



## NAVEGACION

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## General Wilhelm Testifies on Proposed U.S. Aid to Colombia

**General Charles Wilhelm,  
Commander-in-chief of the United States Southern Command (SouthCom)  
statement before the House Committee on Government Reform,  
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources**

**February 15, 2000**

[Note: In the text, billion=one-thousand million.]

[Resumen en español](#)

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the narcotics threat in Colombia and the danger it poses to Colombia's neighbors and to the U.S. I will describe and assess the drug trafficking threat and its impact on the U.S. and the region; the adequacy, type, and level of our counter-drug (CD) support to Colombia; and our strategy and long-range plan for CD assistance to Colombia. Our proposal for supporting Plan Colombia provides \$1.6 billion in Fiscal Years 2000 and 2001 and will enable Colombia to implement its strategic plan and seize the initiative in its war against drug trafficking.

### **GROWING MENACE AND THE RAMIFICATIONS OF COLOMBIAN COCAINE AND HEROIN TRAFFICKING TO THE UNITED STATES**

#### ***Regional Destabilization***

The drug threat to Colombia is real, immediate, and growing. It is a corrosive force without precedent, relentlessly eroding the foundations of Colombia's democracy, corrupting her public institutions, poisoning her youth, ruining her economy, and disrupting the social order. Colombia must lead the fight against the drug trafficking, but needs our commitment of financial aid, operational planning, and intelligence assistance.

Colombia's problems are not contained by her borders, but are spilling over into neighboring countries. The spillover disrupts life along the border in Venezuela and is severely straining relations between the two countries. Venezuela has approximately 10,000 troops deployed along the border to prevent intrusions, particularly by the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas. Ecuador and Peru also deploy forces along their borders with Colombia to deter the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), paramilitary forces, and drug traffickers from unwanted incursions. FARC and drug trafficker incursions into the Amazon region prompted the Brazilian Army to reinforce military garrisons along the Colombian border and spurred the government to continue development of the very expensive (\$1.4 billion) and controversial Amazon Surveillance System (SIVAM).

Lacking an army and the resources for an effective border police, Panama is experiencing difficulty in controlling its border with Colombia. FARC and paramilitary forces routinely enter Panama with impunity to traffic in drugs and arms and to terrorize and extort Panamanian locals.

### ***Assessment of the Colombian Heroin and Cocaine Industry***

Colombia is the world's largest producer of Cocaine due, in large part, to the Colombian Government's limited internal control. This weakness allowed traffickers to increase coca production in 1998 by approximately 24% over 1997 and we expect a further increase for 1999. Despite aerial spraying of over 38,000 acres in Colombia, potential cocaine production for 1998 may have exceeded 435 metric tons, with a U.S. street value of approximately \$5.4 billion. Production in 1999 increased by 20% over 1998. Despite aerial spraying of over 38,000 acres in Colombia, potential cocaine production for 1999 may have exceeded 520 metric tons, with a U.S. street value of approximately \$6.2 billion.

Using air, sea, and overland routes, drug traffickers attempted to move an estimated 521 metric tons of cocaine from the Source Zone in 1999. Multinational CD efforts interdicted approximately 131 metric tons, but up to an estimated 381 metric tons, with a U.S. street value of approximately \$4.6 billion, evaded our interdiction efforts and entered the Transit Zone, potentially destined for the U.S.

Colombia has also become a major center for heroin production, and now ranks third among the world's heroin producers. Estimated production potential for 1998 was six metric tons annually.

### ***Challenges***

Colombia has been torn by internal conflict since 1946 and has faced a continuous insurgency since the early 1960s. Despite GOC efforts to foster a viable peace process, the FARC and ELN persist in their aggressive attacks against the nation's infrastructure, military and police forces, and civilians. There were at least 160 such attacks during the 6-month period from July to December of 1999, highlighted by major assaults at Jurado, Puerto Inirida, and Gutierrez. Paramilitary violence and massacres of civilians also continue. Paramilitary incursions into Panama against FARC sympathizers have also occurred. A successful peace process will remain elusive without a firm U.S. and international commitment to the Government of Colombia.

The drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are sophisticated and have verifiable links to the FARC, ELN, and paramilitary organizations. Over half of FARC fronts and one-fourth of ELN fronts receive support from, and provide protection to DTOs. Drug money makes up a major portion of the FARC's war chest and is the FARC's primary source for financing forces, combat operations and weapons purchases. Most paramilitary groups also protect or receive support from DTOs.

### ***Required Intelligence Support to assist the Colombian CD Effort***

The success and effectiveness of CD efforts hinge on timely, accurate, predictive, and actionable intelligence. Proposed funding in the supplemental bill for U.S. military airborne intelligence assets will allow Southern Command to provide critical intelligence on drug smuggling activities in the Source and Transit Zones in Colombia.

We have significant Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) deficiencies in the Source Zone, which prevent us from providing the timely and actionable tactical intelligence necessary to counter increasingly diversified and mobile drug trafficking operations. ISR shortfalls inhibit essential collection on the capabilities, intentions, and activities of drug traffickers and degrade the effectiveness of force protection and CD operations.

Correcting some parts of this problem is inexpensive. U.S. assistance, including increased information sharing, detection and monitoring, equipment and training, requires only a change in policies and procedures, entailing little added cost to the U.S. taxpayer. Increased intelligence sharing with Colombia's Armed Forces should improve performance against drug traffickers.

### **ADEQUACY, TYPE AND LEVEL OF SUPPORT TO THE COLOMBIAN CD EFFORT**

During the past year, we have provided funding, equipment, training, facility improvement, and technology support to enhance the Colombians' capability to fight drug trafficking in their country. We have focused our support on their ground, air, and riverine programs.

### ***Support to Ground Programs***

We have helped the Colombian Army (COLAR) organize, train, and equip their first Counternarcotics Battalion (CN BN), which became operational December 15, 1999. Manned by over 900 COLAR soldiers and based with the Joint Task Force (JTF)-South headquarters in Tres Esquinas, the CN BN consists of a headquarters company, and three line infantry companies. The battalion completed an extensive three-phased training program conducted by U.S. Special Forces at a cost of \$3.9 million and received \$3.5 million worth of individual field equipment, unit equipment, and medical supplies to enable stand-alone operations.

For tactical mobility, the Department of State provided the battalion 18 refurbished UH-1N helicopters (and accompanying spare parts). Based at Tolemeida and Florencia, the helicopters are manned by 25 contract pilots and 14 mission ready Colombian crews trained in the U.S. Follow-on support equipment (armament and portable hangars) is also being provided. To keep the aircraft operational, we have budgeted \$2.1 million of monthly Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funding for the Colombian military. Planning is underway to establish, train, and equip two additional CN Battalions and a COLAR CN Brigade headquarters staff in the near future.

To provide the CN Battalion fused, tactical intelligence, we have helped the GOC establish a Colombian Joint Intelligence Center (COJIC) which became operational on December 22, 1999, to support military, police and JTF-South CD operations. The COJIC produces real-time targeting information, terrain and weather analysis, force protection vulnerability assessments, and intelligence estimates and assessments. USSOUTHCOM approved COJIC funding of \$4.9 million for construction of the facility, the required networked computer, communications and administrative material, upgrade of base infrastructure, and sustainment costs through mid June 2000. To enhance intelligence support to the CN Battalion and JTF-South, three U.S. subject matter experts are deployed to the COJIC through June 2000 to observe and assist the COLAR and Colombian National Police manning the facility. To facilitate the, increased operational capabilities programmed for Tres Esquinas, we have funded significant upgrades to the base. These upgrades are underway and include extension of the existing aircraft runway and construction of a ramp. To enhance force protection, we are spending over \$600,000 to correct security deficiencies noted during earlier assessments.

### ***Support to Air Programs***

Southern Command and the inter-agency developed a three-phased CD Air Interdiction Plan to enhance current GOC capabilities. This plan will maximize host nation success through a focused, phased air interdiction operation against drug smuggling aircraft in Colombia. Operations will integrate Relocatable Over-the-Horizon Radar (ROTHR), U.S. tracker and detection aircraft, and Colombian air force and national police aircraft for mission success. Training to implement this plan will begin this month, followed by 120 days of focused air interdiction operations.

### ***Support to Riverine Programs***

We have continued to support the Colombian riverine program with much needed boat maintenance spares, armored flotation vests, and night vision devices. This equipment has allowed the Colombians to increase the number of Riverine combat elements to 25 (of a projected 45), with seven advanced riverine bases. Funding is approved for Fiscal Year 2000 for the delivery of eight 25-foot patrol boats, additional spare parts, night vision devices, and radio/navigation equipment to allow for expanded coverage of waterways. Training support continues at an accelerated pace with five U.S. Marine Corps and two Special Operations Command training deployments planned for this year.

## **STRATEGY AND LONG RANGE PLAN TO ASSIST COLOMBIA WITH ITS CD EFFORTS**

### ***Personal Assessment***

As I stated earlier, as Colombia's Problems spill over into neighboring countries, they threaten the regional stability that is essential to the growth and sustainment of strong democracies and free market economies throughout the region. Drug trafficking is a major contributing factor to Colombia's internal problems. A key to success in achieving regional stability is to support CD efforts through a strategy that considers the regional impact of Colombia's multi-faceted internal conflict.

Two national policy directives guide our counter-drug way ahead: the Presidential Decision Directive (PDD-14) and the National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) Goals Four and Five. This guidance clearly identifies the importance of effective interdiction and the need to break the source of the supply of drugs. The NDCS identifies two salient milestones for Southern Command and the entire Interagency: a reduction of 10 percent in the Transit Zone and 15 percent in the Source Zone by 2002; and a reduction of 20 percent in the Transit Zone and 30 percent in the Source Zone by 2007. The relevant burden falls primarily on the Government of Colombia, and our job will be to prepare them to conduct regional CD operations.

While our efforts for the foreseeable future center around a Colombia-focused strategy, we also maintain significant efforts in neighboring nations such as Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela to train their counter-drug forces to conduct current operations against production and transportation of illicit drugs in those nations. Continued U.S. support of these efforts is crucial to long-term success in the region since spillover of the problem from Colombia is a distinct possibility once Colombia's CD forces achieve success.

### ***CD Campaign Plan***

Southern Command, as part of the interagency team, has developed a three-phased regional CD Campaign Plan that supports the goals, objectives, and intent of the NDCS and PDD-14. While continuing interdiction efforts in the Transit Zone during all three phases, the focus of Phase I will be a prioritized effort to assist Partner Nations in developing CD capabilities. This requires the U.S. to help organize, train, and where necessary, equip the Partner Nations to be able to conduct air, riverine, and ground operations against the drug traffickers.

Phase II is regional decisive operations where all the Partner Nations conduct a series of offensive operations to neutralize all aspects of the illicit drug trade by isolating drug production areas from their markets and by extending police presence into the drug production areas.

Phase III is the sustainment phase which allows Partner Nations to adapt to the constantly evolving drug trafficker attempts to outmaneuver the Partner Nations' military and law enforcement forces.

### ***Importance of the Forward Operating Locations (FOLs)***

To realize the full benefits of our CD Campaign Plan, our CD assets must conduct Source Zone operational support. FOLs provide the required operational support for conducting sustained operations throughout the entire Source Zone. Conducting critical ISR missions from the FOLs will enhance the coupling of U.S. detection and monitoring assets with partner nation interceptors.

The FOL in Manta, Ecuador is my number one theater architecture priority. Manta is crucial to attaining deep Source Zone air coverage with Airborne Early Warning aircraft, and it is the only FOL that enables us to achieve full coverage of Peru and Colombia and nearly all of Bolivia. We concluded a long-term access agreement last November and are now able to operate three medium-size aircraft (e.g., P-3 and C-130) from Manta under visual flight rules during daylight hours. All weather, 24-hour operations will begin this April, following completion of necessary improvements to satisfy mandated safety requirements. The Manta FOL military construction in the proposed supplemental bill will fund infrastructure improvements required for KC-135 and E-3 aircraft, giving us the ability to conduct unconstrained Detection, Monitoring, and Tracking operations.

The FOLs at Aruba and Curacao, funded in the Fiscal Year 2001 request, are essential for us to conduct efficient, rapid response detection and monitoring operations in the northern Source Zone, to include the Guajira Peninsula and Venezuelan border region, as well as a large part of the Transit Zone. Ambassador Brown recently completed additional talks with The Hague. We expect signing of long-term agreements with the Dutch Government for the continued use of Aruba and Curacao on or about the 1st of March. Aruba is our hub of operations for Customs Service P-3 and C-550 Citation aircraft. Once construction is complete, Aruba will be able to support all medium type CD aircraft.

Curacao is currently capable of supporting all types of CD aircraft, but available ramp space and lodging limit operations to one large, two medium and six small aircraft. Completed military construction will enable the FOL to accommodate two large, four medium, and six small aircraft, such as the F-16 and C-550.

An FOL in Central America is essential to our theater architecture in light of our departure from Panama. This FOL would ensure air coverage in the Eastern Pacific and Central America to keep pressure on the Transit Zone

as we build enhanced CD capabilities in the Source Zone.

### ***Operations in Support of "Plan Colombia"***

Partnership nation cooperation and "will to succeed" are crucial to execution of the Southern Command Strategy. The Pastrana Administration continually demonstrates a commitment to resolve the problems in Colombia. Colombia developed "Plan Colombia" to regain the confidence of its citizenry and restore the basic norms of a peaceful society. The Plan has a national focus and covers the wide array of problems the Government of Colombia faces, from social and economic to military and judicial. Southern Command's role is to provide support as part of the interagency team.

Plan Colombia contains specific measures for strengthening human rights policies; Southern Command has supported Colombia's human rights programs through training conferences and distribution of Human Rights handbooks. Colombian troops continually receive human rights instruction and learn to recognize abuses and how to report them. Plan Colombia also stresses the importance of earlier prosecution of human rights abuses. The U.S. Military fully supports the vigorous prosecution of human rights offenses and recognizes the importance of cooperation between the civilian and military judicial systems to ensure such prosecutions.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict hired a contractor to perform an assessment of the Colombian Military and recommend ways to professionalize and modernize the Armed Forces. The report will lead to the development of a Colombian National Security Strategy, provide a level of detail sufficient to plan and program resource requirements, and enable the Armed Forces to operate and sustain CD forces effectively.

The proposed supplemental appropriations allocated to improved CD capabilities will advance Colombia's preparations for transitioning to Phase II of our regional CD strategy. It also will balance the capabilities of the Colombian military with those of the Colombian National Police. Colombia will then have the capability to ensure the necessary security for conducting CD operations.

### **CONCLUSION**

I have now served at U.S. Southern Command for over 28 months. Shortly after assuming command and making my initial assessment of security conditions in my Area of Responsibility (AOR), I asserted that Colombia was the most threatened nation in the AOR. Even though I continue to stand behind that assessment, I am cautiously optimistic about Colombia's future. My optimism stems from several convictions, two of which I would like to share. First, I have been in and out of Colombia for more than a decade, and the leadership team that now guides Colombia's security forces is the best I have seen. In Generals Tapias, Mora, Velasco, and Serrano and Admiral Garcia, the armed forces and the national police are now, I believe, in the hands of those most capable of resolving Colombia's difficult and demanding CD problem. Second, Colombia has made gains on the battlefield. The results of the FARC's country-wide offensive during 1999 indicate that Colombia's security forces are capable of defeating FARC insurgents and defending Colombia's national territories. I attribute their successes first and foremost to competent, aggressive leadership at both tactical and operational levels. Other important factors are improved intelligence preparation of the battlefield; better cooperation between the armed forces and national police; improved air-ground coordination; and more effective command and control. I predict these favorable trends will continue. While I share the widely held opinion that the ultimate solution to Colombia's internal problems lies in negotiations, I am convinced that success on the battlefield provides the leverage that is a precondition for meaningful and productive negotiations.

We at Southern Command are genuinely grateful to the members of the committee for your continued interest and support.

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**El General Wilhelm declara sobre propuesta ayuda**

## de EE.UU. a Colombia

**General Charles Wilhelm,  
Jefe del Comando Sur de Estados Unidos  
ante una subcomisión de la Comisión de Reforma Gubernamental  
de la Cámara de Representantes**

**15 de febrero de 2000**

[Nota: En el texto, billón=millardo.]

### [Texto completo en inglés](#)

Los fondos adicionales solicitados por la Administración Clinton para apoyar los esfuerzos colombianos contra las drogas "le permitirán a Colombia llevar a cabo su plan estratégico y tomar la iniciativa en su guerra contra el narcotráfico", dice el general Charles Wilhelm, comandante en jefe del Comando Sur (SouthCom) de Estados Unidos.

Al declarar el 15 de febrero ante una subcomisión del Congreso, Wilhelm habló en términos inequívocos acerca de la necesidad de emprender acción decisiva para contener en Colombia la violencia relacionada con las drogas. "La amenaza de las drogas a Colombia es real, inmediata y creciente. Es una fuerza corrosiva sin precedentes, que erosiona incesantemente los cimientos de la democracia de Colombia, corrompe sus instituciones públicas, envenena a su juventud, arruina su economía y disloca el orden social".

Argumentó que si bien "Colombia debe encabezar la lucha contra el tráfico de drogas" el cual alimenta la turbulencia en ese país, el gobierno colombiano "necesita nuestro compromiso de ayuda financiera, planificación operativa y ayuda de inteligencia". Apuntó que "a los problemas de Colombia no los contienen sus fronteras, sino que se derraman sobre los países vecinos", afectando adversamente a Venezuela y "poniendo en grave tensión las relaciones entre las dos naciones. Incursiones indeseables de los traficantes de drogas, de las guerrillas insurgentes y de fuerzas paramilitares en Ecuador y Perú, son también ejemplos de la medida en la cual el caos interno de Colombia socava la estabilidad regional.

También Panamá "experimenta dificultades para controlar su frontera con Colombia". Hizo notar que las fuerzas militares, como las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, grupo guerrillero de cuyos miembros se ha dicho que están vinculados con los narcotraficantes, y al cual se conoce por su sigla FARC, "entra en Panamá como asunto de rutina y con impunidad, para traficar con drogas y armas y aterrorizar y extorsionar a los panameños que viven en la zona".

El tormento que vive Colombia tiene un efecto pernicioso en muchas partes del Hemisferio Occidental y Estados Unidos no es, por cierto, inmune al peligro. "Colombia es el mayor productor de cocaína del mundo", y agregó que "Colombia se ha convertido también en un centro importante de producción de heroína, y ahora se clasifica tercera entre los productores de heroína del mundo". Gran parte de esta cosecha ilícita se destina a Estados Unidos, y Wilhelm advirtió que la producción colombiana de drogas "en 1999 aumentó 20% en relación con 1998".

El gobierno del presidente colombiano Andrés Pastrana, que lucha por establecer el orden en el país, encara tremenda resistencia de parte de la guerrilla y las organizaciones paramilitares financiadas por el narcotráfico. Por eso el gobierno de Pastrana merece la ayuda generosa de Estados Unidos, afirmó Wilhelm. La historia reciente de Colombia, demuestra la tenacidad de sus problemas, y la incapacidad de los sucesivos gobiernos para terminar con el desasosiego civil sin recurrir al apoyo externo. "Colombia se ha visto desgarrada por el conflicto interno desde 1946 y ha encarado una insurgencia continua desde principios de la década del 60. A pesar de los esfuerzos (de Pastrana) para promover un proceso de paz viable, (los grupos guerrilleros) persisten en sus ataques agresivos a la infraestructura de la nación, las fuerzas militares y policiales y los civiles".

Al advertirles a los legisladores que "un proceso de paz exitoso seguirá siendo esquivo en ausencia de un firme compromiso estadounidense e internacional con el gobierno de Colombia", Wilhelm repitió su advertencia de que la crisis de Colombia amenaza "la estabilidad regional la cual es esencial para el crecimiento y el mantenimiento de democracias fuertes y economías de mercado libre en toda la región".

Aunque no subestimó el alcance del reto, Wilhelm se declaró "cautelosamente optimista acerca del futuro de Colombia". El fundamento de su optimismo, deriva de su convicción de que "el liderato que ahora guía las fuerzas de seguridad de Colombia es el mejor que yo haya visto" en una década de extensos viajes a ese país. Además, "Colombia ha logrado progresos en el campo de batalla", lo cual lo hacer creer que "las fuerzas de seguridad de Colombia son capaces de derrotar a los insurgentes de las FARC y defender el territorio nacional de Colombia".

Wilhelm atribuyó los éxitos del gobierno colombiano "primero y ante todo al liderato competente y decidido tanto a nivel táctico como operativo", y cerró sus declaraciones con un firme respaldo a la premisa del Presidente Clinton de ofrecer mayor ayuda a Colombia. "Si bien comparto la opinión, ampliamente sostenida, de que la solución final de los problemas internos de Colombia radica en las negociaciones de paz (con las fuerzas antigubernamentales), estoy convencido de que el éxito en el campo de batalla es la condición previa para negociaciones significativas y productivas".

Washington, D.C.  
15 de febrero de 2000

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