

Testimony of
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I very much appreciate your invitation to appear before the Subcommittee today to talk about the connection between drugs and terrorism. I will focus my remarks on Colombia and what the United States should be doing in addressing the situation there. This is precisely the right moment to ask hard questions, and engage in an open, public debate about where US policy is heading, and ought to be heading, on these issues. Our interests and goals in Latin America's third largest country deserve serious discussion. That is why this hearing is so important.

Let me start with the question of what purpose we want to achieve in Colombia. The objective should be clear: we need to do all we can to defend Colombia's democracy by strengthening the government's capacity and authority to protect its citizens throughout its territory. Our efforts should go towards helping the government reach a political solution to the country's deep, internal conflict. Given the scale and nature of the conflict, a military solution is not a viable option. Colombia will only be able to deal effectively with its narcotics and terrorism problems if it moves in this direction.

By now, there is widespread agreement about the diagnosis of Colombia's crisis. The country is experiencing unprecedented lawlessness perpetrated by a host of violent actors. The problem is that violence and armed conflict exist because of the weakness and even absence of governance and effective authority in wide swaths of territory. There are three groups that appear on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations, all of which deserve the designation. These are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The first and third groups, in conflict with one another, should particularly concern us. They are formidable forces that have expanded most dramatically in recent years and, together, have an estimated 30,000 combatants.

The Colombian conflict has old, historic roots, but is so virulent now because the insurgent groups have developed a system of financing themselves through kidnapping, extortion, and taxing the drug trade. Narcotics is not the cause of terrorist criminal activity, but it does fuel it. Although the FARC and AUC are no doubt strengthened from the drug trade, these groups would continue to pose a threat to Colombia even if the drug problem were somehow resolved. Drugs, coca and heroin production, is an important element or dimension of a much more profound and complex problem. Drugs and terrorism - though intimately related and mutually reinforcing - are distinct phenomena and should be treated as such.

For the United States, it is understandable why there is such a great temptation to fit Colombia under the framework of the war against drugs and, since September 11, the global campaign against terrorism. Drugs and terrorism are no doubt serious problems, and both affect US interests. But in the Colombia case, both of these problems derive from a lack of state authority, control and capacity. That is what needs most urgent attention to turn around the country's

dramatic deterioration. That should be the focus and guiding purpose of US policy. A Colombian state threatened by collapse -a democracy at serious risk- cannot be a very good partner in tackling the drug and terrorism problems.

In concrete terms, what does this mean? First, the United States should engage actively and in a sustained way with the Colombian government to formulate a comprehensive joint strategy and end game. High-level political attention should seek to support efforts aimed at forcing a negotiated political settlement. Until now, Colombia policy has been in the hands of operational policymakers. Peace talks have now broken down, and conditions are not ripe to move towards a settlement. But, perhaps unlike the goals in the war against terrorism in other parts of the world, the political objective in Colombia must be paramount.

Second, to help shape the conditions that will make an eventual negotiation with all three of Colombia's terrorist groups more realistic and feasible, it is crucial for the United States to undertake a long-term effort aimed at professionalizing Colombia's security forces. Our objective should be to help Colombia develop a professional, modern military, and police capacity to maintain public order. At present, the security forces cannot effectively protect Colombia's citizens. The US security aid provided to Colombia until now has been focused on equipment and training for eradication and interdiction of drugs. That the administration and Congress are now looking to go beyond this narrow emphasis is welcome news. But a plan of military assistance needs to be explicit about the importance of Colombia's security forces targeting all groups operating outside of the law, concerns and conditions related to human rights, and a clear eye on the ultimate political objective outlined above. This would mean a significant departure from what is now in place.

Third, although the security question in Colombia is most urgent, the United States government should make it clear that it is prepared to support the Colombian government over the longer-term on a wide range of badly needed reform efforts. Judicial and social reform particularly stand out. These may not be part of an eventual negotiation, but should be integral to an assistance package aimed at strengthening Colombia's key institutions. Such a commitment should be contingent on the Colombian government and business leaders demonstrating accountability and doing their share in contributing to such a rebuilding effort. Tax reform and greater enforcement, for example, should be part of such a deal.

Finally, the United States should intensify and improve current efforts to tackle the serious drug problem, not only in working with Colombia, but with our other partners in the region. This is a global problem, and the United States should seek to promote greater cooperation among the relevant countries in this hemisphere in an effort to reduce production and trafficking. The US government should give highest priority to supporting the region's legal economy; it can best do so by expanding the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA). A multilateral mechanism being developed in the Organization of American States is promising and deserves political support. To make an overall drug policy more effective, the US government needs to give greater attention to efforts aimed at reducing demand and consumption in the United States, as well as more vigorous law enforcement in this country.

Colombia will only be a good partner with the United States on these critical issues if its state is able to assert greater authority and better control its territory. That is the urgent priority that should frame US policy on questions related to drugs and terrorism.

The United States has an enormous stake in what happens in Colombia. This is not only because of the relentless, drug-fueled terrorist acts that are putting South America's oldest democracy at serious risk. It is also because of the potential for an even deeper crisis that affects the wider region. With the recent escalation of violence in Colombia, Peruvian, Venezuelan, Ecuadorian and Brazilian troops have been put on alert on their borders. Last week there was a confrontation between the FARC and Brazilian soldiers. There is tremendous political tension and uncertainty in Venezuela, and troubling institutional fragility in Ecuador. This is a region that is nervous and on edge. At least some of the trends are ominous. I believe US engagement in the ways outlined here is critical precisely to avert a deteriorating situation that would, down the road, be even more difficult to control.

Finally, it's important to remember that Colombia has important assets and advantages to work with. It has a long, democratic tradition, and prizes elections. In the last century, it had only four years of military rule. Contrary to what is often said, the country is not experiencing a civil war, but rather a war against society. It is not politically divided. On the contrary, it is politically united around the common desire to lead normal lives, in peace. Unfortunately, some of the country's actors, who commit barbarous, terrorist acts, are making it virtually impossible for the overwhelming majority of law-abiding Colombian citizens to fulfill that common desire. The US government should help them do so.

Thank you very much for this opportunity. I would be happy to clarify or expand on any of these points, or answer any questions you might have.