



Colombia: Issues for Congress

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Summary

In the last decade, Colombia—a key U.S. ally in South America—has made significant progress in reasserting government control over much of its territory, combating drug trafficking and terrorist activities by illegally armed groups, and reducing poverty. Since the development of Plan Colombia in 1999, the Colombian government, with substantial U.S. support, has stepped up its counternarcotics and security efforts. Congress has provided more than \$7 billion to support Colombia from FY2000 through FY2009. In October 2009, Colombia and the United States signed a defense agreement that provides U.S. access to Colombian military bases for the next decade. Proponents of the current U.S. policy towards Colombia point to improving security conditions in the country and the weakening of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas as evidence that the strategy is working. Critics, however, argue that while pursuing these security improvements, U.S. policy has not rigorously promoted human rights, provided for sustainable economic alternatives for drug crop farmers, or reduced the amount of drugs available in the United States.

President Álvaro Uribe, elected in 2002 and reelected in May 2006, has made headway in addressing Colombia's 45-year conflict with the country's leftist guerrillas, as well as the rightist paramilitary groups that have been active since the 1980s. Uribe enjoys wide popular support, which has not been significantly affected by two scandals. The ongoing "para-political" scandal concerns past government ties to illegal paramilitary groups. A more recent scandal concerns unauthorized eavesdropping by the Colombian domestic security agency (DAS) on Uribe's political opponents. Uribe's popularity soared after Colombia's March 2008 raid of a FARC camp in Ecuador resulted in the killing of a top guerrilla commander and the seizure of his computer files. It spiked again following the Colombian military's successful July 2008 rescue of 15 hostages long held by the FARC. Those hostages included three U.S. defense contractors and a former Colombian presidential candidate. Some Colombians are calling for President Uribe to seek a third presidential term in the May 2010 election, but others have concerns about his attempt to reform the constitution again in order to remain in power.

Concerns in the 111th Congress regarding Colombia continue those of prior sessions: funding levels and U.S. policy regarding Plan Colombia, trade, and human rights. The FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161) raised the level of U.S. funding provided for economic and social aid closer to that provided for security-related programs. Assistance for Plan Colombia appropriated in the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-8) reflected the same balance and a slight increase over the prior year. While acknowledging the progress that the Uribe government has made in improving security conditions in Colombia, some Members of Congress have expressed concerns about labor activist killings, the para-political and DAS scandals, and the prospect of a third consecutive term for President Uribe, issues that have delayed consideration of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CFTA). In June 2009, President Obama met with President Uribe in Washington and discussed future cooperation and the CFTA.

For more information, see CRS Report RL34470, *The Proposed U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Economic and Political Implications* and CRS Report RL34759, *Proposed Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Labor Issues*. The future of the CFTA in the 111th Congress remains uncertain.

Contents

Recent Developments.....	1
Introduction	1
Political Situation.....	4
The First Uribe Administration.....	4
The Second Uribe Administration	4
Uribe Re-Election Bid for Third Term	6
Progress in Addressing Colombia’s Internal Conflict	6
Roots of the Conflict	6
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	7
National Liberation Army (ELN).....	10
Paramilitaries	10
Remaining Political Challenges	12
Para-political Scandal.....	12
The Justice and Peace Law and Demobilization.....	13
Human Rights Violations by Colombian Security Forces	14
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)	15
Landmines	15
Colombia and Global Drug Trends	16
Colombia and Regional Security	17
Relations with Venezuela and Ecuador	18
Issues for Congress	20
Plan Colombia and the Andean Counterdrug Program (ACP)	21
Aerial Eradication and Alternative Development	22
Integrated Military/Civilian Strategy	24
Funding for Plan Colombia	25
U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement	26
Paramilitary Demobilization.....	28
Human Rights	29
U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement	30

Figures

Figure 1. Map of Colombia	3
Figure 2. Military Bases Addressed by the Defense Cooperation Agreement.....	28

Tables

Table 1. UNODC Coca Cultivation in Colombia	23
Table 2. U.S. ONDCP Coca Cultivation in Colombia	23
Table 3. U.S. Assistance For Plan Colombia, FY2000-FY2010.....	33

Appendixes

Appendix A. Key Developments in 2009..... 34

Contacts

Author Contact Information 35

Acknowledgments 35

Recent Developments

On October 30, 2009, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia William Brownfield and Colombian Foreign Minister, Jaime Bermúdez signed the U.S.-Colombia military base agreement in Bogotá providing the United States access to seven Colombian military bases for 10 years (see “U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement”).

On September 22, 2009, the Colombian Supreme Court rejected all three candidates put forward by President Uribe to fill the position of Prosecutor General for the second time. The Prosecutor General is a constitutionally independent position that investigates common crimes as well as suspected crimes by former paramilitaries and drug traffickers and accusations against the military. The outgoing Prosecutor General, Mario Iguarán, was considered independent and effective.

On September 17, 2009, President Uribe announced that he favored dismantling the scandal-plagued Department of Administrative Security (DAS) and would create a new agency with fewer responsibilities. The 50 year-old DAS, the Colombian Presidency’s internal intelligence agency, has faced numerous controversies forcing the departure of previous DAS Directors for links to paramilitary leaders. The DAS drew new scrutiny in 2009 over charges that it conducted illegal wiretapping of President Uribe’s political opponents including human rights advocates, journalists and Supreme Court justices.

Over September 9-18, 2009, U.S., Colombian and Mexican customs officials seized \$41 million in a multi-day antidrug operation confiscating suspected drug proceeds from shipping containers in the ports of Manzanillo, Mexico and Buenaventura, Colombia. It was the largest cash seizure ever by the Colombian government.

On September 1, 2009, the lower House of the Colombian Congress approved the re-election referendum bill that would permit President Uribe to run for an unprecedented third term. Passed by a single vote over the simple majority needed, the referendum bill which had been approved by the Senate in August went to the Constitutional Court for its review. The approval by Congress moves the controversial re-election project forward, although the timeframe for changing the constitution in time for Uribe to run in the May 2010 elections remains tight.

For earlier developments in 2009, see **Appendix A** at the end of this report.

Introduction

Colombia is a South American nation of roughly 45 million people, the third-most populous country in Latin America. It is an ethnically diverse nation—58% of the population is mestizo, 20% white, 14% mulatto, 4% black, 3% black-Amerindian, and 1% Amerindian.¹ Colombia has one of the oldest democracies in Latin America, yet it has been plagued by violence and a conflict that has been ongoing for over 40 years. The country’s rugged terrain historically made it difficult

¹ U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Colombia,” May 2009. For more discussion on Afro-Colombian issues, see CRS Report RL32713, *Afro-Latinos in Latin America and Considerations for U.S. Policy*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and June S. Beittel.

to establish state control over large swaths of the nation's territory. High rates of poverty have also contributed to social upheaval in the country. In 2006, 45% of Colombians lived in poverty, down from close to 60% in 2000.² Colombia's ability to reduce poverty in recent years is at least partly due to increases in the country's economic growth rates, which reached 7.5% in 2007.³ Security improvements and a more stable economy have likely led to the recent increase in foreign direct investment (FDI). FDI grew from roughly \$6.5 billion in 2006 to some \$9 billion in 2007, with the bulk of new investments occurring in the oil, manufacturing, and mining sectors. Despite the Colombian government's success in reducing poverty levels, income inequality and land concentration are still significant problems.⁴

Drug trafficking has helped to perpetuate Colombia's conflict by providing earnings to both left- and right-wing armed groups. The two main leftist guerrilla groups are the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), both of which kidnap individuals for ransoms, commit serious human rights violations, and carry out terrorist activities. Most of the rightist paramilitary groups were coordinated by the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), which disbanded in 2006 after more than 30,000 of its members demobilized. Members of the AUC have been accused of gross human rights abuses and collusion with the Colombian Armed Forces in their fight against the FARC and ELN.

Colombia is a democratic nation with a bicameral legislature. The Liberal and Conservative parties, which dominated Colombian politics from the 19th century through much of the 20th century, have been weakened by their perceived inability to resolve the roots of violence in Colombia. In 2002, Colombians elected an independent, Álvaro Uribe, as President, largely because of his aggressive plan to reduce violence in Colombia. The major political parties currently represented in the Colombian Congress include the Liberal, Conservative, Alternative Democratic Pole, National Unity, and Radical Change parties, as well as several smaller political movements. To some observers, the legitimacy of the Colombian Congress has been undermined because 86 of its 268 members, many from pro-Uribe parties, have either been jailed or placed under investigation for ties to illegal paramilitary groups.⁵

² These statistics are taken from the Colombia National Planning Department as cited by the U.S. Department of State. See U.S. Department of State, "Charting Colombia's Progress," March 2008. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's (ECLAC) *Social Panorama 2006* data also showed a decline in both poverty and indigence rates since 1999. ECLAC reported that 55% of Colombians lived in poverty in 1999, with 27% living in indigence. By 2005 those poverty and indigence rates fell to 47% and 20%, respectively. No new data on poverty rates in Colombia were included in ECLAC's *Social Panorama 2008*.

³ "Country Report - Colombia," *Economist Intelligence Unit*, August 2008.

⁴ ECLAC reports that Colombia is now the fourth most unequal society in Latin America and the Caribbean, after Bolivia, Brazil, and Honduras. Colombia also has one of the most unequal land tenure patterns in Latin America, with 0.4% of land holders owning 61% of registered rural property. See ECLAC, *Social Panorama 2006*; J.D. Jaramillo, *El Recurso Suelo y la Competitividad del Sector Agrario Colombiano*, 2004.

⁵ Frank Bajak, "Head of Colombian Governing Party Arrested for Alleged Paramilitary Ties," *Associated Press*, July 25, 2008; "Parapolitics: Power and Democracy Seized by Mafias," presentation at the Inter-American Dialogue, December 9, 2008, by Claudia López. The number currently under investigation is according to Colombia's Prosecutor General's Office, as reported at a briefing by the U.S. Department of State desk officer for Colombia on July 28, 2009.

Figure I. Map of Colombia



Source: CRS

Political Situation

The First Uribe Administration

During his first term (2002-2006), President Uribe took steps to fulfill his campaign promises to address the paramilitary problem, defeat leftist guerrilla insurgents, and combat narcotics trafficking.⁶ President Uribe took a hard-line approach to negotiations with illegally armed groups, declaring that the government would only negotiate with those groups who are willing to give up terrorism and agree to a cease-fire, including paramilitary groups with which former President Pastrana had refused to negotiate. Negotiations with the AUC paramilitaries resulted in a July 15, 2003 agreement in which the AUC agreed to demobilize its members by the end of 2005. President Uribe endorsed a controversial Justice and Peace Law that was designed to provide a framework for those demobilizations. At the same time, Uribe sought to build up the size and strength of the Colombian military and police, whose forces stepped up their counternarcotics operations and activities against the FARC. High public approval ratings, likely due to reductions in violence that had occurred largely as a result of his security policies, prompted Colombia to amend its constitution in 2005 to permit Uribe to run for re-election.

The Second Uribe Administration

On August 7, 2006, Álvaro Uribe was sworn into his second term as president. Pro-Uribe parties won a majority of both houses of congress in elections held in March 2006, giving President Uribe a strong mandate as he started his second term. The domination of pro-Uribe parties, most of them new, appears to have further weakened the traditionally dominant Liberal and Conservative parties. Nevertheless, there is not a high level of unity among the pro-Uribe parties.

Now in the final year of his second presidential term, President Uribe retains widespread support in Colombia although his support has dipped somewhat due to economic decline. His popularity derives from the progress his government has made in improving the security situation in Colombia, demobilizing the AUC, and defeating the FARC and ELN. According to U.S. State Department figures, kidnappings in Colombia have declined by 83%, homicides by 40%, and terrorist attacks by 76% since Uribe first took office in 2002. Police are now present in all of Colombia's 1,099 municipalities, including areas from which they had been previously ousted by guerrilla groups.⁷ President Uribe has also overseen the demobilization and disarmament of more than 31,000 AUC paramilitaries, although the demobilization process has been criticized for failing to provide adequate punishments for perpetrators and reparations to victims of paramilitary violence.⁸ On March 1, 2008, the Colombian military successfully carried out a raid of a FARC camp in Ecuador that killed a top FARC leader and resulted in the capture of his computer files. This was followed by a successful operation on July 2 that rescued 15 hostages long held by the FARC, including three U.S. defense contractors and a former Colombian presidential candidate.

⁶ See CRS Report RS21242, *Colombia: The Uribe Administration and Congressional Concerns*, by Nina M. Serafino.

⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Charting Colombia's Progress," March 2008.

⁸ Latin American Working Group, "The Other Half of the Truth," June 2008.

Despite this progress, Colombia continues to face serious challenges. While FARC's numbers have been dramatically reduced in the last year or so, it still has thousands of fighters capable of carrying out terrorist attacks, kidnappings, and other illicit activities.⁹ Not all paramilitaries demobilized, and others have returned to paramilitary activities since demobilizing. One of the weaknesses of the demobilization program has been the difficulty of reintegrating demobilized forces into law-abiding civilian life.¹⁰ Moreover, there are credible reports that a new generation of paramilitaries is forming that is much more criminal than political in nature.¹¹ An estimated 4,000 to 9,000 new fighters have formed and as many as 15% to 20% of the new paramilitary groups may consist of former combatants.¹² Although President Uribe has not been personally implicated, the Colombian Supreme Court is investigating possible links between Colombian politicians, many from pro-Uribe parties, and paramilitary groups. Ongoing peace talks with the ELN have yet to yield any tangible results. Since the 2006 elections, there have been several scandals involving some Colombian military officials and concerns remain about extrajudicial killings committed by Colombian security forces.¹³ The latest scandal of these occurred in October 2008 when 27 soldiers and military officers (including three generals) were fired over the discovery of 13 murdered civilians who had been dressed as guerilla fighters to increase military body counts.¹⁴ As a result, General Mario Montoya, the commander of the Colombian army, stepped down on November 4, 2008.

Drug production and trafficking continue to generate millions of dollars annually for illicit groups. As a result of the ongoing conflict and drug-related violence, Colombia has one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons in the world, with a reported 380,000 people displaced in 2008 alone.¹⁵

⁹ The FARC is believed responsible for more than half of the cocaine entering the United States according to the November 2008 "Background Note on Colombia," by the U.S. Department of State.

¹⁰ Jonathan Morgenstein, *Consolidating Disarmament: Lessons from Colombia's Reintegration Program for Demobilized Paramilitaries*, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 217, Washington, DC, November 2008.

¹¹ Those concerns are cited in the U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007*, March 2008. See also: International Crisis Group (ICG), "Colombia's New Armed Groups," May 2007; Chris Kraul, "In Colombia, Paramilitary Gangs Control Much of Guajira State," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 2008.

¹² Chris Kraul, "New gangs run Colombians off their land; The government says paramilitary groups no longer exist. But more and more people are being displaced," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2008; "Militias March again," *The Economist*, October 31, 2009.

¹³ "Amnesty Says all Sides in Colombia Have Bloody Hands," *EFE*, May 28, 2008; Chris Kraul, "Colombia Military Atrocities Alleged," *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 2008.

¹⁴ In addition to the 27 officers dismissed in October 2008, 24 other officers were subsequently dismissed under the Commander of the Armed Force's discretionary authority, bringing to a total of 51 members of the Colombian armed forces dismissed in connection with the Soacha murders. See U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Justification Concerning Human Rights Conditions with Respect to Assistance for the Colombian Armed Forces," September 8, 2009.

¹⁵ The figure for 2008 was reported by the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), a non-governmental agency in Colombia. The CODHES figures are frequently higher than those reported by the Colombian government. However, the government's agency, Social Action, reported a slightly higher figure of 389,967 displaced persons for 2008. See <http://www.accionsocial.gov.co/Estadisticas/publicacion%20junio%20de%202009.htm>. According to an official at the Colombian Embassy, the Social Action total for IDPs in 2008 was greater because, for the first time, it included those displaced in prior years who were registering in 2008.

Uribe Re-Election Bid for Third Term

President Uribe's high approval ratings led many of his supporters to urge him to seek a third presidential term. In order for Uribe to be re-elected, the Colombian constitution would have to be amended again (as it was in 2005) to allow him to seek a third term. Uribe's supporters have delivered a petition with 5 million signatures to Colombian election authorities urging them to convoke a referendum to reform the constitution to allow a third Uribe term. On December 17, 2008, in a special session of Congress, the lower house of the Congress passed an ambiguously worded bill authorizing President Uribe to run in either 2010 or 2014. Legislation to explicitly permit him to run in 2010 passed the Senate. The different versions of the bill were reconciled in a bicameral committee to allow President Uribe's re-election in 2010. In August 2009, the Senate passed the reconciled bill and on September 1, 2009, the bill was approved by the House. Now that the bill has cleared its final congressional hurdle, it must work its way through the Constitutional Court, a process that could take months. If the referendum receives the Court's approval, it must gain the participation of 25% of the electorate (about 7.5 million people) for results to be valid. The measure must then pass by at least 50% of the vote to approve the change that would allow Uribe to run in the May 2010 election.¹⁶

President Uribe has yet to make an absolute declaration that he will run again. His popularity dipped slightly as a result of the declining economy, but polling in fall 2009 found that his approval rating jumped above its average of 70% to 74% (indicating strong popular support for his opposition to Venezuela's critique of the military base agreement with the United States). More than 50% of potential voters planned to vote if the referendum is held and of those 86% reported they would vote for re-election.¹⁷ Finally, if Uribe is allowed to stand in May for re-election, one pollster found that President Uribe would win with 63% of the vote.¹⁸

Many Colombian and international observers have urged Uribe not to seek another term and to respect the integrity of Colombian democracy. Some have expressed concerns about his conflicts with Colombian democratic institutions and his attempt to remain in power.¹⁹

Progress in Addressing Colombia's Internal Conflict

Roots of the Conflict

Colombia has a long tradition of civilian, democratic rule, yet has been plagued by violence throughout its history. This violence has its roots in a lack of state control over much of Colombian territory, and a long history of poverty and inequality. Conflicts between the Conservative and Liberal parties led to two bloody civil wars—The War of a Thousand Days (1899-1903) and The Violence (1946 to 1957)—that killed hundreds of thousands of Colombians.

¹⁶ "Uribe on course for a third term in Colombia," *Latin American Regional Report: Andean Group*, September 2009.

¹⁷ "Poll Shows Colombia's Voters Approve of Third Term for Uribe," *Dow Jones News Service*, September 10, 2009.

¹⁸ "Uribe's re-election looks secure," *Latin American Weekly Report*, October 8, 2009. The poll also asked how many were in favor of indefinite re-election and more than 35% supported that option.

¹⁹ Patricia Markey, "Colombia's Uribe Mulls Re-election, but Will he run?" *Reuters*, August 22, 2008; "Editorial: Mr Uribe's Choice," *New York Times*, August 22, 2008; Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Is Colombia's Uribe pulling a Chavez on term limits?," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 2009; Diana Delgado, "Foreign Investors See Risk in Colombia Pres' Possible 3rd Term," *Dow Jones Newswires*, September 4, 2009.

While a power sharing agreement (the so-called National Front pact) between the Liberal and Conservative parties ended the civil war in 1957, it did not address the root causes of the violence. Numerous leftist guerrilla groups inspired by the Cuban Revolution formed in the 1960s as a response to state neglect and poverty. Right-wing paramilitaries were formed in the 1980s when wealthy landowners organized armed groups to protect themselves from the leftist guerrillas. The shift of cocaine production from Peru and Bolivia to Colombia in the 1980s increased drug violence, and provided a new source of revenue for both guerrillas and paramilitaries. The main paramilitary organization, the AUC, began demobilization in 2003 and disbanded in 2006. Major armed groups today are the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the new generation of paramilitary groups.

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

The FARC can trace its roots to armed peasant self-defense groups that had emerged during “the Violence” of the 1940-50s. By the 1960s, those groups—located in the remote, mountainous regions between Bogotá and Cali—had developed into a regional guerrilla movement. In 1964, the guerrillas announced the formation of the FARC, a group dedicated to rural insurgency.²⁰ The FARC is the oldest, largest, and best-equipped and financed guerrilla organization in Latin America. It mainly operates in rural areas, but has shown its ability to strike in urban areas, including Bogotá. It conducts bombings, murders, mortar attacks, kidnappings, extortion, and hijackings mainly against Colombian targets. The FARC is fully engaged in the drug trade, including cultivation, taxation of drug crops, and distribution, from which it reaps significant profits. In recent years, the FARC has increased its activities along Colombia’s borders with Ecuador and Venezuela.

During the Pastrana Administration (1998-2002), the FARC entered into peace negotiations under which it was granted control of a Switzerland-size territorial refuge while the peace process was underway. With continued FARC military activity, including the kidnapping of a Colombian senator, President Pastrana halted the negotiations and ordered the military to retake control of the designated territory. During the inauguration of President Uribe on August 7, 2002, the FARC launched a mortar attack on the Presidential Palace that killed 21 residents of a nearby neighborhood.

In mid-2003, the Colombian military’s *Plan Patriota*, a campaign to recapture FARC-held territory, began operations in what was largely seen as a successful effort to secure the capital and environs of Bogotá. In 2004, military operations, conducted by up to 17,000 troops, turned to regaining FARC territory in the southern and eastern regions of the country. The FARC initially responded with a tactical withdrawal of forces, but launched a new counter-offensive in February 2005. The conflict with the FARC has, however, largely remained in the countryside and the FARC was unable to disrupt President Uribe’s August 7, 2006, inauguration. In 2006 the FARC controlled an estimated 30% of Colombian territory.²¹ The Colombian government maintains that *Plan Patriota* enabled it to reduce FARC ranks, recapture land held by the FARC, and confiscate large amounts of materials used to process cocaine. Despite these advances, critics pointed out that large numbers of civilians were displaced during the campaign.

²⁰ Peter DeShazo, Johanna Mendelson Forman, and Phillip McLean, *Countering Threats to Security and Stability in a Failing State: Lessons from Colombia*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, DC, September 2009.

²¹ “Colombia: Executive Summary,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment*, August 24, 2006.

Colombia's March 2008 Raid of a FARC Camp in Ecuador

On March 1, 2008, the Colombian military bombed a FARC camp in Ecuador, killing at least 25 people, among them, Raúl Reyes, the terrorist groups' second highest commander whose real name is reportedly Luis Edgar Devia Silva, four Mexican students visiting the camp, and one Ecuadorian citizen reportedly tied to the FARC.²² This mission marked the first time in the Colombian military's 44-year struggle against the leftist FARC insurgency that it had been able to kill a member of the FARC's seven-member ruling secretariat. A few days later, Ivan Rios, another member of the FARC's secretariat, was murdered by his own security agent. Many assert that these high-level killings dealt a significant blow to the FARC, particularly following a FARC announcement in May 2008 that its top commander, Manuel Marulanda, had died in March of a heart attack.

During the raid in Ecuador, information on captured laptops raised questions about Venezuela's potential support for the FARC, including information that the Chávez government was planning to provide millions of dollars in assistance to the FARC for weapons purchases. The files also included information that President Rafael Correa of Ecuador received campaign donations from the FARC in 2006. Both Chávez and Correa vigorously reject these claims. Venezuelan officials have dismissed the data as having been fabricated even though Interpol verified in May 2008 that the files had not been tampered with since they were seized. In a welcome turn of events on June 8, 2008, President Chávez called for the FARC to release all hostages unconditionally and to cease military operations, maintaining that guerrilla warfare "has passed into history," signaling a major change in his public stance.²³ Tensions have persisted between Colombia and Ecuador since the incursion. Colombian-Venezuelan relations also remain strained despite a temporary rapprochement with President Chávez.

Hostage Releases, Escapes, and the July 2008 Hostage Rescue

Since 2007, prisoner escapes, hostage deaths, and later hostage releases have focused international attention on the plight of hundreds of hostages held by the FARC. In April 2007, Colombian police officer Jhon Frank Pinchao escaped after eight years in FARC custody. In June 2007, eleven departmental deputies who had held since 2002 were reportedly executed by the FARC.²⁴ In August 2007, President Uribe authorized leftist Senator Piedad Córdoba and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to conduct dialogue with the FARC to secure the release of some 45 high-profile hostages, including the three American contractors held since 2003. Negotiations stalled in November 2007 due to the FARC's failure to provide proof of life of the hostages and allegations that President Chávez inappropriately contacted the head of the Colombian Army. However, the Colombian government did find over a dozen proof of life videos, including videos of the three American contractors, in a November 2007 raid on the FARC. In December 2007, Fernando Araujo, a former Minister of Development, escaped from the FARC after being held as a hostage for more than six years. From February through July 2008, Araujo served as Colombia's Foreign Minister.

²² Simon Romero, "Files Released by Colombia Point to Venezuelan Bid to Arm Rebels," *New York Times*, March 30, 2008.

²³ "Analysis: Chávez Reverses FARC Stance, Domestic Moves Ahead of Elections," *Open Source Center*, June 19, 2008.

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2007*, March 11, 2008.

Six hostage releases occurred during early 2008. In January 2008, two hostages were released to a delegation led by President Chávez and the Colombian government was able to successfully reunite one of the hostages with a son born to her in captivity that the FARC had turned over to the Colombian foster care system more than two years ago. A day after the two hostages' release, Chávez's called for the international community to no longer label the FARC and the ELN as terrorist groups prompted widespread condemnation. Nevertheless, his role in the release of hostages continued. On February 27, 2008, the FARC released four former members of the Colombian Congress to Venezuelan officials in Colombian territory.

On July 2, 2008, after months of planning and tracking the FARC, the Colombian military successfully tricked the FARC into releasing 15 of their prized hostages. Those hostages included three U.S. defense contractors—Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes, and Keith Stansell—held since February 2003 and former Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt held since February 2002. The success of the bloodless hostage rescue was widely cited as an example of the Colombian military's increasing professionalism and intelligence capabilities, which has occurred largely as a result of years of the U.S. training and security assistance programs provided through Plan Colombia.²⁵ Some press reports indicate that the United States provided millions of dollars to help Colombia find and rescue the hostages, including tactical support and training provided by the U.S. military and technical assistance supplied by a unit of planners, intelligence analysts, and hostage negotiators based in Bogotá.²⁶

Current Status of the FARC

Many analysts hailed the successful hostage rescue as evidence that the FARC was disintegrating, but others maintained that it was premature to draw that conclusion. The FARC lost three of its top commanders in 2008 and suffered a series of humiliating defeats at the hands of the Colombian military. Their communications systems were infiltrated, their leadership was in disarray, and reports indicated that many guerrilla units were running short on supplies.²⁷ Demobilization of FARC combatants rose sharply in 2007 to 2,480 from less than half that number the prior year. In 2008, a reported 3,027 FARC combatants demobilized.²⁸ Many rebels reportedly hoped to take advantage of the Colombian government's offer to allow the Justice and Peace Law's provisions to apply to those who surrender.²⁹

Although the FARC, now led by Alfonso Cano, is still unwilling to negotiate with the Uribe government, their position is much weaker than it was in the past. In late December 2008, the FARC announced plans to release six hostages unconditionally including two captive politicians and four members of the Colombian armed forces who had been held for years in jungle camps.³⁰ In March 2009, the FARC released the last foreign hostage they were holding, a 69-year old Swedish national who suffered paralysis from a stroke during his captivity. All the remaining

²⁵ "Colombian Officials Recount Rescue Plan; Commandos Took Acting Classes to Prepare," *Washington Post*, July 6, 2008.

²⁶ "U.S. aid was a key to the Hostage Rescue," *New York Times*, July 13, 2008.

²⁷ Patrick McDonnell and Chris Kraul, "Colombian Rebels Splintering," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 2008; "After the War in Colombia," *El Pais*, July 10, 2008.

²⁸ International Crisis Group, *Ending Colombia's FARC Conflict: Dealing the Right Card*, Latin America Report No. 30, March 26, 2009.

²⁹ "Closing the net on the FARC, Striking at the ELN," *Latin American Security and Strategy Review*, July 2008.

³⁰ Patrick Markey, "Colombian Rebels Say to Free Six More Hostages," *Reuters*, December 22, 2008.

FARC “high value” hostages (at least 24 who are being held in jungle hide outs) are members of the Colombian security forces that the FARC hopes to trade for imprisoned FARC combatants they consider political prisoners.³¹ In addition, the FARC continues to kidnap and hold hundreds of other kidnap victims beyond its “high value” hostages.³²

National Liberation Army (ELN)

The smaller ELN was formed in 1965, inspired by the ideas of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. With a membership of about 3,000, it is less active than the FARC, but has still been able to carry out a number of high profile kidnappings and bombings. In addition to the rural civilian population, the ELN has also targeted the country’s infrastructure, especially its oil and electricity sectors. Its operations are mainly located in the rural areas of the north, northeast, the Middle Magdalena Valley, and along the Venezuelan border. The ELN earns funds from the taxation of illegal crops, extortion, attacks on the Caño-Limón pipeline, and kidnapping for ransom. Its size and military strength have been dramatically reduced since the late 1990s.³³

In recent years, the ELN has shown more of a willingness to attempt peace negotiations with the government. In December 2003, President Uribe revealed that he had met with an ELN leader to discuss possible peace initiatives, but a subsequent ELN statement ruled out any possibility of demobilization. However, in 2004, the ELN and the Colombian government accepted an offer from Mexican President Vicente Fox to facilitate peace negotiations. In June 2004, Mexico named Andres Valencia, a former Mexican ambassador to Israel, as its facilitator. Meetings with Valencia and the ELN occurred, but the rebel group rejected Uribe’s offer of a cease-fire.³⁴ In April 2005, the ELN rejected further Mexican facilitation after Mexico voted to condemn Cuba at the U.N. Human Rights Commission. The Colombian government and the ELN held several rounds of exploratory talks in Havana, Cuba between December 2005 and August 2007, but those talks resulted in no concrete agreements. In June 2008, the ELN announced that it would not continue negotiating with the Uribe government for the time being. President Uribe responded by ordering the Colombian military to step up its operations against the ELN.³⁵

Paramilitaries

Paramilitary groups trace their origins to the 1980s when wealthy ranchers and farmers, including drug traffickers, organized armed groups to protect them from kidnappings and extortion plots by the FARC and ELN. The largest paramilitary organization, the AUC, was formed in 1997 as an umbrella organization for a number of local and regional paramilitary groups operating in the country. As discussed in more detail below, the AUC disbanded in 2006. Not all paramilitary groups joined the AUC umbrella. The AUC conducted massacres and assassinations of suspected insurgent supporters and directly engaged the FARC and ELN in military battles. The Armed Forces of Colombia have long been accused of turning a blind eye to these activities. The AUC,

³¹ Vivian Sequera, "Uribe changes tack on release of rebels' hostages," *Associated Press*, September 21, 2009.

³² Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2009*, January 2009.

³³ International Crisis Group, "Colombia: Moving Forward with the ELN?" October 11, 2007.

³⁴ Kate Joynes, "ELN Rebels Rebut Colombian Government’s Peace Pledge," *WMRC Daily Analysis*, July 12, 2004.

³⁵ "Closing the net on the FARC, Striking at the ELN," *Latin American Security and Strategy Review*, July 2008.

like the FARC, earned most of its funding from drug trafficking. *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism* estimated that in 2006 paramilitaries handled 40% of Colombian cocaine exports.³⁶

On July 15, 2003, the AUC reached an agreement with the Colombian government to demobilize its troops by the end of 2005. At that time, the State Department estimated that there were between 8,000 and 11,000 members of the AUC, although press reports used numbers ranging up to 20,000. The demobilization process begun in 2004 officially ended in April 2006. As of that time, over 30,000 AUC members had demobilized and turned in over 17,000 weapons.³⁷ AUC leaders remained at large, however, until August 2006 when President Uribe ordered them to surrender to the government to benefit from the provisions of the Peace and Justice Law.³⁸ It remains to be seen how Uribe's May 2008 decision to extradite 15 paramilitary leaders to the United States to stand trial for drug trafficking charges will affect ongoing investigations into the "para-political" scandal, as well as efforts to ensure that victims of paramilitary violence receive compensation for their suffering.

Not all paramilitaries demobilized, and still others have returned to paramilitary activities since demobilizing. Moreover, there are credible reports that a new generation of paramilitaries has formed and may be recruiting demobilized paramilitaries. Some former AUC members continue to be active in the drug trade.³⁹ There are reports that the AUC continues to take part in drug trafficking, in spite of the demobilization process. *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism* reports that since demobilization the AUC's purpose has shifted from combating the FARC and ELN to protecting drug trafficking networks and preventing the extradition of leaders wanted on drug trafficking charges in the United States. The State Department and U.N. both note that the new illegal groups do not share the political ideology of the AUC, which sought to defeat leftist guerrillas. Despite their ad-hoc nature, the new illegal groups pose a threat to Colombian civilians and the Uribe government is taking steps to combat them.⁴⁰ Some observers attribute a recent increase in violence in Colombia (following years of decline) to the new FARC leadership's changes in strategy and to the growing number of new criminal groups and competition between them.⁴¹

³⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2005*, and, "Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, August 10, 2006.

³⁷ "Only 2% of 30,150 Demobilized Paramilitaries to Stand Trial," *Associated Press*, April 18, 2006.

³⁸ Vicente Castaño, brother of AUC founder Carlos Castaño, remains at large. Vicente Castaño is under investigation by Colombian authorities for ordering the 2004 murder of his brother who reportedly planned to turn paramilitary leaders over for extradition to the United States as part of peace negotiations.

³⁹ International Crisis Group, *Colombia's New Armed Groups*, May 10, 2007; WOLA, *Captive States: Organized Crime and Human Rights in Latin America*, October 2007.

⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly - Human Rights Council, "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia," February 29, 2008; U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Human Rights Conditions with Respect to Assistance for the Colombian Armed Forces," July 28, 2008, available at <http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/080728cert.pdf>.

⁴¹ Adam Isacson, "Friday Links, Increasing Violence Edition," Blog of the Center for International Policy (CIP) Colombia Program, October 23, 2009.

Remaining Political Challenges

Para-political Scandal

A scandal involving alleged paramilitary ties to politicians, including current members of the Colombian Congress, erupted in November 2006. On November 9, 2006, the Colombian Supreme Court ordered the arrest of three congressmen for their alleged role in establishing paramilitary groups in the Caribbean state of Sucre. Since the scandal broke, several Colombian politicians, including several past and current members of the Colombian Congress, have been charged with ties to paramilitary groups. Former Foreign Minister Maria Consuelo Araujo was forced to resign due to the investigation into her brother's and father's connections to the paramilitaries and their involvement in the kidnapping of Álvaro Araujo's opponent in a Senate election. In December 2007, Congressman Erik Morris was sentenced to six years in prison for his ties to the paramilitaries, making him the first Member of Congress to be sentenced in the ongoing scandal. In February 2008, the former head of Colombia's Department of Administrative Security (DAS), Jorge Noguera, was formally charged with collaborating with paramilitaries, including giving paramilitaries the names of union activists, some of whom were subsequently murdered by the paramilitaries. In April 2008, Mario Uribe, a former senator, second cousin, and close ally of President Álvaro Uribe, was arrested for colluding with the paramilitaries. By November 2008, more than 30 congressmen from pro-Uribe parties had been indicted for past links to the paramilitaries.⁴² In the September 2009 human rights certification to Congress by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the extent of the political fallout from the para-political scandal in Colombia is noted: "with 86 members of Congress, 34 mayors and 15 governors linked to crimes."⁴³

The para-political scandal has increased tensions between President Uribe and the Supreme Court, which is charged with investigating the politicians accused of having paramilitary ties, many of whom are from pro-Uribe parties. In July 2008, representatives from the two branches met in a series of meetings to discuss President Uribe's concern that the paramilitary investigations were advancing too quickly. Despite those meetings, the Supreme Court ordered the arrest of Senator Carlos Garcia, head of Uribe's main coalition party, in late July. Tensions escalated again in August when press reports announced that two of President Uribe's advisers had met with representatives of Don Berna, the top paramilitary leader, at the presidential palace in April.⁴⁴ Government critics have questioned whether President Uribe's decision in May 2008 to extradite key paramilitary figures to the United States may have been done, at least partially, in order to thwart ongoing investigations into government-paramilitary ties. They have also questioned the motives behind a judicial reform package submitted by Uribe to the Congress that would remove the Supreme Court's power to investigate legislators.⁴⁵ The judicial reform bill was ultimately withdrawn by the government after it received strong criticism from the courts and

⁴² Economist Intelligence Unit, *Colombia risk: Government effectiveness risk*, November 14, 2008.

⁴³ See U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Justification Concerning Human Rights Conditions with Respect to Assistance for the Colombian Armed Forces," September 8, 2009. Available at: <http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/090908cert.pdf>.

⁴⁴ "Uribe Squares up to Supreme Court and Liberals as Parapolitical Scandal Deepens," *Latin American Weekly Report*, August 28, 2008.

⁴⁵ Juan Forero, "U.S. Extraditions Raise Concerns in Colombia," *Washington Post*, August 19, 2008; Human Rights Watch, "Colombia: Proposal Threatens 'Parapolitical' Investigations," August 4, 2008.

from members of Colombia's Congress.⁴⁶ In October 2008, Human Rights Watch released a report that examined the government's efforts to investigate and prosecute paramilitaries and those who collaborated with them. It warns that the Uribe administration has harassed the Supreme Court as it has carried out prosecutions of politicians, security forces and others with alleged paramilitary ties.⁴⁷

The Justice and Peace Law and Demobilization

As part of the paramilitary demobilization process, President Uribe introduced a Justice and Peace Law granting conditional amnesties to illegal combatants, which would mean that the law could also apply to FARC and ELN fighters if they decide to enter into negotiations with the government. Colombia's Congress approved the legislation in 2005. The Justice and Peace Law called on demobilized fighters to provide a voluntary account of their crime and to forfeit illegally acquired assets in exchange for an alternative penalty of up to eight years' imprisonment. If the accused was subsequently found to have intentionally failed to admit to a crime, the alternative penalty could be revoked and the full sentence imposed. Critics contended that the penalties provided for in the law were too lenient and amount to impunity. The Uribe Administration argued that without the inducement of the new law, paramilitary leaders and fighters would be unwilling to demobilize and a spiral of violence would continue in Colombia.

In July 2006, Colombia's Constitutional Court upheld the constitutionality of the law. In the same ruling, however, the Constitutional Court limited the scope under which demobilizing paramilitaries can benefit from the reduced sentences. Paramilitaries who commit crimes or fail to fully comply with the law will have to serve full sentences. The ruling also stipulates that paramilitaries must confess all crimes and make reparations to victims using both their legally and illegally obtained assets. Paramilitary leaders reacted by stating that they would not comply with the law. In response, President Uribe ordered paramilitary leaders to turn themselves in. By October 2006 all but 11 paramilitary leaders had complied with this order.⁴⁸

The merits of the Justice and Peace Law have been fiercely debated both in Colombia and the United States. Supporters believe it is an effective means to end paramilitary activities. The Bush Administration has expressed support for the law, noting that it has facilitated the demobilization of more than 31,000 paramilitary members. Supporters of the law maintain that paramilitaries must act in good faith and avoid further participation in illegal activities in order to benefit from the peace process. The Uribe Administration has removed some demobilized paramilitaries, including Carlos Mario "Macaco" Jiménez, from the Justice and Peace process due to their continued participation in illegal activities. In May 2008, Uribe extradited Jiménez, Salvatore Mancuso, and 13 other paramilitary leaders who had violated the terms of the law to the United States to stand trial on drug trafficking charges.

Despite these results, the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia and other observers have expressed concern about the institutional frailty of the Justice and Peace process.

⁴⁶ Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Rights group rips government; Colombia hinders paramilitary prosecutions, a human rights group said," *The Miami Herald*, September 17, 2008.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Breaking the Grip?: Obstacles to Justice for Paramilitary Mafias in Colombia*, October 2008.

⁴⁸ "Country Report - Colombia," *Economist Intelligence Unit*, October 2006; Human Rights Watch, "Colombia: Court's Demobilization Ruling Thwarts Future Abuses," July 19, 2006; "Gobierno colombiano abrirá debate público sobre decretos reglamentarios de ley de Justicia y Paz," *El Tiempo*, August 29, 2006.

Although more than 155,000 victims have registered since the law's passage, the International Crisis Group describes implementation as "lagging." Their report cites lack of interest in victim's rights from the Uribe government, inadequate support for the implementing institutions, and the persistence of armed conflict and threatening presence of new illegal armed groups.⁴⁹ Human rights organizations are also concerned that the paramilitaries have not been held accountable for their illegal activities and, that by under reporting illegally obtained assets, have failed to provide adequate reparation to their victims.⁵⁰ Other observers have expressed concerns that many paramilitaries have elected not to participate in the Justice and Peace process. Of the more than 31,000 paramilitary members that had demobilized, just 3,751 had been found eligible to receive benefits under the Justice and Peace Law's framework.⁵¹ In response to concerns that the Justice and Peace Unit tasked with investigating and prosecuting the paramilitaries was severely understaffed, the Uribe government issued a decree in spring 2008 to authorize tripling the size of its staff.⁵² The International Criminal Court is monitoring the investigations and prosecutions of former paramilitaries to ensure that those who are guilty of human rights abuses are held accountable for their crimes.⁵³ In August 2009, the Colombian Supreme Court suspended further extraditions of paramilitary leaders to the United States because the crimes for which they stand accused in the United States such as drug trafficking are not nearly as heinous as the atrocities they have allegedly committed in Colombia.⁵⁴

Human Rights Violations by Colombian Security Forces

Human rights organizations have raised serious concerns about the extrajudicial execution of civilians by the Colombian military for a number of years. This issue received prominent attention when more than a dozen young men from the impoverished community of Soacha were lured to another part of the country with a promise of jobs and then murdered. In October 2008, the armed forces were linked to the murder of the civilians whose bodies had been disguised as guerillas in order to inflate military body counts. As a result, the government fired 27 soldiers and officers (including three generals) and the commander of the Colombian army, General Mario Montoya, resigned on November 4, 2008.⁵⁵ Named the "false positives" scandal by the Colombian press, there has been continuing revelations about this problem as the Colombian military has worked to revise a policy that rewarded high guerrilla body counts. Many observers believe that justice for the Soacha murders, and other cases, has lagged.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ International Crisis Group, *Correcting Course: Victims and the Justice and Peace Law in Colombia*, Latin America Report 29, October 30, 2008.

⁵⁰ Latin America Working Group Education Fund, *The Other Half of the Truth*, June 2008.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Justification Concerning Human Rights Conditions with Respect to Assistance for the Colombian Armed Forces," September 8, 2009, available at: <http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/090908cert.pdf>.

⁵² U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Human Rights Conditions with Respect to Assistance for the Colombian Armed Forces," July 28, 2008.

⁵³ "International Criminal Court not to Allow Colombian Paramilitary Members Impunity," *Noticias Financieras*, August 31, 2008.

⁵⁴ "Militias March Again," *The Economist*, October 31, 2009.

⁵⁵ Simon Romero, "Colombian Army Commander Resigns in Scandal Over Killing of Civilians," *New York Times*, November 5, 2008.

⁵⁶ "Siete de los implicados en 'falsos positivos' podrían quedar libres en ocho días," *El Tiempo*, October 14, 2009. "False positives' arrests in Colombia," *LatinNews Daily*, October 21, 2009.

The State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Colombia covering 2008 stated that while "the government's respect for human rights continued to improve. ... Political and unlawful killings remained an extremely serious problem, and there were periodic reports that members of the security forces committed extrajudicial killings during the internal armed conflict." In its 2009 State of the World Human Rights report, Amnesty International asserted that between June 2007 and June 2008, at least 296 civilians were extrajudicially killed by Colombian security forces and many were disguised as guerillas who had been killed in combat. In June 2009, on a 10-day mission to Colombia, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions found the killings were not a result of official government policy. Nevertheless, "The sheer number of cases, their geographic spread, and the diversity of military units implicated, indicate that these killings were carried out in a more or less systematic fashion by significant elements within the military."⁵⁷

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Colombia has one of the largest internally-displaced populations in the world—more than 3 million IDPs—with indigenous and Afro-Colombians disproportionately represented among those displaced. There is some discrepancy over the current rate of displacement. The Colombian government registered over 250,000 IDPs in 2007, a decline of about 8,000 from 2006. Some IDPs do not register with the Colombian government out of fear and procedural barriers. As such, estimates of new displacements put forth by NGOs tend to be higher than government figures. For example, the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), a Colombian NGO, estimated that some 305,000 people were displaced in 2007, about 27% higher than the number CODHES recorded in 2006. Although still concerned by the overall numbers of individuals displaced, international NGOs found that the rate of mass displacements decreased in 2007. Colombian government assistance to IDPs increased in 2008 to an estimated total of \$508 million.⁵⁸ In 2008, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed particular concern about new displacements occurring along southern Colombia's Pacific Coast.⁵⁹ In 2008, both the Colombian government and CODHES reported more than 380,000 new IDPs.⁶⁰ This was an increase of over 24% over the prior year's total according to CODHES.

Landmines

The use of landmines by Colombian guerrilla groups is an ongoing problem in the country. Although Afghanistan and Cambodia continue to have higher rates of landmine casualties (per capita) than Colombia, the International Committee to Ban Landmines reported that Colombia had the highest number of landmine casualties in the world in 2006, with 1,106 casualties.⁶¹ Both

⁵⁷ United Nations, Press Release, "Statement by Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions – Mission to Colombia, 8-18 June 2009." Available at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/C6390E2F247BF1A7C12575D9007732FD?opendocument>.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2008*, February 2009.

⁵⁹ U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Thousands Displaced in Southern Colombia," August 22, 2008.

⁶⁰ The figure for 2008 was reported by the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), a non-governmental agency in Colombia. The CODHES figures are frequently higher than those reported by the Colombian government. However, the government's socio-economic development agency, Social Action, reported a slightly higher figure of 389,967 displaced persons for 2008. See: <http://www.accionsocial.gov.co/Estadisticas/publicacion%20junio%20de%202009.htm>.

⁶¹ Landmine casualties increased nearly 25% in 2005.

Human Rights Watch and the International Committee to Ban Landmines report that the vast majority of landmines are laid by the FARC and ELN.⁶² In 2007, *Landmine Monitor* cited a decline in landmine casualties to 895, the first decline since 2002. The change was attributed to setbacks suffered by the FARC.⁶³ Colombia still had the largest number of landmine victims in the world in 2008, even as the numbers of casualties declined to 777.⁶⁴

Colombia and Global Drug Trends

Colombia's prominence in the production of cocaine and heroin is cited as justification for the U.S. focus on anti-narcotics efforts in the Andean region. According to various sources, Colombia produces 60% of the world's cocaine.⁶⁵ It is the source of over 90% of cocaine consumed in the United States. Even though Colombia produces only a small fraction of global heroin production, it is the leading supplier of heroin in the eastern United States, according to the State Department's *2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*.

The world's supply of cocaine is produced by just three countries: Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. Until the mid-1990s, Peru and Bolivia were the two major producers. Colombia eclipsed Bolivia in 1995 and Peru in 1997, the result of increased eradication programs in those two countries and the displacement of coca cultivation to Colombia. Cocaine production in Colombia increased fivefold between 1993 and 1999. UNODC reported for 2008 an 18% decrease in coca cultivation in Colombia and reported a rise of 4.5% and 5.5% in Peru and Bolivia respectively.⁶⁶ These changes are from the level in 2007 when the U.N. reported an unusual rise of 27% in coca growing in Colombia. The UNODC's Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey notes the coca cultivation reported at 81,000 hectares approximates the levels reported in the 2004 to 2006 period. The report also notes an even larger decline in "potential" production of cocaine of 28%, from 600 metric tons in 2007 to 430 metric tons in 2008.⁶⁷

Most heroin consumed in the United States comes from Mexico and Colombia. In its October 2008 report, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that opium poppy cultivation and heroin production had declined by about 50% between 2000-2006 in Colombia.⁶⁸ In 2008, the U.N. found that opium production dropped to a low of 394 hectares, the lowest figure in the last 14 years of reporting.⁶⁹

In recent years, the Colombian government, with significant U.S. assistance, has stepped up its eradication efforts, with manual eradication accounting for an increasing percentage of total eradication efforts. In 2007, the Colombian government eradicated over 219, 529 hectares of illicit coca crops, up from 215,421 hectares eradicated the previous year. Aerial eradication

⁶² International Committee to Ban Landmines, *Landmine Monitor 2007* and Human Rights Watch, *Maiming the People*, July 2007.

⁶³ International Committee to Ban Landmines, *Landmine Monitor 2008*.

⁶⁴ Statistic from the Government of Colombia's Presidential Program for Integral Action against Landmines (PAICMA). Information provided by official from the U.S. Embassy in Bogota on October 23, 2009.

⁶⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region*, June 2008.

⁶⁶ "Fall in Colombia's Coca Crop vs. rises in Peru and Bolivia," *Security & Strategic Review*, June 2009.

⁶⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey*, June 2009.

⁶⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance*, GAO-09-07, October 2008.

⁶⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2009*.

accounted for 70% of the coca crops destroyed in 2007.⁷⁰ ONDCP has credited ongoing aerial spraying and manual eradication programs with recent declines in the cocaine productivity of the coca currently cultivated in Colombia.⁷¹ The U.N. reported in 2008 that the Colombian government eradicated 133,496 hectares through aerial spraying and 96,115 hectares through manual eradication for a total of 229,611 hectares.⁷²

After a long period of stable prices, purity, and availability of illegal drugs in the United States, evidence indicated that the price of cocaine rose dramatically from January 2007 to September 2008 according to a report from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). On December 11, 2008, the DEA announced that the average price of a gram of cocaine rose 89%—from \$96.61 to \$182.73—over the 21-month period ending in September. Over the same time frame, the agency reported a decline in cocaine average purity from 67% to 46% drawing data from 24,000 drug seizures reported in the DEA's System to Retrieve Information from Drug Evidence (STRIDE) database. The supply of drugs is often judged by changes in price, with higher prices signifying decreased supply. Declining purity is also used as a measure indicating decreased availability. DEA's Acting Administrator Michele Leonhart credited the changes in price and purity to regional counternarcotics efforts, including U.S. funded programs in Colombia.⁷³ The *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, published in December 2008, found a decline in cocaine availability in the United States that may have been responsible for price increases and purity declines. While the report states “the leading cause of the decrease in domestic availability is unclear,” the likely factors include the exceptionally large drug seizures made while the drugs are in transit to the United States, the crackdown in enforcement by the Mexican government, intercartel violence in Mexico, U.S. law enforcement efforts along the Southwest border, and expanding markets in Europe and South America.⁷⁴

Some observers have expressed caution in interpreting government figures on price, purity, and availability. They maintain that short-term fluctuations are not uncommon and may not be sustainable.⁷⁵ Another possible explanation for the declining cocaine supply in the United States is that cocaine is being diverted to Europe where drug traffickers can earn more money.⁷⁶

Colombia and Regional Security

Another justification of current U.S. policy in the Andean region is that drug trafficking and armed insurgencies in Colombia have a destabilizing effect on regional security. With porous borders amid rugged territory and an inconsistent state presence, border regions are seen as

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control and Strategy Report (INCSR) 2008*.

⁷¹ U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Official U.S. Colombia Survey Reveals Sharp Decline in Cocaine Production,” September 10, 2008.

⁷² UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey*, June 2009. The manual eradication figures reported for 2008 were slightly higher than the U.S. Department of State in its INCSR Report published in February 2009. The UN reported 96,115 hectares and the INCSR Report stated 95,732 hectares were eradicated manually, a difference of 383 hectares.

⁷³ U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, *DEA News: U.S. Cocaine Market Disrupted, Prices Continue 21-month Surge*, December 12, 2008.

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, National Drug Intelligence Center, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, December 2008.

⁷⁵ “U.S. Drug Czar Claims Cocaine Prices Fall,” Associated Press, November 8, 2007.

⁷⁶ Ibid and Chris Kraul, “U.S. Says War on Narcotics is Working,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 2007; “Editorial: Not Winning the War on Drugs,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2008.

particularly problematic. Colombia shares a 1,367-mile border with Venezuela, approximately 1,000 miles each with Peru and Brazil, and much smaller borders with Ecuador and Panama. The conflict in Colombia and its associated drug trafficking have led to spillover effects in Colombia's neighboring countries, especially Ecuador and Venezuela.

Relations with Venezuela and Ecuador

Colombia's relations with its neighbors have been strained by the spillover from Colombia's counter-insurgency operations, including cross-border military activity. Colombia has asked both Venezuela and Ecuador for assistance in patrolling border areas where the FARC is strong. The State Department's *2008 Country Reports on Terrorism* report, issued in April 2009, states that the Venezuelan government did not systematically police its border with Colombia to prevent the movements of groups of armed terrorists or to interdict arms or the flow of narcotics. It asserts: "The FARC, ELN, and remnants of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) regularly crossed into Venezuelan territory to rest and regroup as well as to extort protection money and kidnap Venezuelans to finance their operations." According to the State Department report, Ecuador's territory is also used for rest, resupply, and training, as well as some coca cultivation and processing primarily by the FARC. Because of poverty in the area near Ecuador's northern border with Colombia, the region is especially susceptible to "narcoterrorist influence" and a contraband economy has developed.⁷⁷

On July 20, 2009, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report on the status of drug trafficking through Venezuela and the status of U.S.-Venezuelan counternarcotics cooperation. According to the report, U.S. and Colombian officials assert that Venezuela has extended a lifeline to illegally armed groups in Colombia by providing significant support and safe haven along the border. U.S. officials also contended that a high level of corruption within the Venezuelan government, military, and other law enforcement and security forces contributes to the permissive environment.

Tensions with Ecuador also escalated after the raid on the FARC in March 2008, with accusations of incursions by Colombian troops chasing FARC units across the border. Colombia is concerned that the FARC are using Ecuadorian territory to launch attacks. Leftist Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa opposes U.S. involvement in Colombia and he did not renew the United States' 10-year lease on the Manta air base for regional counternarcotics operations. Ecuador is also concerned that aerial spraying of coca crops in southern Colombia is reaching into Ecuador potentially damaging licit Ecuadorian crops. Other concerns between the countries relate to high numbers of refugees from Colombia's conflict.⁷⁸ However, relations between Colombia and Ecuador have recently improved despite many areas of ongoing and significant sensitivity.

Following the March 2008 raid on a FARC camp inside Ecuador by Colombian military forces, Ecuador broke off diplomatic ties with Colombia. In a show of solidarity, Venezuela broke diplomatic and trade ties with Colombia and sent 10 battalions of troops to Venezuela's border with Colombia. After a diplomatic intervention, initially Venezuela restored diplomatic relations with Colombia although Ecuador's President Rafael Correa remained angered by the affair and did not.

⁷⁷ For details, see the report at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122435.htm>

⁷⁸ "Ecuador Moves Colombians from Border," *LatinNews Daily*, August 28, 2007; "Some 50,000 Colombians in Ecuador to be Registered Under Un-backed Scheme," *States News Service*, December 12, 2008.

Ties between Venezuela and Colombia were severed again in July 2009 based on new allegations that Swedish-made military equipment sold to the Venezuelan government in the 1980s had been found in a FARC camp. On July 27, 2009, Venezuela temporarily withdrew its Ambassador from Colombia and cut off trade. The hostile actions were attributed to the implied relationship between the Venezuelan government and the FARC and President Chávez's outspoken opposition to the military base agreement with the United States announced by the Colombian government earlier in the month. President Chávez subsequently agreed to send his Ambassador back to Bogota, but has left in place the trade restrictions against Colombian exports. Trade between Venezuela and Colombia exceeded \$7 billion in 2008 with Venezuela as Colombia's second largest trading partner after the United States. Trade restrictions imposed by President Chávez caused bilateral trade to decline by more than 46% in August 2009 and 52% in September 2009 in month-by-month comparisons with the prior year.⁷⁹

The Colombian-Venezuelan relationship deteriorated further in late October and early November 2009. The United States and Colombia signed the previously announced defense agreement on October 30, 2009, permitting the use by U.S. troops of seven base facilities in Colombia and "use of other facilities and locations" as mutually agreed upon. Several additional incidents in the fall of 2009 further aggravated the relationship including the kidnapping and murder of ten members of an amateur Colombian soccer team in the Venezuelan border state of Táchira; Venezuela's arrest of two Colombian nationals for allegedly spying in Venezuela; and the killing of two members of Venezuela's National Guard at a roadside checkpoint in Táchira state near the border. President Chávez subsequently ordered some 15,000 National Guard troops to the border with Colombia and in early November made some remarks in a weekly broadcast that were interpreted by Colombia as a threat.⁸⁰ Ironically, the friction between the two countries and the accusations leveled by both leaders who come from opposite poles of the political spectrum has continued to benefit each leader with his constituency back home.

Ecuador, on the other hand, has yet to fully restore relations with Colombia but a distinct thawing has taken place. Colombia's foreign minister met with the Ecuadoran foreign minister at a side meeting during a U.N. General Assembly in New York in late September 2009 and subsequently met several times in October 2009 in an effort to repair relations. The steps towards reconciliation were temporarily set back because of judicial processes initiated by Ecuador. The first involves the decision by the government of Ecuador to take Colombia to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for alleged contamination from glyphosate used in coca spraying. The second is the result of a decision by an Ecuadoran judge to bring a legal case against Colombia's former defense minister, Juan Manuel Santos, for his role "as an architect" of the March 2008 bombing raid, and the action of another judge to seek the arrest of Colombia's military chief, General Freddy Padilla de León, also for his role in the Ecuador raid.⁸¹ On November 4, 2009, the warrants for the arrest of Mr. Santos and General Padilla were suspended by an appeals court judge in Ecuador (although not the case against them). This new ruling is likely to facilitate a continued warming of the relationship.

⁷⁹ August data from Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Colombia*, November 2009. September data provided by the Embassy of Colombia to CRS on October 27, 2009.

⁸⁰ Michael Shifter, "Calm Down, Chávez," *Foreign Policy*, November 10, 2009.

⁸¹ "Colombia and Ecuador move swiftly towards restoring diplomatic ties," *Latin American Weekly Report*, October 15, 2009;

One important step toward repairing ties between the two governments was the decisions to exchange charges d'affaires by November 15 and to reactivate the binational border commission (Combifron).⁸² Colombia has offered Ecuador intelligence about FARC camps on the Ecuadorian side of the border. In its present overtures to Ecuador's government, Colombia's foreign ministry has downplayed ties between the FARC and Ecuador's President Rafael Correa and stressed the Colombian government's long time concern about FARC operations inside of Venezuela and Ecuador.

Issues for Congress

Recent debate on U.S. policy toward Colombia has taken place in a context of concern over the sheer volume of illegal drugs available in the United States and elsewhere in the world. The United States approved increased assistance to Colombia as part of a six-year plan called Plan Colombia in June 2000, and has provided over \$7 billion in assistance from FY2000 to FY2009. The United States from FY2000 to FY2009 provided assistance to Colombia through the Andean Counterdrug Program (ACP) account, formerly known as the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI), and other aid accounts. In the FY2010 request, the Obama Administration shifted ACP funds back into the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account. The Obama Administration request also reduces overall funding to Colombia by about 5% as Plan Colombia program management and funding is gradually turned over to Colombia.

In addition to the larger debate over what role the United States should play in supporting Colombia's ongoing struggle against drug trafficking and illegally armed groups, Congress has repeatedly expressed concern with a number of specific policy issues. These include continuing allegations of human rights abuses; the health and environmental consequences of aerial eradication for drug control; the progress of alternative development to replace drug crops with non-drug crops; judicial reform and rule of law programs; and the level of risk to U.S. personnel working in Colombia. Prior to the release of the three U.S. hostages held by the FARC in early July 2008, securing the release of those hostages was also a key issue of congressional concern.

In October 2008, the GAO released a report stating that Plan Colombia had only partially fulfilled its drug reduction goals. In the years 2000-2006 coca cultivation and production of cocaine had actually increased by about 15% and 4%, respectively. The report concludes that while significant security gains were achieved by the Colombian government with U.S. assistance, coca farmers had undermined eradication goals by taking effective countermeasures and alternative development programs had not been implemented in the areas where the majority of coca is grown.⁸³ Moreover, the report criticized the "nationalization" of Plan Colombia programs—the transfer of U.S.-administered programs to the Colombians—as too slow and lacking coordination.⁸⁴

⁸² "Trilateral dynamic changes," *Latin American Weekly Report*, November 5, 2009.

⁸³ According to the report: "...alternative development is not provided in most areas where coca is cultivated and USAID does not assess how such programs relate to strategic goals of reducing the production of illicit drugs or achieving sustainable results."

⁸⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance*, October 2008, GAO-09-07.

Proponents of the current U.S. policy towards Colombia point to the progress that has been made in improving security conditions in Colombia and in weakening the FARC guerrillas. They favor maintaining the current level of security assistance to Colombia in order to help Colombian security forces continue to combat the FARC and ELN, solidify their control throughout rural areas, and eradicate illicit narcotics. They also believe that guerrilla forces regularly cross borders using neighboring countries' territory for refuge and supplies, and that this has a potentially destabilizing effect in the region.

Opponents of current U.S. policy in Colombia respond that the counterdrug program uses a repressive approach to curbing drug production which could provoke a negative popular reaction in rural areas. They argue for halting aerial fumigation of drug crops, limiting aid to the Colombian military, and stressing interdiction rather than eradication so that the direct costs to peasant producers is less. Some critics of U.S. policy support a policy that focuses largely on economic and social aid to combat what they consider to be the conflict's root causes, curbs human rights abuses by paramilitary groups and security forces, provides vigorous support for a negotiated end to the fighting, and emphasizes illicit drug demand reduction in the United States.⁸⁵

Plan Colombia and the Andean Counterdrug Program (ACP)

Plan Colombia was developed by former President Pastrana (1998-2002) as a plan to end the country's 40-year-old armed conflict, eliminate drug trafficking, and promote development. The initial plan was a \$7.5 billion three-year plan, with Colombia providing \$4 billion of the funding and requesting \$3.5 billion from the international community. The U.S. Congress approved legislation in support of Plan Colombia in 2000, as part of the Military Construction Appropriations Act of 2001 (P.L. 106-246) providing \$1.3 billion for counternarcotics and related efforts in Colombia and neighboring countries. Plan Colombia was never authorized by Congress and subsequent funding has been approved annually. President Bush continued support for the plan under the ACP aid account. The ACP account funded counternarcotics programs in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and, until recently, Venezuela. Because narcotics trafficking and the guerrilla insurgency have become intertwined problems, in 2002 Congress granted the Administration flexibility to use U.S. counterdrug funds for a unified campaign to fight drug trafficking and terrorist organizations.⁸⁶

Formerly, the ACP and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) accounts supported the eradication of coca and opium poppy crops, the interdiction of narcotics shipments, and the protection of infrastructure through training and material support for Colombia's security forces. U.S. assistance supports alternative crop development and infrastructure development to give coca and opium poppy farmers alternative sources of income, and institution building programs to strengthen democracy. Alternative development (AD) programs were shifted from the ACP account to the Economic Support Fund (ESF) account in FY2008. U.S. assistance includes human rights training programs for security personnel in response to Congressional concerns about human rights abuses committed by Colombian security forces. Congress has prohibited U.S. personnel from directly participating in combat missions and has capped the number of U.S.

⁸⁵ Julia E. Sweig, *Andes 2020: A New Strategy for the Challenges of Colombia and the Region*, Council on Foreign Relations Center for Preventive Action, January 2004.

⁸⁶ The State Department and the Department of Defense explain expanded authority as providing them with flexibility in situations where there is no clear line between drug and terrorist activity.

military and civilian contractor personnel that can be stationed in Colombia in support of Plan Colombia at 800 and 600 respectively.⁸⁷

The United States also supports the interdiction of drug shipments through the Air Bridge Denial (ABD) Program. The Air Bridge Denial program began as a joint interdiction effort between the United States, Peru, and Colombia that sought to identify possible drug flights and to interdict them by forcing them to land, and if necessary to shoot down the aircraft. The program was suspended in 2001 after a flight carrying American missionaries was shot down over Peru. Following the establishment of new safeguards against accidental shutdowns, the program was renewed in Colombia in 2003. The State Department credits the ABD program with reducing the number of illegal flights over Colombia by some 73% since 2003.⁸⁸ In 2008, the U.S. government began to transfer control of the ABD program to the Colombian government.

Aerial Eradication and Alternative Development⁸⁹

Upon taking office, President Uribe announced that aerial eradication, along with alternative crop development, would form a significant basis of the government's efforts. The Plan Colombia eradication spraying program began in December 2000 with operations by the U.S.-funded counternarcotics brigade in Putumayo. It should be noted, however, that spraying does not prevent, although it may discourage, the replanting of illicit crops. During 2008, the Colombian government sprayed 133,496 hectares of coca and manually eradicated 96,113 hectares of coca and poppy.⁹⁰

The United Nations and United States use different methodologies to estimate annual coca cultivation levels in Colombia. The different methodologies yield results that not only show different levels of cultivation, but different trends as well. **Table 1** and **Table 2** include United Nations and United States data on coca cultivation in Colombia since 2000. The area of cultivation is measured in hectares.⁹¹ For 2007, the United Nations reported a 27% increase in coca cultivation to 99,000 hectares.⁹² U.S. data from the ONDCP showed a 6.2% increase in coca cultivation in 2007. Some of the 9% increase in cultivation that ONDCP reported for 2006 may be attributed to the fact that the area surveyed increased significantly from the previous year.

In 2008, both the United Nations and the United States showed a decline in coca cultivation (they each measured a downward trend but their estimates of hectares cultivated differed). The 2008 estimates in each case approximated the cultivation levels of 2004. Analysts have attributed the decline to greater eradication pressure. Some observers say the relative reduction in aerial

⁸⁷ The FY2005 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4200; P.L. 108-375) raised the military cap from 400 to 800 and the civilian cap from 400 to 600. The cap does not apply to personnel conducting search and rescue operations, or to U.S. personnel assigned as part of their regular duties to the U.S. embassy. According to the State Department, military personnel levels between 2005-2008 have ranged from 136 to 563 military and 173 to 454 civilian contractors, averaging 250 of each.

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of State, *INCSR 2008*.

⁸⁹ Also see CRS Report RL33163, *Drug Crop Eradication and Alternative Development in the Andes*, by Connie Veillette and Carolina Navarrete-Frias.

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *INCSR 2009*.

⁹¹ A hectare is equivalent to 2.47 acres.

⁹² U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Drug Report 2008*; and "Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region," June 2008.

spraying compared with the more labor-intensive manual eradication in 2008 caused coca cultivation in Colombia to decline.⁹³ In 2008, the area sprayed declined by 13% from the prior year and the area manually eradicated increased by 43% compared with 2007.⁹⁴ Others speculate that another factor resulting in the positive reduction in Colombia's coca crop was the success of Colombian security forces in gaining control of territory from the FARC which could discourage farmers from replanting.⁹⁵

Table 1. UNODC Coca Cultivation in Colombia

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Area	163,000	145,000	102,000	86,000	80,000	86,000	78,000	99,000	81,000
% change	—	-11%	-30%	-16%	-7%	8%	-9%	27%	-18%

Table 2. U.S. ONDCP Coca Cultivation in Colombia

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Area	136,200	169,800	144,450	113,850	114,100	144,000	157,200	167,000	119,000
% change	—	25%	-15%	-21%	0.2%	26%	9%	6.2%	-29%

Notes: U.S. government estimates for 2008 from the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, November 6, 2009.

Aerial eradication has been controversial both in Colombia and the United States. Critics charge that it has unknown environmental and health effects, and that it deprives farmers of their livelihood, particularly in light of a lack of coordination with alternative development programs.⁹⁶ With regard to environmental and health consequences, the Secretary of State, as required by Congress, has reported that the herbicide, glyphosate, does not pose unreasonable health or safety risks to humans or the environment. In consultation for the certification, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confirmed that application rates of the aerial spray program in Colombia are within the parameters listed on U.S. glyphosate labels. However, press reports indicate that many Colombians believe the health consequences of aerial fumigation are grave, and many international non-governmental organizations criticize the certification for being analytically inadequate.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funds alternative development programs to assist illicit crop farmers in the switch from illicit to licit crops, and provides assistance with infrastructure and marketing. Through 2008, the United States has completed 1,212 social and productive infrastructure projects. These programs have benefited more than

⁹³ Adam Isacson, "2008: Less Fumigation, Less Coca," Blog of the Center for International Policy (CIP) Colombia Program, November 9, 2009.

⁹⁴ "Mixed Signals Among the Coca Bushes," *The Economist*, June 27, 2009.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Chemical Reactions: Spreading Coca and Threatening Colombia's Ecological and Cultural Diversity," *Washington Office on Latin America*, February 2008.

291,000 families in 18 departments.⁹⁷ The USAID Mission in Colombia reports significant progress since funding started flowing for alternative development through Plan Colombia. In an October 2008 fact sheet, USAID states that to date there have been 238,263 hectares of licit crops supported in areas that illicit crops once predominated, and more than 280,000 jobs have been created.⁹⁸

The success of alternative development in Colombia has been limited both by security concerns and the limited scope of the program. Various reports, including the recent GAO report that examined the progress of Plan Colombia, have identified weaknesses in the program including that a majority of the USAID alternative development projects were not located in areas where the majority of coca is grown in Colombia and they have not been evaluated with regard to drug reduction goals or sustainability. Security concerns were blamed for the planned withdrawal of USAID assistance to five departments where coca production was increasing, according to a USAID memo leaked to the press in October 2006. UNODC reported in June 2006 that alternative development programs have been successful, but only reach 9% of Colombian coca growers and called for a tenfold increase in international donor support for alternative development programs. In 2007, UNODC reported a disparity in spending on alternative development programs. The departments of Norte de Santander, Antioquia, and Santander received 65% of ongoing alternative development project funding, yet coca cultivation in these three departments is about 10% of the national total. In contrast, 40% of current coca cultivation is in the departments of Meta, Caqueta, Guaviare, and Vichada, which receive just 10% of ongoing alternative development project funding. Proponents of U.S. policy argue that both eradication and alternative development programs need time to work. USAID has argued that alternative development programs do not achieve drug crop reduction on their own, and that the Colombia program was designed to support the aerial eradication program and to build “the political support needed for aerial eradication efforts to take place.”⁹⁹

Integrated Military/Civilian Strategy

In early 2007, the Colombian Ministry of Defense announced a “Policy of Consolidation of Democratic Security” to guide security policy for the Uribe administration’s second term (2006-2010). The strategy was intended to consolidate the gains of the Democratic Security policies that were successful in reducing violence in the first term and to consolidate state presence in areas where insurgent activity by FARC and other illegal armed groups, drug trafficking and violence converged. Led by civilian and defense officials in the Ministry of Defense, this major shift in approach was based on an “integrated action doctrine” and was declared to be a “strategic leap” forward by former Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos in March 2009.

Integrated action is a sequenced military and counternarcotics strategy in high priority geographic zones designed to re-establish Colombian government control of marginalized areas. It has been promoted as a model to guide future U.S. assistance to Colombia, especially as funding for Plan Colombia gradually winds down. Under this approach, security forces enter a contested zone and

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *INCSR 2009*.

⁹⁸ USAID/Colombia, “Program Overview: Alternative Development,” Fact Sheet, October 2008.

⁹⁹ Joshua Goodman, “U.S. Pulling Economic Aid from Colombia’s Coca Infested South,” Associated Press, October 12, 2006; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Coca Cultivation in Andes Stabilizes in 2005,” June 20, 2006; UNODC, *Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region*, June 2006; and, UNODC, *Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey*, June 2007.

stabilize and hold the area so that civilian state agencies can come in rapidly behind to provide education, health, infrastructure, and justice services and assert a positive state presence. The doctrine is based on the premise that all military and social actions are interdependent and no efforts can be successful if the others are not.¹⁰⁰

At the national level, the Colombian presidency's Center for the Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI) directs the integrated action programs.¹⁰¹ Now part of a "National Consolidation Plan," the coordinated military/civilian efforts are focused on building a state presence in the highest priority areas seen as strategic to the FARC. At the local level, application of this strategy is carried out at "comprehensive fusion centers," physical locations within consolidation zones where military, police, economic development, social and judicial activities are coordinated. The two best-known examples, which have each received some U.S. and international support, are the fusion centers established in La Macarena in the Meta department and Montes de María near the central Caribbean coast. Both are intended to function as models for CCAI efforts in other regions of Colombia. Critics argue that the blurring of lines between military and civilian activities poses some dangers and that there is a need for increased civilian leadership and greater representation of local interests. USAID programs and the U.S. Department of Defense have strongly supported this approach and provided funding to CCAI programs since 2007.¹⁰² According to the State Department, the U.S. government collaborated with Colombia in 2008 to pilot integrated counternarcotics initiatives in three regions that combined security, eradication and development "under one implementation umbrella."¹⁰³

Funding for Plan Colombia

From FY2000 through FY2009, U.S. funding for Plan Colombia and its follow-on strategies totaled over \$7 billion in State Department and Defense Department programs. Most U.S. assistance is provided through the ACP account, although this account was consolidated into the INCLE account in the Obama Administration's FY2010 request. In FY2008 Congress funded eradication and interdiction programs through the ACP account, and funded alternative development and institution building programs through the Economic Support Fund (ESF) account. In previous years, alternative development and institution building were funded through the ACP account. In addition, support for aerial eradication programs is provided from the State Department's Air Wing account. The Defense Department requests a lump sum for all counternarcotics programs worldwide under Sections 1004 and 1033, and under Section 124, of the National Defense Authorization Act. DOD can reallocate these funds throughout the year in accordance with changing needs. While not considered a formal component of the ACP Program, the Defense Department has provided Colombia with additional funding for training and

¹⁰⁰ Juan Manuel Santos, "Afghanistan's challenges—lessons from the Colombian experience," *NATO Review*, Autumn 2007.

¹⁰¹ CCAI is an interagency group that works out of the President's office bringing together members from 15 government ministries and other state agencies for the purpose of coordinating government efforts to introduce state presence to priority areas where it had not existed or was weak. See: Peter DeShazo, Phillip Mclean, Johanna Mendelson Forman, "Colombia's Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena: An Assessment," Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2009.

¹⁰² U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance*, October 2008, GAO-09-07.

¹⁰³ U.S. Department of State, *INCSR 2009*.

equipment for a number of years, as well as the deployment of personnel in support of Plan Colombia.

In 2008 there was significant debate in Congress over the proper level and components of U.S. assistance to Colombia. While some Members supported the Bush Administration's emphasis on security-related assistance to Colombia, others expressed concerns that the Administration put too much of an emphasis on so-called "hard-side" security assistance, rather than traditional development and rule of law programs. Many Members have expressed a desire to see a more rapid transfer of responsibility for the military operations associated with Plan Colombia from the United States to Colombia. The FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161) reduced interdiction, eradication, and military aid to Colombia by roughly \$104 million to about \$305 million and increased funds for alternative development, human rights, and institution building programs by some \$84 million to \$236 million. **Table 3** at the conclusion of this report provides a more detailed breakdown of U.S. assistance to Colombia from FY2000 through the FY2010 request.

U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement

On October 30, 2009, the United States and Colombia signed an agreement to provide the United States access to seven military facilities in Colombia to conduct joint counternarcotics and anti-terrorism operations over a 10-year period. The seven facilities include three Colombian air force bases at Palanquero, Apiay, and Malambo; two naval bases; and two army installations (see **Figure 2** for base locations). In the United States, \$46 million of funding for construction at the Palanquero air base in Central Colombia was included in the defense authorization for FY 2010 signed into law October 2009 (P.L. 111-84). Funding for military repairs at Palanquero was included in President Obama's FY2010 defense budget request and is included in both the House and Senate versions of the military construction and veteran's affairs FY2010 appropriations bill (H.R. 3082 and S. 1407).

The disclosure regarding the negotiations and elements of the base agreement in mid-July 2009 resulted in a strong reaction from countries in the region led by President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela who claimed that he saw the placement of U.S. troops in Colombia as a threat and described the base agreement as fanning "the winds of war" across the region. Colombian President Uribe toured seven Latin American countries in early August 2009 to meet with heads of state in an effort to diffuse opposition to the agreement and allay concerns. Following this outreach effort, Brazil and Chile toned down their opposition to the agreement and cited Colombia's sovereignty in the matter, but only Peru's President Alan Garcia expressed outright support for the pending agreement.¹⁰⁴

On August 18, 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Colombia's Foreign Minister Jaime Bermúdez to discuss the base deal.¹⁰⁵ On the same day, the U.S. State Department released a press announcement naming the pending agreement the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). Through the announcement and at the meeting, officials noted that the DCA did not establish any new U.S. bases in Colombia, but would provide access or continue to provide use of seven Colombian military facilities to deepen existing security cooperation and

¹⁰⁴ Oxford Analytica, "Latin America: Regional tensions challenge UNASUR," August 21, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ "Does the US want bases in Colombia?," Latin American Regional Report: Andean Group, August 2009.

that the agreement harmonizes and updates existing agreements. Negotiations for the agreement concluded August 14, 2009, followed by a review of the provisional agreement by both countries.¹⁰⁶

Some observers believe the agreement was precipitated by the closing of a U.S. forward operating location (FOL) at a coastal air base in Manta, Ecuador, used for regional counterdrug operations. The FOL at Manta allowed U.S. forces to patrol the Pacific. The ten-year lease (1999-2009) was not renewed by Ecuador's President Rafael Correa following up on his campaign promise to decrease U.S. presence in the region. The final U.S. mission from Manta was flown in July and the U.S. forces left Manta in September 2009.¹⁰⁷

According to the U.S. Department of State, the agreement with Colombia is not a replacement for the Manta FOL¹⁰⁸ The new agreement provides for U.S. and Colombian security cooperation including counternarcotics and counterterrorism *within* Colombia. The radar-equipped aircraft based at Manta (including P-3 Orions and E-3 AWACS) used for anti-drug surveillance missions over multiple countries have been reallocated to other locations in the Western Hemisphere including the United States and other FOLs based in El Salvador and Curacao.¹⁰⁹

Even with the new agreement, the cap on the number of U.S. personnel deployed in Colombia will remain the same as set by Congress in 2004 (P.L. 108-375)—800 military personnel and 600 contractors. According to the State Department, the 1,400 personnel limit “will continue to be faithfully respected.” U.S. personnel presence in recent years has declined to less than half of the authorized number which is a trend that is expected to continue.¹¹⁰ Every operation undertaken by U.S. personnel from the bases must receive prior approval from the Colombian government according to the signed agreement.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement,” August 18, 2009. See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/aug/128021.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Juan Forero, “U.S. Plan Raises Ire in Latin America,” *Washington Post*, August, 8, 2009; “U.S. military operations in Ecuador to be transferred to five bases in Colombia,” *BBC Monitoring Americas*, July 10, 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Communication with State Department Desk Officer on October 9, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Department of Defense official on November 9, 2009.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement,” October 30, 2009. See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/oct/131134.htm>. According to the announcement: “Consistent with U.S. policy to nationalize U.S.-supported activities by turning them over to Colombian authorities, U.S. personnel presence has been in a gradual decline. It is the United States’ expectation and commitment that those trends will continue.”

¹¹¹ For the text of the U.S.-Colombia base agreement see: <http://justf.org/content/supplemental-agreement-cooperation-and-technical-assistance-defense-and-security-between-gov>.

Figure 2. Military Bases Addressed by the Defense Cooperation Agreement

Source: Adapted by CRS from information provided by U.S. Southcom.

Paramilitary Demobilization

The 111th Congress remains concerned over the ongoing scandal involving paramilitary ties to Colombian politicians. Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about both the AUC demobilization process and the overall demobilization framework under the Justice and Peace Law approved by the Colombian Congress in 2005. (For background, see “Para-political Scandal” and “The Justice and Peace Law and Demobilization”).

The FY2006 Foreign Operations Act (P.L. 109-102) provided \$20 million to assist in the demobilization of former members of foreign terrorist organizations, provided that the Secretary of State certified that the assistance only went to individuals who had verifiably renounced and

terminated membership in the FTO; that the Colombian government was cooperating with the United States on extradition; that the Colombian government was working to dismantle FTO structures; and that the funds would not be used to make cash payments to individuals. The FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-8) provided \$16.7 million to assist in the demobilization of former members of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs), pending a certification from the Secretary of State that was issued on October 16, 2009. In that certification, Secretary of State Clinton certified the following to Congress:

- That assistance will be provided only for individuals who have verifiably renounced and terminated any affiliation or involvement with FTOs or other illegal armed groups, and are meeting all the requirements of the Colombia demobilization program, including disclosure of past crimes; the location of kidnapped victims and bodies of the disappeared; and, knowledge of FTO structure, financing, and assets; and are not involved in criminal activity.
- That the Colombian government is fully cooperating with the United States to prosecute the extradited leaders and members of FTOs who have been indicted in the United States for murder, torture, kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, or other violations of United States law.
- That the Colombian government is not knowingly taking steps to legalize titles of land or other assets illegally obtained by FTOs, their associates, or their successors; and that the Colombian government has established effective procedures to identify such land and assets; and is seizing and returning such land and assets to their rightful owners and occupants.
- That the Colombian government is dismantling the organizational structures of FTOs and successor armed groups.
- That funds will not be used to make cash payments to individuals, and funds will only be available for any of the following activities: verification, reintegration (including training and education), vetting, recovery of assets for reparations for victims, and investigations and prosecutions.

Human Rights

Debate in the U.S. Congress has continued to focus on allegations of human rights abuses by the FARC and ELN, paramilitary groups, and the Colombian Armed Forces. The State Department's February 2009 human rights report stated that while "the government's respect for human rights continued to improve...political and unlawful killings remained an extremely serious problem, and there were periodic reports that members of the security forces committed extrajudicial killings during the internal armed conflict." Human rights groups have continued to document extrajudicial killings by some Colombian military forces.¹¹² Human Rights Watch in its annual World Report published in January 2009 stated that Colombia's Prosecutor General's office was currently investigating cases involving more than 1,000 victims of extra-judicial killings dating back to mid-2003. Reportedly progress in addressing the backlog of cases concerning extrajudicial killings has proceeded slowly.¹¹³ In June 2009, on a ten-day mission to Colombia,

¹¹² "Amnesty Says all Sides in Colombia Have Bloody Hands," *EFE*, May 28, 2008; "Activists say Army Killing Civilians to Gain Points," *Irish Times*, March 25, 2008.

¹¹³ This is one finding in U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Justification Concerning Human Rights (continued...)"

the U.N. Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions found the killings were not a result of official government policy. Nevertheless, according to the U.N. official, “the sheer number of cases, their geographic spread, and the diversity of military units implicated, indicate that these killings were carried out in a more or less systematic fashion by significant elements within the military.”¹¹⁴

Congress has annually required that the Secretary of State certify to Congress that the Colombian military and police forces are severing their links to the paramilitaries, investigating complaints of abuses, and prosecuting those who have had credible charges made against them. Congress has made funding to the Colombian military contingent on these certifications. In the latest certification, issued on September 8, 2009, Secretary Clinton asserted that the Colombian government and armed forces are meeting the statutory requirements with regard to human rights. The Secretary noted that “Colombia remains a country in transition. While the security situation has vastly improved in the last decade, fighting between the Armed forces and illegal armed groups continues to harm the country’s citizens, especially its most vulnerable groups: the displaced, indigenous, and Afro-Colombians.”¹¹⁵

Congress has also regularly included the so-called Leahy amendment in foreign operations appropriations legislation that denies funds to any security force unit for which the Secretary of State has credible evidence of gross human rights violations. (The restriction was codified as Section 620J of the Foreign Assistance Act, as amended, in the FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act, (P.L. 110-161)). The Secretary may continue funding if she determines and reports to Congress that the foreign government is taking effective measures to bring the responsible members of these security forces to justice. Congress released its last hold on \$52.5 million in FY2007 assistance in mid-2009, but reportedly some \$19.54 million of FY2008 funds and \$15.6 million of FY2009 funds for the Colombian military remain on hold.¹¹⁶ Despite these actions, human rights organizations claim that the U.S. government often turns a blind eye to questionable activities of Colombian security forces.

U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement¹¹⁷

In 2003, the Bush Administration announced its intentions to begin negotiating an Andean region free trade agreement (FTA) with Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. In its announcement, the Administration asserted that an FTA would reduce and eliminate barriers to trade and investment, support democracy, and fight drug activity. After regional talks broke down, the United States

(...continued)

Conditions with Respect to Assistance for the Colombian Armed Forces,” September 8, 2009. Available at: <http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/090908cert.pdf>. For example in the continuing investigations of the Soacha murders, the report notes that family members of the victims have been threatened while 75 members of the armed forces are being investigated in connection with the murders.

¹¹⁴ United Nations, Press Release, “Statement by Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions – Mission to Colombia, 8-18 June 2009.” Available at: <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/C6390E2F247BF1A7C12575D9007732FD?opendocument>.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Justification Concerning Human Rights Conditions with Respect to Assistance for the Colombian Armed Forces,” September 8, 2009. Available at: <http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/090908cert.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Information provided by State Department official, November 12, 2009.

¹¹⁷ See CRS Report RL34470, *The Proposed U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Economic and Political Implications*, by M. Angeles Villarreal.

pursued bilateral trade agreements with Colombia and Peru. The United States and Colombia signed the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement on November 22, 2006, now called the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CFTA); the agreement must now be ratified by both nations' congresses. Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru currently benefit from the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA).¹¹⁸ On October 16, 2008, the 110th Congress enacted legislation to extend ATPA trade preferences until December 31, 2009 for Colombia and Peru, and until June 30, 2009 for Bolivia and Ecuador (P.L. 110-436).¹¹⁹ The ATPA authorizes the President to grant duty-free treatment to certain products, with more than half of all U.S. imports in 2004 from the Andean countries entering under these preferences.

Critics of the free trade agreement are concerned about the status of labor rights in Colombia and the ongoing para-political scandal. Critics argue that violence against labor activists in Colombia is excessive and inadequately addressed by the Uribe government. Labor activist killings declined under President Uribe, but increased in 2006. Data on the number of labor leaders murdered in any given year vary widely by source. In 2002, the Colombian government estimated that 99 labor activists were killed, while the National Labor School (ENS, a Colombian NGO) estimated that 178 labor activists were killed. In 2006, the Colombian government estimated that 60 labor activists were killed, while ENS estimated that 72 labor activists were killed. In 2007, both groups reported a drop, with the Colombian government reporting 26 labor activists killed and ENS estimating 39 labor activists according to the U.S. State Department.¹²⁰ One reason for the discrepancy is that the Colombian government counts deaths of unionized teachers separately from other labor union deaths.

Another area of concern is whether labor activists were killed because of their union activity. Very few investigations have been completed. More than 2,000 incidents of violence involving killings and threats between 1991 and 2006 have been alleged. At least 470 union murders are alleged to have occurred since President Uribe first took office in 2002. In January 2007, Colombian Attorney General's office set up a unit of 13 prosecutors and 78 investigators to investigate 187 priority cases. From October 1, 2007 through May 20, 2009, 1,304 investigations were initiated in cases of violence against labor union members. In that time, 193 convictions have been obtained in 153 cases. Authorities have detained 355 suspects and an additional 245 suspects have been identified. In addition, 610 cases have been initiated but suspects have not yet been identified. Of the priority cases, 18 cases have resulted in convictions of 69 individuals.¹²¹

On April 8, 2008, President Bush submitted implementing legislation to Congress for the CFTA. The 2002 Trade Promotion Authority procedures stipulated that Congress must vote on that implementing legislation within 90 legislative days of its introduction. But on April 10, 2008, the House voted 224-195 in favor of changing those procedures, effectively putting congressional consideration of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement on hold. It is unclear whether and how the 111th Congress will consider implementing legislation for the pending CFTA in the future. It

¹¹⁸ See CRS Report RS22548, *ATPA Renewal: Background and Issues*, by M. Angeles Villarreal.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ U.S. Department of State, "Charting Colombia's Progress," November 5, 2008. Another possible reason for the decline in murders is the overall decline in labor union membership in Colombia. Unions have dwindled from 13% of the formal labor force in 1965 to 4% currently. For further discussion of labor violence and trends, see CRS Report RL34759, *Proposed Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Labor Issues*, by Mary Jane Bolle.

¹²¹ Communications from the U.S. Department of State to CRS.

could be considered pursuant to the usual rules or the House could restore TPA-like "fast track" procedures.¹²²

The likelihood of reintroduction and passage of the CFTA under the Obama Administration is also unclear. During his campaign, President Obama favored delaying consideration of the trade agreement in order to pressure the Colombian government to further reduce labor violence.¹²³ President Obama met with President Uribe at the White House on June 29, 2009, and after that meeting he stated to reporters that he had asked U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk to work closely with the Colombian government to see how the two countries could proceed on the pending FTA. President Obama praised President Uribe for progress in addressing trade union violence and noted that there had been a "downward trajectory" in the killings as well as improvements in the prosecutions of those responsible for the murders. The Obama Administration announced that it is developing its trade policy, and that pending free trade agreements will be held until that policy is unveiled.¹²⁴ In November 2009, the Commerce Secretary announced that the President's legislative agenda was so full with health care, financial regulation, and alternative energy that pending trade agreements including the CFTA would have to wait.¹²⁵

¹²² For more information on procedures, see CRS Report RL34470, *The Proposed U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Economic and Political Implications*, by M. Angeles Villarreal. The author notes: "The CFTA implementing legislation...could still be re-introduced in the 111th Congress under the general rules of both houses, and could be considered in the House under a TPA-like procedure pursuant to a special rule reported by the Committee on Rules and approved by the House."

¹²³ Obama for America, "A New Partnership for the Americas," press release. May 2008, available at: http://obama.3cdn.net/f579b3802a3d35c8d5_9aymvyqpo.pdf.

¹²⁴ Bureau of National Affairs, *International Trade Reporter*, "Obama Confident Colombia FTA Problems Can Be Resolved, Has No 'Strict' Timetable," July 2, 2009.

¹²⁵ Alex Kennedy, "US Commerce Secretary: Trade Pacts Must Wait," *Associated Press*, November 13, 2009.

Table 3. U.S. Assistance For Plan Colombia, FY2000-FY2010

(in millions \$)

	ACI/ACP	ESF	FMF	IMET	INCLE	NADR	AirWing	DOD	Total
FY2000	60.1	—	—	—	—	—	38.0	128.5	226.6
P.L. 106-246	832.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	100.7	932.7
FY2001	48.0	—	—	—	—	—	38.0	190.2	276.2
FY2002	379.9 ^a	—	—	—	—	25.0	38.2	119.1	562.2
FY2003	580.2 ^b	—	17.1	1.2	—	3.3	41.5	165.0	808.3
FY2004	473.9	—	98.5	1.7	—	.2	45.0	122.0	741.3
FY2005	462.8	—	99.2	1.7	—	5.1	45.0	200.0	813.8
FY2006	464.8	—	89.1	1.7	—	—	45.0	112.0	712.6
FY2007	465.0	—	85.5	1.6	—	4.1	37.0	101.0	694.2
FY2008	244.6	194.4	55.1	1.4	41.9	3.7	39.0	133.7	713.8
FY2009 (est)	242.5	200.0	53.0	1.4	45.0	3.2	14.5 (est.)	126.7	686.3
FY2010 (req)	^c	200.7	66.4	1.7	237.8	6.5	14.9 (est.)	n.a.	528.0
Total	4,253.8	595.1	563.9	12.4	324.7	51.1	366.7	1,498.9	7,696.0

Sources: Figures are drawn from the annual State Department Foreign Operations Congressional Budget Justifications for fiscal years 2002 through 2010; the State Department's Washington File, "U.S. Support for Plan Colombia, FY2000 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations," July 5, 2000; the FY2006 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, P.L. 109-102, and conference report, H.Rept. 109-265; and the FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161) and Division J Joint Explanatory Statement.

Notes: For FY2000 and thereafter, Plan Colombia funds are assigned to the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau (INL) or the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI). The State Department transfers funds to other agencies carrying out programs in Colombia, of which USAID has received the largest portion. Defense Department funding is from its Counter Narcotics account. DOD requests one sum for programs around the world and adjusts its regional allocations as needed. Table 3 does not include Public Law 480 (Food Aid). Air Wing figures for FY2009 and FY2010 are estimates provided by the State Department.

- a. Includes \$6 million appropriated to FMF but transferred to the ACI account.
- b. Includes \$93 million in FMF regular appropriations and \$20 million in FMF supplemental funds that were transferred to the ACI account.
- c. U.S. Department of State has subsequently reallocated sums to different accounts in the FY2010 Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations. In the FY2010 request, funds previously shown in the Andean Counterdrug Program moved to the State Department's INCLE account.

Appendix A. Key Developments in 2009

On August 27, 2009, the 12-member Union of South American States (UNASUR) met in Bariloche, Argentina to discuss common security issues including the pending U.S.-Colombia base agreement, dubbed the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), by the U.S. Department of State. Controversy over the proposed agreement persisted but condemnation of Colombia by UNASUR members was more muted than previously. President Uribe sidestepped demands by Brazil and others to produce a copy of the pending agreement and to provide guarantees that the DCA would not allow U.S. military personnel to operate beyond Colombia's borders.

On August 4, 2009, President Álvaro Uribe started a seven-country regional tour to explain to his counterparts provisions of a pending U.S.-Colombia military base agreement.

On July 27, 2009, Venezuela withdrew its Ambassador from Colombia following allegations that Swedish-made anti-tank weapons sold to the Venezuelan government had shown up at a FARC camp in 2008, suggesting that the Venezuelan government had some role in arming the guerillas. President Hugo Chávez threatened to take additional measures that would damage bilateral trade with Colombia, an important trade relationship for both countries.

On July 16, 2009, the Uribe government announced that it was holding negotiations with the United States to provide access to seven of its military bases to house U.S. military counternarcotics units. For ten years (1999-2009) the United States had similar troops stationed at an air base in Manta, Ecuador, which served as one of three forward operating locations for regional counterdrug activities. President Rafael Correa of Ecuador kept a campaign promise not to renew the Manta base lease, and the last counterdrug flight flown from Manta was flown in July. Regional opposition to the announcement of the U.S.-Colombian agreement was led by President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, although Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador and Bolivia also expressed concerns. Both the U.S. government and the Uribe administration noted that the United States would not be acquiring its own bases but would obtain increased access to Colombian facilities. (For map of base locations, see "U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement").

On June 29, 2009, President Uribe and President Obama met at the White House to discuss their collaboration on the fight against drug trafficking, the pending U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, and the possible consecutive third term for President Uribe.

On June 19, 2009, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released findings from their 2008 coca cultivation surveys of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. This year's study found a decline in coca cultivation and cocaine production in Colombia and a rise in coca cultivation in neighboring Peru and Bolivia. Comparing the 2008 figures for Colombia with the prior year, UNODC reported a steep decline of 28% in cocaine production (an estimate), and a more modest decline in cultivation of 18%. (For more, see "Colombia and Global Drug Trends").

On May 29, 2009, a FARC rebel captured by the Colombian government had in his possession a video on which a FARC leader alleges that Ecuador's President Correa received campaign contributions from the terrorist organization. The video, leaked to the press on July 17, sparked recriminations from Mr. Correa, who said the Colombian government was attempting to destabilize his government.

On April 15, 2009, the Colombian police captured one of Colombia's most wanted drug traffickers, Daniel Rendón Herrera (former paramilitary alias "Don Mario"). He allegedly worked

closely with the Mexican drug trafficking organizations and is wanted for extradition to the United States.

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