



Highlights of [GAO-03-820T](#), testimony before the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States has been providing assistance to Colombia since the early 1970s to help reduce illicit drugs. In 1999, the Colombian government introduced Plan Colombia—a program that, among other things, proposed reducing illicit drug activities by 50 percent over 6 years. In fiscal years 2000-03 alone, the United States provided more than \$2.5 billion in counternarcotics assistance. Despite this aid, Colombia remains the world’s leading producer and distributor of cocaine and a major source of the heroin used in the United States.

This testimony 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.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-820T.

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

DRUG CONTROL

Financial and Management Challenges Continue to Complicate Efforts to Reduce Illicit Drug Activities in Colombia

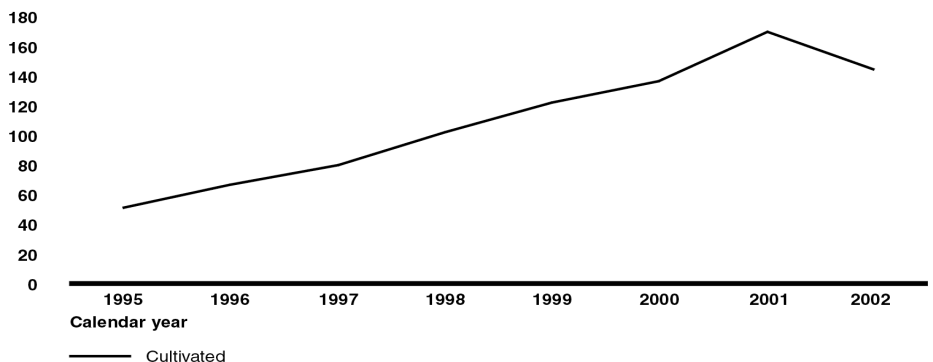
What GAO Found

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. Most of this assistance has been delivered and is being used for counternarcotics operations.

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 eradicate coca and poppy plants without restriction.

Although the U.S.-supported counternarcotics program in Colombia has recently begun to achieve some of the results envisioned in Plan Colombia, Colombia and the United States must continue to deal with financial and management challenges. Neither the Colombian Army nor the Colombian National Police can sustain ongoing counternarcotics programs without continued U.S. funding and contractor support for the foreseeable future. According to U.S. embassy officials, these programs alone may cost up to \$230 million per year, and future costs for some other programs have not been determined. Because of overall poor economic conditions, the government of Colombia’s ability to contribute more is limited, but the continuing violence from Colombia’s long-standing insurgency limits the government’s ability to institute economic, social, and political improvements. Moreover, Colombia faces continuing challenges associated with the need to ensure it complies with human rights standards and other requirements in order for U.S. assistance to continue. 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.

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



Source: U.S. Department of State, Office of Aviation