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DRUG CONTROL

International Programs Face Significant Challenges Reducing the Supply of Illegal Drugs but Support Broad U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives

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Highlights of [GAO-10-921T](#), a report to House Government Oversight Committee, Subcommittee on Domestic Policy

Why GAO Did This Study

The overall goal of the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, prepared by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), is to reduce illicit drug use in the United States. GAO has issued more than 20 products since 2000 examining U.S.-funded international programs aimed at reducing the supply of drugs. These programs have been implemented primarily in drug source countries, such as Colombia and Afghanistan, as well drug transit countries, such as Mexico, Guatemala, and Venezuela. They have included interdiction of maritime drug shipments on the high seas, support for foreign military and civilian institutions engaged in drug eradication, detection, and interdiction; and rule of law assistance aimed at helping foreign legal institutions investigate and prosecute drug trafficking, money laundering, and other drug-related crimes.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State and other agencies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs. In particular, GAO has recommended that agencies develop plans to sustain programs. GAO has also recommended that agencies improve performance measurement and results reporting to assess program impacts and to aid in decision making. In most cases, the agencies have either implemented these recommendations or have efforts underway to address them.

[View GAO-10-921T or key components.](#)

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What GAO Found

GAO's work on U.S.-funded international counternarcotics-related programs has centered on four major topics:

- Counternarcotics-related programs have had mixed results.** In Afghanistan, Colombia, and drug transit countries, the United States and partner nations have only partially met established targets for reducing the drug supply. In Afghanistan, opium poppy eradication efforts have consistently fallen short of targets. Plan Colombia has met its goals for reducing opium and heroin but not coca crops, although recent data suggest that U.S.-supported crop eradication efforts over time may have caused a significant decline in potential cocaine production. Data also indicate that increases in cocaine production in Peru and Bolivia have partially offset these declines. Interdiction programs have missed their performance targets each year since goals were established in 2007.
- Several factors have limited program effectiveness.** Various factors have hindered these programs' ability to reduce the supply of illegal drugs. In some cases, we found that U.S. agencies had not planned for the sustainment of programs, particularly those providing interdiction boats in transit countries. External factors include limited cooperation from partner nations due to corruption or lack of political support, and the highly adaptive nature of drug producers and traffickers.
- Counternarcotics-related programs often advance broad foreign policy objectives.** The value of these programs cannot be assessed based only on their impact on the drug supply. Many have supported other U.S. foreign policy objectives relating to security and stabilization, counterinsurgency, and strengthening democracy and governance. For example, in Afghanistan, the United States has combined counternarcotics efforts with military operations to combat insurgents as well as drug traffickers. U.S. support for Plan Colombia has significantly strengthened Colombia's security environment, which may eventually make counterdrug programs, such as alternative agricultural development, more effective. In several cases, U.S. rule of law assistance, such as supporting courts, prosecutors, and law enforcement organizations, has furthered both democracy-building and counterdrug objectives.
- Judging the effectiveness of some programs is difficult.** U.S. agencies often lack reliable performance measurement and results reporting needed to assess all the impacts of counterdrug programs. In Afghanistan, opium eradication measures alone were insufficient for a comprehensive assessment of U.S. efforts. Also, the State Department has not regularly reported outcome-related information for over half of its programs in major drug transit countries. Furthermore, DOD's counternarcotics-related measures were generally not useful for assessing program effectiveness or making management decisions.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss our analysis of the United States' international counternarcotics effort over the past several years. Since 2000, we have published over 20 reports on U.S. international counternarcotics programs and other international programs related to counternarcotics. Today, I will discuss the overall findings from these reports and some of the recommendations we have made. Specifically, I will focus on four major topics with regard to U.S. international counternarcotics-related programs: (1) their results in reducing the supply of illegal drugs; (2) factors limiting their effectiveness; (3) their alignment with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives, such as counterinsurgency and the promotion of political stability, and democracy, and (4) difficulties in judging their effectiveness, given a lack of reliable performance measurement and results reporting.

My statement today is based on our extensive body of work examining U.S. efforts to reduce the flow of drugs into this country (see app. I). We have conducted extensive on-the-ground work in the United States as well as in major illicit drug producing countries, such as Afghanistan, Colombia, and Peru, and major drug transit countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico Panama, and Venezuela.¹ Our reports incorporate information we obtained and analyzed from foreign officials in these countries as well as U.S. officials posted both overseas and in Washington, D.C., from the Departments of Defense (DOD), Homeland Security, State (State), Justice, Treasury; the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); the Defense Intelligence Agency; the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). In the United States we also obtained information from U.S. officials at other agencies and organizations involved in international drug control and interdiction, such as the U.S. Southern Command and the Joint Interagency Task Force-South in Florida and the El Paso Information Center in Texas, and the

¹As defined in State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2010*, a major illicit drug producing country is one in which: (a) 1,000 hectares or more of illicit opium poppy are cultivated or harvested during a year, (b) 1,000 hectares or more of illicit coca are cultivated or harvested during a year, or (c) 5,000 hectares or more of illicit cannabis are produced or harvested during a year, unless the President determines that such illicit cannabis production does not significantly affect the United States. A major drug transit country is one (a) that is a significant direct source of illicit narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances significantly affecting the United States; or (b) through which are transported such drugs or substances.

Central Intelligence Agency's Crime and Narcotics Center in Virginia. Our work was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence we obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

During the past decade, the overarching goal of the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy has been to reduce illegal drug use in the United States. A main priority of the strategy has been to disrupt illegal drug trade and production abroad in the transit zone² and production countries by attacking the power structures and finances of international criminal organizations and aiding countries with eradication and interdiction efforts.³ This involves seizing large quantities of narcotics from transporters, disrupting major drug trafficking organizations, arresting their leaders, and seizing their assets. The strategy also called for the United States to support democratic institutions and the rule of law in allied nations both in the transit zone and in drug producing countries, strengthening of these nations' prosecutorial efforts, and the prosecution of foreign traffickers and producers. According to State's International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, the goal of U.S. counternarcotics assistance to other countries is to help their governments become full and self-sustaining partners in the fight against drugs.

The updated U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, released in May 2010, endorses a balance of drug abuse prevention, drug treatment, and law enforcement. International efforts in the strategy include collaborating with international partners to disrupt the drug trade, supporting the drug control efforts of major drug source and transit countries, and attacking key vulnerabilities of drug-trafficking organizations.

²The transit zone is defined as the 6 million square miles encompassing Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean island nations, the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the eastern Pacific Ocean.

³Other priorities include stopping drug use before it starts and healing America's drug users.

Counternarcotics-Related Programs Have Had Mixed Results in Meeting Supply Reduction and Interdiction Goals

Our work in Afghanistan, Colombia, and the transit zone has shown that the United States and its partner nations have partially met established targets for reducing the supply of illicit drugs. Most programs designed to reduce cultivation, production, and trafficking of drugs have missed their performance targets.

Some Afghan Opium Poppy Reduction Targets Have Been Achieved

In Afghanistan, one of the original indicators of success of the U.S.-funded counternarcotics effort was the reduction of opium poppy cultivation in the country, and for each year from 2005 to 2008, State established a new cultivation reduction target. According to State, the targets were met for some but not all of these years. We recently reported that cultivation data show increases from 2005 to 2007 and decreases from 2007 to 2009 and that 20 of the 34 Afghan provinces are now poppy-free. However, the U.S. and Afghan opium poppy eradication strategy did not achieve its stated objectives, as the amounts of poppy eradicated consistently fell short of the annual targeted amounts. For example, based on the most recent data we analyzed-for 2008-2009-slightly more than one-quarter of the total eradication goal for that year was achieved: of the 20,000 hectares targeted, only 5,350 hectares were successfully eradicated.⁴

These eradication and cultivation goals were not met due to a number of factors, including lack of political will on the part of Afghan central and provincial governments. In 2009, the United States revamped its counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan to deemphasize eradication efforts and shift to interdiction and increased agricultural assistance.

⁴See *Afghanistan Drug Control: Strategy Evolving and Progress Reported, but Interim Performance Targets and Evaluation of Justice Reform Efforts Needed*. [GAO-10-291](#). Washington, D.C., March 9, 2010

Plan Colombia Partially Met Six-Year Drug Supply Reduction Goals and Recent Data Suggest More Improvements Have Been Made

In 2008, we reported that Plan Colombia's goal of reducing the cultivation and production of illegal drugs by 50 percent in 6 years was partially achieved.⁵ From 2001 to 2006, Colombian opium poppy cultivation and heroin production decreased by about 50 percent to meet established goals. However, estimated coca cultivation rose by 15 percent with an estimated 157,000 hectares cultivated in 2006 compared to 136,200 hectares in 2000.⁶ State officials noted that extensive aerial and manual eradication efforts during this period were not sufficient to overcome countermeasures taken by coca farmers. U.S. officials also noted the increase in estimated coca cultivation levels from 2005 through 2007 may have been due, at least in part, to the U.S. government's decision to increase the size of the coca cultivation survey areas in Colombia beginning in 2004.⁷ Furthermore, in 2008 we reported that estimated cocaine production was about 4 percent greater in 2006 than in 2000, with 550 metric tons produced in 2006 compared to 530 metric tons in 2000.⁸

Since our 2008 report, ONDCP has provided additional data that suggests significant reductions in the potential cocaine production in Colombia despite the rising cultivation and estimated production numbers we had cited. ONDCP officials have noted that U.S.-supported eradication efforts had degraded coca fields, so that less cocaine was being produced per hectare of cultivated coca. According to ONDCP data, potential cocaine production overall has dropped from 700 metric tons in 2001 to 295 metric tons in 2008—a 57 percent decrease. According to ONDCP officials, decreases in cocaine purity and in the amount of cocaine seized at the Southwest Border since 2006 tend to corroborate the lower potential cocaine production figures.

In interpreting this additional ONDCP data, a number of facts and mitigating circumstances should be considered. First, increasing effectiveness of coca eradication efforts may not be the only explanation for the data that ONDCP provided. Other factors, such as dry weather conditions, may be contributing to these decreases in potential cocaine

⁵See *Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security has Improved: U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance*. GAO-09-71. Washington, D.C., October 6, 2008.

⁶See GAO-09-71.

⁷See GAO-09-71.

⁸See GAO-09-71.

production. Also, other factors, such as increases in cocaine flow to West Africa and Europe could be contributing to decreased availability and purity of cocaine in U.S. markets. Additionally, ONDCP officials cautioned about the longer-term prospects for these apparent eradication achievements, because weakened economic conditions in both the U.S. and Colombia could hamper the Colombian government's sustainment of eradication programs and curtail the gains made. Moreover, as we noted in 2008, reductions in Colombia's estimated cocaine production have been partially offset by increases in cocaine production in Peru and, to a lesser extent, Bolivia. Although It remains to be seen whether cocaine production in Peru and Bolivia will continue to increase and these whether Peru will return to being the primary coca producing country that it was through the 1980's and into the 1990's.⁹

Cocaine Interdiction Programs in the Transit Zone Has Fallen Short of Targets

According to ONDCP data, the United States has fallen slightly short of its cocaine interdiction targets each year since the targets were established in 2007. The national interdiction goal calls for the removal of 40 percent of the cocaine moving through the transit zone annually by 2015. The goal included interim annual targets of 25 percent in 2008 and 27 percent in 2009.¹⁰ However, since 2006, cocaine removal rates have declined and have not reached any of the annual targets to date. The removal rate dropped to 23 percent in 2007 and 20 percent in 2008 (5 percentage points short of the target for that year) then rose to 25 percent in 2009 (2.5 percentage points short of the target for that year). ONDCP has cited aging interdiction assets, such as U.S. Coast Guard vessels, the redirection of interdiction capacity to wars overseas, and budget constraints, as contributing factors to these lower-than-desired success rates. Moreover, the increasing flow of illicit narcotics through Venezuela and the continuing flow through Mexico pose significant challenges to U.S. counternarcotics interdiction efforts.

⁹In 1995, Peru and Bolivia together accounted for 76 percent of the world's cultivated coca crop while Colombia comprised 23 percent. See *Drug Control: Long-Standing Problems Hinder U.S. International Efforts*. GAO/NSIAD-97-75. Washington, D.C. February 27, 1997.

¹⁰Subsequent targets increase 2 percentage points per year.

Several Factors Have Limited the Effectiveness of U.S. Programs

A number of factors to counternarcotics-related programs have limited the effectiveness of U.S. counternarcotic efforts. These factors include a lack of planning by U.S. agencies to sustain some U.S.-funded programs over the longer term, limited cooperation from partner nations, and the adaptability of drug producers and traffickers.

Lack of Planning by U.S. Agencies to Sustain Some Programs

U.S. agencies had not developed plans for how to sustain some programs, particularly those programs providing assets, such as boats, to partner nations to conduct interdiction efforts. Some counternarcotics initiatives we reviewed were hampered by a shortage of resources made available by partner nations to sustain these programs. We found that many partner nations in the transit zone had limited resources to devote to counternarcotics, and many initiatives depended on U.S. support. Programs aimed at building maritime interdiction capacity were particularly affected, as partner nations, including Haiti, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama and the Dominican Republic, were unable to use U.S.-provided boats for patrol or interdiction operations due to a lack of funding for fuel and maintenance. Despite continued efforts by DOD and State to provide these countries with boats, these agencies had not developed plans to address long-term sustainability of these assets over their expected operating life.¹¹

Also, we found in 2006 that the availability of some key U.S. assets for interdiction operations, such as maritime patrol aircraft, was declining, and the United States had not planned for how to replace them. According to JIATF-South and other cognizant officials, the declining availability of P-3 maritime patrol aircraft was the most critical challenge to the success of future interdiction operations.¹² Since then, DOD has taken steps to address the issue of declining availability of ships and aircraft for transit zone interdiction operations by using other forms of aerial surveillance and extending the useful life of P-3 aircraft. Recently, DOD's Southern Command officials told us that they plan to rely increasingly upon U.S.-

¹¹See *Drug Control: Cooperation with Many Major Drug Transit Countries Has Improved, but Better Performance Reporting and Sustainability Plans Are Needed*. [GAO-08-784](#). Washington, D.C., July 15, 2008.

¹²See *Drug Control: Agencies Need to Plan for Likely Declines in Drug Interdiction Assets, and Develop Better Performance Measures for Transit Zone Operations*. [GAO-06-200](#). Washington, D.C., November 15, 2005.

supported partner nations for detection and monitoring efforts as DOD capabilities in this area diminish. However, given the concerns we have reported about the ability of some partner nations to sustain counternarcotics-related assets, it remains to be seen whether this contingency is viable.

Limited Cooperation Between the United States and Partner Nations

Our work in Colombia, Mexico, and drug transit countries has shown that cooperative working relationships between U.S. officials and their foreign counterparts is essential to implementing effective counternarcotics programs. The United States has agreed-upon strategies with both Colombia and Mexico to achieve counternarcotics-related objectives and has worked extensively to strengthen those countries' capacity to combat illicit drug production and trafficking. For example, to detect and intercept illegal air traffic in Colombian air space the United States and Colombia collaborated to operate the Air Bridge Denial Program, which the Colombian Air Force now operates independently. Also, in Mexico, increased cooperation with the United States led to a rise in extraditions of high-level cartel members, demonstrating a stronger commitment by the Mexican government to work closely with U.S. agencies to combat drug trafficking problems. Similarly, in 2008 we reported that in most major drug transit countries, close and improving cooperation has yielded a variety of benefits for the counternarcotics effort. In particular, partner nations have shared information and intelligence leading to arrests and drug seizures, participated in counternarcotics operations both at sea and on land, and cooperated in the prosecution of drug traffickers.¹³

However, corruption within the governments of partner nations can seriously limit cooperation. For example, in 2002, the U.S. government suspended major joint operations in Guatemala when the antinarcotics police unit in that country was disbanded in response to reports of widespread corruption within the agency and its general lack of effectiveness in combating the country's drug problem. In the Bahamas, State reported in 2003 that it was reluctant to include Bahamian defense personnel in drug interdiction operations and to share sensitive law enforcement information with them due to corruption concerns.

¹³See [GAO-08-784](#).

Corruption has also hampered Dominican Republic-based, money-laundering investigations, according to DEA.¹⁴

Afghan officials objected to aerial eradication efforts and the use of chemicals in Afghanistan, forcing eradication to be done with tractors, all-terrain vehicles, and manually with sticks, making the effort less efficient. Furthermore, Afghan governors had been slow to grant permission to eradicate poppy fields until the concept for the central government's eradication force was changed in 2008 so that this force could operate without governor permission in areas where governors either would not or could not launch eradication efforts themselves.¹⁵

Deteriorating relations with Venezuela have stalled the progress of several cooperative counternarcotics initiatives intended to slow drug trafficking through that country. In 2007, Venezuela began denying visas for U.S. officials to serve in Venezuela, which complicated efforts to cooperate. Additionally, the overall number of counternarcotics projects supported by both the United States in Venezuela has fallen since 2005. For example, the Government of Venezuela withdrew support from the Prosecutor's Drug Task Force in 2005 and a port security program in 2006.¹⁶

Highly Adaptive Nature of Drug Traffickers and Producers

Drug trafficking organizations and associated criminal networks have been extremely adaptive and resourceful, shifting routes and operating methods quickly in response to pressure from law enforcement organizations or rival traffickers. In 2008, we reported that drug traffickers typically used go-fast boats and fishing vessels to smuggle cocaine from Colombia to Central America and Mexico en route to the United States. These boats, capable of traveling at speeds over 40 knots, were difficult to detect in open water and were often used at night or painted blue and used during the day, becoming virtually impossible to see. Traffickers have also used "mother ships" in concert with fishing vessels to transport illicit drugs into open waters and then distribute the load among smaller boats at sea. In addition, traffickers have used evasive maritime routes and changed them frequently. Some boats have traveled as far southwest as

¹⁴See [GAO-08-784](#)

¹⁵See [GAO-10-291](#)

¹⁶See *Drug Control: U.S. Counternarcotics Cooperation with Venezuela Has Declined*. [GAO-09-806](#). Washington D.C., July 20, 2009.

the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean before heading north toward Mexico, while others travel through Central America's littoral waters, close to shore, where they could hide among legitimate maritime traffic. Furthermore, the Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-South), under DOD's U.S. Southern Command, reported an increase in suspicious flights—particularly departing from Venezuela. Traffickers have flown loads of cocaine to remote, ungoverned spaces and abandoned the planes after landing. Traffickers have also used increasingly sophisticated concealment methods. For example, they have built fiberglass semisubmersible craft that could avoid both visual- and sonar-detection, hidden cocaine within the hulls of boats, and transported liquefied cocaine in fuel tanks.¹⁷

According to DOD officials, these shifts in drug trafficking patterns and methods have likely taken place largely in response to U.S. and international counternarcotics efforts in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean, although measuring causes and effects is imprecise. In addition, according to DOD, drug trafficking organizations and associated criminal networks commonly enjoy greater financial and material resources (including weapons as well as communication, navigation, and other technologies) than do governments in the transit zone.¹⁸

In addition to maritime operations, drug trafficking organizations have adopted increasingly sophisticated smuggling techniques on the ground. For example, from 2000 to 2006, U.S. border officials found 45 tunnels—several built primarily for narcotics smuggling. According to DEA and Defense Intelligence Agency officials, the tunnels found were longer, deeper, and more discrete than in prior years. One such tunnel found in 2006 was a half-mile long. It was the longest cross border tunnel discovered, reaching a depth of more than nine stories below ground and featuring ventilation and groundwater drainage systems, cement flooring, lighting, and a pulley system.¹⁹

In production countries, such as Colombia, drug producers also proved to be highly adaptive. In 2009 we reported that coca farmers adopted a

¹⁷See [GAO-08-784](#).

¹⁸See [GAO-08-784](#).

¹⁹See *Drug Control: U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotic Efforts, But Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States*. [GAO-07-1018](#). Washington D.C., August 17, 2007.

number of effective countermeasures to U.S. supported eradication and aerial spray efforts. These measures included pruning coca plants after spraying; replanting with younger coca plants or plant grafts; decreasing the size of coca plots; interspersing coca with legitimate crops to avoid detection; moving coca cultivation to areas of the country off-limits to spray aircraft, such as the national parks and a 10 kilometer area along Colombia's border with Ecuador; and moving coca crops to more remote parts of the country—a development that created a “dispersal effect.”²⁰ While these measures allowed coca farmers to continue cultivation, they also increased the coca farmers and traffickers' cost of doing business.

Counternarcotics Initiatives Have Been Closely Aligned with Broad U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives

U.S. counternarcotics programs have been closely aligned with the achievement of other U.S. foreign policy goals. U.S. assistance under Plan Colombia is a key example where counternarcotic goals and foreign policy objectives intersect. While, as of 2007, Plan Colombia had not clearly attained its cocaine supply reduction goals, the country did improve its security climate through systematic military and police engagements with illegal armed groups and degradation of these group's finances. Colombia saw a significant drop in homicides and kidnappings and increased use of Colombian public roads during Plan Colombia's six years. In addition, insurgency groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) saw a decline in capabilities and finances. While these accomplishments have not necessarily led to a decrease in drug production and trafficking, they signaled an improved security climate, which is one of the pillars of Plan Colombia.

In Afghanistan, we recently reported that the U.S. counternarcotics strategy has become more integrated with the broad counterinsurgency effort over time. Prior to 2008, counterinsurgency and counternarcotics policies were largely separated and officials noted that this division ignored a nexus between the narcotics trade and the insurgency. For example, DEA drug raids yielded weapons caches and explosives used by insurgents, as well as suspects listed on Defense military target lists, and military raids on insurgent compounds also yielded illicit narcotics and narcotics processing equipment.²¹ DOD changed its rules of engagement in November 2008 to permit the targeting of persons by the military (including drug traffickers) who provide material support to insurgent or

²⁰See [GAO-09-71](#).

²¹See [GAO-10-291](#)

terrorist groups. Additionally, in December 2008, DOD clarified its policy to allow the military to accompany and provide force protection to U.S. and host nation law enforcement personnel on counternarcotics field operations. DEA and DOD officials stated that these changes enabled higher levels of interdiction operations in areas previously inaccessible due to security problems. DEA conducted 82 interdiction operations in Afghanistan during fiscal year 2009 (compared with 42 in fiscal year 2008), often with support from U.S. military and other coalition forces. These operations include, among other things, raiding drug laboratories; destroying storage sites; arresting drug traffickers; conducting roadblock operations; and seizing chemicals and drugs. The U.S. military and International Security and Assistance Force are also targeting narcotics trafficking and processing as part of regular counterinsurgency operations.²² In addition, DEA efforts to build the Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA) has contributed to the goals of heightening security in Afghanistan. The DEA has worked with specialized units of the CNPA to conduct investigations, build cases, arrest drug traffickers, and conduct undercover drug purchases, while also working to build Afghan law enforcement capacity by mentoring CNPA specialized units. By putting pressure on drug traffickers, counternarcotics efforts can bring stabilization to areas subject to heavy drug activity.

Many counternarcotics-related programs involve supporting democracy and the rule of law in partner nations, which is itself a U.S. foreign policy objective worldwide. In Colombia, assistance for rule of law and judicial reform have expanded access to the democratic process for Colombian citizens, including the consolidation of state authority and the established government institutions and public services in many areas reclaimed from illegal armed groups. Support for legal institutions, such as courts, attorneys general, and law enforcement organizations, in drug source and transit countries is not only an important part of the U.S. counternarcotic strategy but also advance State's strategic objectives relating to democracy and governance.

²²See [GAO-10-291](#).

Judging the Effectiveness of Some Counternarcotics-Related Programs is Difficult

In many of our reviews of international counternarcotic-related programs, we found that determining program effectiveness has been challenging. Performance measures and other information about program results were often not useful or comprehensive enough to assess progress in achieving program goals.

Existing Performance Measures and Results Reporting Are Often Not Useful for Assessing Progress in Achieving Program Goals

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires federal agencies to develop performance measures to assess progress in achieving their goals and to communicate their results to the Congress.²³ The act requires agencies to set multiyear strategic goals in their strategic plans and corresponding annual goals in their performance plans, measure performance toward the achievement of those goals, and report on their progress in their annual performance reports. These reports are intended to provide important information to agency managers, policymakers, and the public on what each agency accomplished with the resources it was given. Moreover, the act calls for agencies to develop performance goals that are objective, quantifiable, and measurable, and to establish performance measures that adequately indicate progress toward achieving those goals. Our previous work has noted that the lack of clear, measurable goals makes it difficult for program managers and staff to link their day-to-day efforts to achieving the agency's intended mission.²⁴

Performance Measures Established for Afghanistan Do Not Reflect the Full Impact of Counternarcotics Programs

In Afghanistan, we have reported that the use of poppy cultivation and eradication statistics as the principal measures of effectiveness does not capture all aspects of the counternarcotics effort in the country. For example, these measures overlook potential gains in security from the removal of drug operations from an area and do not take into account potential rises in other drug related activity such as trafficking and processing of opium.²⁵ Some provinces that are now poppy-free may still contain high levels of drug trafficking or processing. Additionally, according to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the use of opium poppy cultivation as a measure of overall success led to an over-emphasis on eradication activities, which, due to their focus on

²³Pub. L. No. 103-62, as amended.

²⁴See [GAO-08-784](#).

²⁵See [GAO-10-291](#).

Alternative Development
Performance Measures in
Colombia Do Not Capture
Programs' Effect on Drug
Supply

farmers, could undermine the larger counterinsurgency campaign. ONDCP officials also criticized using total opium poppy cultivation as the sole measure of success, stating that measures of success should relate to security, such as public safety and terrorist attacks.

For Plan Colombia, several programs we reviewed were focused on root causes of the drug problem and their impact on drug activity was difficult to assess. In 2008 we reported that the United States provided nearly \$1.3 billion for nonmilitary assistance in Colombia, focusing on economic and social progress and the rule of law, including judicial reform. The largest share of U.S. nonmilitary assistance went toward alternative development, which has been a key element of U.S. counternarcotics assistance and has reportedly improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Colombians. Other social programs have assisted thousands of internally displaced persons and more than 30,000 former combatants.²⁶ We reported that progress tracking of alternative development programs, in particular, needed improvement. USAID collected data on 15 indicators that measure progress on alternative development; however, none of these indicators measured progress toward USAID's goal of reducing illicit narcotics production through the creation of sustainable economic projects. Rather, USAID collected data on program indicators such as the number of families benefited and hectares of legal crops planted. While this information helps USAID track the progress of projects, it does not help with assessing USAID's progress in reducing illicit crop production or its ability to create sustainable projects.²⁷

State Does Not Measure
Performance or Report Results
for Most Transit Zone
Programs

In 2008 we reported that U.S.-funded transit zone counternarcotics assistance encompasses a wide variety of initiatives across many countries, but State and other agencies have collected limited information on results. Records we obtained from State and DEA, including State's annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports and End Use Monitoring Reports, provide information on outcomes of some of these initiatives but do not do so comprehensively. For example, in our review of State's International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports for 2003 to 2007, we identified over 120 counternarcotics initiatives in the countries we reviewed, but for over half of these initiatives, the outcomes were unclear or not addressed at all in the reports.²⁸ State has attempted to

²⁶See [GAO-10-291](#).

²⁷See [GAO-09-71](#).

²⁸See [GAO-08-784](#).

DOD and DEA Performance Measures Do Not Reflect the Results of Key Efforts

measure the outcomes of counternarcotics programs in its annual mission performance reports, which report on a set of performance indicators for each country. However, these indicators have not been consistent over time or among countries. In our review of mission performance reports for four major drug transit countries covering fiscal years 2002 through 2006, we identified 86 performance indicators directly and indirectly related to counternarcotics efforts; however, over 60 percent of these indicators were used in only one or two annual reporting cycles, making it difficult to discern performance trends over time. Moreover, nearly 80 percent of these performance indicators were used for only one country, making it difficult to compare program results among countries.²⁹

Based on our report on DOD performance measures released today, we found that DOD has developed performance measures for its counternarcotics activities as well as a database to collect performance information, including measures, targets, and results. However, we have found that these performance measures lacked a number of the attributes that we consider key to being successful, such as being clearly stated and having measurable targets. It is also unclear to what extent DOD uses the performance information it collects through its database to manage its counternarcotics activities.³⁰

In 2008, we reported that DEA's strategic planning and performance measurement framework, while improved over previous efforts, had not been updated and did not reflect some key new and ongoing efforts. While DEA had assisted in counterterrorism efforts through information collection and referrals to intelligence community partners, DEA's strategic plan had not been updated since 2003 to reflect these efforts. As such, the strategic plan did not fully reflect the intended purpose of providing a template for ensuring measurable results and operational accountability. The performance measures that were to be included in DEA's 2009 annual performance report did not provide a basis for assessing the results of DEA's counterterrorism efforts—efforts that

²⁹See [GAO-08-784](#).

³⁰See *Drug Control: DOD Needs to Improve Its Performance Measurement System to Better Manage and Oversee Its Counternarcotic Activities* [GAO-10-835](#). Washington, D.C., July 21, 2010.

include giving top priority to counternarcotics cases with links to terrorism and pursuing narcoterrorists.³¹

Recommendations

We have made many recommendations in past reports regarding counternarcotics programs. Several of our more recent recommendations were aimed at improving two key management challenges that I have discussed in my testimony today—planning for the sustainment of counternarcotics assets and assessing the effectiveness of counternarcotics-related programs.

- **Improved planning for sustainment of counternarcotics assets.** In our 2008 report on U.S. assistance to transit zone countries, we recommended that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense (1) develop a plan to ensure that partner nations in the transit zone could effectively operate and maintain all counternarcotics assets that the United States had provided, including boats and other vehicles and equipment, for their remaining useful life and (2) ensure that, before providing a counternarcotics asset to a partner nation, agencies determined the total operations and maintenance cost over its useful life and, with the recipient nation, develop a plan for funding this cost.
- **More consistent results reporting.** In our report on U.S. assistance to transit zone countries, we recommended that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Director of ONDCP, the Secretaries of Defense and Homeland Security, the Attorney General, and the Administrator of USAID, report the results of U.S.-funded counternarcotics initiatives more comprehensively and consistently for each country in the annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report.
- **Improved performance measures.** Several agencies we reviewed did not have sufficient performance measures in place to accurately assess the effectiveness of counternarcotics programs. In our DOD report released today, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take steps to improve DOD's counternarcotics performance measurement system by (1) revising its performance measures, and (2) applying practices to better facilitate the use of performance data to manage its counternarcotics activities. For Colombia, we recommended that the Director of Foreign Assistance and

³¹See *Drug Control: Better Coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and an Updated Accountability Framework can Further Enhance DEA's Efforts to Meet Post-9/11 Responsibilities*. GAO-09-63. Washington, D.C., March 20, 2009.

Administrator of USAID develop performance measurements that will help USAID (1) assess whether alternative development assistance is reducing the production of illicit narcotics, and (2) determine to what extent the agency's alternative development projects are self-sustaining. The existence of such measures would allow for a greater comprehension of program effectiveness. For Afghanistan, we recommended that the Secretary of Defense develop performance targets to measure interim results of efforts to train the CNPA. We also recommended to the Secretary of the State that measures and interim targets be adopted to assess Afghan capacity to independently conduct public information activities. Lastly, we recommended that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Administrator of DEA and the Attorney General, establish clear definitions for low-, mid-, and high-level traffickers that would improve the ability of the U.S. and Afghan governments to track the level of drug traffickers arrested and convicted.

In most cases, the agencies involved have generally agreed with our recommendations and have either implemented them or have efforts underway to address them.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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