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UNTIL RELEASED BY THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the United States Southern Command's role in assisting Colombia with its battle against narcoterrorism. Every day your soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians at Southern Command are working hard and employing their skills to accomplish our missions in this vital endeavor. We are shoring up our own national security by addressing this challenge at this time and in this place. Simultaneously we are laying the groundwork to promote and maintain future security and stability.

Colombia is at a decisive point in their fight. We are seeing steady progress toward establishing security and stability in Colombia and we are confident the Government of Colombia will continue to do so under President Uribe. President Uribe is a man of vision, principle, and substance. He is inculcating his government and his armed forces with an aggressive spirit and belief they can win the war against the narcoterrorists and end the violence. But the momentum he has built and the progress Colombia has shown is reversible. Consequently, we must maintain our steady, patient support in order to reinforce the successes we have seen and to guarantee a tangible return on the significant investment our country has made to our democratic neighbor.

To outline United States Southern Command's efforts in this endeavor, I will discuss the status of Southern Command's support of Plan Colombia, the progress we are seeing in Colombia, our activities with the Andean Ridge countries and the way ahead.

Assisting Colombia in their fight continues to be in our own best interest. A secure Colombia will benefit fully from democratic processes and economic growth, prevent narcoterrorist spillover, and serve as a regional example. Conversely, a failed Colombia,

serving as a safe haven for narcoterrorists and international terrorists, would be a most unwelcome regional model. The center of gravity right now is in Colombia, and the future health of the region hinges upon what happens there. While this is Colombia's fight to win, we have the opportunity to tip the balance by augmenting their efforts decisively with our unwavering support.

U.S. Southern Command's Support to Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia is a six-year plan designed to defeat the threat the Colombians face. This threat continues to come from the three largest illegal armed groups in Colombia, all named on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations and two named on the President's list of drug kingpins: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC, the National Liberation Army or ELN, and the United Self-Defense Forces or AUC. While these groups may retain fragments of their founding philosophies, they appear to have jettisoned ideology in favor of terrorist methods and narco-trafficking.

Narcoterrorism threaten the stability of several nations in Latin America and the Caribbean and erodes the very fabric of democracy by spawning terrorism, corrupting public institutions, promoting criminal activity, undermining legitimate economies, and disrupting social order. The violence and corruption not only threatens our neighbors, it poses a direct national security threat to our homeland. Illicit drug abuse is certainly a multi-faceted problem, but our support to Plan Colombia is effectively addressing one of its most critical components.

Our role at Southern Command is to support implementation of the military aspects of the plan. The plan addresses the entire depth of Colombia's complex problem, however,

and is by no means envisioned as a simple military solution. As you know, various other U.S. government agencies and departments received funding to support both military and non-military aspects of Plan Colombia.

Colombia is just completing the fourth year of this six-year plan. The first phase of their three-phased plan focused on the Putumayo and Caqueta Departments of Southern Colombia where approximately half of Colombia's coca cultivation took place and lasted from December 2000 until December 2002. That phase consisted of challenging illegal armed groups, finding and destroying cocaine laboratories, and providing security for intensive aerial eradication of coca, the principal bill payer for narco-terrorism in Colombia. Southern Command was responsible primarily for training and equipping a Counter Narcotics Brigade, fielding Blackhawk and Huey II helicopters and also training pilots and crews during the first phase. Secondary efforts provided for infrastructure upgrades, riverine training, and counterdrug intelligence support. In Phase II, the Colombians are expanding the size of the armed forces, working with neighboring countries for combined operations, building forests where coca once grew, and creating units comprised of campesino soldiers to help guard towns where government presence was formerly lacking. These initiatives support continued drug eradication and interdiction. Phase III of Plan Colombia culminates the entire plan by expanding the government presence and control nationwide. While it is still too early to predict the exact end state of Plan Colombia, the progress we are seeing is a positive development that promises to complete that plan and institutionalize its successes.

Counter Narcotics Brigade

The Counter Narcotics Brigade (CN Brigade) headquarters and its three battalions are the best-trained and equipped conventional units in the Colombian Army. Its mission is to conduct ground, riverine, and air assault offensive operations against narcoterrorist organizations and provide ground security for aerial eradications. U.S. military personnel conducted staff and light infantry training for almost 2,300 troops. In accordance with Plan Colombia, the CN Brigade was originally designed to operate in southern Colombia. The CN Brigade has had impressive results during drug interdiction operations in that part of the country by destroying coca processing labs, providing security to eradication operations, and seizing chemical precursors and coca leaf. Most recently, the CN Brigade captured Nayibe Rojas Valdarrama, aka “Sonia” Chief of Finances and Logistics for the FARC Southern Bloc. Her capture has led to numerous other related arrests and has degraded the FARC’s ability to conduct narco trafficking.

The Colombian military synchronized the deployments of the CN Brigade in Phase I with Colombian National Police and Department of State eradication efforts. The Office of National Drug Control Policy found that Colombia’s coca cultivation decreased by 21 percent in 2003 from 2002. Because of its success in the Putumayo and Caqueta Departments, this brigade is now also being used beyond its original scope in other parts of the country, most notably the Nariño Department. We continue to provide sustainment training to the CN Brigade. In 2003, this unit transformed its organizational structure to become more flexible and deployable to plan and conduct offensive operations throughout the entire country.

Helicopters

Since December 2000, the United States has provided air mobility to the first CN Brigade using a company of 28 UH-1Ns with a combination of Colombian and Department of State contracted pilots. The UH-1N aircraft are based in Tolemaida with the Colombian Army Aviation Battalion and are forward deployed to Larandia for operations. The current operational focus remains providing air mobility support for counterdrug operations as well as selected counter-narcoterrorism operations. Delivery of the 25 Plan Colombia Huey IIs was completed in September 2002. These helicopters are also based at Tolemaida and currently focused on supporting pilot training and infrastructure security. All fourteen UH-60L Blackhawk helicopters procured under Plan Colombia for the Colombian military began operations in January 2003 after a thorough program of pilot training. These helicopters also support the CN Brigade, pilot training, and infrastructure security. While the Department of State is responsible for program oversight and funding for operations and contract maintenance for all of these helicopters, quality control is provided by a U.S. Army Technical Assistance Field Team. The Department of Defense retains responsibility for training Colombian Army pilots, crew chiefs and aviation unit maintenance personnel to fly and maintain Blackhawk and Huey II helicopters. The maintenance programs are supplemented by a safety initiative that integrates risk management planning into air operations. Overall, these helicopters have given the Colombian military unprecedented mobility. This mobility allows an increasingly well-trained Colombian Army to maneuver across a rugged landscape, in parts of the country they have not operated in for years, resulting in greater operational effectiveness against the narcoterrorists.

Engineer and Infrastructure Support

The Plan Colombia supplemental appropriation allowed us to complete large-scale infrastructure improvements that greatly accelerated the development of increased operational capabilities for Colombia's forces. In subsequent years, we have continued to provide necessary facilities to support our training and equipping programs. Among our more significant engineer projects were the expansion of both fixed-wing and helicopter facilities at Tres Esquinas, the establishment of a comprehensive helicopter pilot training school at Melgar and Tolemaida, improved port facilities at Buenaventura, development of riverine support and maintenance facilities at Tres Esquinas and La Tagua, and the development of helicopter operational and support facilities at Larandia. We are moving now to develop the logistics infrastructure needed to support Colombian forces as they move outward to re-establish government control throughout Colombia. We just completed and turned over a hangar that will improve the operational rate of the Colombian C-130 fleet by improving their maintenance program. Additionally, in September 2003, we awarded contracts to establish logistics support centers, motorpools and maintenance facilities. As a direct result of the completion of these facilities, Colombian forces will be better able to conduct and sustain forward operations.

Professionalism and Human Rights

Embedded within the training Southern Command and U.S. forces provide under Plan Colombia is the institutionalization of human rights and the respect for law by the Colombian military. We have helped the Colombian Ministry of Defense institute legal reforms through the creation of a Military Penal Justice Corps, similar to the U.S.

military's Judge Advocate General's corps. On July 29, 2003, the permanent facility for Colombia's new Armed Forces School of International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights, and Military Justice opened. This school teaches human rights and international humanitarian law to attorneys, commanders, officers, and sergeants. Additionally, hundreds of military, police, and civilian lawyers have received continued professional legal education beyond that provided at the school. The Colombian military legal corps, similar to the method used by our armed forces, is also becoming embedded with the field units of the Army in order to provide on the spot legal advice to commanders during operations.

United States Southern Command continues to support Colombian efforts to extend human rights training throughout its ranks. Colombia is fighting its illegal armed groups justly, in accordance with democratic values and human rights. This is instrumental in what we are collectively striving to achieve.

Under President Uribe's "Democratic Security Policy" extrajudicial executions in 2003 were down 48 percent, assassinations were down 41 percent, homicides of trade unionists were down 68 percent and forced displacements were down 68 percent. Further, none of the units U.S. forces and trained have been accused of human rights abuses. I am confident that President Uribe and the Colombian military have taken human rights to heart, unlike their adversaries, who commit the vast majority of human rights abuses. Alleged human rights abuses by Colombian security forces are now less than two percent of those reported and the institutionalization of respect for human rights continues.

In 2003, as members of the illegal armed groups demobilized, over 77 percent turned themselves into government forces. If they suspected that they would be subject to

torture and abuse, they would have turned themselves into non-governmental organizations and the Church as they did in years past, before human rights became an integral part of the Colombian military's ethos. The Colombian government is not resorting to rural concentration camps, peasant roundups, massacres, disappearances or other tactics used by their enemies. Their professional ethos is also reflected in public opinion that lists the Colombian Military as the second most respected institution in the country just behind the Catholic Church.

The Uribe Administration's Progress

Plan Colombia predates President Uribe by two years and will end coincidentally when he leaves office in 2006. While he has firmly embraced the plan, he has also brought to office new initiatives and a long-term vision that extends well beyond that six-year plan. President Uribe won a landslide victory by running on a platform of aggressively defeating and neutralizing the terrorists in his country while asserting government control of national territory. After years of failed attempts to negotiate with illegal armed groups, to include a bold experiment that gave the FARC a safe haven in the southern part of the country, the people of Colombia had finally had enough of terrorist groups, especially after seeing how the FARC had used their safe haven to plot terrorist acts and establish drug base camps instead of developing their notional politics into a concrete reality.

President Uribe faces enormous challenges, but he is using his mandate to put deeds behind his words. He has been in office for nineteen months, and turning the government from a conciliatory posture to an aggressively focused one has not been an easy task. We need to be steadfast in our support of him now to set the conditions for his longer-term

success. The signs of his progress, which have built upon our support to Plan Colombia, are already becoming evident. Colombia developed a comprehensive national security strategy that directs all the tools at the government's disposal toward a common end of defeating the terrorists. The Colombians now spend nearly 4 percent of their GDP on defense. President Uribe has levied a war tax on the country's wealthiest citizens. He is increasing police end-strength to supplement those already planned for the military. The government has developed a plan to protect travelers along the major roadways. He is pushing the military and the police to gain control of areas and neighborhoods dominated by the narcoterrorists.

The military has had growing operational success against the narcoterrorist organizations across the country, particularly against the mid-level leadership, and all indications are that they will continue to take the fight to the illegal armed groups over the next year. The firm resolve of the Uribe administration, backed by aggressive military operations, has resulted in increased desertions by enemies of the state. These desertions are promising, especially since the government provides a program under which those who leave the FARC voluntarily are put in protected housing and receive health care, education, and work training.

Our Special Forces have trained the staff and soldiers of Colombia's best units, giving these units an added edge of operational effectiveness that is paying dividends. The Colombian Army has established its own Special Operations Command to coordinate and oversee difficult and complex operations against the most sensitive targets. The establishment and training of Commando and Lancero Battalions, modeled on our own Ranger battalions, has given the Colombians a unit that can strike high-value targets

including enemy leadership. The Colombian military is also in the process of establishing a Joint Special Operations Command that will synchronize special operations among all branches of the Colombian military. U.S. Southern Command's special forces component, Special Operations Command South, will provide training to this new unit. Currently, U.S. military forces are conducting deployments in fourteen different locations in Colombia providing training to nine major Colombian military units. Additionally, Planning Assistance Training Teams are assisting the Colombian army's mobile brigades in operational planning. We have also trained the Colombian urban counter-terrorist unit and continue to upgrade their capabilities and equipment.

U.S. Special Forces also trained Colombian Armed Forces in Arauca to protect a portion of the 772-kilometer oil pipeline that had been a frequent target of FARC and ELN attacks. Pipeline attacks are down significantly. This training was just one part of a nationwide Infrastructure Security Strategy that protects critical facilities and reestablishes control in narcoterrorist influenced areas of the country.

We continue to train Colombia's helicopter pilots, providing their forces a growing ability to perform air assaults that are key in the battle against dispersed enemies. We deploy intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets in country that have provided timely, actionable intelligence to Colombian units. We are training their staffs with Planning Assistance Training Teams that increase their ability to plan and execute intelligence driven operations against illegal armed groups. We are working with Colombian Marines to establish a third Colombian Training Team that will work with units of the Riverine Brigade to increase the operational readiness and proficiency of Colombia's extensive riverine forces. We contracted logistics to help the Colombians

maintain their own C-130 fleet and provided maintenance trainers to improve the operational readiness of their helicopter fleet. Toward that end, we are looking forward to establishing long term solutions to readiness issues with the establishment of a National Maintenance Point for Colombia's helicopters, and a Logistical Automation System that will integrate supply and fiscal management for parts and materials for the Colombian military and National Police. We also are assisting in the training of the Colombian National Police Carabineros (Rural) who have recently established presence throughout the country.

We continue to provide medical training and assistance to the Colombian military to improve their health services support to their combat troops. With our support the Colombian military now has a well-established "Combat Life Saver" training course. Additionally, they have adopted our Forward Surgical Team concepts and doctrine and have moved ahead by establishing four deployable surgical teams.

In civil-military relations, we are helping the Colombians to build a civil-affairs capability that will enhance the communications between the Colombian military and government with the populace in previously ungoverned spaces. In the past year, with our support, the Colombian military has written and adopted a civil affairs doctrine that allows them to minimize the impact of their military operations on the civilian population, while at the same time synchronizing humanitarian assistance with their operations. In the departments of Arauca, Cudinamarca, Caqueta, and Guaviera – portions of the last three are in the former despeje – the Colombian military has provided basic medical care to over 20,000 civilians and rehabilitated a number of educations and medical facilities. In the next six months, they will conduct 39 similar events in

conjunction with other Colombian ministries. In addition, our Civil Affairs forces have worked with the office of the Minister of Defense to develop mechanisms that synchronize the inter-agency planning requirements needed to re-establish governance in previously ungoverned spaces. To this end, the Government of Colombia has established a Coordination Center for Integrated Action. This inter-agency body – consisting of representatives from the office of President Uribe, the ministries of defense, interior, education, and others – develops policies and plans to ensure that as the Colombian military successfully reclaims terrorist controlled areas that the other bodies of government rapidly respond, establish presence, and provide the population with the government services they did not have while under control of the illegally armed groups.

Beyond our coordinated military efforts, President Uribe has sponsored political, economic, and judicial reforms. These measures will assist the Colombian economy as well as free up resources for increased security measures. President Uribe aims to reduce the government bureaucracy, eliminate corruption, and enact fiscal reform.

Economically, President Uribe's stance and the promised reforms have buoyed the country's confidence. The government of Colombia has collected 18 percent more taxes compared to last year. Further, tax collection (as a percentage of GDP) rose from 16 percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2003. Colombia has raised over one billion dollars via bonds since the new administration took office, and its stock market has increased by 50 percent this year. Likewise, President Uribe has sought to stamp out corruption and bolster judicial reform.

This list is just a partial highlight of the coordinated effort the Colombian government is making to solve its own problems. President Uribe has infused his government with

energy, organization, and a sense of purpose. He is getting results now, and will continue to direct all his resources toward making Colombia a safe, prosperous, democratic nation.

Under President Uribe, our country's significant investment in Plan Colombia is beginning to show substantial results. He is fully adhering to Plan Colombia and already looking well beyond it. Most notably a subsidiary campaign plan provides a long-term strategy and has been coordinated across the Colombian services, and the interagency. This campaign plan details the systematic defeat of Colombia's narcoterrorists. He is also building the systems that will eventually return Colombia to the ranks of peaceful and prosperous nations. President Uribe has only two and a half more years in office. Consequently, it is critical – especially this year and next – that he gets our unwavering support to set all his long-term initiatives firmly into place.

Way Ahead

We are seeing the pendulum swing in Colombia, and we will continue all of our planned training and support as well as seeking new opportunities to increase that support at this critical moment. Colombia is the linchpin in the narcoterrorist battle, but we must be careful not to win the battle in Colombia and lose the war in the region. As the Colombians make progress, their success will push narcoterrorists to seek safer areas in which to operate. Already, the FARC, ELN, and AUC operate across the porous borders of Colombia's neighbors, and the remote nature of many of these areas makes them ever more attractive as safe havens. While we are seeing increased coordination and cooperation among most of Colombia's neighbors, some of those countries also lack the resources to maintain territorial sovereignty in these ungoverned spaces. Thus, across the

Andean Ridge, we are working with the bordering nations to increase cooperation further, fortify borders and strengthen capabilities.

In an ongoing series of multinational exercises (UNITAS, Amphibious, and Panamax), we are training with the Colombian Navy in a combined operation. In Peru, we continue to sustain their riverine interdiction ability, as well as working with the interagency to support their eradication program and counternarcotics aviation. In Ecuador, we have supported their riverine capability and worked closely with them to complete the essential forward operating location at Manta. We are seeing a welcome acknowledgment of the Colombian border concern by Ecuadorian. In Bolivia, we have worked on their riverine capabilities as well and supported their eradication efforts. Additionally, we have already seen the Brazilians take up active patrolling on their own border with Colombia.

As the lead Department of Defense agent for implementing military aspects of U.S. policy in Colombia, U.S. Southern Command will continue to maintain a priority effort against narcoterrorism. Key in most of our recent endeavors has been approval by the U.S. Congress of Expanded Authority legislation. This legislation has allowed us to use funds available for counterdrug activities to provide assistance to the Government of Colombia for a coordinated campaign against the terrorist activities of its illegal armed groups. The granting of Expanded Authority was an important recognition that no meaningful distinction can be made between the terrorists and drug traffickers in our region. The country's two largest terrorist groups – the FARC and AUC – are deep into the narcotics business; the smaller ELN also participates to an extent. Trying to decide whether a mission against a FARC unit was a counterdrug or counterterrorist one was an

exercise in futility and hampered operational effectiveness on the ground. Expanded Authority has eliminated the time consuming step of first evaluating the mission based on its probable funding source and now allows us to bring to bear all our assets more rapidly. As just one example, it will allow assets controlled by Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) to continue being used to their full potential to provide real-time, actionable intelligence that is key in conducting effective operations against the narcoterrorists. Additionally, JIATF-S will take an increased role in counter-illicit trafficking, as many materials other than narcotics use the same transit routes through our area of responsibility. Expanded Authority for Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006 coupled with increasing the personnel CAP are the single most important factors for us to continue building success in Colombia. While our efforts are, for good reason, Colombia-centric, we are not letting others fall behind to become the next targets for terrorist groups. The cooperative counter narcoterrorist groundwork we are laying today will further our national security for decades to come.

Conclusion

We are at a critical time in Colombia's history. The elected government of President Uribe enjoys unparalleled approval ratings over 75 percent. Under his leadership, the military and police are helping to regain control of areas long held by narcoterrorists. Colombia's citizens are taking a more active role in their nation's defense and providing actionable intelligence to the Colombian Armed Forces. There is a renewed sense of momentum, commitment, and hope as the Colombian people struggle to save their country, but there is also a finite window of opportunity beyond which public opinion and support will wane without significant progress.

We are optimistic about the progress we are seeing in Colombia, though there remains an enormous amount of work to be done. We are at a critical point where the progress in eliminating conflict, reducing tension, and establishing democracy throughout the region could be at risk if we are not steadfast in our efforts. While our attention is drawn to another region of the world, we must keep in mind that we live in this hemisphere, and its continued progress as a region of democracy and prosperity is paramount to our national security.

I would like to thank the Chairman, Ranking Member and the Members of the Subcommittee for this opportunity and for your continued support. The men and women of the United States Southern Command are working to their utmost to accomplish their missions for our great country.