

Report to Congress

Training of Colombian Nationals for Helicopter Operations
and Maintenance Programs

Submitted to the Congress by the Secretary of State
Pursuant to House Report (108-222) and Joint Explanatory Statement of the
Managers accompanying the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related
Programs Appropriations Act, 2004
(P.L. 108-199).

April 2004

Prepared by the Department of State
in coordination with the Department of Defense

Report on Training of Colombian Nationals for Counternarcotics Activities

Introduction

This report is submitted in accordance to House Report (108-222) and the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Managers that accompanied the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill, 2004 (P.L. 108-199, Division D).

House Report (108-222) states that: "The Committee directs that not later than 60 days after enactment of this Act the State Department shall provide to the Committees on Appropriations a report that describes detailed plans and programs by the Departments of State and Defense to train Colombian nationals for the purpose of assuming responsibilities for programs funded in this Act currently being executed by United States contractors. The report shall outline the program activities, estimates of funding levels, location of training, and expected length of time in which the training of Colombian nationals will be completed."

Joint Explanatory Statement of the Managers further clarifies that:

"The managers remain concerned about the annual cost to the United States of operating and maintaining the fleet of helicopters used by the Colombian military for counternarcotics and counterterrorism purposes. While these helicopters are a key tool in the fight against coca and poppy, the managers believe the Department of State should begin to turn over the maintenance costs to the Colombian Government. In fiscal year 2004, over one-quarter of all assistance to Colombia is devoted to these costs, and the managers believe that other important programs in Colombia need to be prioritized through the allocation of United States assistance. Therefore, the managers expect to see the start of this transition reflected in the fiscal year 2005 budget request, and if it is not, the managers expect this matter to be addressed in the fiscal year 2005 appropriations process."

As requested, this report discusses detailed plans and programs by the Department of State and Department of Defense to train Colombian nationals for the purpose of assuming responsibilities for operating and maintaining the fleet of helicopters used by the Colombian Armed Forces for counternarcotics and counterterrorism purposes and outlines the program activities, estimates of funding levels, location of training, and expected length of time in which the training of Colombian nationals will be completed.

Discussion

High among United States Government (USG) goals in Colombia is assisting the institutionalization and professionalization of Colombian counterdrug entities to improve their effectiveness while enhancing respect for basic human rights. Training of Colombian nationals to take on the duties of flying and maintaining counternarcotics aircraft in Colombia is an important step for reducing United States financial support for the Colombian military and Colombian National Police (CNP). USG financial support for these programs is currently funded by the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) and the Department of Defense. Development of a plan for Colombia to assume increased responsibility for support has been led by the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) of the U.S. Embassy in Bogota in close cooperation with the Military Group (MILGRP), and the Colombian military, police and Ministry of Defense.

President Alvaro Uribe has committed his nation to strong support of domestic counternarcotics operations. In a September 2002 letter to President Bush, he pledged increased Colombian resources for security and defense, and committed to increasing Colombia's defense budget to 5.8 percent of GDP by the end of his term in 2006. Substantial progress is being made toward this goal. Colombia has increased taxes and improved collection. The Government of Colombia (GOC) is implementing plans to add 35,000 professional soldiers to the ranks as well as establishing rural soldiers who serve in or near their home towns. The GOC has also established a civilian intelligence network, and there is now a police presence in all 1098 of Colombia's municipalities for the first time in history. These actions demonstrate the highest levels of support for the goal of increasing Colombian responsibility for operations in Colombia.

This past year, the Colombian military has increased its military operations against the country's illegal armed groups. Our nationalization and budget plans reflect these developments. As the two governments agree to each phase of the nationalization plan, memoranda of understanding will be drafted and signed to further indicate mutual commitment to Colombian self-sufficiency in matters of internal controls and law enforcement. While we are committed to nationalization, as is Colombia, increasing progress towards this goal could be interrupted by unforeseen factors in the military campaign, including a dramatic increase in narcoterrorist activity or reversals on the battlefield.

Training Plans

At the beginning of USG support for Plan Colombia, objectives were set for the training of Colombian pilots, mechanics and crew chiefs to support 33 UH-1N helicopters. The goal was to develop a basic cadre of professionals to fly and maintain the assets in replacement of USG contractors. We have trained 99 pilots and 154 mechanics and crew chiefs since 1999. We have substantially met the initial training objectives, but the levels of equipment and other factors have rendered the original training goals obsolete. We now have an updated set of goals intended to reduce the number of personnel contracted by the USG involved in operation or maintenance of Colombian helicopters.

The original funding for Plan Colombia did not include funding for a training component for Colombian pilots and mechanics. This was added in 2001. Today the Colombian Army (COLAR) is progressively assuming more responsibility for this.

Currently the operational readiness (OR) rate of the U.S.-supported Colombian security forces' aircraft is higher than most comparable U.S. Department of Defense OR rates. Though some decrease in the OR rates is possible following nationalization, we are confident that a careful transition plan can maintain the OR rates at a reasonable level.

It should also be noted that the 35 UH-1N helicopters made available to Colombia in 2001 were not programmed to remain in Colombia, but were a stopgap measure to fill in until Huey II and UH-60 helicopters could be delivered. They became such an important asset in the fight against narcoterrorists and eradication that the decision was made to leave these airframes in place. As a result, more training programs were implemented.

The pending addition of eight HUEY IIs and two UH-60 airframes to support the Infrastructure Security Strategy program in Arauca will require training additional pilots and support crew. The current COLAR helicopter fleet consists of:

Helicopter type	Number in Colombia
UH-60s	26
UH-1Ns	(all have been converted to Huey IIs)
Huey IIs	25

To account for present and projected equipment levels, the pilot and support crew requirements were recently reviewed in Colombia. The review covered the entire COLAR helicopter fleet, with the exception of Russian made MI-17s. For the pilot requirement, one hundred percent of the assigned aircraft were taken into consideration with a pilot-to-seat ratio of 2 to 1. For mechanics, two teams of mechanics per aircraft was considered. This will allow enough pilots and maintainers to conduct combat operations, given the current COLAR rotation schedule of 15 days at Forward Operating Locations and 15 days in the rear. It also takes into account pilots becoming sick, in school, on vacation, etc. Management and headquarters positions were also included for the aviation helicopter battalion and brigade, as they are necessary for a well-run program.

Infrastructure improvements have been made over the past few years at the Colombian Joint Helicopter training facility in Melgar, Colombia. This includes runway improvements, classroom, barracks, briefing rooms, power upgrades, helipads, control tower upgrades, clinic upgrades, and a Huey simulator. The improvements provide the Colombia Armed Forces with an excellent training base. This base is where in-country Initial Entry Rotary Wing training is taught. All classes, curricula and schedule for the training program are expected to meet the plan's goals, and are described in detail below.

In total, and estimated 160 more pilots and 193 maintenance personnel still need to be trained.

- **Initial Entry Rotary Wing (IERW) Pilots**

To feed UH-60, UH-1N and HUEY II pilot requirements basic pilots must be trained. An additional thirty basic pilots per year will be trained through FY09. This reflects the COLAR's capability to provide personnel. All 160 additional pilots will pass through this fundamental training. IERW costs approximately \$145K/student in Colombia and \$250K/student in the USA. The majority of the costs of funding are borne by the country where the training takes place.

- **UH-60 Pilot Aircraft Qualification Course (AQC) Training**

Ten pilots, who previously graduated from IERW, per year will be further trained in Fort Rucker, Alabama. Including the current classes, this will supply an additional 50 Pilots by 2006. This will yield a total of 112 trained UH-60 pilots. DoD counternarcotics training funds will pay for this training. UH-60 AQC training costs about \$84K/student.

- **UH-1N Pilot AQC Training**

The COLAR will train an additional 47 Pilots by June 2008. This will yield a total of 104 trained UH-1N pilots. This training takes place in Colombia at the base in Tolémaida.

- **Huey II Pilot AQC Training**

The DoD funded training for Huey IIs will end on October 26, 2004, as originally planned. The COLAR will train an additional 63 Pilots in Tolémaida by August 2009. This will yield a total of 140 trained Huey II pilots.

- **Aviation Mechanics and Allied Shops training**

154 Maintenance personnel have attended a six-month basic course given at the Aviation Maintenance School in Bogota. UH-1N and Huey II personnel are then trained through a two-month in-country course given by the contractor. UH-1N personnel receive an additional two weeks of aircraft specific training at this point. UH-60 personnel go directly from the Aviation Maintenance School to training in the United States for five months. All US based training is covered by the DoD at this time

Training for maintenance personnel is lengthy and varied, depending on which specialization the person is working towards. Subsequent to the initial training, all individuals receive another four months of on the job training to become certified to work on Plan Colombia aircraft. To gain the appropriate amount of experience to work unsupervised generally requires an additional three to four years.

- Maintenance personnel will receive training in one or more of 12 specializations ranging from avionics to sheet metal working for each type of helicopter in Fort Eustis, Virginia. Follow-on training will occur on the job in Colombia.
- The Colombian maintenance personnel for the UH-60s will be trained by the end of 2005. Training takes place in the US with follow on training in Colombia.
- The maintenance personnel for the UH-1N and Huey II helicopters are scheduled to be in place by mid-2010. Training will take place in Colombia and at Fort Rucker, Alabama.
- All training will be primarily funded by the Colombians when it takes place in Colombia and by the DoD when it takes place in the USA.

- There will be a total of 193 additional maintenance personnel trained to provide the skill base required to maintain all three types of aircraft. Colombian responsibility for maintaining counternarcotics aircraft increases proportionally with newly trained personnel.

Position	<i>Already Trained</i>	<i>To be Trained</i>	<i>Total Needed</i>	<i>Location of Training</i>
UH-60 pilot	62	50	112	USA
UH-1N pilot	47	57	104	Colombia
Huey II pilot	63	77	140	Colombia
Maintenance Personnel	154	193	347	USA and Colombia
TOTAL	326	377	703	

Estimates of funding for air support and training

<i>Year</i>	<i>DoS Training*</i>	<i>DoD Training**</i>
FY 04	30.947	10.43
FY 05	31.735	12.35

* As our contracts do not now break out training as a separate line item, we have estimated that 1/3 of the total direct helicopter operations and maintenance costs of the UH-60, UH-1N and Huey II helicopters used by the Colombian Army for counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations can be counted as contributing directly to pilot, crew, and maintenance training.

** This estimate is based on DoD cost estimates.

Beyond pilot and maintenance personnel training, other steps are being taken to bring greater efficiency to the maintenance of counternarcotics aircraft in Colombia. The Department of Defense will establish a Joint National Helicopter Maintenance Facility near Bogota that is designed to bring all the necessary skills and materials into one centralized system under the Ministry of Defense for both

military and law enforcement helicopters, including those provided by the United States. The Government of Colombia has also been in direct contact with Sikorsky regarding a "Total Maintenance Program" for its Colombian-owned and -supported UH-60 helicopters in Colombia, with a goal of having 100% Colombian support for those UH-60s within the next five to ten years.

U.S. Contractors

At the present, 312 contractors are working as maintenance personnel in support of INL programs in Colombia. This is projected to decline to 25 contractors by 2010. There are 82 pilots are working in Colombia on contracts with INL and this will decline to 6 in 2009. The projected effect of the training program can be seen in the table below.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Maintenance Contract Personnel	312	266	213	157	107	50	25
Contract Pilots	82	100	70	38	28	6	0
Total	394	366	283	195	135	56	25

In the immediate future we are seeking to add contractors because several new programs are adding aviation assets and/or training requirements to U.S.-assisted Colombian counternarcotics programs. Specific examples of this are the renewal of the Air Bridge Denial program in Colombia and a new dedicated secure voice and data transmission system. We are also adding two UH-60s and eight Huey IIs to the Colombian Army helicopter fleet to support the Arauca pipeline security.

Our Assets:

As our counternarcotics programs mature and drug cultivation, processing, and trafficking are reduced in Colombia, we expect to consider transfer of these INL titled assets to our host nation partners. Some assets could be titled to Colombia or leased, and remain in Colombia, continuing their missions, maintained by Colombians. (Currently all "Plan Colombia" aircraft—both Colombian Military and CNP—remain titled to the USG and leased to the GOC.) The timeframe in which the decisions will be made remains dependent on

continued progress on training and mission definition. We think there is sufficient flexibility in Section 484 of the FAA to permit the Administration to pass title to any or all such aircraft should that prove to be in the national interest, after consultations with the Congress.

Cost Savings:

It is difficult to calculate the exact savings to be expected through nationalization of aircrews and maintenance personnel. The Department of State spent \$140.6 million. The Department of Defense spent \$40.2 Million in 2003 on contracts with companies such as DynCorp, Lockheed-Martin and ARINC for a combination of maintenance personnel and pilots to fill positions Colombian nationals are being trained to fill, and to provide on the job training for the Colombians. As maintenance personnel and pilots are brought into full active service, the amount spent should decrease proportionately to Colombia's ability to fill the positions. The remainder would represent oversight and end use monitoring, which are not within the scope of this training program.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total State Department Contract Personnel	394	366	283	195	135	56	25
% of 2004 Personnel	100	92	72	49	34	14	6
Estimated Budget*	118	108	85	57	40	17	7

* This budget estimate is derived by assigning an equal value to the work of each contractor. This is a very rough method of estimation. In reality, the lower cost contractors will be replaced sooner by trained Colombians. This figure is presented in millions of USD.

The value that the USG receives from Colombian counternarcotics efforts is also difficult to calculate precisely. However, there is a clear and ongoing benefit to the U.S. in having less cultivation of coca and opium poppy. The benefit of having fewer illegally armed groups, and fewer illicit cash flows in the hemisphere is also clear. These goals cannot be attained without active USG support for programs in Colombia.

As funding and other resources required to operate and maintain the aircraft in Colombia are supplied more from Colombian sources, the U.S. Government counternarcotics budget for Colombia should decline to a sustaining level sufficient to establish an ongoing deterrent to the narcoterrorist industry of cultivation and processing of illicit drugs. However, some continued U.S. funding and technical oversight may be necessary.

Conclusion

The Departments of State and Defense share the concerns of Congress, but are not yet able to reduce operations and maintenance costs in FY 2005 nor to reduce the U.S. contractor presence. We have recently concluded an extensive set of briefings with Congressional staff on our request to increase the mandated personnel ceilings. We believe that the Uribe Administration offers a unique opportunity to make significant progress in our counternarcotics and counterterrorism goals, while at the same time continuing to pursue increased Colombian support of these programs.