



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

Why GAO Did This Study

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

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

What GAO Recommends

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

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

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

DRUG CONTROL

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

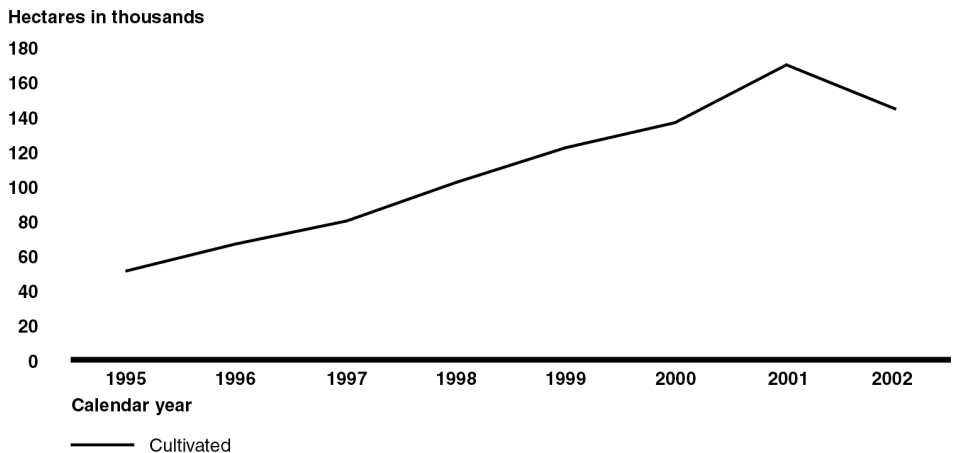
What GAO Found

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

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

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

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



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