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# An Overview of the Effectiveness of U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia, 2000–2020, and Recommendations for the Future

## KEY FINDINGS

- The broad partnership between the governments of Colombia and the United States beginning in 2000 was instrumental in preventing Colombia from becoming a likely failed state and in ending the insurgency.
- U.S.-funded capacity-building programs have assisted in transforming Colombian national capabilities in coca eradication; interdiction and law enforcement; investigations; and prosecution of criminal networks.
- Colombian-U.S. efforts to extend a permanent security and state institutional presence and alternative development to rural levels have been far less successful.
- A growing misalignment of goals between the governments of Colombia and the United States had occurred—U.S. support will continue to be vital for sustaining the hard-fought gains from the past 20 years.
- The use of measures and metrics should be expanded to more fully address the broader nature of U.S. efforts to assist Colombia to accomplish the goals of the peace accord.

**T**his report examines the period in Colombia from 2000 to 2020 to assess the effectiveness of U.S. counternarcotics and security efforts, with the overarching goal of informing U.S. government decisionmaking and collaborative efforts.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) was tasked by Congress to review U.S. counternarcotics and security efforts in Colombia over the past two decades. GAO completed two reviews, once in 2008 and again in 2018. The former report noted that drug-reduction goals were not fully met, although the security situation had improved under U.S. assistance. However, GAO later noted that gains in the area of counternarcotics were limited, and it did not identify the long-term effectiveness of many U.S. efforts.

In its 2018 report, GAO made two recommendations to the U.S. Department of State, the lead U.S. agency charged with implement-

## Abbreviations

DTO	drug trafficking organization
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia]
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office
GBH	glyphosate-based herbicide
PCIM	Plan de Consolidación Integral de La Macarena [La Macarena Integral Consolidation Program]
PDET	Programa de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial [Territorially Focused Development Plan]

ing and coordinating counternarcotics efforts in Colombia: (1) evaluate the effectiveness of eradication and interdiction in reducing the cocaine supply in Colombia and (2) undertake a comprehensive review of the U.S. counternarcotics approach in Colombia that considers the relative benefits and limitations of eradication, interdiction, and alternative development efforts. This report helps follow through on these two GAO recommendations.<sup>2</sup>

With the initiation of Plan Colombia in 2000, the governments of Colombia and the United States began a strategic relationship centered on ending five decades of hostilities and stemming the cocaine trade, including the production of coca and cocaine trafficked to the United States. The original plan was developed by former President Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998–2002) as a six-year plan designed to end Colombia’s lengthy armed conflict, eliminate drug trafficking, and promote economic and social development.<sup>3</sup> After consultations in Washington, D.C., his original plan would be changed to prioritize counternarcotics and counterinsurgency.

Throughout its 20-year history, the Colombian-U.S. collaboration has evolved in response to successes that have been achieved, the changing situation on the ground, and the implementation of a peace agreement that was signed in 2016. Despite this close cooperation, the 2019 National Drug Threat Assessment by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration noted, “Cocaine is a resurgent threat in the United States as seizures, availability, coca cultiva-

tion, and cocaine production remain at elevated levels.”<sup>4</sup> The abundance of Colombian cocaine is becoming evident as drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are supplying new cocaine markets in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

During the course of the Colombian-U.S. partnership, assistance has focused on four key lines of effort—eradication of coca crops; interdiction of cocaine, precursor chemicals, cash, and other assets and destruction of facilities involved in drug production and trafficking operations; security and rule-of-law efforts to protect populations and support the development of institutions; and alternative development programs that discourage involvement in the drug trade by supporting viable, legal livelihoods through training, land formalization, technical assistance, and cash transfers.

In this report, we review the effectiveness of previous joint efforts and provide recommendations for future Colombian-U.S. cooperation on counternarcotics and development. In doing so, we offer strategic perspectives rather than elaboration on detailed findings, observations, and recommendations.

The report is divided into three sections. In the first section, “Strategic Context,” we provide a broad strategic characterization of the U.S. support to Colombia. The second section, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of U.S. Government–Funded Counternarcotics Programs in Colombia,” provides our assessment of the period from 2000 to 2020 in fulfillment of our first study objective. The third section, “Looking to the Future of U.S. Support to Colombian Counternarcotics and Development Efforts,” identifies opportunities for the United States to have the greatest impact going forward and fulfills our second study objective.

## Strategic Context

At the start of the 21st century, the U.S. government, to aid the government of Colombia, focused its efforts on supporting counternarcotics and counterinsurgency through the training of Colombian military and police forces and by providing equipment for these operations. Early efforts sought to reduce the number of hectares of coca under cultivation through

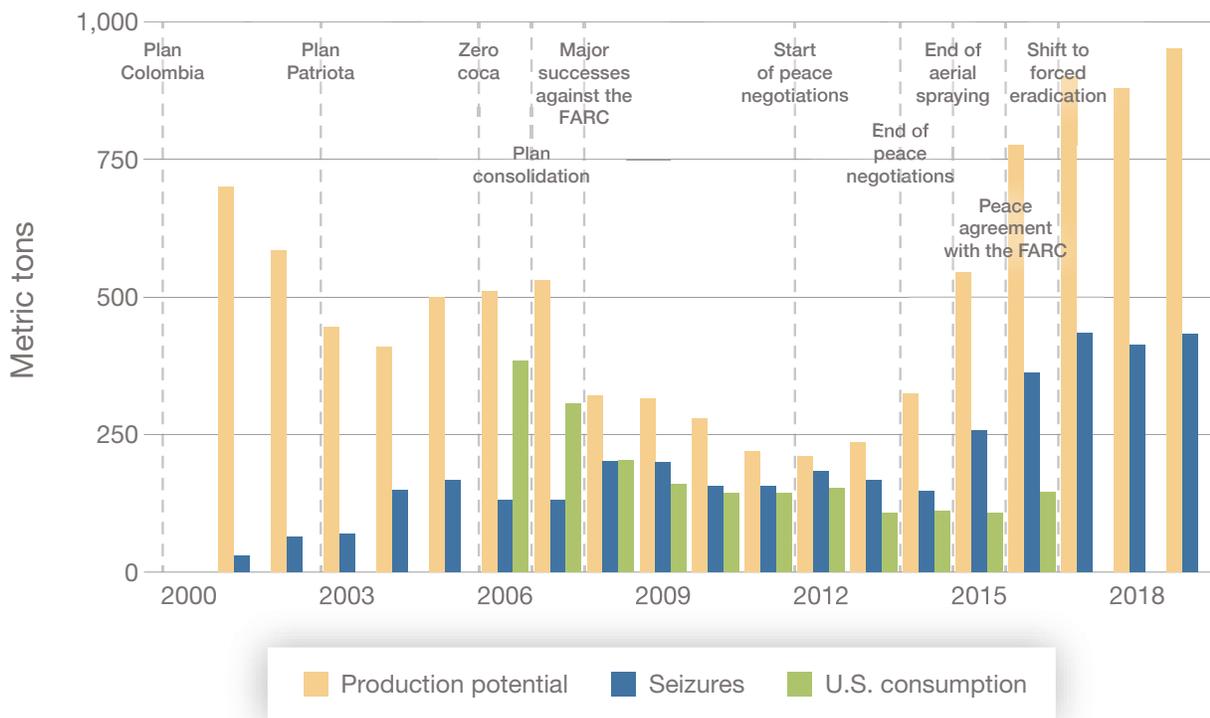
an aggressive aerial eradication program. Several years later, manual eradication, which was more dangerous for eradicators, was added. Both used forced eradication rather than cooperative eradication done in coordination with the rural government and the populace.

While early outcomes, through 2004, led to a reduction of hectares of coca under cultivation, the counterinsurgency continued, violence and murders were at high levels, and cocaine availability in the United States was only marginally affected. However, from 2007 to 2012, coca cultivation was significantly reduced and remained at its lowest levels, and cocaine availability in the United States was also reduced through the combination of eradication and interdiction. This would not last. Figure 1 provides

an overview of cocaine supply and use and major counternarcotics initiatives from 2000 to 2020.

In fact, during the past eight years, coca growth has risen to its highest levels in 20 years. These increases are attributed to two factors: (1) the perverse incentive created by the peace accord to grow coca in order to initially qualify for the program and (2) the halting of aerial eradication. In response to these elevated levels of coca cultivation, Colombia and the United States developed a joint goal of reducing cultivation by 50 percent between 2017 and 2023. At this point, it appears highly unlikely that rapid reductions of this magnitude could be achieved without a return to the hard-power tactics that were employed during the early years of Plan Colombia. Furthermore, a return to such tactics would not be prudent or possible given the implementation of

FIGURE 1  
Overview of the Cocaine Trade and Major Counternarcotics Initiatives, 2000 to 2020



SOURCES: RAND analysis of data from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs provided to the authors and data from Gregory Midgette, Steven Davenport, Jonathan P. Caulkins, and Beau Kilmer, *What America's Users Spend on Illegal Drugs, 2006–2016*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3140-ONDCP, 2019.

NOTE: U.S. consumption estimates are available only from 2006 to 2016.

the peace accord and the legal restrictions on aerial spraying.<sup>5</sup>

Over this 20-year period, interdiction programs have evolved that have sought to disrupt the large flows of cocaine heading toward the United States. Interdiction has continued to mature, with organizations, processes, and intelligence dedicated to stopping the flows of the cocaine trade. U.S. support for interdiction with equipment, training, and intelligence resulted in increasing year-on-year seizures of cocaine that continue today. Interdiction also included rule-of-law and security force professionalization programs that were focused at the national level. These programs sought to improve the capacity for seizing narcotics and associated products, law enforcement, investigations, reform of the courts, and prosecutions of narcotraffickers. The goal of these programs was to investigate, prosecute, and dismantle DTOs.

Under Plan Colombia, rule-of-law efforts—largely focused at the national level—sought to improve the Colombian state when it came to justice and security. However, in terms of rural security and development, Plan Colombia failed to adequately address the concerns in many communities. Even today, drug production remains entrenched in areas with weak rule of law that were once dominated by the insurgency or that were outside the control of national government authorities.

Alternative development programs were employed to entice coca producers to abandon cultivation of coca and transition to legal alternatives. At times, the alternative development and other economic incentive programs were included in the counternarcotics approaches, yet many of

these were implemented conditionally (i.e., eradication was mandatory before communities could be offered developmental assistance and infrastructure support). Often, these development efforts were conducted without the security and rule-of-law programs that are essential to providing the conditions for licit rural economic activity and institution-building to occur. Without the necessary security to protect communities and ensure that licit economic activity would not be disrupted by criminal actors or insurgent groups, the efforts largely floundered. Even in areas in which consolidation was prioritized—such as the U.S.-supported Plan de Consolidación Integral de La Macarena (PCIM) or the La Macarena Integral Consolidation Program—the long-term approach of addressing counternarcotics and development in a coordinated manner was not uniformly pursued. In retrospect, the focus on narrower, shorter-term eradication and interdiction efforts obfuscated the broader, longer-term economic and societal goals and objectives that are especially necessary to build resilient rural communities.

Despite these criticisms, Plan Colombia has transformed Colombia, professionalizing the national security and judicial systems and strengthening the state in its long-standing efforts to eliminate the insurgent groups. Indeed, some have characterized Plan Colombia as successful in pulling the country back from collapse.<sup>6</sup> Yet these successes have not been even across the entire country; some rural and remote areas have not seen any change.

Plan Colombia also set the conditions for the peace negotiations. The peace negotiations and the signing of the peace accord likely would not have been possible without the joint collaboration and

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the hard-fought gains won through Plan Colombia. As a result, the peace accord can be viewed as the next logical step in the history of Colombia. However, since the negotiations and signing of the peace accord, some of the gains of Plan Colombia have been lost. At the national level, the amount of coca cultivation has largely returned to pre-Plan Colombia levels.

Over this more-than-20-year period—beginning with the negotiation between the governments of Colombia and the United States on the terms of reference for Plan Colombia—the strategic priorities between partners had evolved, and they became somewhat misaligned. When the terms of reference were first negotiated between Colombia and the United States, Colombia wanted to implement a balanced approach between the lines of effort. The United States sought to prioritize counterinsurgency and eradication. Over the course of these early discussions, the partners agreed to initially focus on addressing the insurgency and eradication and interdiction. This prioritization worked well in the early stages of Plan Colombia, through the period of 2012 just prior to the beginning of the peace negotiations.

Eradication and interdiction numbers were up. The insurgency had been weakened and overall measures, such as violence and killings, had been reduced. However, much of the effort was focused on national-level programs for eradication, interdiction, and rule of law and security. This strategy resulted in gains at the national level in the professionalization of the national police and judicial reform but did not address the root causes of the instability in rural areas or the coca trade. With the negotiation and early implementation of the peace accord, the priorities of Colombia and the United States began to

diverge. For example, Colombia recognized the need to prioritize its efforts for development in local communities, while the United States continued to prioritize eliminating coca growth. This divergence should be corrected going forward.

Colombian whole-of-government approaches from the national level to the rural level need to be implemented by and inclusive of all stakeholders. The result should be building whole-of-society solutions. In this effort, the United States has an important role to play in “winning the peace” through supporting continued counternarcotics programs and coordinated national and rural development and institution-building efforts.

U.S. support could be even more important over the next several years as Colombia will be conducting congressional and presidential elections in 2022. In other Colombian transition periods, new approaches have often led to changes to the programs on the ground, resulting in a loss of momentum in some cases. Here, PCIM stands as an example of why consistency in operational approaches within the Programa de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (PDET), or Territorially Focused Development Plan, as called for in the peace accord, should be a central focus for the future.

PDETs are a special planning and management infrastructure for realizing the Comprehensive Rural Reform posited in the final peace accord. The PDET program was specifically created to work with those 170 (of 1,300) municipalities in Colombia that have been most affected by the insurgency and the narcotics trade. The 170 municipalities have been grouped into 16 subregions and were prioritized based on the levels of poverty and degree of impact from the

armed conflict. These areas are known for the presence of illicit crops and other illicit economies.

## Evaluating the Effectiveness of U.S. Government-Funded Counternarcotics Programs in Colombia

In 2000, Colombia was nearly a failed state, with almost 30 percent of its territory ungoverned, high violence related to narco-trafficking and insurgency, high rates of corruption, and an ineffective judicial system. Over the 20-year period that followed, the United States provided more than \$10 billion in counternarcotics and security assistance toward joint Colombian-U.S. efforts.<sup>7</sup>

The progress over this period has transformed large parts of the country. However, new tensions are emerging during the peace agreement implementation because progress has been slow and expectations in rural communities remain largely unmet.

Throughout the period of Colombian-U.S. cooperation, there has been an overreliance on eradication of hectares of coca to assess the effectiveness of U.S. support to counternarcotics operations in Colombia. This has tainted the way in which outcomes have been measured and perceived. This near-term, single-measure approach does not account for the broader whole-of-society changes occurring in Colombia and the benefits of the United States having a reliable partner in Latin America.

Despite this 20-year history of collaboration, many facets of the coca trade continue to be not well understood. Flows of cocaine precursors and various coca products continue to be challenging to understand. The changing nature of the cocaine trade has only exacerbated these issues. A combination of a lack of quality data and, in some cases, inconsistent data has complicated efforts to develop programs to permanently address the causes of the illegal activity, target the cocaine-trade flows, and build licit economies in rural areas.

Our assessment contains findings and observations, including the following:

- The broad partnership between the governments of Colombia and the United States

beginning in 2000 was instrumental in preventing Colombia from becoming a likely failed state and in ending the insurgency.

- U.S.-funded capacity-building programs (in the form of dollars, training, equipment, intelligence, and more) have assisted in transforming Colombian national capabilities in coca eradication; interdiction and law enforcement; investigations; and prosecution of criminal networks, including extradition of key narco-trafficking leadership.
- Collaborative Colombian-U.S. efforts to extend a permanent security and state institutional presence and alternative development to rural levels have been far less successful and remain considerable challenges.
- A growing misalignment of goals between the governments of Colombia and the United States had occurred—however, U.S. support will continue to be vital for sustaining the hard-fought gains that have been made over the past 20 years.<sup>8</sup>
- The use of measures and metrics should be expanded to more fully address the broader nature of U.S. efforts to assist Colombia to accomplish the goals of the peace accord.

We also looked individually at the lines of effort to assess how effective each has been during the period from 2000 to 2020. Specific findings and observations across each of the lines of effort are provided in Table 1.

## Eradication

A key component of Plan Colombia was eradication, which began in December 2000 with the Putumayo region—a stronghold of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—being the first where U.S.-funded eradication efforts were carried out.<sup>9</sup> Both manual and aerial eradication efforts were employed during Plan Colombia. However, aerial eradication with glyphosate-based herbicide (GBH) far surpassed manual eradication totals and remained the main form of eradication during Plan Colombia.<sup>10</sup> The number of hectares targeted by

TABLE 1  
Assessments of Lines of Effort, 2000 to 2020

Line of Effort	Assessments
Eradication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eradication was essential for reducing coca cultivation from 2000 to 2012, but from 2013 to 2018, coca cultivation doubled.<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• The joint goal of reducing coca cultivation and cocaine production to 50 percent of 2017 levels by the end of 2023 was likely not realistic, because returning to large-scale aerial eradication was not possible for legal reasons.</li> <li>• Eradication needs to be part of a whole-of-government approach and not a standalone program.</li> <li>• Inconsistencies and gaps in data create challenges in assessing the effectiveness of eradication programs.</li> </ul>
Interdiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quantities of cocaine-related products seized over the past 20 years have continued to increase, although there have been some declines from 2006 to 2012.</li> <li>• Intelligence-driven operations have yielded significant interdictions, but flows continue.</li> <li>• U.S. interagency and government of Colombia collaboration has been important for maximizing interdiction outcomes.</li> <li>• Difficult interdiction challenges remain, including difficulty understanding and measuring the flows, discrepancies with the data, container shipments and corruption at the ports, the porous land border with Venezuela, the Mexican connection, and Central American routes.</li> </ul>
Security and rule of law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operations have gone from combating an armed counterinsurgency to national police implementing the peace accord during the period of 2000 to 2020.</li> <li>• Progress in such indicators as homicides, corruption, political stability, and violence has been seen overall but not evenly felt across Colombia (especially in the rural areas).</li> <li>• Since the signing of the peace accord, violence in some rural communities has increased because of the vacuum created by the demobilization of insurgents and the lack of progress in achieving the promise of the accord, including lasting state institutional presence, impartial judicial systems, and rule of law.</li> <li>• Law enforcement, rule of law, and security programs without a complementary focus on the other lines of effort are not likely to be successful.</li> </ul>
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early efforts tended to look at alternative development, such as substituting coffee for coca.</li> <li>• Efforts often failed to account for the realities on the ground, including lack of security in rural communities, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to a market for licit goods, and the disparity of the prices for coca versus licit goods.</li> <li>• Some policies have not been encouraging of the development programs—one example is the requirement to eliminate coca cultivation before beginning development programs; this policy has negatively affected licit market transitions.</li> <li>• Development needs to be part of a comprehensive program in rural communities to be effective.</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Government of Colombia, *Colombia: Monitoreo de territorios afectados por cultivos ilícitos 2019* [Colombia: Monitoring Territories Affected by Illicit Crops 2019], Bogotá, Colombia, July 2020.

aerial eradication increased between 2001 and 2007, only to gradually decline after 2007.

Early successes in Plan Colombia were measured in terms of significant reductions in the cultivation of coca based on an aggressive aerial eradication program that was jointly conducted by the governments of Colombia and the United States. From 2000 to 2004, hectares of coca declined by as much as half. Beginning in 2005, aerial eradication, which requires multiple sprayings per year to eliminate the crop, was augmented with manual eradication, which ensured crop destruction in a single pass but was also far more dangerous for the manual eradication teams, who were often attacked and killed by improvised explosive devices and snipers. By 2008, coca produc-

tion was estimated to be down to 80,000 to 120,000 hectares or 30 to 50 percent less than 2000 totals, depending on whether one uses United Nations or U.S. government data. As a result of eradication efforts, overall coca cultivation decreased in terms of total hectares from 2000 to 2012.<sup>11</sup> The decrease happened despite farmers' efforts to cultivate more coca to compensate for their losses and the movement of coca cultivation to mountainous and jungle areas, where aerial eradication was more difficult to carry out.<sup>12</sup>

Today, coca cultivation and cocaine production in Colombia have returned to historic levels, making Colombia the leading global source of cocaine since 2014. Several reasons are often cited

for this increased production. The initiation of the peace negotiations—to include the pre-negotiation time frame—led to a desire to reduce the violence and make accommodations to the FARC in advance of the negotiation to show good faith. To this end, the Colombian government slowed down eradication operations in the areas that the insurgents controlled to reduce the probability of confrontations between government forces and guerrillas and to prevent the negotiations from getting derailed.<sup>13</sup> The final agreement, which signaled conditional cash transfers to growers, created a perverse incentive to grow coca for its eradication later. Additionally, concerns about the health effects of GBH resulted in legal prohibitions against its use. In May 2015, Colombian courts ordered an end to aerial eradication,<sup>14</sup> and, on October 1, 2015, the Colombian government formally suspended aerial eradication of coca.<sup>15</sup> This has left manual eradication—forced and voluntary—as the only form of eradication.

By 2020, the Colombian government was again strongly focused on eradication and had set a goal for eradication of 130,000 hectares of coca by the police, military, and contract eradicators. To achieve this goal, the Colombian government planned to increase the number of Mobile Eradication Groups (known as GMEs in Spanish, for *Grupos Móviles de Erradi-*

*cación*) from 100 (the number of groups active in 2019) to 200. At the end of the Santos administration in 2018, 24 groups were active.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this planned increase in manual eradication teams, the joint Colombian-U.S. objective to reduce coca cultivation and cocaine production by 50 percent from 2017 levels by the end of 2023 was highly unlikely to be met. Coca cultivation in 2017 was about 20 percent greater in terms of hectares than it was in 2000, and today's coca crop might be more productive in terms of cocaine yields. For example, the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy estimated that coca growth had increased from 2019 to 2020 by 15 percent.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, and in contrast to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the 2020 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report indicated that Colombia reduced the area occupied by coca across the country by 7 percent in 2020.<sup>18</sup> Both organizations reported an increase in the cocaine production potential during this time frame. Additionally, the current goal becomes especially challenging when one considers that there are legal restrictions against aerial eradication and that illegal coca production has expanded to harder-to-reach and protected areas. Finally, the Colombian government seeks to implement its obligations under the peace agreement, and the sorts of programs needed to reach these outcomes would jeopardize achieving the broader outcomes outlined in the peace accord.

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## Interdiction

Interdiction programs seek to disrupt the operations of DTOs through drug, precursor, and asset seizures; destruction of drug laboratories and illegal runways; the capture of air- and watercraft; and the deterrence of high-value targets.<sup>19</sup> Under Plan Colombia, U.S. interdiction support for equipment, training, and intelligence resulted in increasing year-on-year seizures of cocaine that continue today. Between fiscal years 2000 and 2008, the U.S. government provided Colombia with some \$89 million to support the interdiction efforts of the Colombian Navy and Marines. The Colombian Navy played an important role in drug-interdiction efforts, seizing cocaine transported along internal waterways and on the high seas despite

challenges resulting from inadequate resourcing and intelligence availability, and drug traffickers varying the routes they used.<sup>20</sup> These interdiction operations included raids against various FARC fronts and strongholds.

Interdiction-related initiatives—especially the military operations targeting the FARC—were successful at weakening insurgent groups and improving the security situation throughout the country; however, these efforts did not fully interrupt the flow of Colombian cocaine. Interdiction operations also disrupted FARC activities geared toward selling coca base and providing various supplies to fronts located outside regions of coca cultivation. The result was that members of some FARC fronts faced shortages of ammunition and basic supplies, and, by 2014, the organization’s numbers were down from approximately 20,000 members in the early 2000s to approximately 7,000.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of its aggressive approach to interdiction, the Santos administration also focused on “destruction of drug laboratories; seizure of cargoes and precursor chemicals; and effective detention of drug traffickers.”<sup>22</sup> In 2016, combined land and maritime interdiction efforts resulted in the Colombian police and armed forces seizing more than 421 metric tons of drugs, or 40 percent more than in 2015,<sup>23</sup> and destroying “4,613 cocaine base labs and 229 cocaine hydrochloride labs.”<sup>24</sup>

One of the most effective interdiction tools appears to be maritime interdiction exercised bilaterally with the United States under the 1997 shipboarding agreement, which, in 2016, enabled the seizure of some 146 metric tons of cocaine.<sup>25</sup> In 2017, with the implementation of the peace accord and the Trump administration’s strong focus on coca eradication, the Santos administration employed aggressive interdiction policies combined with crop eradication and substitution.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, successful interdiction cooperation between the U.S. and Colombian governments resulted in the arrests of major Colombian “narco-chiefs” and the extradition of several transnational crime figures to the United States.<sup>27</sup>

Rule-of-law and security force professionalization programs focused at the national level have been increasingly effective in seizures of narcotics and associated products, law enforcement, investigations,

reform of the courts, and prosecutions of narco-traffickers. These programs also support riverine operations that seek to interdict shipments as they are moved internally throughout Colombia. These riverine interdictions are aided by targeted intelligence that has been increasingly successful.<sup>28</sup>

However, there are also several interdiction challenges to be addressed. The first is corruption at seaports, which has resulted in concerns about the smuggling of cocaine in container ships. The DTOs have also changed their transshipment corridors to avoid detection. One example is moving their smuggling operations to the Pacific coast. The changes to the global flows of cocaine products out of Colombia have also complicated interdiction efforts. The cocaine trade, including the flows of cocaine-related products, has continued to shift and expand to other international destinations, including Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Interdiction data disparities and differences among organizations also confound the understanding of the cocaine trade. Flow estimates are naturally predicated upon past interdictions, disruptions, and intelligence (i.e., interviewees), as well as source zone production estimates. Significant inconsistencies in reporting continue to be a source of frustration with respect to cocaine trafficking and vary greatly among

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## The United States and partner nations likely interdict only a small percentage of the drug movements every year.

the different counternarcotics organizations. Suf-  
fice to say that greater transparency and disclosure  
of each agency’s assumptions and source data with  
respect to their estimates could assist in improving  
overall estimates that serve as the basis for Colom-  
bian counternarcotics policy and program decisions.

Overall, interdiction remains challenging. As far  
back as 1987, GAO warned that drug “seizures are  
small compared to the amounts successfully smug-  
gled into the United States.”<sup>29</sup> Congress reiterated this  
message by stating that “. . . the nation’s interdiction  
efforts have not made a difference in our ability to  
reduce the flow of cocaine to American streets.”<sup>30</sup> In  
a prepared statement, Admiral Craig S. Faller, Com-  
mander of U.S. Southern Command, offered the  
following assessment: “While improving efficiency,  
we still only successfully interdicted about six percent  
of known [air and maritime] drug movements.”<sup>31</sup>  
Regardless of the precise number, it is reasonable to  
conclude that the United States and partner nations  
likely interdict only a small percentage of the drug  
movements every year.

### Rule of Law and Security

From 2000 to 2012, rule of law and citizen security  
improved in many areas of Colombia, even if human  
rights issues still lagged. The main improvements in  
rule of law consisted of professionalization of Colom-  
bian police and armed forces, a reduction in kidnap-  
ping and homicide rates, anti-corruption measures,  
and judicial reforms. However, two major scandals  
overshadowed the progress made in the realm of rule  
of law: the 2006 “parapolitics scandal” and the 2008

“false positives” scandal. The first one unveiled the  
deep involvement of paramilitary groups in Colom-  
bian politics. The second showed how Colombian  
security forces artificially inflated the number of  
insurgents killed by kidnapping and killing inno-  
cent civilians; in some cases, these victims were  
dressed in guerrilla uniforms and presented to the  
public as guerrillas killed during kinetic operations.  
Human rights abuses from 2000 to 2012 carried out  
by nonstate armed groups against members of Afro-  
Colombian communities and members and leaders of  
labor unions were also a key source of concern.<sup>32</sup>

Although the rate of homicides in Colombia  
declined after 2012 from 35.68 to 25.4 homicides per  
100,000 inhabitants in 2019 and has held steady since  
the signing of the peace accord in 2016,<sup>33</sup> violence in  
certain areas of the country and against certain cat-  
egories, such as former guerrillas and human rights  
leaders, has increased. From 2013 to 2020, violence  
affected rural areas more than urban ones, as a result  
of limited state presence and precarious economic  
conditions, which made it easier for criminal groups  
to gain control over the local illicit economies.<sup>34</sup>  
After the FARC demobilized, other nonstate armed  
groups, such as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional  
(the National Liberation Army) and other criminal  
groups, moved into the areas cleared of FARC pres-  
ence and took over control of coca cultivation.<sup>35</sup>  
These groups continued the forced displacement  
of local populations and began to systematically  
threaten and kill demobilized FARC combatants,  
human rights defenders,<sup>36</sup> and community or social  
leaders, whom the Colombian government commit-  
ted to defend in chapter 2 of the 2016 peace accord.<sup>37</sup>  
In 2019, Colombia was the deadliest country for  
human rights defenders, with 106 killings.<sup>38</sup>

If not addressed, the high violence in rural com-  
munities will undoubtedly limit the ability to con-  
duct counternarcotics and development programs  
in these areas. This will negatively affect the govern-  
ment’s capacity to meet its obligations under the  
peace accord. The result will be continued concerns  
about unmet expectations in rural communities, and  
a longer-term effect will be a loss of trust and confi-  
dence in the government.

## Development

Alternative development and other economic incentive efforts were included in the counternarcotics approaches, yet many of these were limited in scope, were implemented in a serial fashion, and came with preconditions (e.g., eradication was required before developmental assistance could begin). The effort to extend alternative development to communities was problematic because doing so required security to protect local communities, build community support, and ensure that licit economic development activity would not be disrupted by criminal actors or insurgent groups.

From 2000 to 2012, alternative development was the least developed of the four lines of effort. Alternative development programs were mainly directed toward western parts of Colombia that had better infrastructure, stronger security, and more state presence. However, this approach was counterproductive because it excluded those areas of eastern Colombia that had a strong guerrilla presence and were most in need of such programs.

Lack of adequate funding and the “zero-coca” policy that President Álvaro Uribe Velez set in place also proved challenging for development efforts.<sup>39</sup> Inadequate funding prevented building the infrastructure and institutions that would have supported the farmers’ ability to transition away from coca to cultivation of licit crops. Under zero coca, aid was denied to entire communities if even one farmer in the community continued to cultivate coca.<sup>40</sup> The violence that nonstate actors involved in the drug trade threatened and carried out against subsistence farmers and their families to force them to continue cultivating coca also eroded the appeal of alternative development programs.<sup>41</sup>

During the period of negotiations and implementation of the peace process with the FARC, alternative development initiatives once again became a component of the government’s peace strategy with the FARC. Chapter 4 of the 2016 peace accord created the Plan Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos, or the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops. This plan offered the families participating in the program the financial incentive “to trade in their illicit crops for legal alternatives,

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Many alternative development and other economic incentive efforts included in the counternarcotics approaches were limited in scope, were implemented in a serial fashion, and came with preconditions.

like cacao and coffee.”<sup>42</sup> This created the perverse incentive to grow coca to later gain reimbursement for its eradication. The result was historically high coca growth beginning in 2016.

However, the implementation of chapter 4 of the peace accord has been problematic, especially under the current administration of Colombian President Iván Duque Márquez. On the one hand, the administration did not honor the Colombian government’s financial commitments to compensate individual families’ economic losses from ending their support to the cocaine-producing operations. On the other hand, it failed to provide security to communities involved in the program, leaving at risk not only individual families but also leaders of the communities participating in the program. Between the 2016 signing of the peace accord and July 2019, 58 community leaders from the Plan Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos were killed in the context of drug trafficking groups putting pressure on communities to give up crop substitution.<sup>43</sup>

The current administration was considering restarting aerial eradication as a result of the rising growth of coca. To this end, the government obtained a 2019 Constitutional Court ruling, which opened

a legal path to overturn the 2015 legal ruling and restart aerial spraying.

## Conclusions on the Effectiveness of Colombia-U.S. Efforts from 2000 to 2020

Plan Colombia largely achieved its counterinsurgency goals and demonstrated that coca cultivation and trafficking could be greatly reduced using forced-eradication techniques; however, the broader issues—such as building licit economies, extending institutions and infrastructure, and promoting societal well-being—need to be addressed, particularly in rural areas. In short, aggressive eradication and interdiction campaigns alone do not address the root causes that contribute to illegal activity, including coca growing. A more comprehensive approach requires closely coordinating the counternarcotics and development programs and activities.

Prioritizing eradication and interdiction at the expense of citizen security and alternative development was never likely to yield long-term, sustainable gains. In the early days of Plan Colombia, this prioritization was necessary to support the more immediate goals: reduce coca cultivation, weaken the FARC, and bring the insurgency to an end. However, in the long run, both counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts are more likely to be successful and sustainable if the four lines of effort—eradication, interdiction, security and rule of law, and development—are designed to complement and support one another. The limits of prioritizing eradi-

cation and interdiction over security and rule of law and development are especially noticeable in rural communities, where the root causes of coca cultivation and cocaine trafficking are most directly felt and must be most directly addressed.

## Looking to the Future of U.S. Support to Colombian Counternarcotics and Development Efforts

Opportunities exist for making progress in the counternarcotics and rural development collaboration between Colombia and the United States. We assess that particular emphasis should be placed on extending successful national-level programs to rural communities. Whole-of-government approaches will be essential for addressing the broad needs of communities as they work to ensure security, build institutions, rid themselves of criminal activity (such as illegal mining, coca cultivation, and cocaine processing), and develop vibrant licit economies. The goals and objectives for these efforts are largely contained directly within the peace accord.

Although reducing coca cultivation and continuing interdictions are important to reduce supply, future efforts should prioritize key peace accord rural development and institution-building activities. Such support would have the effect of permanently easing households out of the cocaine trade and building more-resilient societies.

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Both counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts are more likely to be successful and sustainable if the four lines of effort—eradication, interdiction, security and rule of law, and development—are designed to complement and support one another.

Our overall recommendations are as follows:

- The United States should continue to support the Colombian government's counternarcotics and development efforts.
- Whole-of-government approaches need to be implemented that include all stakeholders and build whole-of-society solutions from the national level to the PDET level.
- Although reducing coca cultivation and continuing interdiction should remain key outcomes, future efforts should prioritize key peace accord outcomes, including rural policing, security, and law enforcement; infrastructure development; and health and education.
- New measures and metrics should be developed for more fully assessing the broad nature of assisting Colombia in accomplishing the goals of the peace accord.
- Data collection needs to be improved to ensure that inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes are accurately measured and can assist in guiding policy decisions.

Our specific findings and observations begin with the development of a comprehensive campaign plan that aligns the ends, ways, and means to achieve broad, coordinated counternarcotics and development efforts focused on the rural areas. The overall goal should be to remove communities from the cocaine trade through the coordinated application of the four lines of effort. The campaign plan should be based on factual information and use high-quality decision-analysis tools. PDETs should be prioritized to ensure that resources are allocated most effectively and efficiently to achieve the overarching goals of the Colombian-U.S. collaboration.

To accomplish this, we have recommended use of a logic model to better relate inputs, activities (processes), outputs, and outcomes. This would ensure a strategy-to-resources alignment that prioritizes the allocation of resources based on the goals and objectives of the campaign plan.

This campaign plan approach should also address the strategic-, operational-, and rural-level issues simultaneously. Such a campaign plan must be supported with situational awareness capabilities and multipliers that contribute to the success of the over-

all effort. In this case, the concept of the overall effort must be broadened from Colombia counternarcotics operations to a whole-of-government push to address the root causes of the cocaine trade.

These coordinated efforts must come from the perspective that the cocaine trade is not a choice for the farmer but an economic imperative. Therefore, to address one of the causes of the cocaine trade, economic alternatives and security must be established that allow farmers to meet or exceed whatever revenue they could gain from the growing of illicit coca. In addition, the new approaches that are incorporated should lead to societal as well as individual family benefits. These include access to education, health care, and basic services.

Several important elements have been identified across five areas: strategic approaches, operational changes, rural implementation, development of greater situational awareness to fill knowledge gaps, and facilitation of the counternarcotics and development efforts. These elements are intended to provide a basis for synchronizing the efforts within a campaign plan structure.

Our logic for the necessary changes in these five areas is as follows:

- **Strategic approaches** that have guided Colombian and U.S. efforts over the past 20 years should be reconsidered and adapted to reflect the changes in the cocaine trade and the implementation of the peace accord.
- **Operational changes** should be considered that create a greater linkage between the strategic approaches and the rural implementation of the peace accord.
- **Rural implementation** should be a primary consideration when making efforts to counter cocaine, protecting the environment, carrying out the peace accord, building institutions in the long term, and developing infrastructure in local communities.
- **Situational awareness** remains imperative for prioritizing efforts, understanding the cocaine-trade flows, making informed decisions, and developing policies and programs to address the cocaine trade and implement the peace accord.

- **Facilitating and synchronizing these efforts** requires developing new analytical approaches and targeted resource commitments.

Across each of these five areas, the elements should be synchronized. This ensures coherence in execution of the campaign plan. For example, within strategic approaches that one would expect at the national level, there will be a need for continued U.S. support and whole-of-government solutions. Furthermore, the center of gravity should transition from the national to the local level, goals and objectives should be realigned, and a reassessment of measures and metrics should be undertaken. Equally important in synchronizing efforts is that more, rather than less, support likely will be required in the near term.

Another, more subtle approach to synchronization is that logical linkages should be developed between the five areas. Figure 2 provides an instruc-

tive view for understanding how these horizontal and vertical linkages are essential to the execution of a future campaign plan. For example, the changing center of gravity described under “strategic approaches” in the figure implies that changes should be implemented at the operational level, including creating incentives at the lower levels that align with national goals and objectives and developing analytical bases for prioritizing PDETs and related programs. In turn, these operational changes imply rural implementation changes, such as national-level resources directly supporting PDET-prioritized efforts, ensuring security in local communities, having local leaders and communities assume responsibility for outcomes, and building trust in rural communities through early and sustained progress.

Situational awareness and synchronizing efforts become essential enablers in a defined campaign

FIGURE 2  
Cross-Walking the Five Areas

<p><b>Strategic approaches</b> should be reconsidered to reflect the changes in the cocaine trade and the implementation of the peace accord</p>	<p><b>Operational changes</b> should create a greater linkage between the strategic approaches and the rural peace accord implementation</p>	<p><b>Rural implementation</b> should become the focus of counter-cocaine trade and development efforts</p>	<p><b>Situational awareness</b> is key for prioritizing efforts, making decisions, and developing policies and programs</p>	<p><b>Synchronizing efforts</b> requires developing new analytical approaches and resource commitments</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue U.S. support</li> <li>2. Take whole-of-government approach with long-term time horizons and targeted support from the U.S. government</li> <li>3. Transition center of gravity from the national to the community level</li> <li>4. Realign goals and objectives</li> <li>5. Reassess measures and metrics</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take rural bottom-up approach with a focus on good governance and institutions</li> <li>2. Create incentives that align the goals of counternarcotics and development efforts</li> <li>3. Employ parallel versus sequential approaches across lines of effort</li> <li>4. Develop analytical bases for prioritizing PDETs and programs</li> <li>5. Continue support to Colombia’s interdiction efforts</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support PDET efforts and security</li> <li>2. Assume responsibility (communities and leaders)</li> <li>3. Build trust in rural communities with early and sustained progress</li> <li>4. Develop cooperative eradication as a basis for long-term success</li> <li>5. Immediately address the growing violence in local communities</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Address the issue of the absence of quality data</li> <li>2. Follow the financial trail</li> <li>3. Better understand the changing nature of the cocaine trade to develop strategies and programs</li> <li>4. Address the issue of corruption at ports, which is a vulnerability</li> <li>5. Prioritize technology for improving situational awareness and decisionmaking</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employ logic models (such as iResults)</li> <li>2. Extend supply chains from rural areas to markets</li> <li>3. Align U.S. government efforts (e.g., U.S. Department of State, interagency) with more-coherent policies</li> <li>4. Prioritize PDETs to target those with the greatest need and chance of success</li> <li>5. Be aware that a greater expenditure of resources is likely in the near term</li> </ol>

plan. This cross-walking vertically and horizontally should be more than a onetime effort. The elements should be periodically assessed and the campaign plan aligned as necessary as facts on the ground change.

The use of a campaign plan helps synchronize each of the lines of effort as well. In a sense, the progress of each line of effort—in our case, eradication, interdiction, rule of law and security, and development—must proceed in a coordinated manner, at a pace the society can absorb, and in a way that builds the morale and institutions of the local communities. As we have seen in other counterinsurgency, counternarcotics, and institution-building historical antecedents, establishing security and a state presence early in the process should be considered a precondition for implementing a campaign plan.

An essential element of this campaign plan would entail shifting decisionmaking and implementation to the rural or PDET level. Programs and activities should continue to be centrally resourced at the national level, but the implementation and management of resources, along with the obligations to adhere to the peace accord, should transition to rural leaders and other community stakeholders. This

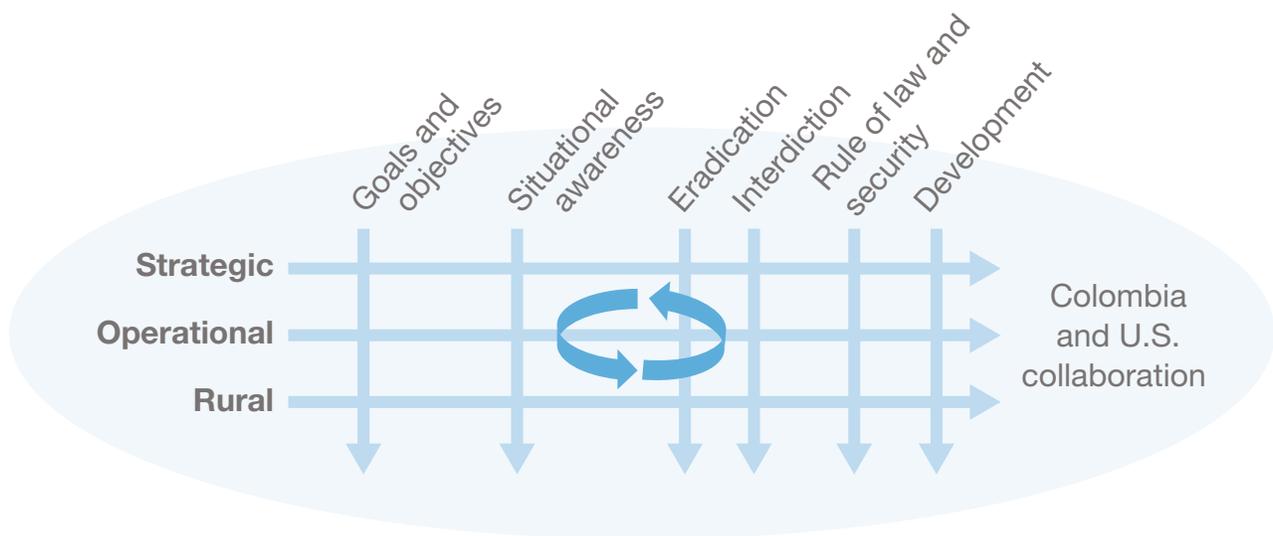
means that rural leaders would have the responsibility of ensuring coca eradication within their communities. The shift implies that the decisions for what PDETs and initiatives are implemented would reside with community leaders and would be highly tailored to the communities where these programs and initiatives would be implemented.

An overview of the campaign plan that we developed is provided in Figure 3. The vertical axis contains the strategic, operational, and rural levels. Along the horizontal axis are the goals and objectives, situational awareness, and the four lines of effort.

Displaying the campaign plan in this format provides an important conceptual depiction highlighting the need for synchronization across the different geographic areas and across the programs that are implemented. The four lines of effort contain individual programs and activities that will also need to be coordinated in time, space, and purpose. In other words, all planning elements should be coordinated to allow for maximum synchronization of the lines of effort as they are being implemented at the national, regional, and PDET levels.

We have also identified several campaign plan imperatives that could be incorporated going for-

FIGURE 3  
Campaign Plan Structure



ward. Certainly, others could be added, but the following list provides a reasonable starting point:

- Campaign planning requires balancing ends, ways, and means to ensure a strategy-to-resources approach.
- The Colombian and U.S. governments should select PDETs to be prioritized to ensure the best allocation of resources. Potential criteria for prioritization include amount of coca grown, current infrastructure capacity, willingness to implement land formalization, receptiveness of the rural government, individual and household predictors, and geography and microclimates.
- Each PDET is likely to have different priorities, goals, and objectives that need to be factored into specific PDET programs.
- Wherever possible, voluntary eradication should be implemented with full support from rural government leaders and the populace.
- Support to PDETs for security, rule of law, and development of local interdiction capabilities should become a high priority in the individual plans for each PDET.
- The metrics and measures associated with assessing outcomes should be revised to reflect the new balance between counternarcotics and development programs.
- Efforts must be made to ensure high-quality data for situational awareness of the changing cocaine trade and for making decisions on resource allocation and prioritization of programs and activities.
- A logic model approach could be beneficial for assessing the long-term benefits of the campaign plan. This would allow for making a logical linkage between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

For the campaign plan implementation, the use of incentives should be considered to build community buy-in and ensure that goals and objectives are being met. For example, for the development section of the campaign plan, such initiatives as land titling and infrastructure development, including building and extending tertiary roads that are essential for transitioning to a licit economy, would be imple-

mented early in the process, while such development activities as building new health clinics and schools could be sequenced later in the plan. In this way, we would expect that cooperative clearing of the coca fields could serve as a good-faith demonstration (perhaps a quid pro quo) for progressing to the longer-term building of institutions.

Over time, the campaign plan could be adjusted to take advantage of immediate opportunities or respond to potential challenges that arise. The current coronavirus disease crisis presents an opportunity to rapidly extend limited health care services to local communities. As vaccines become available, national-level programs to extend vaccine availability to remote local communities should be undertaken. Engaging with the community would also provide an opportunity for national-level health organizations to play a positive role in supporting PDET health initiatives. Through such means, trust can begin to be built that will be necessary for implementing the campaign plan within each PDET.

## Concluding Thoughts

History has demonstrated that counternarcotics and counterinsurgency activities require staying power to be successful. Where such approaches have been fleeting, they have largely not been effective in the long term. Success requires the state to address structural factors, such as citizen security, the building of security institutions, and societal well-being. Without a robust state presence, criminal activity, including coca cultivation, is likely to continue.

The conditions are ripe in Colombia—if Colombia has the United States as a strong partner, appropriate resources, and a long-term horizon—for these counternarcotics and development programs to achieve successful outcomes. However, these outcomes are not assured and will require remaining keenly focused on winning the peace.

The next several years, with the Colombian presidential election in 2022 and growing concerns about implementation at the rural level, are likely to determine how the peace implementation will proceed, what outcomes will be achieved, and whether the expectations of rural communities will be met. Here,

the United States has a potentially productive role to play in assisting the Colombian national government in remaining firm and supporting local counter-narcotics and development programs and initiatives.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We do not evaluate demand-reduction efforts in the United States or how they interact with supply. This issue is beyond the scope of this study, although demand is an equally important dimension that can affect supply.

<sup>2</sup> This report provides an overview of U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Colombia from 2000 to 2020; the study is described in greater detail in Daniel M. Gerstein, Bryce Pardo, Aaron C. Davenport, and Irina A. Chindea, *Examining U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia: Looking to the Future of Colombia-U.S. Collaboration*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2021, Not available to the general public.

<sup>3</sup> Connie Veillette, *Plan Colombia: A Progress Report*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL32774, June 22, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, *2019 Drug Enforcement Administration National Drug Threat Assessment*, Springfield, Va., DEA-DCT-DIR-007-20, December 2019, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> The U.S.-Colombian counternarcotics strategy published on October 25, 2021, did not reaffirm this goal (White House, “The White House Releases Details of the New, Holistic U.S.-Colombia Counternarcotics Strategy,” press release, October 25, 2021b).

<sup>6</sup> GAO, *U.S. Counternarcotics Assistance Achieved Some Positive Results, but State Needs to Review the Overall U.S. Approach*, Washington, D.C., GAO-19-106, December 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Miroff, “American Cocaine Use Is Way Up. Colombia’s Coca Boom Might Be Why,” *Washington Post*, March 4, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> On October 25, 2021, the White House released details of a “new, holistic U.S.-Colombia counternarcotics strategy” that addresses the misalignment. The new strategy “broadens focus to include specific actions on rural security and development, environmental protection, and supply reduction” (White House, 2021b).

<sup>9</sup> [Name redacted], *Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) and Related Funding Programs: FY2005 Assistance*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL32337, May 11, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan D. Rosen, *The Losing War: Plan Colombia and Beyond*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2014, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops, and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 83–84; and International Crisis Group, *Deeply Rooted: Coca Eradication and Violence in Colombia*, Brussels, Belgium, Latin America Report No. 87, February 26, 2021, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Daniel Mejía cited in Rosen, 2014, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume I, Drug and Chemical Control*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, March 2017, p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> William Neuman, “Defying U.S., Colombia Halts Aerial Spraying of Crops Used to Make Cocaine,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2017, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Pedro Arenas and Ricardo Vargas, “Forced Eradication of Crops for Illicit Use and Human Rights,” Transnational Institute, July 20, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> White House, “UPDATED: ONDCP Releases Data on Coca Cultivation and Potential Cocaine Production in the Andean Region,” press release, July 16, 2021a.

<sup>18</sup> Luis Jaime Acosta and Oliver Griffin, “Colombia Cut Coca Crop Area in 2020 but Cocaine Output Rose - UNODC,” Reuters, June 9, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Andres Angel, *Rethinking the Balanced Approach to Cocaine Supply Reduction in Colombia: A Policy Alternative to Meet the Goals of the U.S. War on Drugs*, Washington, D.C.: McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University, MPPL-780, December 10, 2020; and Nicholas R. Magliocca, Kendra McSweeney, Steven E. Sesnie, Elizabeth Tellman, Jennifer A. Devine, Erik A. Nielsen, Zoe Pearson, and David J. Wrathall, “Modeling Cocaine Traffickers and Counterdrug Interdiction Forces as a Complex Adaptive System,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 116, No. 16, April 16, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Rosen, 2014, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> Luis Jaime Acosta, “FARC Rebels Involved in Drug Trade Despite Peace Talks: Police,” Reuters, April 12, 2016; and Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Narco-Belligerents Across the Globe: Lessons from Colombia for Afghanistan?” working paper, Madrid, Spain: Real Instituto Elcano, October 2009, pp. 15, 20.

<sup>22</sup> June S. Beittel and Liana W. Rosen, *Colombia’s Changing Approach to Drug Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, November 30, 2017, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Senate, *Assessing the Colombia Peace Process: The Way Forward in U.S.-Colombia Relations: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women’s Issues of the Committee on Foreign Relations*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> William R. Brownfield, “Assessing the Colombia Peace Process: The Way Forward in U.S.-Colombia Relations,” testimony presented before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women’s Issues, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, August 2, 2017, p. 3. See also Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Detoxifying Colombia’s Drug Policy: Colombia’s Counternarcotics Options and Their Impact on Peace and State Building*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, January 2020.

- <sup>25</sup> Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2017, p. 135.
- <sup>26</sup> Beittel and Rosen, 2017.
- <sup>27</sup> Felbab-Brown, 2020.
- <sup>28</sup> Several people we interviewed said that intelligence-driven riverine operations to interdict cocaine-related products had been successful and should be continued.
- <sup>29</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Drug Smuggling: Large Amounts of Illegal Drugs Not Seized by Federal Authorities*, Washington, D.C., GAO/GGD-87-91, June 1987, p. 3.
- <sup>30</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, *Reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy: Hearings Before the Legislation and National Security Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Third Congress, First Session, October 5 and 14, 1993*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995.
- <sup>31</sup> Staff, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, “Hearing on ‘Western Hemisphere Drug Interdictions: Why Maintaining Coast Guard Operations Matter,’” memorandum to Members, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, Washington, D.C.: Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, U.S. House of Representatives, May 30, 2019. The estimate in this document is percentage of known maritime and air movements interdicted in 2018 conducted by the United States and partner nations that are tracked by the Joint Interagency Task Force South.
- <sup>32</sup> Rosen, 2014, pp. 70–71.
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- <sup>41</sup> Rosen, 2014, pp. 37–39.
- <sup>42</sup> Claire Dennis, “Colombia’s New Crop Substitution Plan Facing Old Obstacles: Report,” *InSight Crime*, July 13, 2017.

- <sup>43</sup> Gabrielle Gorder, “Uncertainty Surrounds Protection Plan for Colombia’s Crop Substitution Leaders,” *InSight Crime*, July 24, 2019.

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## About This Report

This report provides an overview of U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Colombia from 2000 to 2020, with the overarching goal of informing U.S. government decisionmaking and collaborative efforts going forward.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) was tasked by Congress to review U.S. counternarcotics and security efforts in Colombia over the past two decades. GAO made two recommendations to the U.S. Department of State: (1) evaluate the effectiveness of eradication and interdiction in reducing the cocaine supply in Colombia and (2) undertake a review of the U.S. counternarcotics approach in Colombia that considers the relative benefits and limitations of eradication, interdiction, and alternative development efforts. This report helps follow through on these recommendations.

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