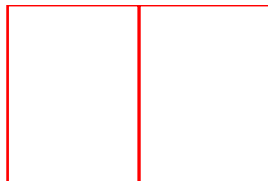




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BRIGADIER GENERAL BENJAMIN R. MIXON
TESTIMONY BEFORE CONGRESS
21 APRIL 04



Committee: House Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy
& Human Resources

Members Present: Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN), Chairman; Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), Ranking Member; Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)

Participants: Brigadier General Benjamin R. Mixon, SOUTHCOM; Assistant Secretary of Defense Tom O'Connell (Asst. Sec. Def. for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict); Admiral David Kunkel, PACOM.

Statement:

Yes, sir. Thank you. If I may make an off-the-cuff comment referencing the effect of drugs on the United States per your comment. We at U.S. Southern Command view drugs and its movement into the United States as a weapon of mass destruction, and we treat it accordingly, and I think my comments will focus on that particular aspect.

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Cummings, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for allowing me a few minutes to make some opening comments.

We at U.S. Southern Command are fully committed to DOD's responsibilities in the fight against drugs and narcoterrorists. We fulfill these responsibilities through detection and monitoring programs, close interagency coordination and military support to partner nations. Our programs cover the entire SOUTHCOM area of responsibility, including Central and South America and

the Caribbean Basin.

Our principal agent in the planning and execution of the detection and monitoring effort leading to the end game, that being interdiction and apprehension, is the National Joint Interagency Task Force South, or JIATF South. JIATF South is a one-of-a-kind premier organization of excellence for multiservice, multination and multiagency support to the counterdrug mission. Interoperations, in conjunction with USSOUTHCOM, deliver an integrated approach to meeting DOD mission sets in the war against drugs and narcoterrorists.

Colombia is the source zone of 90 percent of the cocaine and 70 percent of the heroin here in the United States, and much of our efforts are necessarily centered there. Still, we recognize the importance of the transient zones of Central America, the Pacific and the Caribbean as well as the source zones in Bolivia and Peru as our other focus areas.

Our efforts in Central America include daily interdiction efforts where we have conducted 18 major surge counterdrug operations last year. We remain strong partners with our Caribbean friends. We have also deployed counterdrug training teams to Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. As the primary source country assisting Colombia in their fight continues to be in the United States' best interest and a top priority for U.S. Southern Command.

In close coordination with the U.S. Department of State, we continue to provide a full range of support to the Colombian government, its security forces and its people. This includes training and equipment of both the military and police, assisting the Ministry of Defense with development of a modern budget and logistic organizations, assisting them in their narcoterrorist demobilization programs and providing humanitarian assistance to populations most dramatically affected by this narcoterrorist war.

Two of our most successful training and equipment programs remain the extensive support we have provided the Colombian army's Counternarcotics Brigade and the Infrastructure Security Strategy Program, which has dramatically reduced the number of narcoterrorist attacks on Colombia's northeastern infrastructure.

I'd like to emphasize that all of our training and advising programs operate under a strict rules of engagement that prohibits U.S. military personnel from actually participating in combat operations. In other words, they operate from a secure base.

The continuation of expanded authorities is the single most important factor for us to continue building success in Colombia. This legislation has allowed us to use funds that were once only available for strictly defined counterdrug activities to provide assistance to the government of Colombia for a coordinated campaign against the narcoterrorists and its legal eagle armed groups who fuel the drug trade, granting that standard authority was an important recognition that no meaningful distinction can be made between a terrorist and drug traffickers in our region. All three of Colombia's terrorist groups are deep in to the illicit narcotics business.

Measures of effectiveness are very difficult to gauge in the counterterrorist mission, but over the last several years we have

seen some encouraging results. As you know, we recently restarted the Air Bridge Denial Program in Colombia. Since the program restarted, there have been 14 aircraft forced down, 11 of those destroyed on the ground and 7.9 metric tons of drugs seized.

In Colombia, the primary source zone country, our support to the Colombian security forces, has also resulted in good results. Using calendar year '02 and '03 data, which roughly corresponds to the inception of expanded authorities, the Colombian security forces have experienced dramatic successes in all fronts.

A few examples. In 2003, the homicide rate has been the lowest since 1987 with approximately 52 per 100,000 capita, the capture of over a dozen mid-level members and one senior-level member of the FARC leadership, the restoration of the government of Colombia presence in all of Colombia's 1,098 municipalities and a 48 percent reduction in the terrorist attacks on Colombia's infrastructure. Most important, the people of Colombia feel free to move about the country under this new level of security.

As these indicators demonstrate, we've been increasingly successful. However, we have been able to achieve these results with a decrease in both surface and air interdiction and detection assets due to the demands of prosecuting the global war on terror worldwide. We have continued to be increasingly successful due to better information sharing, better information flow and improved granularity of information coming from U.S., European, Latin American law enforcement agencies. Also, our European allies have provided air and maritime assets to offset some of our shortfalls.

In conclusion, we continue to press forward successfully in our fight against narcoterrorists and the drug trade. We are encouraged by Colombia's success and recognize that they are at a critical point in their history which is central to our counternarcotics fight. Under the leadership of President Uribe, who enjoys a very high approval rating, approximately 75 to 80 percent of the population, the military and police have regained areas long held by the narcoterrorists. They have also dealt serious blows to the leadership of these groups and have embarked on a strategic offensive to dismantle the FARC. Our commitment to support them at this juncture is critical.

We will also continue our efforts in the rest of SOUTHCOM's AOR understanding that despite our focus on Colombia, our other missions in the transient and remaining source countries will be key to success.

I appreciate this opportunity to highlight the great counternarcotics work done by the men and women of U.S. Southern Command and all they are doing in the interest of regional and U.S. and national security. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

End of Statement