

## *A Much Wider War*

By Lisa Haugaard

In the coming weeks, congress will begin to debate the wisdom of sending a billion additional dollars to the Andes region of South America. According to the Bush administration, this money—added to the \$1.3 billion the Clinton administration sent—will help the U.S. in its war on drugs.

Let's be clear: it won't cut down on drug use in the U.S. one iota. Instead, the new package will cement the United States' partnership with the brutal and ineffectual Colombian military and will expand the war to at least five other nations. Rather than repeat expensive past failures, the United States should rethink its approach to international drug policy.

The Colombian armed forces are unworthy of U.S. support. The Colombian military is strongly tied to paramilitary forces that are committing the majority of killings of civilians in Colombia's brutal civil war. Paramilitaries enter rural villages, select rural leaders—teachers, union members, shopkeepers, community activists—and kill them. Under threat, the remaining villagers then flee their homes, adding to the ranks of the two million Colombians displaced since 1985. Colombia's guerrillas are also brutal, responsible for the great majority of kidnappings for profit. Colombia's civilian population is caught in the middle of this terrible violence. Peace negotiations, although slow and frustrating, provide the only answer.

International human rights groups have documented how elements of Colombia's military provide intelligence and cover to the paramilitaries to do their dirty work, and then look the other way as paramilitaries commit atrocities. This package will make the United States an accomplice in these abuses, and it will sink the United States into a quagmire from which there will be no easy exit.

As well as funding Colombia's military, the package will escalate aerial fumigation campaigns in Colombia's coca-growing regions. The goal is right, but the method is ineffective and brutal. Crop-dusters rain down chemical herbicides on poor farmers, their families, and their livestock. The U.S. Congress has provided money for alternative crop production, but those programs, added as an afterthought, have barely begun to flow, while fumigation has charged ahead. Farmers left with no alternatives simply pack up and go deeper into the Amazon frontier, and plant coca again.

Despite over \$25 billion spent in international drug control efforts in the past two decades, the United States has never achieved more than a temporary dent in coca production. Just as police presence shifts the location of drug pushers from one city block to the next, U.S. counternarcotics policy chases drug production around the continent. When temporary successes were achieved in Peru and Bolivia, production shifted to Colombia.

A sustainable solution to the scourge of drugs—whether on the consumption end in the United States or the production end in the Andes—must go to the root of the problem. In the United States, expanding access to drug treatment programs for addicts and providing job opportunities and afterschool programs for young people at risk, as well as providing drug education programs, offer a more long-term and humane solution than simply throwing nonviolent drug offenders in jail. In the Andes, where poor farmers in impoverished frontier lands turn to illicit crops out of desperation, providing real opportunities for farmers to grow legal crops can make a difference.

Proponents of Mr. Bush's Andean Counternarcotics Initiative say there is no alternative, that we either choose their package or

walk away from a serious problem. That's false. The United States can choose to fight drugs through greater investment in drug treatment and prevention at home—not by adding token amounts to a budget, but by providing adequate funding, including for treatment for all addicts who seek it. The emphasis must be on the demand side; if the demand exists, even if coca production were to fall, new drugs, like Ecstasy—made in the

United States—would take their place. In the Andes, the United States can choose to back sustained alternative development, as well as peace negotiations—for drug production thrives in the chaos of war. Law enforcement assistance targeting drug traffickers and money launderers, already provided, could be strengthened.

The “soft” solutions of drug treatment and crop substitution sound weak to drug warriors. But they are the stronger solutions. Because they actually can work. You can look tough and chase the problem around from place to place... or you can deal with it. Here and in the Andes.

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