 31, 2004. These numbers include pilots and mechanics who rotate in and out of Colombia. These personnel work 15 days in Colombia and then are relieved for 13 days by another group of pilots¹⁸ and mechanics who work 15 days. This rotation overlap allows time for departing pilots and mechanics to brief the newly arrived personnel.

¹⁸Fixed-wing aircraft pilots are provided by a subcontractor to DynCorp.

Table 3: DynCorp Personnel in Colombia Who Support the Aerial Eradication Program, Fiscal Years 2001-04

Personnel assigned	Personnel by fiscal year (as of September 30)			Personnel as of May 31, 2004
	2001	2002	2003	
Permanent	58	69	116	112
Rotational	118	150	165	175
Total	176	219	281	287

Source: DynCorp.

Number of Aircraft Increased

From the end of fiscal year 2001 through May 2004, the number of spray aircraft and helicopters supporting aerial eradication in Colombia increased from 22 to 35, with 12 additional spray aircraft and 1 additional helicopter assigned. The Office of Aviation uses three types of aircraft to spray coca and poppy fields in Colombia—the OV-10, the T-65, and the AT-802. The OV-10 is a Vietnam-era observation plane that was retrofitted to carry herbicide and fly eradication missions.¹⁹ The T-65 and AT-802 are newer aircraft designed for crop dusting and are widely used in the United States. Although the Office of Aviation has 24 spray aircraft for use in Colombia—11 OV-10s, 5 T-65s, and 8 AT-802s, some are usually at Patrick Air Force Base for scheduled maintenance or training and at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, for mountain-flying training. The exact number of aircraft in Colombia varies throughout the year depending on maintenance and training requirements.

The Office of Aviation also uses helicopters to support eradication missions. On any given mission, spray aircraft are accompanied by at least 5 helicopters. Two Office of Aviation helicopter gunships and 2 or 3 Colombian National Police gunships provide protection from insurgent fire, and 1 search and rescue helicopter is available to rescue crewmembers in the event of an emergency. Table 4 illustrates the number of Office of Aviation aircraft available for the aerial eradication program.

¹⁹The OV-10 has two engines while the other spray aircraft have one. Office of Aviation officials stated that the two engines give an extra measure of safety. However, the OV-10 is old and increasingly expensive to operate and maintain.

Table 4: Total Aircraft Supporting Office of Aviation Aerial Eradication Program, Fiscal Years 2001-04

Aircraft type	Aircraft by fiscal year (as of September 30)			Aircraft as of May 31, 2004
	2001	2002	2003	
Spray planes	12	17	20	24
Helicopters	10	11	12	11
Total	22	28	32	35

Source: Office of Aviation.

Note: In addition, the Office of Aviation operates three other fixed-wing aircraft. Two are used for transportation support throughout the Andean region, and the third is used to locate illicit drug crops.

State/INL's Planning and Budgeting Process Does Not Provide for All of the Office of Aviation's Needs

State/INL does not develop a specific budget for the Office of Aviation addressing all of its programs and does not plan for the long-term costs of the Office of Aviation's programs, such as providing for replacement aircraft. As a result, State/INL sometimes uses funds from other programs to pay for the aerial eradication program in Colombia. Although Office of Aviation and DynCorp managers said that the resources provided in fiscal years 2001-04 (through May) were sufficient to carry out the increased eradication activities safely, they noted that they did not always know how much funding would be available or when, and that this has led to last-minute decisions and informal workarounds to avoid suspending or curtailing eradication operations.

This situation is not new. In 1998, we reported that State and the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá were not adequately prepared to manage increases in aerial eradication.²⁰ Specifically, when U.S. support for aerial eradication increased in 1997, the unanticipated costs associated with the increase led to the reallocation of funds from other NAS programs. At the time, NAS/Bogotá reported that it reallocated \$11 million from other activities, including interdiction, demand reduction, and efforts designed to strengthen law enforcement institutions in Colombia.

The situation continues. DynCorp officials told us that it nearly suspended the eradication program because of a shortage of funds in 2002. But

²⁰U.S. General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia Face Continuing Challenges*, GAO/NSIAD-98-60 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 12, 1998).

because of delays in training Colombian Army helicopter mechanics and pilots, DynCorp used funds allocated for that program to continue the aerial eradication program. Further, DynCorp officials told us they also have had to delay ordering needed parts because of the lack of funds. Some of these parts—especially those for the older aircraft, such as the OV-10 spray planes and UH-1N helicopters that accompany the spray planes—are in short supply and could be difficult to acquire. If the parts are not available when needed, the aircraft cannot operate.

Office of Aviation’s funding comes from several State/INL sources, including the Andean Counterdrug Initiative account, the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement account, and supplemental appropriations. However, although some of the Andean Counterdrug Initiative funds are designated for the Office of Aviation, the funds are divided among multiple country budgets and managed by each country’s NAS. As a result, the Office of Aviation has to request those funds from the respective NAS Director, which may adversely affect those programs. In fiscal year 2003, State/INL reprogrammed more than \$5 million from programs in Bolivia, Peru, and Pakistan to fund the Office of Aviation program in Colombia. In addition, the NAS Director in Colombia told us that sometimes other funding priorities—such as the narcotics interdiction program—conflicted with Office of Aviation program needs and delayed funding for the aerial eradication program.

Furthermore, State/INL often does not receive funds for its programs, including the aerial eradication program, until months after the start of the fiscal year. For instance, fiscal year 2004 funds were not available until mid-June 2004 because of the time needed to address congressional inquiries about how State/INL proposed to use the funding. State/INL officials said they have used prior year funds or moved funds from one project to another to satisfy the most critical needs until all funds are available. These officials stated that the safety of their operations has not been compromised but added that the uncertainty over funding availability has caused an administrative burden.

In June 2004, our report on federal aircraft fleet management also noted weaknesses in State/INL’s planning process.²¹ We reported that State/INL

²¹U.S. General Accounting Office, *Federal Aircraft: Inaccurate Cost Data and Weaknesses in Fleet Management Planning Hamper Cost Effective Operations*, GAO-04-645 (Washington, D.C.: June 18, 2004).

had not developed a long-term fleet acquisition plan or performed a cost-benefit analysis that considered long-range aircraft replacement, mission support, and other related costs. In addition, INL had not performed a life-cycle cost analysis of its aircraft, estimated future long-term mission requirements, or identified the aircraft best-suited to meet those requirements. As a result, according to State/INL officials, State has delayed requesting funding for additional aircraft.

Finally, in October 2003, a State/INL internal review team began examining the Office of Aviation's programs.²² The review team has noted that the Office of Aviation has operated effectively in five countries with high safety and operational success rates. Given its aged aircraft, complex logistics requirements, and aggressive flight schedule, the team commended Office of Aviation staff for their professionalism and continued success under trying circumstances. However, the team also has identified many of the same concerns that we have raised—from generally poor strategic planning to inadequate management and financial tools. The team has noted that State/INL focuses on short-term planning to meet new missions and changing requirements, with little input from the Office of Aviation.

State/INL officials have begun to address the shortcomings. For example, State/INL and the Office of Aviation are preparing a strategic plan to identify long-term mission costs for all of the Office of Aviation programs. As part of this strategy, State/INL and the Office of Aviation have developed a critical flight safety plan that includes projected costs to maintain the Office of Aviation's current aircraft and acquire additional aircraft to sustain the program. State/INL also intends to enhance the Office of Aviation's contract oversight capability through training and the hiring of additional contract administrators and budget specialists.

Conclusions

The aerial eradication program in Colombia is a difficult mission in a hostile environment. Since 2001, the demands on the program have increased significantly and the Office of Aviation's resources for the program have more than doubled. However, State/INL's planning and budgeting process for the Office of Aviation did not keep pace with the growth of the Office of Aviation and the increasing complexity of its

²²This review is the first of a series of planned reviews of State/INL programs. The reviews are intended to assess INL's strengths and weaknesses to better prepare for future operations.

mission. The current process does not fully serve State/INLs or the Office of Aviation's present-day needs. As a result, the Office of Aviation's short- and long-term funding requirements have often been addressed through ad hoc decisions. In particular, not having a strategic plan that identifies long-range needs, mission support, and other costs has prevented State/INL from assessing future requirements and planning and budgeting for them.

The Office of Aviation will likely continue its operations in Colombia for the foreseeable future. Further, it may be called on to extend its operations to other parts of the world as illicit drugs continue to provide income to insurgents and terrorists who pose a security threat to the United States and its allies. However, without a planning and budgeting process that systematically addresses the short- and long-term requirements of the Office of Aviation's programs, State/INL cannot ensure that the Office of Aviation's requirements are appropriately prioritized, long-term resource needs are addressed, and funding is sufficient.

Recommendation for Executive Action

To improve State/INLs process for providing resources to the Office of Aviation, we recommend that the Secretary of State direct the Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs to develop and implement a strategic planning and budgeting process that addresses all of the program requirements for the Office of Aviation, including the aerial eradication program in Colombia. The strategic plan and budget should address the day-to-day operational needs of the Office of Aviation's programs, aircraft fleet refurbishment and eventual replacement, and the resources needed to meet these requirements. The plan should also be systematically updated as part of State's annual budget cycle.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

State provided written comments on a draft of this report (see app. II). It stated that the report provides a useful summary of the technical, planning, and budgeting issues that may affect the Office of Aviation's programs in Colombia. State also expressed concern that the report suggests that State/INL does not manage and plan for its aviation program requirements. However, it agreed that a more comprehensive long-term planning and budgeting process is needed and has taken some initial steps to this end.

We did not say that State/INL does not manage and plan for the Office of Aviation's programs. Rather, we stated that State/INL does not prepare a specific budget for the Office of Aviation that accounts for all of its

program needs. In fact, State notes that State/INL is beginning to institutionalize a more formal planning and budgeting process for the Office of Aviation to address this shortcoming. According to State, State/INL completed an “initial cut” of an Office of Aviation Strategic Plan in April 2004, and also recently prepared a Critical Flight Safety Program to extend the life of its aircraft fleet and an Office of Aviation Reorganization Plan to hire more staff for strategic planning, budgeting, and financial analysis. State adds that it has incorporated the safety program and reorganization plan in State/INL’s fiscal year 2006 performance plan and budget request.

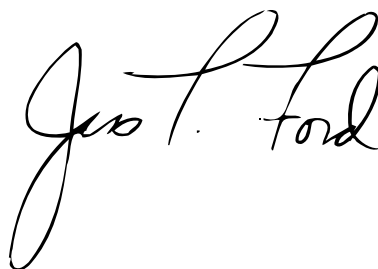
These are critical components of a more systematic planning and budgeting process. We believe that if State/INL follows through with its approach that it will allow the Office of Aviation to prioritize its programs and, when funding is limited or not readily available, make systematic decisions about how to proceed.

In addition, State/INL and Office of Aviation officials provided technical comments that we have incorporated into this report, as appropriate.

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 interested congressional committees and the Secretary of State. 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 about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-4128 or FordJ@gao.gov, or contact Al Huntington, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-4140 or HuntingtonA@gao.gov. Other key contributors to this report were Ron Hughes, Reid Lowe, and Jim Strus.

Sincerely yours,

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

Scope and Methodology

To determine how the threat to the aerial eradication program changed since 2001, we reviewed cables, memorandums, and reports prepared by the Department of State/Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (State/INL), the Office of Aviation, and the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá, Colombia. We also discussed the threat issue with officials responsible for program oversight and implementation from State/INL; State's Narcotics Affairs Sections (NAS), the Office of Aviation, and other offices at the U.S. Embassy; and DynCorp Aerospace Technology.

To determine what actions State had taken to address any operational safety concerns, we examined cables; memorandums; and related documents, including site inspections and accident reports, prepared by State/INL, the Office of Aviation, and the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá. We also interviewed officials from State/INL, the Office of Aviation, DynCorp, and the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá (including the current NAS Director and her predecessor) to obtain their views on the actions taken.

Similarly, to determine the resources provided by State/INL to support the aerial eradication program in Colombia during fiscal years 2001-04 (through May 2004), we reviewed and analyzed various cables, memorandums, and other relevant documents related to budget, staffing, and aircraft prepared by State/INL in Washington, D.C.; the Office of Aviation and DynCorp at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida; and the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá. We interviewed cognizant U.S. officials in Washington, D.C., and Colombia and at Patrick Air Force Base about the adequacy of the resources provided to meet aerial eradication missions. We also discussed resource availability with the DynCorp project manager at Patrick Air Force Base.

We traveled to Colombia in January 2004. In Colombia, we met with NAS and other cognizant U.S. Embassy officials and with Office of Aviation and DynCorp managers at their offices at El Dorado International Airport, Bogotá. We also visited three operational sites—Popayan, San Jose del Guaviare, and Tumaco—where spray operations were occurring. We interviewed DynCorp site managers, pilots, and mechanics at each location. At Tumaco, we also interviewed Colombian Marine Corps officers who coordinated eradication activities with U.S., DynCorp, and Colombian police officials.

To determine the reliability of the data provided, we interviewed officials at State/INL, the Office of Aviation, the U.S. Embassy/Bogotá, and DynCorp to determine how they collected and verified the data. To check the reliability

of data on the number of ground-fire hits and flying hours, we compared information from two different sources at the U.S. Embassy and found it similar. Further, to determine the reliability of the funding data used in this report, we examined State financial management activity reports and compared some of these data with similar information from our prior reports addressing Office of Aviation activities. However, we did not audit the funding data and are not expressing an opinion on them. Finally, to satisfy ourselves that the numbers of personnel and aircraft were reliable, we examined monthly reports prepared by the Office of Aviation and DynCorp. We discussed how the reports were compiled and resolved a few discrepancies concerning the numbers of personnel with cognizant officials at Patrick Air Force Base and in Bogotá. Based on our examination of the documents we received and our discussions with State and DynCorp officials, we concluded that these data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Comments from the Department of State



United States Department of State

Assistant Secretary and Chief Financial Officer

Washington, D.C. 20520

JUL 21 2004

Ms. Jacqueline Williams-Bridgers
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
General Accounting Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Ms. Williams-Bridgers:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "DRUG SECURITY: Aviation Program Safety Concerns in Columbia Are Being Addressed, but State's Budgeting Process Can Be Improved," GAO Job Code 320231.

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 Barry Friedman, Budget Officer, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law, at (202) 776-8700.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Burnham".

Christopher B. Burnham

cc: GAO – Al Huntington III
INL – Bill Todd
State/OIG – Mark Duda

**Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report
DRUG CONTROL: Aviation Program Safety Concerns In Colombia Are
Being Addressed, But State's Budgeting Process Can Be Improved
(GAO-04-918, GAO Job Code 320231)**

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on GAO's draft report, "Aviation Program Safety Concerns in Colombia are Being Addressed, But State's Budgeting Process Can Be Improved." The report provides a useful summary of technical, planning, and budgeting issues that potentially impact INL's Office of Aviation programs in Colombia. The bureau is keenly interested in anything that affects these programs, and is interested in continuing to improve our management and planning efforts in these areas.

The State Department has a few concerns concerning the report's planning and budgeting conclusions. The State Department does not fully agree with the report's statements (pages 14 and 18) that State/INL does not plan for all aviation program requirements. Given INL's existing budgeting and funding constraints, we believe the bureau manages and plans for its aviation program requirements. The success of these programs would seem to bear this out. Financial considerations must play a significant role in INL's planning processes. For example, INL receives much of its funding through the Foreign Assistance Act, which historically allocates funding country by country. This means INL funds and operates a centralized Air Wing using decentralized funding from multiple sources. We also have no long-term aviation funding assurances, which make expensive aircraft replacement strategies very difficult to plan and manage financially. These fundamental financial considerations have always been a basic tenet of INL aviation operations. While they are mentioned in the report, the report does not discuss the extent to which they affect INL's planning.

In the FY 06 BPP process, INL worked to address these needs by requesting funding for a Critical Flight Safety Program (CFSP). The CFSP would include a depot level maintenance program, an equipment modernization and replacement program, a robust helicopter upgrade/conversion program, and the acquisition of key aircraft. With these actions, the bureau believes it has made substantial strides in this area, but they are unfortunately not mentioned in the report.

The bureau feels the report does not sufficiently address the challenging nature of long-term aviation operations planning in an environment consistent with the scrutiny and control of multiple Congressional committees, OMB, and other USG entities with oversight over or interest in these Colombia aviation programs.

Now on pp. 18-20.

INL takes pains to be fully compliant with all Congressional and USG oversight requests, regulations, and constraints. The bureau cooperates fully and freely in all areas, but must take these factors into consideration during its planning processes.

INL is also making significant strides in improving our long range planning, financial transparency, and fiscal accountability. The bureau self-identified problem areas and began to implement solutions before the GAO report process started. The implementation of those improvements continues as of this writing.

The report also notes that the State Department shifts funds between aviation and country programs to meet the aerial eradication program requirements. Almost all federal departments reprogram funds between programs at one time or another, but usually in much more stable operating environments where lives are not necessarily at stake. While INL does not dispute GAO's conclusions in this area, the bureau does request GAO include a more detailed description of the full impact of consistent funding delays and/or uncertainties in a high risk, high visibility operational planning environment such as INL's Office of Aviation.

In sum, shifting funds among programs is a necessity. Given the lag time of up to two years between INL's budget requests and actual receipt of those funds, delays in receiving the bureau's annual FY funding that consistently stretch several financial quarters into each fiscal year, program scope and mission increases to which INL historically attempts to respond as quickly as possible, and frequently delayed responses to INL's requests to Congress to move funds from one program to another, INL must shift funds to achieve our mission goals.

The report also states that the State Department does not have a strategic plan for the aviation program. In fact, the initial cut at INL's new Air Wing Strategic Plan was completed in April 2004. The process included several days of participation by all aviation Functional Area Managers, Senior Aviation Advisors, and RM Strategic Planning personnel. It included development of a mission statement, values, and goal papers for each functional area (Admin/COR, IT, Logistics, Maintenance, Operations and Safety).

Examples of the INL Aviation Program's Strategic Planning process include the Critical Flight Safety Program (CFSP) and INL/A Reorganization Plans, which as mentioned above were incorporated into the INL FY 2006 BPP and FY 2006 Budget Request.

The Critical Flight Safety Program, as noted above, identifies an immediate need to stop the degradation and extend the life of its severely aged aircraft fleet to sustain counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism missions. The declining condition of the fleet presents a crippling reality of potential unsafe aircraft, increased costs for maintenance, material requirements, and degraded performance. To stop any further deterioration of the fleet, INL/A is embarking on a multi-level / multi-year program that consists of near-term and long-term initiatives.

The Re-organization Plan, for which funding was requested through the FY 06 BPP process, identifies the need to increase the number of staff personnel at Patrick AFB and Washington DC offices to support an organization that has grown four fold since 1996. A critical need is for personnel specializing in Strategic Planning, Budgeting, and Financial / Cost / Analysis to continue to address the shortcomings addressed in this report.

In conclusion, INL understands and agrees with GAO's conclusion that more comprehensive long term planning and budgeting processes are needed. INL is working towards this end as part of Assistant Secretary Charles's management initiatives and improvements. The INL Executive Director has initiated several actions to improve the bureau's management and financial controls, improve planning and financial transparency, and address the conclusions noted in this report. Actions already underway include significant action to reconcile prior year funds, establish processes to ensure current funds remain reconciled, recurring program reviews by the Assistant Secretary before program plan and funding final approval, and maximizing the use of de-obligated prior year funds to address budget shortfalls. The bureau developed and is implementing a strong strategic plan for the aviation support program, as well as comprehensive long-term flight capitalization and refurbishment programs.

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