Combating Coca in Colombia and Bolivia: A Critique of U.S. Drug Eradication Policies in the Andes

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Since the mid-1980s, Bolivia and Colombia have shared the dubious honor as principal suppliers of coca, the raw ingredient for cocaine. The forces that have led each country to dominate the coca market include underdevelopment, poverty, lack of economic opportunity, and weak government. In determining the most appropriate course of action in Colombia today, this paper applies the lessons from the recent failure of coca eradication efforts in Bolivia. The paper explores the ultimate economic factors that increase susceptibility to the drug industry, identifies the weaknesses of current policies, and suggests a new framework for future policies.

Since the mid-1980s Bolivia and Colombia have shared the dubious honor as principal suppliers of the raw ingredient for the world cocaine market. While both countries have earned this ignominious distinction at separate times over the last two decades, the forces that have led to such market dominance for each country have been nearly identical. Underdevelopment, poverty, lack of economic opportunity, weak governments, and remote, marginalized regions where little else can be grown have plagued both countries. The existence of these conditions has fostered incentives for widespread coca production. To be successful in the long-term, drug eradication policies must directly address these economic realities as part of the strategy to achieve sustainable coca-free regions in Colombia and Bolivia.

Though the literature on supply-side drug policy falls almost exclusively into

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two polarized camps, it is critical to locate some middle ground in the larger debate. On one hand, U.S. and Colombian government agencies argue that punitive drug crop eradication measures will diminish cocaine output and ultimately reduce U.S. cocaine consumption. Meanwhile, Andean and U.S. human rights and environmental groups counter that the demand-driven nature of the narcotics industry renders supply-side eradication efforts futile. In fact, some validity can be found in both arguments. Given that the stable U.S. demand for drugs fuels the Latin American market, demand-side prevention and treatment programs should comprise the foundation for the U.S. domestic counter-drug strategy. At the same time, the coca industry in Latin America perpetuates economic and geographic marginalization for growers and poses larger threats to the stability and security of the hemisphere. Ultimately, the implementation of sustainable alternative development programs should be considered an integral component to furthering hemispheric development and security agendas and to promoting a U.S. anti-drug campaign that encompasses demand, supply, and interdiction.

As the world's leading cocaine producer and the hemisphere's most violent state, Colombia has long been a focal point in the U.S. drug war. Since September 11, 2001, however, the co-existence of both narco-traffickers and local terrorist insurgencies in Colombia has given U.S. policy toward Colombia greater salience and complexity. The Bolivian case of drug eradication will be used as an historical example against which to evaluate the current and more geo-politically significant case of Colombia. By extracting the lessons from the recent failure of Bolivian coca eradication efforts, this analysis seeks to determine the proximate factors that have challenged alternative development efforts and the ultimate economic factors that make workers in both countries susceptible to the drug industry. Finally, a critique of the current policy in Colombia and recommendations for a modified approach will be offered.

I. The Dubious Success of Bolivian Coca Eradication Efforts

Once considered a major producer of coca leaves, with one-quarter of the world market share of cocaine in 1997,[1] Bolivia proudly declared its victory over coca in 2001. At that time, the U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia Manuel Rocha declared, "Bolivia has done in the past two to three years what no other country has done in the drug war in Latin America. This is the success story."[2] Ironically, as success was heralded and the U.S. War on Drugs focused exclusively on Colombia, widespread violent protests against coca eradication began to threaten political stability in Bolivia. In May 2002, coca union leader, Evo Morales, nearly won the presidency on the platform of returning coca cultivation and expelling the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) from Bolivia. An evaluation of the Bolivian eradication and alternative development programs reveals that the supply reduction imperative may have been, in fact, fundamentally at odds with long-term political stability and, ironically, with the maintenance of coca-free regions in South America.

The advent of U.S.-sponsored coca eradication programs during the 1980s resulted in no discernable reduction in output. In fact, during the Paz Zamora administration (1989-1993), net coca yield increased by 312 hectares.[3] The ineffectiveness of eradication policies may be attributed to the Bolivian government's vacillation between marginal compliance and poor enforcement.[4] Furthermore, unlike later eradication programs, early U.S.-sponsored efforts were voluntary, had limited mechanisms for accountability, and yielded predictably poor results. Wedged between U.S. threats to cut funding and Bolivian peasant protests, the Bolivian government chose a wavering strategy that failed to appease either constituency and further escalated tensions.

To the surprise of many, President Hugo Banzer (1997-2001), former dictator of Bolivia (1971-1974), chose a hard line against the *cocaleros* (coca growers), initiating *Plan Dignidad* (Plan Dignity) in 1998. Lauded by the United States for its ambitious goal of total coca elimination by 2002, Banzer's five-year plan emphasized coca eradication, alternative development, prevention, rehabilitation, and interdiction with international cooperation. Executed by a joint U.S.-Bolivian military task force, eradication efforts yielded quick results in the main coca-growing region of the Chapare, a tropical lowland department in central Bolivia, largely due to the dense concentration of coca cultivation.

Alternative development efforts, however, appeared to lag far behind. According to *Plan Dignidad*, alternative development monies were to be distributed communally. However, according to the Washington Office on Latin America, inefficient and corrupt local bureaucracies hindered the distribution of funds.[5] Even when alternative development programs provided peasants with seeds and technology, replacement crops took too long to harvest, leaving peasants who had already destroyed their coca leaves with little means of subsistence. In response to unfulfilled promises of subsistence alternatives, many former coca growers defied U.S. Agency for International Development agreements and replanted coca. Some dissociated themselves from the alternative growers unions implemented by the aid agencies. By 2001, *cocalero* unions had begun to replace licit crop unions, and peasants actively defied authorities' eradication imperatives.

Myriad obstacles to viable alternatives emerged, increasing the peasant farmers' frustration and anger. By September 2000, tensions boiled over at U.S. plans to erect three military installations in the Chapare from which to base coca eradication efforts. Amidst construction, thousands of peasants effectively blocked the PanAmerican highway for one month, calling for an end to forced eradication. The Banzer administration conceded, fearing that a violent conflict might destabilize Bolivia's fragile democracy.

In September 2001, the *cocaleros*' escalating resolve culminated in more brazen acts of protest and continued violent clashes with authorities. At the end of

2001, Ambassador Rocha indicated his concern regarding concessions made to protestors and suggested that funds for 2002 would be withheld unless Bolivian authorities immediately ceased their dialogue with the *cocaleros* and stringently enforced eradication. According to human rights groups, this crack-down in late 2001 prompted security authorities to increase their use of force and coercion, killing ten *cocaleros* and injuring or detaining more than 350.[6] In March 2002, five members of the U.S. Congress urged their government to suspend funding to Bolivia until military abuse allegations could be investigated.

Hailing the success of *Plan Dignidad* for its first four years, the 2002 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report criticizes President Quiroga (successor to Banzer, who resigned due to cancer in August 2001) for yielding to pressure from *cocaleros*.[7] Many speculate, however, that Quiroga's fears over the escalation of violence in an election year led to his acquiescence in enforcing coca eradication. As *Plan Dignidad* increased its rapid-fire eradication and alternative development fell further behind, *cocalero* unions endorsed the candidacy of Evo Morales, coca union leader, to succeed Quiroga as president. Though a runner-up in the May elections, Morales' ability to mobilize such a large support base around the coca eradication issue speaks to the growing level of frustration, anger, and desperation among *cocaleros.*

While Banzer's *Plan Dignidad* succeeded in rapidly eliminating most of Bolivia's 45,000 hectares[8] in less than five years, success proved both dubious and costly. Civil unrest threatens Bolivia's fragile democracy today, while rampant anti-government and anti-U.S. sentiment poses concerns about national security. Critical to understanding these policies is an examination of the incentive structures and economic context in which peasants grow coca. Furthermore, recognizing the commonalities between Bolivian eradication policies of the recent past and those still underway in Colombia will foster greater understanding of what the future holds for Colombia, a nation that poses an even greater challenge in the U.S. drug war.

II. How the Bolivian Experience Informs Our Understanding of Colombia Today

The rapid pace of eradication in the absence of a corresponding level of alternative development played a central role in fomenting Bolivia's current political and social unrest. Not only has *Plan Dignidad* eroded the tenuous relationship between peasant growers and the state, but the resurgence of coca cultivation in the last year in Bolivia also renders eradication success short-lived.[9] In applying lessons from this failed experience to Colombia's tough new eradication plan, two questions emerge: Why was coca eradication successful only in the short-term, and why did this policy spawn unprecedented violent popular protests?

That today's violence in Bolivia has no historical precedent and still poses a threat to political and social stability is worrisome enough. Colombia, however, has been heavily strained by its forty-year civil conflict and bloody battles against drug cartels, rendering it more complex and geo-politically significant than the Bolivian case. Given Colombia's tradition of violence, the need to implement long-term policies that insure a decent subsistence for peasants becomes even more critical. While the United States contributed to *Plan Dignidad*, the economic stakes are even higher for U.S. taxpayers who have committed $2 billion through Plan Colombia and the Andean Counterdrug Initiative. How Colombia emerges from its front in the War on Drugs will have far more drastic consequences for Andean regional stability and even for U.S. national security.

Problems with the Supply Reduction Imperative

The tendency of Andean and U.S. drug policies to set overly ambitious time frames, seemingly dictated by larger political considerations, may be counter-productive in achieving eradication objectives. Banzer's *Plan Dignidad*, for example, put forth a supply reduction imperative of 38,000 hectares to be eradicated in less than five years. Modeled after the initial success in Bolivia, Plan Colombia articulated a similarly ambitious five-year time frame for halving Colombian coca cultivation. Yet, the Bolivian experience of rapid-fire eradication demonstrates the potential long-term strategic dangers generated by short-term tactical practices, especially when alternative development options are not given the same consideration.

If it were feasible to implement alternative crop development in six months to a year, reach the entire population of coca growers, and if requisite infrastructure and markets existed, then Banzer's success would probably have been longer lived. None of these conditions existed in Bolivia, however; nor are they present today in Colombia. Banzer's politically-driven motivation to quickly improve Bolivia's international image from that as a major coca producer was fundamentally at odds with the realities of long-term sustained economic opportunity for citizens.

Development alternatives lagged behind eradication in large part due to formidable ecological obstacles. While the perennial coca crop can be harvested three to four times a year in subtropical regions with limited labor hours or advanced technology, substitute crops like pineapples or passion fruit take two and eight years, respectively, to yield fruit. Furthermore, the majority of coca produced originates in the jungle regions of the Chapare and Yungus departments in Bolivia and in the Guaviare, Putumayo and Caqueta departments in Colombia, where thin soil makes for labor-intensive and uncertain harvests.

One U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) project in the Chapare attempted to substitute pineapples for coca. Yet, even when enough seeds were provided, many farmers lacked sufficient skills to cultivate them. Like many coca growers, Silverio Mamani, age 35, received 6,000 pineapple plants in 1998 but without any technical support, only half of the pineapples produced fruit, the majority of which were small, misshapen and could only be sold for a few cents each.[10]

Efforts at crop substitution must address the difficult reality that every known alternative to coca requires more time, labor-hours and technical expertise. USAID-sponsored projects in Putumayo, Colombia, a region similarly plagued with poor soil conditions as the Chapare, have tried substituting heart of palm and rubber, though similar timing-related obstacles emerged.[11] Over time and with technical assistance, some licit crops may prove viable alternatives to coca, but only as these daunting ecological challenges are examined and overcome.

In the meantime, many farmers have been left without any means of subsistence. This crisis of timing results in rising malnutrition levels and lower caloric intakes among affected populations.[12] In fact, the General Accounting Office (GAO) acknowledged in 2001 that the "rapid pace of the Bolivian government's eradication campaign has created gaps between eradication and alternative development assistance that can leave peasant farmers without livelihoods."[13] Calls from peasants for USAID to permit them to diversify their crops with small amounts of coca fell on deaf ears. Written into USAID assistance protocol was the premise that farmers destroy their coca crops prior to receiving any aid.[14]

Even when peasants were able to wait several years for licit crop yields, few markets existed for their products. Remoteness and limited roads in coca-growing regions mean high transport costs and distant markets on which to sell legal agricultural products. Bearing in mind the requisite tropical climate necessary for coca production, it is critical to acknowledge the impact and conditions of geographical seclusion as impediments to short-term alternative development approaches. World Bank data from 2000 indicates that only 7 percent of all Bolivian and 14 percent of all Colombian roads are paved, the majority of which connect cities to one another but do not extend to remote areas.[15]

While the coca growing regions of the Chapare in Bolivia tend to be four to six hours from regional markets, the coca-growing areas of Colombia are even less accessible. All three main coca-growing departments of Putumayo, Caqueta, and Guaviare reside deep in the Amazonian jungle, where, in extreme cases, villages are several days from the nearest regional market. Isolation from basic transportation and infrastructure capabilities translates into extensive time and high cost in delivering goods to distant markets. In some regions of Colombia, transporting licit agricultural products to far away population centers amounts to 80 percent of the price of the crop, a prohibitive markup.[16]

Coupled with inadequate means of transporting agricultural goods to markets, the price volatility of licit agricultural products also generates unpredictable returns. Since the overwhelming demand for cocaine in the United States has reached a plateau and eradication and interdiction efforts have failed to affect prices in the long run, the market for coca has remained relatively stable and consistent. By contrast, alternative crops like coffee, Colombia's chief licit agricultural export, have grown increasingly volatile. A 15 percent rise in international coffee output with no corresponding increase in consumption has driven international coffee prices to their lowest point in 30 years.[17] This oversupply has reduced Colombian coffee revenue by 50 percent since 1992. Plummeting profits have contributed to the exodus of thousands of farmers from coffee plantations to regions with more stable economic potential. Furthermore, high U.S. import tariffs on agricultural products, designed to protect U.S. farmers, often make nearby U.S. markets unpalatable locales in which to sell licit crops.

The obstacles farmers face when trying to access distant markets are the same ones that make infrastructure development in rural areas extremely slow. USAID-sponsored construction of a 40-mile paved road connecting parts of the Chapare to a regional market in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, as well as expanding the Santa Cruz airport, significantly improved access to markets over time.[18] These and other infrastructure projects funded by USAID and the World Bank have helped gradually integrate remote areas, facilitating transportation to markets and communication to coordinate sales. Yet, these endeavors are by nature, long-term, and thus offer no panacea for the short run.

The Ultimate Factors Driving Coca Cultivation

While the relative ease of growing coca is an important factor to consider, broader economic conditions have played a pivotal role in setting the stage for human migration into coca-growing regions. The fact that neither coca, nor its producers are, in fact, indigenous to the chief coca-growing regions of Colombia and Bolivia indicates that conditions must have changed to stimulate this relatively new phenomenon.[19] Furthermore, the coca-growing regions of Colombia have not been static; the areas used to cultivate coca today are different from those of five years ago and will likely be different from those used in the future.[20] Human migration patterns have translated into dynamic expansion, contraction, and pioneering of new coca growing regions. Only when the ultimate factors that cause these shifts, such as national economic crises, massive unemployment, and decline in the viability of legitimate economic pursuits, are addressed can meaningful policy measures be implemented.

Though the traditional coca growing Yungas department in Western Bolivia has been settled for centuries, until 20 years ago the central region of the Chapare had consisted of small, isolated hamlets.. When hyperinflation reached 24,000 percent in 1985, President Paz Estenssoro (1952-64, 1985-89) implemented severe IMF-sponsored structural adjustment programs that resulted in mass migration.[21] The price of curbing rampant inflation in less than four years came in the form of massive layoffs, including that of 20,000 miners in 1985 due to the government's nationalization of the copper and tin industries.[22] Layoffs spawned massive migration from mining cities like Potosi to sparsely inhabited and remote lowlands of the Chapare, quadrupling the population of the Chapare after 1985.[23]

Just as in Bolivia, the majority of Colombian coca farmers represents the first or second generation in the business and has migrated to remote regions on the economic periphery because previous means of subsistence in neighboring areas had worsened. Despite a relative strong annual growth rate of 5 percent from 1945 to 1995 amidst civil war, the Latin American debt crisis of 1982 led to the curtailing of foreign capital upon which Colombia had previously been dependent. Average income dropped 36 percent during the 1980s, unemployment doubled between 1994 and 1998, and the world prices of Colombia's largest exports, oil and coffee, declined steadily since the 1980s.[24] In addition to urban migration movements, thousands of landless peasants who were historically subsistence laborers began to migrate to areas where large coca plantations offered steady work.

Unlike the Bolivian case, chronic civil war in Colombia and violent atrocities committed by left and right-wing groups displaced thousands of peasants and set a precedent for migration movements. Drugs became involved in this situation later, as insurgent groups battling the state and each other fostered ties with emerging cartels who owned about 90 percent of the international market share for cocaine by 1985.[25] Since the early 1990s, pressure on Peruvian and Bolivian coca leaf harvesters has escalated under the auspices of U.S.-funded anti-drug programs, and Colombian drug cartels discovered it was less risky to produce their own coca leaves in Colombia.

Though the rise of cartels and the organization of the drug trade did not cause migration to coca-growing regions, these groups were able to strategically capitalize on the unemployment effects of the 1980s financial crisis. Left- and right-wing insurgent groups like the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the AUC (National Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) became involved in taxing the lucrative drug trade as well. Today, about one-third of the country's rural areas are influenced or controlled by the FARC, AUC, and ELN (National Liberation Army).[26] These groups occupy regions where the Colombian state has effectively lost or abdicated its legal control, so the majority of Colombia's cocaine grown today is on large plantations run by absentee landlords or drug traffickers. Only about 17 percent of Colombian coca farmers operate on small family farms, while the remainder are cogs in large-scale operations, which usually entail chemically processing leaves into cocaine paste onsite.[27]

Critical to maintaining peasant cooperation has been these groups' ability to make house calls, giving peasants cash in exchange for coca leaves. In remote regions where transportation is slow, expensive, and limited, cartels and insurgent groups effectively transport this rare cash market to peasant growers. In Putumayo, the FARC have been known to provide coca seeds, tools and technical assistance to farmers—something which alternative development programs have struggled to achieve with licit crops.[28] In the absence of local banks or credit institutions, these groups offer loans and credit assistance. Of course, the illegality of growing coca and associating with insurgent groups also makes coca farming a risky venture, in large part because cultivators are often subject to high taxation and coercion by armed groups in rural areas where lawlessness is rampant.

Armed groups in Colombia capitalize on the desperation of landless peasants and at the same time, successfully address the daunting problems posed by remoteness. Despite their coercive behavior, rebel groups fulfill an important role in exchanging cash for coca, bringing a steady market to peasants and sometimes offering protection. Significantly, these services are similar to those that state-run alternative development plans have failed to provide. Thus, development proposals must find a way to compete with the package offered to peasants by armed groups and narco-traffickers.

*I*II. The Need for a Long-Term Approach to Supply Reduction in Colombia

Since nearly all of the U.S. cocaine supply originates in Colombia, it is tempting to believe that targeting coca supply will diminish output and ultimately minimize the deleterious impact of the cocaine trade on the United States. For Colombia, however, the advent of drug production and trafficking coincided with nation-wide economic downturns and massive unemployment. Therefore, an examination of the economic, social, and political context into which the drug industry emerged is integral to improving the situation. Focusing on drug supply, instead of its ultimate causal factors, will merely target the symptoms of a much more complex problem, rather than dealing with its origins. Furthermore, approaches that address supply in isolation, without comprehensive study as to the best means of ensuring alternative subsistence, result in an exacerbation of poverty and economic marginalization and intensified feelings of hostility toward a democratic state.

One valuable lesson gleaned from the Bolivian case is that domestic fragility and vulnerability can be exploited by the drug industry. Driven to supplement or replace economic activities that were threatened by government layoffs, declining world prices of agricultural products, or economic contraction, peasant coca farmers reside on the economic periphery of their societies. As a result, current drug policies that disrupt or eliminate peasants' means of subsistence may lead to popular unrest, as seen in Bolivia. Given both the negative impact of popular protests and the need to effectively eliminate drug supplies, any solution to this daunting problem must seek to ameliorate the economic crises and pressures that peasants face.

Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia, the current supply reduction initiative in place, fails to recognize the economic realities and historical context that contribute significantly to Colombian coca production. Unlike the Bolivian case, U.S.-sponsored drug policies must operate within the complex and volatile context of civil war in which left- and right-wing terrorist groups battle the state and each other, implicating peasants in a vortex of violence. Inspired by the initial success of coca eradication in Bolivia, the initiation of Plan Colombia in 1999 coincided with the Pastrana administration's (1998-2002) peace talks with FARC insurgents. During this process, it was believed that targeting the economic base of guerrilla groups would expedite the peace process, end the civil war, and weaken the cocaine trade.[29]

Most of the $7.5 billion budget for Plan Colombia was devoted to supply reduction, while $230 million of U.S. contributions was allotted to alternative development.[30] Given the presence of guerrillas in some regions and the wide dispersement of coca fields throughout Colombia, aerial fumigation appeared the only option. USAID and its Colombian counter-part, El Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Alternativo (PLANTE), were initially dedicated to promoting voluntary eradication, while providing alternative crop supplies and technical assistance. In February 2002, only one year after implementation had begun, USAID acknowledged that security concerns prohibited the implementation of alternative crop development efforts. A General Accounting Office (GAO) audit in 2002 recommended that Congress suspend aid for alternative development in Colombia because the safety of aid workers could not be guaranteed.[31] According to *The Washington Post*, this means that only $4.4 million of the $42.5 million in U.S. aid allotted for alternative development had been used by April 2002.[32]

Given the daunting challenges of implementing alternative development plans in rebel-controlled areas, USAID re-prioritized its strategies. The emphasis has shifted from trying to substitute legal crops for coca to infrastructure development, particularly in southern Colombia where thin soil inhibits growth of other crops. Alternative development projects are now being pursued in regions with limited guerrilla and paramilitary presence, particularly outside of southern Colombia. The new focus on infrastructure development and quality of life issues does address the broader economic context. However results will be felt only in the long-term in contrast to the short-term orientation of aerial fumigation. As Klaus Nyholm, head of the United National Development Program (UNDP) in Colombia explains, "You can spray a field in five minutes, but development takes more like five years."[33] This unfortunate impasse leaves many peasants with little choice but to return to growing coca.

Meanwhile, peace negotiations have been abandoned, and there is no evidence to suggest that aerial fumigation has had any impact on cocaine output, price, or FARC financial security. The reverse, in fact, may be true. Though reliable data on peasant demographics and specifics relating to the drug trade have proved difficult to obtain, aerial fumigation appears to have caused widespread migration of coca farmers deeper into the Amazon rainforest.[34] Fleeing fumigation, peasants have been steadily slashing and burning their way into remote, uncharted parts of the jungle. Rapid deforestation of the Amazon caused by migrating peasants poses environmental concerns and also results in further economic, political, and social marginalization. Five years ago many coca-growing regions of Colombia were considered remote when separated from the nearest population center by a one- to two- day drive. Today's peasants are migrating deeper into the forest, which isolates them even further from mainstream society and economy.

Millions of dollars are spent on aid projects designed to integrate remote areas, but in a seemingly ironic twist, fumigation appears to cause peasants to move steadily away from the development that will assist them over the long-run. Compounding the problem of underdevelopment that accompanies isolation, peasants who are even further removed from state control become more vulnerable to recruitment by insurgent groups. Peasants join these groups because promises of employment, pay, and security are more attractive than unpalatable or non-existent economic alternatives. Targeting the economic base of the FARC and other groups through fumigation may, therefore, strengthen those groups. Peasants, whose livelihoods are threatened, regardless of the legality of their economic activities, are unlikely to appreciate the goals of the Colombian and U.S. governments' supply reduction imperatives. Peasants are likely to view fumigation as anti-peasant or anti-indigenous, which further erodes the tenuous relationship between weak local governments and their agrarian constituents.

While it appears possible that the FARC may have been able to manipulate supply reduction policies to their political advantage by amassing greater peasant support, it is also possible that for all the hectares of coca destroyed in 2001 , replanting rates may have actually been higher. U.S. government data collected via satellite indicate a 25 percent increase in coca cultivation in 2001, while the Colombian government and the United Nations Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention, using ground surveying techniques, reports that coca cultivation has decreased 11 percent over the same period.[35] That the most reliable sources disagree on the amount of coca that exists indicates gross imprecision in measuring techniques. Most important, these discrepancies demonstrate that even state of the art technology is no match for the challenges posed by a remote, inaccessible jungle region.

If U.S. estimates are correct and coca cultivation has risen 25 percent since fumigation began, several inferences can be drawn. First, peasants and drug lords have found ways to outpace eradication by planting new coca crops, indicating their ability to quickly adapt to the U.S. – Colombian offensive on coca. Second, and equally important, the new coca crops grow predominantly in remote jungle regions that lie beyond the perimeter of aerial fumigation. If the U.S. estimate holds any validity, it would be another confirmation of the unanticipated migration that occurs in resistance to fumigation. Even given the ambiguity of the available data, it appears more likely that the insurgent groups may have been unaffected or inadvertently strengthened by aerial fumigation.

Thus, if the two-fold objective of supply reduction entailed destroying more coca than was being replanted while striking at the core of the FARC economic base, thus far the plan appears to have failed miserably on both counts. If regions where coca is grown today represented the only areas in Colombia where coca could be grown, then the plan might have enjoyed quick and even sustained success. According to oneDEA official, current land under cultivation represents just 2 percent of the terrain capable of supporting coca.[36] This detail appears increasingly significant when viewing the migration into the seemingly limitless jungle regions, most of which are well-suited for coca cultivation.

Conclusion: Redefining Success in the Drug War

The current blending of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror offers an important opportunity to deal a powerful blow to the Andean cocaine trade, which could in turn lead to closure of the hemisphere's oldest civil conflict. At the same time, more is at stake economically for the United States than ever before in Latin America, and the future of Colombian security and democracy are increasingly in jeopardy.

Despite the expanding focus on fighting narco-terrorism between 2002-2003, drug eradication sustainability follows the same economic rules as it did before September 11, 2002. A lasting solution to the drug problem must acknowledge the integral role U.S. demand plays in fueling the industry as well as the realities of underdevelopment that make coca cultivation attractive to peasant farmers in Latin America. In large part, these realities have to do with broader economic downturns and lacking employment opportunities in the legal sector of the economy. Only when non-coca growers enjoy a comparable standard of living and guaranteed security, and when former coca growers are engaged in new, legal activities that sustain them over the long-haul will Colombia resume its journey toward development. Considering the escalating violence and instability in both Colombia and Bolivia, eradication policies have ramifications that extend well beyond the jungle regions where coca is grown.

Bolivian President Hugo Banzer celebrated the success of his eradication efforts too soon; likewise Otto Reich's claim that "U.S. assistance to Colombia has already paid big dividends"[37] was similarly premature. Like Banzer, Reich cited the number of hectares of coca eradicated as the most significant measure of success. Given that the United States appears to be increasing its level of commitment to all aspects of the Colombian narco-terror conflict, old definitions of success must be reconsidered. When the nature of drug production is viewed as symptomatic of larger historical, social, and economic forces, supply reduction that sustains the long-term can only be achieved by directly addressing the factors that ultimately make coca growing appealing. A successful effort on the Andean front of the U.S. drug war will strike at the heart of rebel groups and the drug trade through a long-term approach to alternative development that renders those ideals and ways of life no longer lucrative or relevant.

NOTES

[1] United States Drug Enforcement Administration, "Major Coca and Opium Producing Nations: Cultivation and Production Estimates, 1997-2001," 7.

[2] Anthony Faiola, "In Bolivia's Drug War, Success Has a Price," *The Washington Post*, 4 March 2001, A01.

[3] Mike Williams, "Drug War's Backfire," *The Austin-American Statesman*, 21 January 2001, H1.

[4] Kathryn Ledebur, "Coca and Conflict in the Chapare," *Drug War Monitor,* July 2002, 2. Available at: http://www.tni.org/drugs/links/bolivia.htm

[5] Ibid., 5.

[6] Ibid., 8.

[7] United States Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001), 4. Available at: http://state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2001

[8] United States Drug Enforcement Administration, "Latin American Narcotics Cultivation and Production: Estimates," 2001.

[9] United States Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 2001.

[10] Anthony Faiola, "In Bolivia's Drug War, Success Has a Price," *The Washington Post*, 4 March 2001, A01.

[11] David Johnston, United States Agency for International Development. Interview by author, October 2002.

[12] Ledebur.

[13] United States General Accounting Office. *Drug Control: Efforts to Develop Alternatives to Cultivating Illicit Crops in Colombia Have Made Little Progress and Face Serious Obstacles*. (Washington, D.C.: GAO 02-291, 2002).

[14] USAID, "Alternative Development Program Adjustments." Available at: http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2002/fs020408.html

[15] World Bank, "Millenium Development Goals." Available at: http://www.worldbank.org

[16] Patrick Clawson and Rensselaer Lee, *The Andean Cocaine Industry* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 149.

[17] Oxfam International, "Developing Countries Echo Oxfam's Call for Fair Coffee Trade," 26 September 2002. Available at: http://www.oxfam.org.hk/english/news/previous/coffee_amba3.shtml

[18] David Johnston, USAID. Interview by author, October 2002.

[19] Despite popular belief that coca growing in Colombia is part of an age-old indigenous cultural practice, the reverse, in fact, is true. Considered the sacred leaf during the Incan Empire, coca leaves were chewed or made into tea to mitigate the effects of high altitude and the strain from manual labor. Yet, this cultural practice was never employed in Colombia or outside of the Yungas region in Bolivia. This paper focuses on illegal coca cultivation, which occurs predominantly in the Chapare. Coca from the Yungas is legal, and while some is sold contraband for use in cocaine, the majority is made into tea, or shipped abroad for use in pharmaceutical products or for flavoring in Coca-Cola.

[20] Mark Eiler, United States Drug Enforcement Agency. Interview by author, September 2002.

[21] World Bank, "Bolivia: Country Brief." Available at: http://www.worldbank.org

[22] United States Department of State, “Background Note: Bolivia,” April 2001.
[23] Clawson, 133.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 149.
[26] Mark Steinitz, Center For Strategic and International Security, “The Terrorism and Drug Connection in Latin America’s Andean Region,” July 2002, 10. Available at: http://www.csis.org
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