



Highlights of [GAO-09-71](#), a report to the Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In September 1999, the government of Colombia announced a strategy, known as “Plan Colombia,” to (1) reduce the production of illicit drugs (primarily cocaine) by 50 percent in 6 years and (2) improve security in Colombia by re-claiming control of areas held by illegal armed groups. Since fiscal year 2000, the United States has provided over \$6 billion to support Plan Colombia. The Departments of State, Defense, and Justice and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) manage the assistance. GAO examined (1) the progress made toward Plan Colombia’s drug reduction and enhanced security objectives, (2) the results of U.S. aid for the military and police, (3) the results of U.S. aid for non-military programs, and (4) the status of efforts to “nationalize” or transfer operations and funding responsibilities for U.S.-supported programs to Colombia.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State, in conjunction with the other departments, USAID, and Colombia, develop an integrated nationalization plan that defines U.S. and Colombian roles and responsibilities, future funding requirements, and timelines. We also recommend that USAID develop measures to better assess its alternative development program. In commenting on the recommendations, State said it will continue to improve coordination of nationalization efforts, and USAID/Colombia noted that it is working to identify new indicators to better measure progress.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-71](#). For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4268 or fordj@gao.gov.

PLAN COLOMBIA

Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance

What GAO Found

Plan Colombia’s goal of reducing the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by 50 percent in 6 years was not fully achieved. From 2000 to 2006, opium poppy cultivation and heroin production declined about 50 percent, while coca cultivation and cocaine production levels increased by about 15 and 4 percent, respectively. These increases, in part, can be explained by measures taken by coca farmers to counter U.S. and Colombian eradication efforts. Colombia has improved its security climate through systematic military and police engagements with illegal armed groups and by degrading these groups’ finances. U.S. Embassy Bogotá officials cautioned that these security gains will not be irreversible until illegal armed groups can no longer threaten the stability of the government of Colombia, but become a law enforcement problem requiring only police attention.

Since fiscal year 2000, State and Defense provided nearly \$4.9 billion to the Colombian military and National Police. Notably, U.S.–funded helicopters have provided the air mobility needed to rapidly move Colombian counternarcotics and counterinsurgency forces. U.S. advisors, training, equipment, and intelligence assistance have also helped professionalize Colombia’s military and police forces, which have recorded a number of achievements including the aerial and manual eradication of hundreds of thousands of hectares of coca, the seizure of tons of cocaine, and the capture or killing of a number of illegal armed group leaders and thousands of combatants. However, these efforts face several challenges, including countermeasures taken by coca farmers to combat U.S. and Colombian eradication efforts.

Since fiscal year 2000, State, Justice, and USAID have provided nearly \$1.3 billion for a wide range of social, economic, and justice sector programs. These programs have had a range of accomplishments, including aiding internally displaced persons and reforming Colombia’s justice sector. But some efforts have been slow in achieving their objectives while others are difficult to assess. For example, the largest share of U.S. non-military assistance has gone towards alternative development, which has provided hundreds of thousands of Colombians legal economic alternatives to the illicit drug trade. But, alternative development is not provided in most areas where coca is cultivated and USAID does not assess how such programs relate to its strategic goals of reducing the production of illicit drugs or achieving sustainable results.

In response to congressional direction in 2005 and budget cuts in fiscal year 2008, State and the other U.S. departments and agencies have accelerated their nationalization efforts, with State focusing on Colombian military and National Police aviation programs. One aviation program has been nationalized and two are in transition, with the largest—the Army Aviation Brigade—slated for turnover by 2012. Two National Police aviation programs have no turnover dates established. State, Defense, Justice, and USAID each have their own approaches to nationalization, with different timelines and objectives that have not been coordinated to promote potential efficiencies.