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RESTRUCTURE AID TO COLOMBIA

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Colombia is turning the corner in its war against drug trafficking and terrorism; yet U.S. assistance to this nation of 48 million people still lacks the organization necessary to supply Colombian security forces with needed resources, and other assistance fails to match present needs. To avoid squandering recent gains, the White House and Congress should strengthen the management of security-related assistance and fund it over a longer period of time, extend authority for U.S. training and equipment to be used against terrorist threats, and shift funds from unproductive programs to the priority needs of establishing public security and the rule of law.

Country on the Cusp. Since the August 2002 inauguration of President Alvaro Uribe, the Colombian government has begun to implement needed reforms, curb drug trafficking, and bring the country's three outlaw terrorist armies to justice. Uribe imposed a tax to raise \$780 million in part to train two new army battalions and establish a network of paid civilian informants. He also initiated plans to double the number of army combat troops and police from 100,000 to 200,000. Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Colombia's largest guerrilla army, has been losing strength because of captures, desertions, and defections of mid-level commanders. Aerial eradication of coca plants has exceeded that achieved the previous year under President Andrés Pastrana. In October, the Colombian congress repealed an exemption that kept high school graduates from serving in military combat positions and approved judicial reforms to allow oral trials and improve the administration of justice.

However, Uribe's determination has met resistance. The day of his inauguration, a guerrilla mortar attack killed more than a dozen people in the capital. Since January 2003, a new rebel bombing campaign has killed 67 and injured more than 250.

Support Assured, But Problems Remain. In

1996, after Colombia defeated its powerful drug cartels, the United States cut off security assistance because of allegations that President Ernesto Samper received campaign contributions from kingpins. When aid was resumed two years later, drug production had increased, and Colombia's two major rebel armies—the FARC and the National Liberation Army—had partnered with independent drug producers to finance an expansion in trafficking and terrorism aided by international groups like the Irish Republican Army. In 2000, the bipartisan approval of \$1.3 billion for Plan Colombia, combined with initiatives directed toward other troubled Andean countries, assured continuing U.S. support, but funding and management kinks still hinder delivery.

First, support remains ad hoc. Congress transferred authority over counternarcotics assistance from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to the Department of State's Bureau of International Nar-

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cotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) in the early 1990s, when DOD senior leaders wanted out of a seemingly local law enforcement mission. At the time, the State Department had little institutional capacity to manage such assistance programs. Moreover, Congress has provided funding on a year-to-year basis complicating planning and management.

Since then, congressional investigators have criticized the State Department for inadequately supporting Colombia's army and police air operations, and failing to coordinate the efforts of a proliferating array of U.S. entities from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Coast Guard to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms—all involved in counternarcotics activities directly or through contractors. Tangled management lines may even have contributed to the accidental downing of a missionary plane in Peru in 2001, which involved CIA contractors assisting the U.S.-backed drug-trafficker air interdiction program which was suspended.

Second, funding for related programs does not match urgent priorities. At the root of Colombia's problems is a weak state that once tolerated smuggling and rural terrorism. Now that drug-financed terrorists threaten the country's survival, security assistance must be more comprehensive than the narrow drugs-only focus of the 1990s. Without expanded authority, Colombian security forces cannot use their U.S.-supplied training, helicopters, or intelligence to stop rebel or paramilitary massacres from happening under their noses.

Closely related to securing the countryside is strengthening public institutions and establishing the rule of law. Colombia's justice system is the key, but it needs more than 1,000 courthouses of various sizes and funding to train new judges and personnel. Ironically, the United States will have spent \$312 million on coca crop substitution programs by the end of fiscal year 2003 and just \$143 million on programs to bolster institutions. Crop substitution was only marginally effective when tried in Bolivia in the 1990s. According to the U.S. Agency

for International Development, it will not work where the countryside is not secure.

Getting Back on Track. Colombia must solve its own problems, but Washington can leverage those efforts more effectively by streamlining its chain of command, and prioritizing funding better. Specifically, the White House and Congress should:

- **Stabilize counternarcotics and security assistance funding it over a longer period of time and by strengthening management.** While the State Department should retain its policy role, implementation and coordination with other agencies should revert to DOD, which has subject matter expertise in training troops, delivering equipment, and establishing standards. While using U.S. contractors might be expedient, Washington should prepare countries like Colombia to take over eradication, intelligence, and air interdiction missions.
- **Refocus U.S. support on Colombia's current needs.** Colombia's root challenge is to establish public security and the rule of law throughout its national territory and strengthen weak institutions. A narrow counternarcotics approach will not allow U.S.-provided training and equipment to serve comprehensive needs, including bringing terrorists to justice. Expanded authority now exists for this purpose but must go beyond its present one-year limit. At the same time, Congress should shift funding from questionable crop substitution programs to efforts to strengthen weak institutions such as the judiciary and expand public services into neglected rural areas.

Conclusion. Colombians are now beginning to make headway against narco-terrorism. For U.S. assistance to be truly effective, it must be consistent, comprehensive enough to counter attendant terrorism, and channeled to enable Colombian institutions to bear more of the burden.

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