



## **Andean Regional Initiative: A Policy Fated to Fail**

By Gina Amatangelo, Washington Office on Latin America

The Bush administration's Andean Regional Initiative (ARI)—largely an expansion of U.S. support for Plan Colombia—passed the House of Representatives in late July, largely intact. The House did defeat Bush's proposal to remove the cap on the number of U.S. military and private contractors that can be in the region at any one time, a proposal that would have opened the way for greater direct American involvement. Yet the current cap of 800 is substantial—more than double, for instance, the number permitted in El Salvador during the 1980s. The House also trimmed \$55 million from the administration's request of \$882 million in State Department funds for 2002. The majority of the funds—\$676 million—are to be administered through the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement budget. To proceed, the ARI must win Senate approval.

### **Key Points**

- The Bush administration describes its Andean strategy as a "three-legged stool" of eradication, military assistance, and alternative development, but military aid is by far the largest leg.
- U.S. assistance to Colombia and other Andean countries represents a sizable percentage of the foreign aid budget.
- Opposition to U.S. policy is growing in the region, particularly opposition to aerial fumigation and to the spillover of the Colombian conflict into other countries.

The Bush administration describes its Andean strategy as "a three-legged stool" of eradication, military assistance, and alternative development. About half of the ARI funds are earmarked for Colombia, including funds for: aerial eradication of drug crops; alternative development; logistical support, hardware, and training for the Colombian Army's counternarcotics battalions and the Colombian National Police; social and economic programs, including assistance for internally displaced persons; and judicial reform. The remainder is for the region's six other countries—Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, and Brazil—to support economic development and the rule of law as well as ongoing drug control efforts, including eradication, interdiction, and drug use awareness.

Not included in the ARI package is military funding from the Defense Department. Estimates suggest that if Pentagon funding levels remain constant, 71% of the total U.S. assistance allocated for Colombia in 2002 will go to security forces. In the ARI regional package, as in U.S. funding for Plan Colombia, support for military operations continues to overshadow assistance for democracy strengthening, economic development, and other nonmilitary programs.

Increasingly, governments of the other Andean nations are expressing fears that U.S. policy is leading to the "Colombianization" of the region. To address these concerns about spillover and instability, the ARI package includes increased security assistance to protect borders in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Brazil.

There are also signs of growing opposition to aerial fumigation in Colombia. In July, a Bogotá judge ordered the suspension of aerial spraying with the herbicide glyphosate in indigenous communities in southeastern Colombia until the government investigates complaints of health and environmental damage. Simultaneously, the United Nations Drug Control Program in Colombia called for international monitoring to determine the safety and accuracy of aerial crop spraying, which it termed "inhuman" and "ineffective."

This increasing opposition comes as the pace of spraying is set to escalate dramatically with the arrival of U.S. aircraft, part of the two-year, \$1.3 billion supplemental package for Plan Colombia approved by Congress in 2000. U.S. funds for counterdrug programs in the Andes have surged into the \$1 billion range for 2002, with levels for Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador doubling. If these trends continue, the ARI will constitute a major portion of the diminishing overall U.S. foreign aid budget, which will total roughly \$15 billion this year.

In its ARI aid proposal for 2002, the Bush administration has attempted to address some of the critiques of U.S. support for Plan Colombia. However, Washington is continuing to invest heavily in training and arming hundreds of Colombian troops operating in the southern coca producing regions. Such assistance is drawing the U.S. deeply into this brutal 35-year internal conflict and is undermining the fragile peace negotiations between the government and guerrillas. Despite some adjustments, Bush's ARI fails to adequately address concerns about human rights abuses or health and environmental damage. The ARI also exhibits only perfunctory interest in alleviating rural poverty, an underlying cause of the conflict.

The administration's framing of its ARI counterdrug strategy is reminiscent of efforts by the previous Bush administration, which launched the first Andean Initiative in 1989. That earlier scheme also prioritized military hardware and training for counternarcotics operations. Yet, according to the State Department International Narcotics Strategy Report, since 1989, coca cultivation in the Andes has declined a mere 16%, as relatively large reductions in production in Peru and Bolivia have been paralleled by increased cultivation in Colombia.

# Problems with Current U.S. Policy

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The Andean Regional Initiative is unlikely to have a substantial impact on the production and trafficking of drugs in the region. It continues U.S. support for eradication programs that have had little success, have angered rural communities, and are threatening human health and the environment. Moreover, the new package once again fails to address the major problem of the growth of paramilitary violence and associated human rights abuses.

The ARI includes hundreds of millions of dollars for the Colombian Army and police, which continue to work hand-in-glove with paramilitary groups. Paramilitary squads often do what the military does not want to risk or be seen doing: gaining control of rural areas by killing or forcibly evicting peasant families. Yet the well-documented links of paramilitary squads to the army, as well as to illicit drug operations, have been largely absent from the official U.S. debate.

Paramilitary organizations are deeply involved in all phases of the drug trade: they tax drug production, run cocaine laboratories, protect trafficking routes, and even run drugs themselves. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) called Carlos Castaño, leader of the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) paramilitary group, a “major drug dealer in his own right.” It concluded that he is closely linked to the drug syndicates now responsible for shipping “tons of cocaine and heroin into the U.S.” Washington’s counternarcotics strategy, however, is focused on the southern regions where leftist guerrillas have established a stronghold while ignoring the northern regions, where paramilitary forces control the drug trade.

And paramilitary violence is increasing. The Colombian Commission of Jurists reports that the daily average of politically motivated homicide doubled between 1998 and 2000—to almost 20 murders per day. In 2000, almost 85% of these murders were attributed to state agents and paramilitary groups, with the remaining 15% attributed to guerrilla groups. According to a Colombian government human rights agency, civilian deaths by armed actors rose 75% in 2000, with paramilitaries responsible for almost all of the increase.

In a particularly brutal incident in April 2001, a paramilitary squad killed at least 40 peasants in the Alto Naya region of southwestern Colombia, dismembering some with chainsaws. Less than a month before, UN and Colombian government representatives had warned the security forces of possible paramilitary attacks in the region, but the Colombian Army arrived five days after the slaughter began. Bogotá has failed to take the necessary measures—including prosecuting military officers involved in paramilitary activity—to stop paramilitary violence. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Office has found that “the paramilitary phenomenon continues to expand and consolidate. The government’s commitment to confronting these groups has been weak and inconsistent.”

The ARI will continue aerial fumigation programs, which began in Colombia in 1992 and have expanded since December 2000. But aerial eradication has not proved effective in stopping coca production, and its

human and environmental cost is high. In recent years, coca cultivation has dramatically increased, as aerial eradication—without accompanying alternative development programs—shifted production from Guaviare province in south central Colombia to the Putumayo region along the Ecuadorian border. State Department officials concede that eradication is causing a shift in cultivation to new areas in Colombia and is also likely to reactivate production in traditional areas in Bolivia and Peru. Coca prices have recently risen in Peru, and government officials there fear that thousands of peasant families may be tempted to return to coca cultivation, because alternative development programs have failed to establish other sustainable cash crops.

Both Bogotá and Washington measure success not in terms of decreased drug flows to the U.S. but in terms of a reduced rate of coca expansion. Even so, achievements have been nominal, at best. By mid-2001, Colombian and U.S. officials boasted that they had sprayed 125,000 acres. Yet coca cultivation in Colombia, estimated by the U.S. and UN to cover 336,000 to 402,000 acres in late 2000, was far higher than earlier U.S. calculations. “Everywhere we look there is more coca than we expected,” conceded U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson in July 2001. Cultivation of heroin poppies is also increasing. Moreover, the price of cocaine in the U.S. remained unchanged since Plan Colombia was launched, according to a May 2001 DEA report.

Six governors from Colombia’s southern provinces have repeatedly called for a halt to U.S.-funded aerial fumigation, complaining that it is destroying farmers’ legal cash, food, and animal feed crops. The governors do support manual eradication if accompanied by serious alternative development programs. Officials and human rights activists in the region worry that fumigation is exacerbating social tensions and dislocations and that peasants are losing trust in the government, fleeing their homes, and may be joining either the guerrillas or paramilitaries.

The ARI aims to improve security in surrounding countries and to guard against the collateral damage of Plan Colombia, but this approach has little chance of success. Ecuador, in particular, is being drawn into the Colombian conflict. Ecuador’s army has clashed with Colombian guerrillas in the border area, and increasing numbers of refugees are fleeing into Ecuador’s Amazon region. In addition, Ecuadorian legislators have expressed concern about the U.S. military’s new “operational facility” in Manta, on Ecuador’s coast near the border with Colombia. The Manta base serves as the main hub for U.S. counterdrug surveillance flights, and up to 400 U.S. military personnel may be stationed there.

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## Key Problems

- The U.S. policy debate has not adequately addressed the ties of paramilitary groups both to the Colombian military and to drug operations.
  - Over the past decade, aerial eradication in Colombia has not proved effective, and it poses both health and environmental risks.
  - Aid to Andean militaries is unlikely to improve regional security. Instead, it is having a destabilizing effect, particularly in Ecuador.
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# Toward a New Foreign Policy

The Bush administration's Andean Regional Initiative, with its emphasis on expanding antinarcotics operations, represents further "mission creep" without clearly defined and attainable goals or even an exit strategy. Washington should cease military funding for counternarcotics operations in the Andean region and withdraw U.S. military and private contractors involved in Plan Colombia. Instead, the U.S. should focus on a new three-legged stool strategy: support for the Colombian peace process, sound and sustained alternative development programs, and demand-side domestic drug programs.

The militarized nature of U.S. assistance to Colombia, and to the drug war in general, is undercutting the Pastrana government's peace process and playing into the hands of hard-liners in all factions of the conflict. There are alternatives to the military emphasis of U.S. policy. The governors from southern Colombia have

offered to involve local communities in widespread manual eradication efforts and social development programs. Civil society groups have also presented alternative proposals that include support for the peace process, reforms to promote respect for human rights, and rural development strategies coupled with gradual coca eradication programs.

U.S. assistance for Colombia should focus on reaching a negotiated settlement to the conflict and strengthening democratic institutions. In particular, additional support for the attorney general's office

would strengthen the Colombian government's capacity to investigate and prosecute drug trafficking, kidnapping and homicide, and other human rights violations.

Some argue that U.S. assistance will help improve the Colombian Army's human rights record, but the evidence suggests otherwise. In 2000, many in Congress voted for the \$1.3 billion Plan Colombia package, because it included human rights conditionalities. However, shortly before leaving office, President Clinton invoked a national security waiver, allowing delivery of military aid to the Colombian Army despite Bogotá's failure to meet any of the congressional human rights requirements. The Colombian government, particularly the attorney general's office, has recently taken some steps to arrest members of the paramilitaries and go after their financial backers. Yet, the Pastrana government lacks a coherent strategy to cut military-paramili-

tary links, as demonstrated by Bogotá's failure to dismiss many high-level military officials implicated by their connections to irregular forces.

The Bush administration is currently considering the renewal of the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA), and supporters argue that these trade preferences will serve to provide economic alternatives to drug trafficking in the Andes. However, such claims are overly optimistic. ATPA renewal alone will not address the severe economic inequalities in the region, which engender both social unrest and drug production for the international market. The Bush administration should work with Andean governments to support serious poverty reduction and rural development strategies. Such collaboration would ultimately do more to achieve U.S. goals than an escalated investment in the region's security forces.

Alternative development programs can, potentially, be an important tool both in combating the poverty of coca growing regions and in sustaining eradication efforts. To be effective, such programs should involve the local population in their design and implementation, include market studies to ensure that alternative crops will provide a steady income for farmers, and ensure that farmers have access to adequate post-harvest facilities and transport. In addition, Washington should establish alternative development programs prior to beginning eradication efforts. This would go a long way toward discouraging coca replanting or the transfer of cultivation to new areas.

Finally, the U.S. must do more to address the drug problem at home. A RAND study in the early 1990s found that drug treatment is the most cost-effective method of drug control. Yet the U.S. still does not adequately fund drug treatment programs. The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy reports that 57% of hard-core drug users, nearly 300,000 people, do not have access to treatment. Although the Bush administration has launched a state-by-state treatment gap analysis and has promised a \$1.6 billion increase in funding for drug treatment, this increase is still unlikely to be sufficient to address the existing treatment gap. No one seeking treatment should be turned away.

Washington should step back and reevaluate its drug control priorities. Current supply-side drug control programs are likely to further involve the U.S. in the Colombian quagmire and exacerbate political violence and instability in the Andes region without having a significant impact on the flow of drugs to the United States.

*Gina Amatangelo <GAmatangelo@wola.org> is a Fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America, specializing in international drug control programs in the Andes region.*

## Key Recommendations

- The U.S. should focus on a new three-legged stool strategy: support for the Colombian peace process, sound and sustained alternative development programs, and demand-side domestic drug programs.
- Washington should cease military funding for aerial fumigation and other counternarcotics operations in the Andean region.
- The U.S. should withdraw military and private contractors involved in Plan Colombia operations.

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### Editorial inquiries and information:

**IRC Editor**  
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**Voice:** (202) 234-9382/3 ext. 232  
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## Organizations

### Acción Andina

Bolivia  
Voice/Fax: (591) 444-6705  
Email: andina@albatros.cnb.net

### The Andean Information Network

Bolivia  
Voice/Fax: (591) 422-4384  
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### Washington Office on Latin America

1630 Connecticut Ave. NW, Second Floor  
Washington, DC 20009  
Voice (202) 797-2171  
Fax: (202) 797-2172  
Email: [wola@wola.org](mailto:wola@wola.org)  
Website: <http://www.wola.org/>

## Websites

### Drug Enforcement Administration

<http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/>

### Lindesmith Center-Drug Policy Foundation

<http://www.lindesmith.org/>

### Office of National Drug Control Policy

<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/>

### U.S. Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/fs/index.cfm?docid=3419>

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<http://www.southcom.mil/home/>

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