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*Cover photo:* Colombian soldier surrounded by bales of marijuana, Cali, Colombia, March 2013. Jamie Saldarriaga, Reuters.

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# Measuring Success in the War on Drugs

Pat Paterson and Katy Robinson

## Introduction

“The global war on drugs has failed.”<sup>1</sup> The opening statement in a recent report by a coalition of former heads of state captures the sentiments of a growing number of Latin American leaders. After five decades of combating drug traffickers, Latin American allies who bore the brunt of the drug-fueled violence claim that counternarcotics efforts have not achieved any significant results. Critics say the effort cost a lot—perhaps as much as a trillion dollars according to one scholar—and has produced very little for the investment. Both the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN) have called for reforms to the current strategy. Some Latin American leaders openly support legalization or decriminalization of drugs, a policy at odds with U.S. counternarcotics strategy.

Policy makers are bedeviled by rhetoric from both advocates and critics of the drug war. Both sides cite statistical evidence that they contend justifies continuing their strategy. U.S. Drug Czar Gil Kerlikowske lauds U.S. counternarcotic accomplishments as dramatic and historic.<sup>2</sup> Advocates of the status quo interdiction-based strategy contend that cocaine use is down and that street prices are up. Decriminalization, they say, would create a crime wave and social crisis far worse than the current drug war violence.

Critics of the drug war have a different perspective. Former UN Secretary Kofi Annan and former Brazilian President Fernando Cardoso argue that there is “clear evidence of failure” of harsh drug policies.<sup>3</sup> One U.S. official claims that despite billions upon billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars spent combating the drug trade in Latin America and the Caribbean “the positive results are few and far between.”<sup>4</sup> Other critics of the current strategy say the worldwide supply of illicit drugs like cocaine and heroin has ballooned by more than 400 percent despite massive increases in counternarcotics funds intended to curtail drug trafficking.<sup>5</sup> As a result, they say, narcotics use is increasing in most countries, violence is ravaging their countries, and legalization and regulation is the solution.<sup>6</sup> What confounds the debate further is a lack of empirical evidence that permits policy makers to make a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the counternarcotics efforts.

This paper addresses the fundamental questions surrounding this ongoing controversy: Have the billions of dollars invested by the U.S. and its allies impeded the flow of narcotics to U.S. markets? Are counternarcotic efforts by U.S. allies in Central and South America successful? Is drug use increasing

or decreasing in the United States? Are prices of drugs rising, thereby making them less accessible to large portions of the population? In that regard, what constitutes success in the war on drugs? Is the target goal for interdiction 25 percent of all cocaine? 50 percent?

## **Scope and Methodology**

This essay examines the metrics of counternarcotics strategy in the Americas by following the production and trafficking of coca and cocaine. We trace the illicit products as they are cultivated in the Andes Mountains of South America, processed into cocaine in Colombia and Peru, transported through Central America and Mexico, and finally delivered to markets in the United States. At each phase, we examine empirical evidence that indicates the level of effectiveness of counternarcotics trafficking programs. Cocaine is believed to be the principal source of revenue for many illicit organizations.<sup>7</sup> Hence, it is the focus of our analysis. We aim to provide quantifiable evidence of the level of success of each phase of the counter-narcotics strategy. Statistical evidence is drawn from UN, U.S., and Latin American official government reports.<sup>8</sup>

U.S. policy has been consistently weighted toward interdiction efforts, aimed at the supply chain rather than at demand reduction in the United States. For the last 20 years, the ratio of the funds funneled to supply-side versus demand-side strategy has hovered around 60/40.<sup>9</sup> The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service attests that U.S. counternarcotics strategy “rests on the central premise that helping foreign governments combat the illegal drug trade abroad will ultimately curb illegal drug availability and use in the United States.”<sup>10</sup> Since this has been the focus of the majority of U.S. counternarcotics programs, we examine efforts associated with interdiction rather than ones centered on treatment, prevention, and other demand-side issues.

This paper is not intended to pass judgment on the viability of the U.S. counterdrug policy. There are dozens of other factors that require extensive analysis to provide such a comprehensive assessment. Rather, we hope it sheds light on the effectiveness of one element of the strategy—the interdiction efforts against coca cultivation and cocaine trafficking in the Western Hemisphere. It also addresses the demand from Latin American leaders that the U.S. government conduct a comparative evaluation of the effectiveness of counternarcotics policies.<sup>11</sup> We hope that our results and assessment illuminate the practicality of these strategies and contribute to the debate about the productiveness of counterdrug strategies within the United States and other countries involved in the effort.

## **Background**

The most prominent calls for changes to the drug war strategy have come from a number of former Latin American leaders. In March 2009, the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy issued a report titled, “Drugs and Democracy: Toward a Paradigm Shift,” in which they declared the war on drugs a failure and called for a renewed debate on the topic. The group consists of a number of former Latin American heads of state including Presidents César Gaviria of Colombia, Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico, and Fernando Cardoso of Brazil.

A number of international leaders joined in the call for change. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is one of a number of senior diplomats who conclude that drug use has increased in spite

of a concerted international effort to stop the trafficking. Annan is a member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, a coalition of prominent leaders calling for drug policy reforms. The Commission includes ex-Chilean President Ricardo Lagos and former U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz. Their 2011 report opened with a profound declaration, “The global war on drugs has failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world.”<sup>12</sup>

Much of the criticism of the counterdrug strategy also comes from contemporary Latin American leaders. Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina, a former battalion commander of the fierce *Kabiles* special forces of Guatemala, and Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, one of the architects of Colombia’s successful counterinsurgency strategy against leftist insurgents and drug traffickers, are two of the advocates for change. Perez proposed legalizing drugs soon after taking the helm of the hard-hit Central American nation. “The war we have waged over the past 40 years has not yielded results. It’s a war which, to speak frankly, we are losing,” he said in April 2012.<sup>13</sup>

Santos’s viewpoint stems from the frustration of fighting drug traffickers in his country. The country has made costly gains against leftist insurgents and right-wing paramilitary groups that controlled large parts of the drug industry in Colombia. Despite significant successes in the past 10 years, during most of which Santos served as Minister of Defense and President of the country, drug trafficking persists. The much-vaunted Plan Colombia assistance plan from the United States, an \$8 billion aid package designed to reduce drug trafficking by 50 percent in 6 years, failed to accomplish its objectives.<sup>14</sup> Cocaine production has decreased in the country since 2005 but is still higher than it was in 1990.<sup>15</sup> Much of the drug industry in Colombia is no longer in the hands of large militias but rather has atomized among smaller gangs. “Despite all of the efforts, the immense efforts, the huge costs, we have to recognize that the illicit drug business is prospering,” Santos admitted to fellow Latin American leaders during a 2012 summit in Cartagena. In June 2013, Santos went before the UN General Assembly and declared, “The war has not been won.” Rather than continue with the current strategy, he suggested nations evaluate “what we are doing and seek ways to be more effective.”<sup>16</sup>

In Mexico, President Peña Nieto shares some of the same sentiment. He inherited a bloody conflict from his predecessor when he assumed the presidency in December 2012. In the seven years of the internal conflict against Mexican narcotics cartels, more than 60,000 Mexicans have lost their lives. The violence has refused to subside despite a change of strategy that Peña Nieto implemented to do just that. Until recently, Peña Nieto was not in favor of legalization. However, in September 2013, as the violence persisted in his country, the Mexican President joined other Latin American leaders by calling for an open debate on drug enforcement policy.<sup>17</sup>

Other leaders in the Western Hemisphere echoed calls similar to those of Presidents Perez, Santos, and Peña Nieto. During the June 2013 OAS General Assembly meeting in Antigua, Guatemala, Latin American representatives called for an OAS Extraordinary Session on drug policy to be held in 2014. The event promises to keep the issue front and center of the regional dialogue.<sup>18</sup>

### **Source Zone**

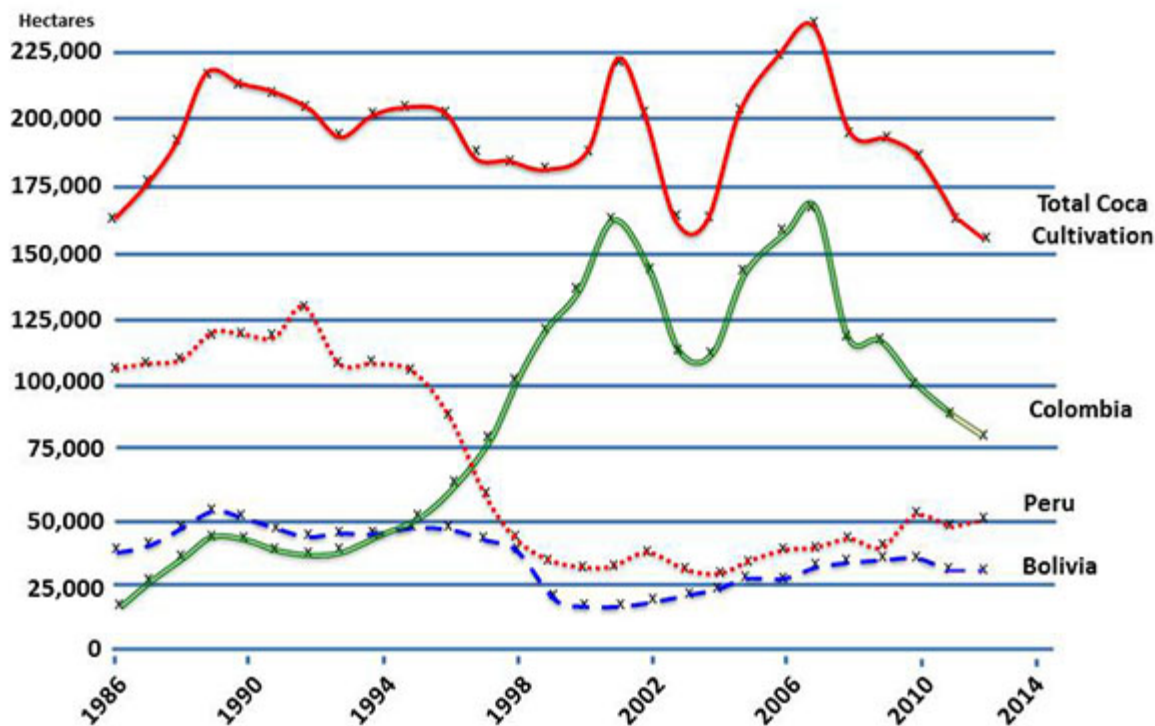
The raw ingredient of cocaine originates from the coca leaf. Coca is primarily grown in the hot, humid foothills of the Andean mountains. Known for its stimulative and hunger-suppressing effect, it has been

a part of the indigenous cultures of the region for thousands of years. Until 1995, Peru was the major source of coca in the region, producing more than Colombia and Bolivia combined. However, Peruvian security efforts against leftist insurgents and drug traffickers in the early 1990s successfully curtailed cultivation in the country.

In the mid-1990s, while the Peruvian security forces were achieving results in their internal conflict, conditions in neighboring Colombia were deteriorating. Prior to this point, Colombian narcotics were controlled by drug lords like Pablo Escobar of the Medellín Cartel and the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers of the Cali Cartel. In the late 1990s, however, insurgent groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) became involved in the drug industry, at first exploiting money from traffickers and later becoming directly involved in the production and transportation of cocaine and marijuana. Other groups followed: the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the paramilitary alliance United Defense Forces (AUC) both funded much of their operations through drug trafficking profits. According to the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), two-thirds of the FARC units and one-third of the ELN units were involved in some form of drug-trafficking activity.<sup>19</sup> Narcotics trafficking in Colombia was a profitable industry. Insurgents once motivated by a political ideology and agenda gradually evolved to fight for control of lucrative drug trafficking corridors and growing fields.

Colombia’s coca cultivation eclipsed Bolivia’s in 1995 and Peru’s in 1997, the result of increased

**Net Coca Cultivation in Andean Nations, 1986-2012**



Total net coca cultivation in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru (in hectares).  
Source: National Drug Control Strategy Data Supplement, 2013 (table 121).



eradication programs in those two countries that displaced growing operations to Colombia. Policy makers referred to this as a “balloon effect”: as security operations pressured drug trafficking operations in the Peruvian Andes, cultivation efforts migrated toward the point of least resistance. In this case, coca farmers moved to adjacent, less-restricted areas like Colombia. Between 1989 and 1999, coca cultivation in Colombia increased almost 300 percent, producing twice as much coca leaf as both Peru and Bolivia combined.<sup>20</sup>

Colombian strategy to reduce cultivation focused on two main efforts: eradication and crop-substitution programs. U.S. government officials considered eradication programs the “most cost-effective means of cutting supply,” because they were more effective and less expensive than cocaine interdiction operations.<sup>21</sup> Hence, as part of an aid package, the U.S. provided a substantial amount of equipment and funding for aerial and manual coca eradication. The Colombian National Police received training, aircraft, and other support to improve their abilities to eradicate coca leaf and opium poppy.<sup>22</sup>

The resulting Aerial Eradication Program also involved U.S.-owned spray aircraft and helicopters, as well as contractor support to help fly, maintain, and operate these assets at forward operating locations throughout Colombia. The aircraft included 13 armored AT-802 spray aircraft, 13 UH-1N helicopters (used as gunships or search-and-rescue aircraft), 4 C-27 transport aircraft (used to ferry supplies and personnel to and from the various spray bases), and 2 reconnaissance aircraft used to find and identify coca fields and plan and verify the results of spray missions. A typical eradication mission consisted of 4 spray aircraft supported by helicopter gunships and a search-and-rescue helicopter to rescue downed pilots and crew. Colombian Army counter-narcotics units provided ground security.<sup>23</sup>

Crop substitution programs (also known as alternative crop development) were implemented to entice farmers who had grown dependent on coca cultivation as a source of income to pursue other means of earning money. The program included a number of development initiatives to generate legal employment alternatives, alleviate poverty, and spur investment and economic growth.<sup>24</sup>

Colombian military actions managed to put the insurgents and traffickers on the defensive but the coca eradication program proved much more difficult. In 2001, coca and cocaine quantities, which had risen steadily since 1993, decreased dramatically as a result of the new Colombian offensive. Security forces’ attacks on coca fields in Putumayo and other insurgent strongholds in the south of the country disrupted growing operations. However, the successes were short-lived. By 2004 and 2005, traffickers had moved to different areas and renewed operations. By 2007, coca cultivation was almost the highest it ever had been in Colombia.

Experts provide a number of explanations for why Colombian eradication efforts failed. Many of the efforts were hindered by the lack of security in rural areas of the country. Insurgents warned farmers in remote areas not to participate in alternative crop development projects unless they were part of an overall peace plan.<sup>25</sup> In addition, countermeasures taken by coca farmers limited the effectiveness of government efforts to reduce the illicit crop. Farmers quickly adjusted to government measures by pruning coca plants after spraying; replanting with younger coca plants; decreasing the size of coca plots to mask them from aerial surveillance; interspersing coca with legitimate crops to avoid detection; concentrating 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. Government officials termed these efforts as a “dispersal effect,” one that placed the burden on government surveillance and detection efforts. According to U.S. Embassy officials, the Colombian farmers’ techniques proved effective: up to about 80 percent of the coca sprayed may have been replanted or pruned.<sup>26</sup> Plan Colombia’s goal of reducing the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by 50 percent in six years (through 2006) was not fully achieved. From 2000 to 2006, opium poppy cultivation and heroin production declined about 50 percent. During the same six-year period, however, coca cultivation increased by 15 percent.<sup>27</sup>

As Colombian officials struggled to control illicit activities in its territory, traffickers in both Peru and Bolivia were accelerating coca-growing programs, perhaps another example of the ubiquity of the balloon effect. After a sharp decrease in the number of hectares of coca cultivation following the defeat of the Sendero Luminoso by Peruvian security forces and rural self-defense forces in the 1990s, coca cultivation increased again. By 2010, the number of hectares under cultivation in the country was the highest it had been since 1998, in part because of the reemergence of factions of the Sendero Luminoso in remote parts of the Peruvian highlands.

The same trends occurred in neighboring Bolivia. In 2009, the amount number of hectares in Bolivia was the highest in a decade. President Evo Morales, elected in December 2005, got his political start as a leader of the Bolivian coca trade union, the *cocaleros*. Not surprisingly, he is critical of U.S. counterdrug policy. Morales, claiming that chewing coca leaf is part of the socio-cultural practices and rituals of indigenous Andean populations, lobbied to have coca-leaf chewing removed from the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs. Bolivia officially denounced and withdrew from the UN convention in June 2011.<sup>28</sup> In September 2008, he expelled the U.S. ambassador from the country and later that year kicked the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) out of the country.

By 2006, Colombian security efforts began to produce results. Part of this may be explained by a lag effect for Colombian security reforms enacted in 2001. Developing counternarcotic units like the *Junglas* of the Colombian National Police or ramping up aerial spraying of coca field operations took a number of years. By 2007, coca cultivation in Colombia dropped sharply. By 2011, the number of hectares of coca was less than 50 percent of what they were in 2007.<sup>29</sup> Hence, despite the upswings in coca cultivation in Peru and Bolivia, the security accomplishments in Colombia and preventive measures in other Andean Ridge countries brought the total amount of coca cultivation in the three countries to its lowest amount since 1986.<sup>30</sup>

## **Production Zone**

In the 1980s, Peru and Colombia were ground zero in the violent struggle against drug trafficking groups. Peru’s internal conflict against the Sendero Luminoso and other leftist insurgents like the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement plunged the country into a conflict that took the lives of 70,000 people. Colombia’s battle against a mosaic of guerilla armies, paramilitary militia, and criminal gangs made it the deadliest conflict in the Western Hemisphere since the War of the Triple Alliance in 1864.

Most of these illicit organizations were either involved directly in cocaine trafficking or indirectly by extorting rent money from drug traffickers working in their regions. The narcotics industry in Peru peaked in the early 1990s just as the Peruvian security forces gained the military advantage

over leftist insurgents in the country. Cocaine production in Bolivia, which had been the second largest producer after Peru since 1994, also began a steady decline. Shut down elsewhere, traffickers moved their operations into Colombia.

Throughout the 1980s, Colombia drug operations had been dominated by two cartels: the Medellín Cartel under Pablo Escobar and the Cali Cartel under the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers. These groups were ruthless criminal enterprises, blowing up airliners, assassinating politicians who opposed them (including the Colombian Attorney General and a leading presidential candidate), kidnapping family members of opponents, and car-bombing the offices of journalists who challenged their impunity.

In 1995, cocaine trafficking from Colombia skyrocketed. The elimination of the leaders of the Medellín and Cali cartels—Escobar was killed in December 1993 and the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers were arrested in 1995—fragmented their massive operations to numerous other organizations. One scholar estimated 300 mini-cartels emerged to take the place of the Medellín and Cali cartels.<sup>31</sup> Around the same time, insurgent groups like the FARC became involved with drug trafficking. Within six years, cocaine production in Colombia increased tenfold. By 2001, Colombia was producing an estimated 700 tons of cocaine each year and shipping it north toward U.S. markets.

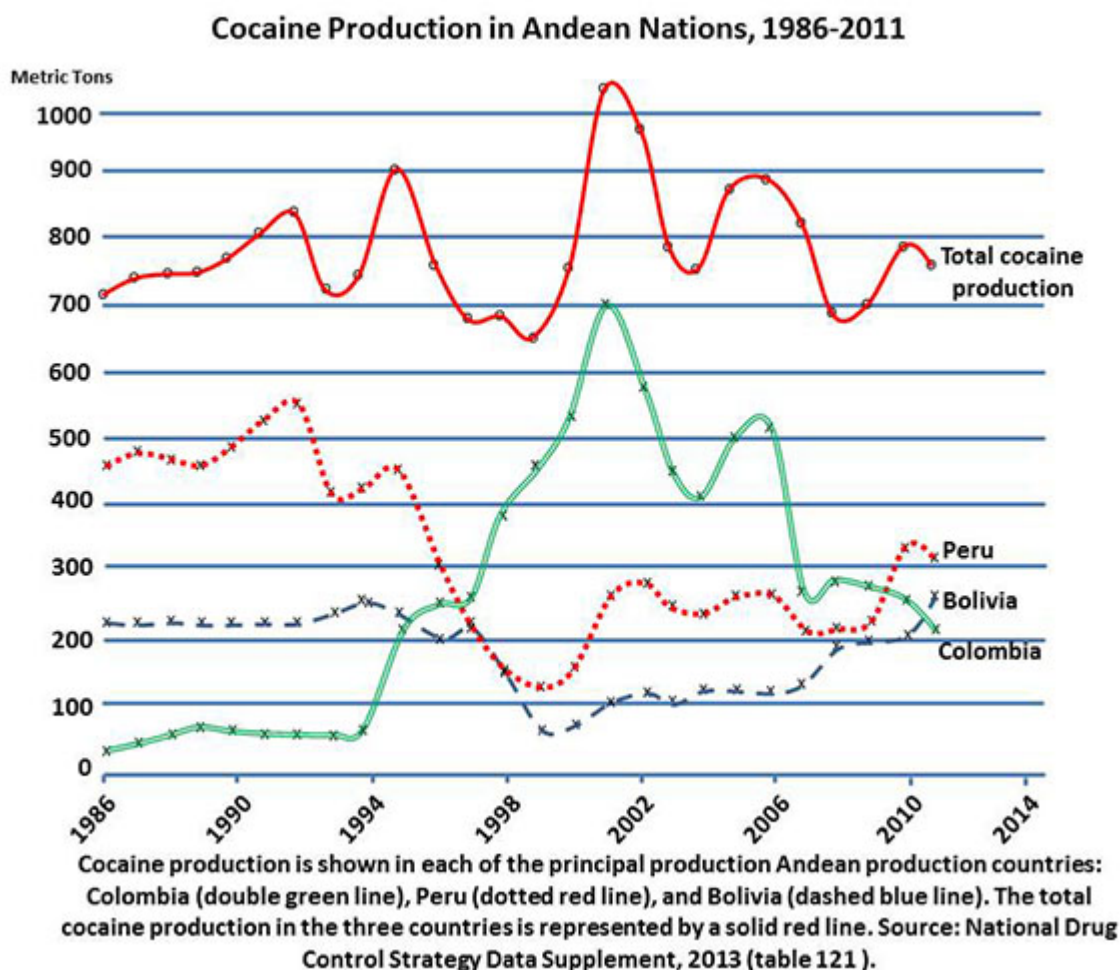
By 1999, the central government in Colombia was on the verge of collapse as drug-fueled violence overwhelmed the abilities of the Colombian security forces. Insurgents and traffickers moved freely over 40 percent of the country, an area equal to the size of Texas.<sup>32</sup> In Washington, policy makers estimated that the country would devolve into a semi-failed state within five years, government forces grasping for control in major cities but leaving the outlying areas under exclusive control of insurgents and traffickers. In January 2000, the Clinton administration submitted a bill to the U.S. Congress for a \$1.28 billion emergency aid program for Colombia, the first installment of what would become known as Plan Colombia. Subsequent U.S. funding raised the total assistance package to over \$8 billion and transformed Colombia into the third largest recipient of U.S. aid in the world. Eighty percent of the funds were earmarked for the Colombian military and police.

Colombia has made remarkable achievements against traffickers and insurgents since 2001, bringing it back from the brink of government collapse. Partly as a result of the military aid package from the United States, Colombia security forces took drug armies like the FARC and ELN to the verge of defeat, forcing their illicit operations deep into the interior of the country and away from most of the major cities. Following the initial Plan Colombia offensive in 2001, cocaine production dropped nearly 300 metric tons. The success was fleeting: traffickers shifted drug operations into new areas, and by 2003 production rebounded. However, by 2006, the damage inflicted on drug labs and cocaine production was irreparable. Since 2006, cocaine production has decreased steadily, from more than 500 metric tons in 2006 to less than 200 tons in 2011, a 60 percent decrease in cocaine production in just five years. Consequently, Peru and Bolivia surpassed Colombia as the leaders in cocaine production in 2010 and 2011, respectively.

The effort came at great cost. More than 220,000 Colombians lost their lives.<sup>33</sup> In September 2013 at the United Nations General Assembly, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos recognized the sacrifices of his countrymen when he said, “Colombia probably has been the country that has incurred the highest cost in this war on drugs. We have lost our best leaders, our best judges, our best policemen,

our best journalists.” It has been “a lot of blood, the cost of this war on drugs.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite these encouraging statistics on cocaine reduction, cocaine production in Colombia remains a serious problem. The success against such massive armies (the FARC numbered nearly 20,000 at its peak in 2001) has not reduced the powerful seduction of drug money.<sup>35</sup> Drug production and distribution atomized in the country. Smaller criminal gangs now run much of the industry. Other countries take notice. Guatemala President Otto Perez Molina observed, “There’s been talk of success in Colombia, but look, in Colombia they are still producing cocaine, the cocaine keeps coming out of Colombia, and it continues to ship through Central America and it still gets to the United States. You don’t have the big cartels and the big capos that you had in decades past. But there are smaller cartels, smaller groups, that continue to produce.”<sup>36</sup> The enemy proved to be effectively resilient, adjusting tactics and strategy in response to government efforts. Colombia’s cocaine production has decreased each year since 2005 but still remains higher than it was in the early 1990s. With a recent resurgence of cocaine production in Peru and Bolivia, total cocaine output from the Andes is roughly the same as it was in 1990.<sup>37</sup>



Such mixed results vex Latin American leaders who have fought drug traffickers for decades. Santos describes cocaine production as a nearly intractable problem. “We have developed policies to attack each link in the chain, yet we still have a big problem,” he said. “We feel like we are pedaling hard on a static bicycle. We need a new approach.”<sup>38</sup> Officials in many countries wonder if there may be a better strategy.

### **Transit Zone**

During the 1980s and 1990s, the majority of the cocaine shipped from Colombia reached U.S. markets in “go-fast” speedboats that crossed Caribbean waters or in larger fishing vessels that navigated north through the Pacific Ocean. South Florida, the U.S. landmass closest to the cocaine labs in Colombia, was a favorite destination for traffickers. With drug violence spilling into the streets of Miami, the U.S. government responded by launching a massive interagency operation to combat the traffickers. In the late 1990s, successful interdiction efforts in the Caribbean and South Florida forced traffickers to turn to the Central American and Mexico corridors.

Today, an estimated 95 percent of all cocaine entering the United States flows through Mexico and its waters, and 90 percent of that cocaine comes through Central America.<sup>39</sup> Not coincidentally, the most violent places in the world lie along the drug trafficking corridors of Central America and Mexico. Of the world’s most murderous cities, 42 of the top 50 are in Latin America, products of a drug-fueled epidemic of violence that has consumed the region. Honduras is the most dangerous; its cities San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa are numbers one and four on the list, with homicide rates of 169 and 102 deaths per 100,000 people, respectively.<sup>40</sup>

While Colombia has been a consistent partner for the United States, other South American nations are less collaborative. In particular, Venezuela under former President Hugo Chávez refused to cooperate with the counternarcotics programs of the United States and other regional allies. In May 2004, for example, President Chávez limited cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense, effectively ending military-to-military programs. In July 2005, he accused the DEA of spying and banished its agents from the country. That year, the Venezuelan government began denying visas for U.S. officials to serve in Venezuela, which further complicated efforts to cooperate on counternarcotic programs. In September 2008 the relationship between the two countries worsened when President Chávez expelled the U.S. ambassador and recalled the Venezuelan ambassador from Washington, D.C.<sup>41</sup>

For its part, the Venezuelan government claims it does not require counternarcotic cooperation with the United States because its own programs are sufficient for the task. The truth may be much more nefarious than that. According to U.S. Department of Treasury officials, Venezuelan officials are widely believed to collude with drug trafficking organizations. Cocaine trafficking, mostly out of the Apure region near the border with Colombia, increased by 400 percent between 2004 and 2007.<sup>42</sup> Much of the illegal drugs depart the area by aircraft. The pilots fly north, avoiding Colombian airspace and the air-bridge denial operation that permits the shooting down of unregistered aircraft. Halfway across the Caribbean Sea, the aircraft turn sharply left toward the northern coast of Honduras.<sup>43</sup> In 2007, the U.S. Department of State reported that the Venezuelan government and military provided “a permissive operating environment” for drug traffickers. In September of the following year, the U.S. Department of

Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated three senior Venezuelan government officials as drug kingpins for complicity in drug trafficking.<sup>44</sup> In March 2009, the U.S. Department of State reported that Venezuela had become a major route for trafficking cocaine out of Colombia. Officials estimate as much as 24 percent of the cocaine shipped out of South America may pass through Venezuela.<sup>45</sup>

Efforts to establish greater cooperation between the U.S. and Central American nations are equally complicated. In Honduras and Guatemala, drug cartels use extraordinary amounts of drug money to coerce or co-opt government representatives. Many government officials, including congressional delegates, judges, and public security officials, are suspected to be on the cartel payroll. The rule of law is on the verge of collapse in these countries. This represents an institutionalization of the drug problem, one that requires a deeper and more drastic type of reform to uproot entrenched corruption. President Otto Perez of Guatemala admitted that, "narcotrafficking has grown, has penetrated institutions, prosecutors, judges... There's a generalized level of corruption, money laundering. Everything that's been tried, and the result has been a growth [in drug trafficking] that shows that the strategy that has been followed for 30 or 40 years has failed."<sup>46</sup>

Hence, U.S. policy makers are limited by the number of countries with which to cooperate. Countries with undeveloped government institutions, corrupt officials, or security forces with poor human rights records aren't suitable partners in the war on drugs. As one observer put it, "there is little trust to go around."<sup>47</sup> For example, to combat Mexican drug cartels that have overrun parts of Guatemala, President Perez requested additional U.S. military equipment.<sup>48</sup> However, Guatemala is under sanctions from a longstanding U.S. ban on military aid imposed over concerns about human rights abuses during the Central American country's 36-year civil war. U.S. federal law prohibits cooperation with countries that have poor human rights records.

The cocaine industry has long been troublesome for Mexico. Two events in particular inflamed problems in the country. The first was the establishment of the South Florida Task Force to combat Colombian cocaine and marijuana flowing into Miami and other parts of South Florida. From 1979 to 1981, the murder rate in Miami nearly doubled, as drug rivals fought for the control over drug markets in the city. In January 1982, President Reagan ordered the establishment of the South Florida Task Force, a massive interagency counter-narcotics effort involving the DEA, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and Customs. The task force's efforts eventually bore fruit—President Reagan reported that the Task Force intercepted \$3 billion in drugs—and by the late 1980s, Colombian traffickers sought alternative routes to get their drugs to the United States. As trafficking routes through the Caribbean and South Florida became riskier, Mexico became the preferred route by which Colombian traffickers reached U.S. markets. Drug profits increased for Mexican traffickers, and Mexican cartels subsequently became more autonomous and important.

The second event was drug trafficker Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo's decision to distribute his cocaine trafficking among regional intermediaries. Throughout the 1980s, Gallardo was the godfather of Mexican drug trafficking organizations. In 1989, fearful that he might be arrested for trafficking, Gallardo delegated control of his empire to numerous subordinates. Gallardo didn't relinquish control but rather decentralized operations. The result was the birth of the first Mexican cartels. Gallardo was arrested in 1989 shortly after he consigned much of his drug empire. Central control of the cartels quickly

disintegrated. Gallardo's subordinates, now freed from working for their former boss, seized control of their respective areas. The increased profits generated additional competition among the cartels. Violent rivalries emerged as cartels fought for control of lucrative corridors (or "plazas") leading to the United States.

U.S. and Mexican cooperation against drug trafficking organizations has always been a complicated diplomatic affair, often impeded by Mexico's sensitivity over its national sovereignty. Additionally, the dominant political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, in Spanish), was widely perceived to be predisposed to coexist with traffickers rather than confront them.<sup>49</sup> In 2001, the PRI lost its hold on the Mexican presidency for the first time in 70 years. Presidents Vicente Fox and his successor Felipe Calderón, both of the opposition party National Action Party (PAN, in Spanish), took a more aggressive stance against traffickers. After assuming power in December 2006, President Calderón vowed to go on the offensive against drug traffickers, and in early 2007 he deployed about 27,000 military and police officers to eight Mexican states.<sup>50</sup> Since then, the country has been engulfed in violence as government security forces battle traffickers to take back territory lost to the cartels. Over 60,000 people have lost their lives in the conflict and another 25,000 have been "disappeared." Efforts have been impeded by corruption among security officials, especially in the Mexican police. Several high-profile arrests for collusion with cartels include the Chief of the Federal Police, the former head of the Organized Crime division, and three former drug czars.<sup>51</sup>

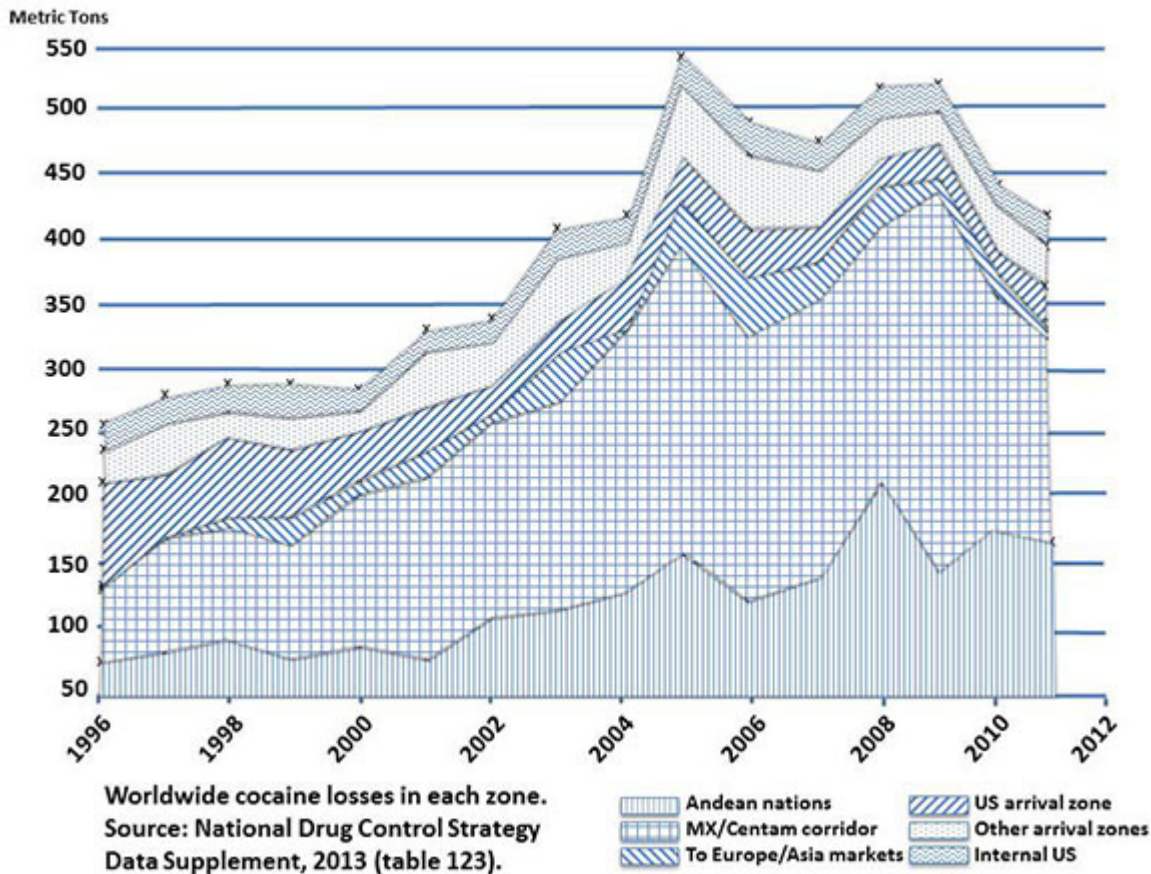
When Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (the PRI candidate) took office in December 2012, he implemented a more restrictive policy for cooperating with the United States, a dramatic shift from the direct sharing of resources and intelligence between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement under former President Felipe Calderón.<sup>52</sup>

Despite these numerous obstacles, the transit zone represents one of the best opportunities for security forces to intercept cocaine as it moves north. A higher percentage of cocaine is intercepted in Mexico and Central America as well in the waters adjacent to these nations than in any other phase of the drug process, including the production and arrival zones. From 2000 to 2010, on average, 50 percent more cocaine was intercepted annually in the transit zone to the U.S. and other markets than was disrupted within Colombia. This equates to 10 times the amount of cocaine seized within the United States each year.<sup>53</sup> In essence, the transit zone represents the riskiest and most vulnerable stage of the supply process for traffickers.

## **Market**

The vast majority of the cocaine that reaches the U.S. crosses into the country along the 2,000-mile-long U.S.-Mexico border. Despite recent efforts to block traffickers by building border containment walls and increasing security presence, much of the border consists of open desert, rugged mountains, and the Rio Grande River. These physical features are impediments to effective border surveillance. Traffickers also use creative means to move their illicit products. From 2000 to 2006, U.S. border officials found 45 tunnels built primarily for narcotics smuggling.<sup>54</sup> The scope of traffic crossing the border, one of the busiest in the world, is difficult to monitor effectively. An estimated 14,000 trucks cross the border each day at 43 legitimate crossing points.<sup>55</sup> Attempts to implement stringent inspections of the vehicles cur-

### Cocaine Losses by Zone, 1996-2011



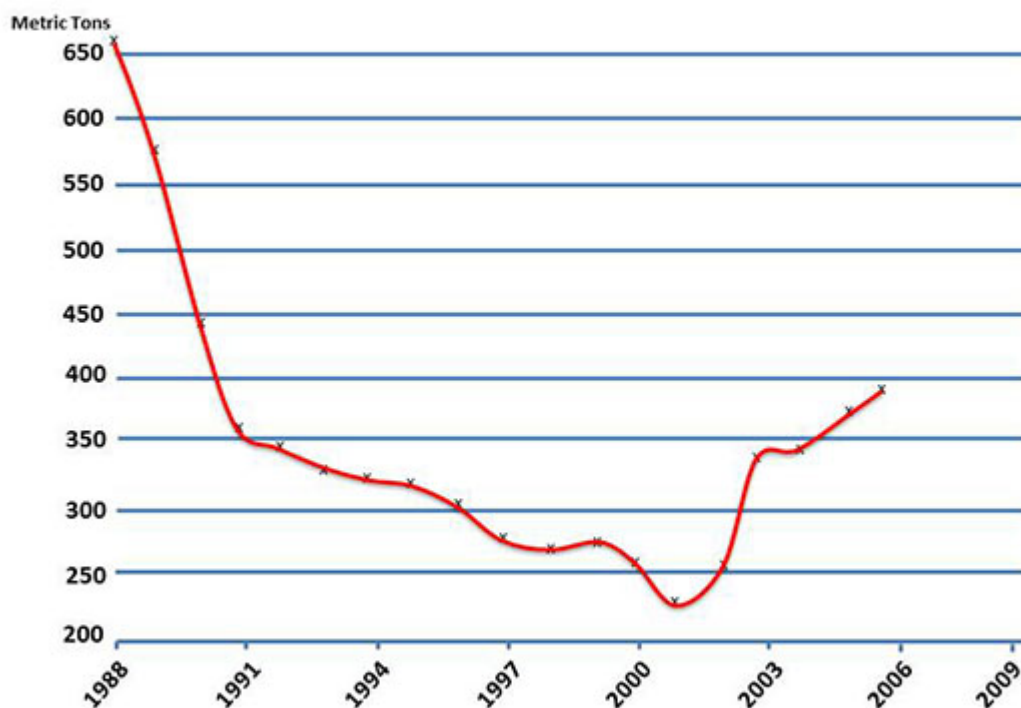
tail important bilateral trade efforts.<sup>56</sup> As a result, hundreds of tons of cocaine make it into the country each year. Only a small percentage is seized.

A number of indicators reveal trends of cocaine use in the United States: (1) cocaine consumption, (2) the number of users, (3) the price of cocaine, and (4) the purity of cocaine. During the heyday of cocaine use in the 1980s, Americans were consuming more than 600 metric tons a year. In 1985, nearly six million Americans age 12 or older (3% of the population) were cocaine users. In the late 1980s, however, cocaine consumption and the number of users decreased dramatically. By 1991, more than four million Americans had stopped using cocaine on a frequent basis. Cocaine consumption continued to drop steeply from its peak in 1988 until 2001, a reduction in 65 percent in drug consumption.

At the turn of the century, trends took a turn for the worse. In 2001, cocaine consumption and the number of users in the United States increased. From 2001 until 2006 (the last year that data is available), consumption increased more than 170 percent. Cocaine consumption and the number of users in the United States correlate to interdiction efforts in the production and transit zones. When production is up and interdiction low, cocaine use in the U.S. increases. When production is low and interdiction efforts are successful, cocaine use drops. The increase in consumption and in users in the U.S. corresponds to the surge in production in the Andes nations and in particular in Colombia.<sup>57</sup> More than 1,000 metric tons of cocaine were produced in the Andes in 2001. During this period, cocaine



### Cocaine Consumption in the United States, 1988-2006



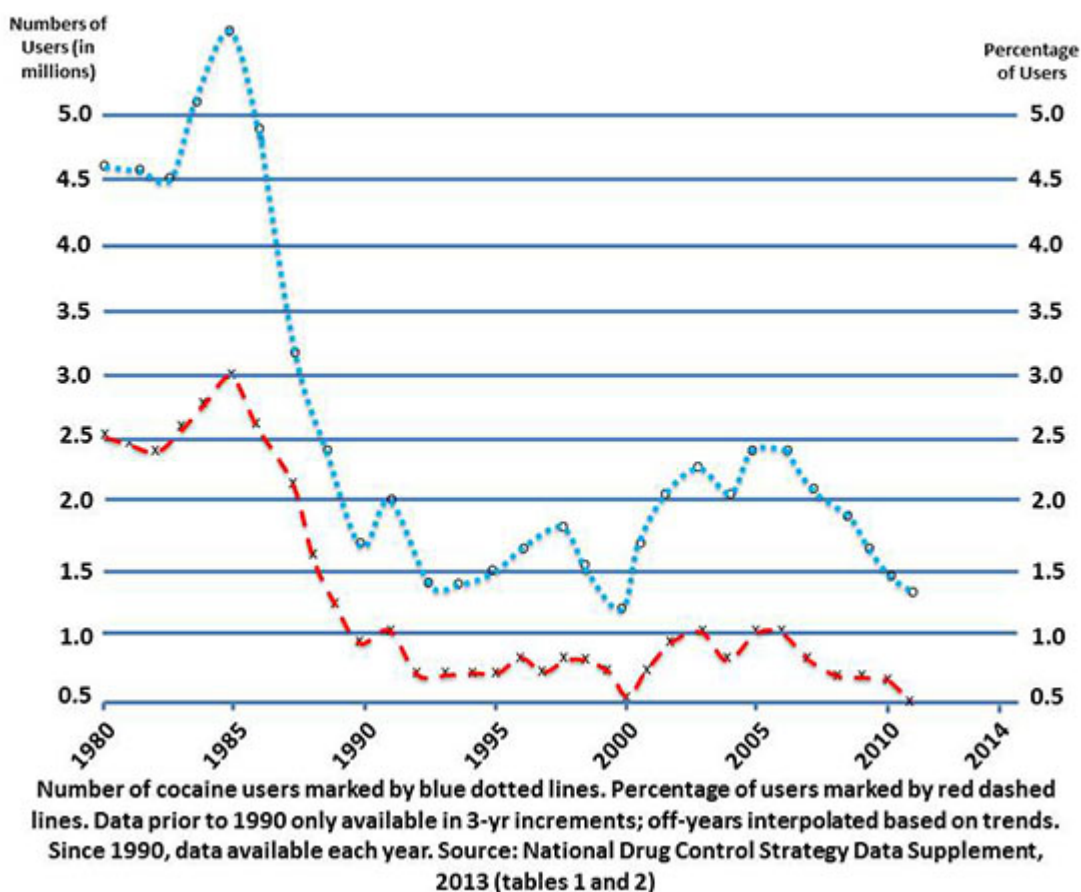
Total cocaine consumption (in metric tons) in the United States.  
Source: National Drug Control Strategy Data Supplement, 2013 (table 69).

production was plentiful in the Andean nations and interdiction rates were only moderately successful. Nearly three-quarters of cocaine shipped from Colombia reached its destination in U.S. and other markets.<sup>58</sup> In short, an abundance of cocaine was reaching U.S. markets and prices were low enough to make the drug affordable. Cocaine was relatively easy to acquire by consumers.

Two other indicators reveal conditions that are also worrisome to counternarcotic efforts in the United States: the price of cocaine and the purity of cocaine. If the price of cocaine increases, it is likely because of a decreased supply due to successful interdiction efforts or demand-side strategies. If the price of a gram of cocaine decreases, it represents a surplus of cocaine on the illegal market and a competitive market for cocaine consumers who can select the least expensive product.<sup>59</sup> Senior government officials agree with this as a measure of effectiveness. According to General John Kelly, the Commander of U.S. Southern Command (which deals with trafficking issues in the Americas), the price of cocaine “might be the best indicator” of progress.<sup>60</sup>

During the 1980s, the price of a gram of cocaine made a precipitous drop in retail value from more than \$700 to less than \$200. This was unwelcome news for counternarcotic officials in the United States: the price reduction made the drug affordable for a greater number of users. Since 1992, the price has fluctuated between \$100 and \$200, indicating that demand for the drug has not declined. Senator John McCain of Arizona, the ranking Republican on the Armed Services committee, admitted that the

### Cocaine Use in the United States, Ages 12 or Older, 1980-2011



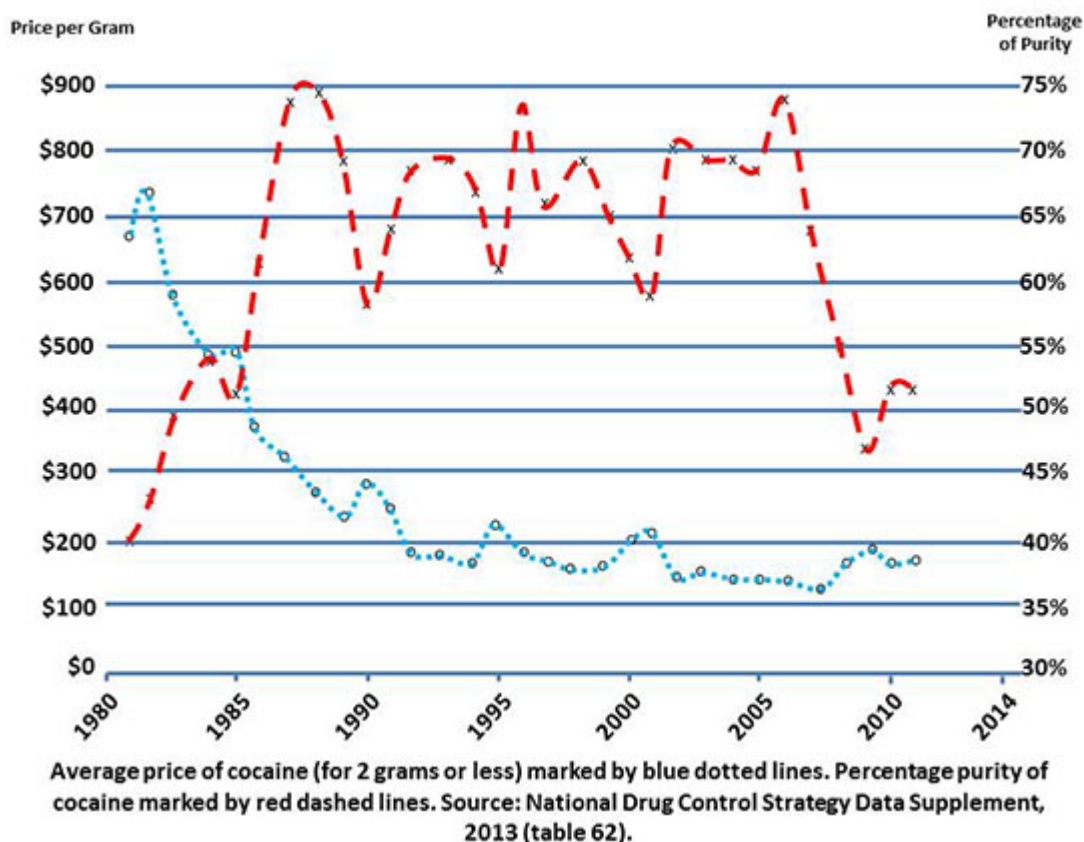
street price of cocaine is an indication that U.S. counternarcotic efforts have not succeeded. “That price has not gone up, despite the billions of dollars of effort we have devoted to it,” McCain said. As a result, “We’re going to have to have a national conversation about drugs and the illegal demand for drugs in this country,” the Senator said.<sup>61</sup>

The second indicator, the purity of cocaine, represents the quality of the drug. Higher purity indicates that dealers have not adulterated or “cut” the product to maximize profits. Decreased purity indicates that dealers are forced to cope with reduced availability, an indication of successful interdiction efforts. The 1980s saw the worst possible combination of these two indicators: prices dropped steeply and purity rose sharply, an indication that traffickers had such an abundance of supply that they could afford to lower the price while simultaneously increasing the purity and quality of the drug. For about 15 years since the late 1980s, the purity of cocaine remained high, fluctuating between 60 and 75 percent. In 2005, conditions improved; the purity of the cocaine took a sharp downward turn to below 50 percent, possibly an indication of reduced supplies. This trend coincides with decreases in cocaine production in Colombia as a result of security force successes.<sup>62</sup>

### Analysis

Measuring success in the war on drugs is an empirically difficult prospect. Meaningful statistics of an

## Price and Purity of Cocaine in the United States, 1981-2011



illicit operation is fraught with methodological challenges.<sup>63</sup> Estimates of the profits of traffickers are difficult to gauge because the industry is a decentralized and clandestine black market. Costs of interdiction and prevention programs are problematic in their own terms because of the myriad of counternarcotics efforts by government agencies. Many other factors need to be considered to assess success or failure. By examining one aspect of the counternarcotics effort—cocaine trafficking—it is possible to provide a snapshot representative of the larger program. We hope our analysis illuminates one component of the regional program that may provide policy makers with a meaningful tool with which to assess the costs and benefits of counternarcotic programs.

Furthermore, cocaine is just one of a number of illicit drugs destined for U.S. markets. Marijuana, heroin, and amphetamines are also heavily trafficked. Likewise, there are many factors that may indicate the level of effectiveness of state actions, ones that require careful study before definitive conclusions can be drawn about the viability of counternarcotic policies. Treatment costs, prison recidivism, number of arrests, and eradication programs all need comprehensive assessments. Policy makers should study the cases of the Netherlands, Portugal, and, after a few years, Uruguay. Have these experiments with legalization worked? We encourage other scholars to examine these elements in order to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of counternarcotics strategies in the Americas.

We conclude that counternarcotics strategy against coca cultivation and cocaine trafficking

**Table 1. Trends in Coca Cultivation and Cocaine Trafficking**

| <i>Metric</i>                    | <i>Trend</i> | <i>Percentage Change in previous five years</i>          | <i>Remarks</i>   |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--|--|
| Coca cultivation                 | Positive     | Down 30%.  | Decreased 30% from 2007 to 2011. Lowest total amount of coca cultivation in three Andean nations since 1986.   |
| Cocaine production               | Negative     | Steady (down 6%).  | From 2007 to 2011, cocaine production decreased in Colombia, but increased in Peru and Bolivia. Overall, a minimal decrease (6%) represents no significant change.   |
| Cocaine interdiction rates       | Negative     | National interdiction goals missed each year except one. | Targeted interdiction rates deficient by an average of 5.5% in last five years. See Table 2. Average interdiction rate from 2000 to 2013 was 25.6%. Reduced funds for interdiction assets will likely create additional interdiction difficulties in coming years. |
| Cocaine price per gram in U.S.   | Positive     | Price up by 34% from 2007 to 2011.                       | Recent positive trends though overall prices remained steady between \$100 and \$200 per gram since 1995.  |
| Cocaine purity                   | Positive     | Down 19% from 2007 to 2011.                              | Cocaine purity in 2011 decreased by nearly 20% since 2007 and by 30% since 2006. This marks the lowest levels of cocaine purity in the US since the 1980s.   |
| Numbers of U.S. users of cocaine | Positive     | Down 34% from 2007 to 2011.                              | Number of users decreased from more than 2.1 million in 2007 to under 1.4 million in 2011, a 34% decrease.   |
| Cocaine consumption in U.S.      | Negative     | Up 38% from 2002 to 2006.                                | Consumption in the U.S. increased by 147 metric tons (from 253 tons in 2002 to 390 tons in 2006). Last data available in 2006. More recent statistics indicate that consumption has decreased since 2008.  |

achieved mixed results. Trends in the production and transit zones are negative. Coca cultivation on the whole in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru is down to levels not seen in almost 30 years. Cocaine production, however, remains a problem. Despite impressive achievements in citizen security in Colombia since 2001, the amount of cocaine production from the Andean Ridge countries remains consistently even, the same amount in the last few years as it was through much of the 1990s. The quantity of cocaine produced in Colombia has decreased since 2005, but the amounts in Peru and Bolivia increased steadily since 2000.

Perhaps the most worrisome trend in the region is the decreased amount of cocaine interdiction. The United States has missed its cocaine interdiction targets every year except one since the goals were established in 2007. National goals require the removal of 40 percent of all cocaine in the transit zone by 2015. The strategy called for an incremental increase by percentage starting at 25 percent in 2008 and increasing each year by 2.5 percent. Starting in 2010, the increment was reduced to 2 percent each year. The ONDCP cites a number of reasons for the intercept deficits including aging ships and aircraft, the redirection of assets and personnel for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and increased flow through Venezuela and Mexico.<sup>64</sup>

Future budget constraints may only make the situation worse. In 2012, U.S. Department of Defense interdiction efforts in the transit zone resulted in the interception of over 180 tons of cocaine. An additional international counternarcotics effort during the same year, Operation Martillo, reportedly intercepted more than 30 additional metric tons of cocaine bound for the U.S. Despite these success rates, future interdiction efforts may be curtailed by budget constraints in the United States. This might result in the number of surface vessels being reduced by half in future years. Southcom Commander General John Kelly testified before Congress that budget limitations equates to fewer ships and aircraft for counternarcotics. According to DOD estimates, that may mean an 38 additional tons of cocaine getting through to U.S. markets.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to the negative trends in the production and transit zones, indicators of cocaine use in the United States are nearly all positive. Cocaine prices, purity, and the number of users are all showing positive trends. The data on the amount of cocaine consumption are available only through 2006. Consumption amounts in the five years prior to 2006 showed an increase. However, more recent indicators associated with consumption (for example, number of users) indicate that consumption is likely decreasing also.

Regardless of the apparent successes in the United States, the drug war remains a transnational problem that requires an international response. The U.S. is not the only destination for illicit drugs. Cocaine use in Europe has doubled in the last decade.<sup>66</sup> Brazil is now widely believed to have the third-largest demand for cocaine in the world after the United States and Europe. West Africa, a major cocaine transit hub to Europe, is being destabilized by the influx of illicit drugs from South America.

If Latin American countries do not do their part, gains made in the U.S. and other countries will disappear. This may be the biggest obstacle. Latin American nations no longer seem willing to make the sacrifices they did in the past. The coalition of partners in the war on drugs is fraying. Latin American leaders with an anti-U.S. agenda are, in particular, obstacles to an effective strategy.<sup>67</sup> There may be little the U.S. can do about it. Consequently, more cocaine will reach U.S. markets. Consumption and

| <b>Table 2. Interdiction Goals and Results for Cocaine Intercepts in the Transit Zone</b> |             |                  |                  |
|---|-------------|------------------|------------------|
| <i>Year</i>   | <i>Goal</i> | <i>Actual</i>    | <i>Deficit</i>   |
| 2008  | 25%         | 20%              | -5%              |
| 2009  | 27.5%       | 25%              | -2.5%            |
| 2010  | 30%         | 31%              | +1%              |
| 2011  | 32%         | 25%              | -7%              |
| 2012  | 34%         | 24%              | -10%             |
| 2013  | 36%         | 28%              | -8%              |
| 2014  | 38%         | To be determined | To be determined |
| 2015  | 40%         | To be determined | To be determined |

the number of users will increase. Without an inclusive counternarcotics strategy among nations in the Western Hemisphere, competition among cartels for a stake in the billions of dollars of profits will continue to produce violent atrocities throughout the Americas.

### **U.S. Response and Policy**

The United States insists there is no alternative to its current counternarcotics strategy (such as legalization or decriminalization) and that the fight is worth continuing. Gil Kerlikowske, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said there has been a sustained reduction in demand for cocaine in the United States. He is correct. The percentage of cocaine users in the U.S. has dropped 50 percent since 2006. The purity of cocaine dropped dramatically in 2005. The price of cocaine has remained relatively stable, but the percentage of cocaine users is at its lowest level in 25 years.

Many U.S. officials consider decriminalization or legalization as greater evils than the societal effects of the current policies. In their opinion, the scourge of drug abuse lies not with violence or excessive imprisonment but with the deterioration of society that would result from access to drugs on a wide scale. Officials refer to the crack cocaine epidemic and the associated extreme violence in many U.S. cities in the 1980s as examples of the type of social and economic unrest that would result from legalization. U.S. drug czar Kerlikowske called marijuana, “a dangerous drug” and said any drug legalization would be “waving the white flag,” that “legalization is off the [table] when it comes to discussion, from my viewpoint,” and that “legalization vocabulary doesn’t exist for me and it was made clear that it doesn’t exist in President Obama’s vocabulary.”<sup>68</sup>

Based on the seemingly intractable nature of the problem, it is prudent to study other alternatives. One economist (Jeffrey Miron of Harvard) who examined the problem concluded that legalizing all illicit drugs would produce \$65 billion per year in revenue for the United States by cutting public spending on enforcement as well as through reduced crime and corruption. Another study by analysts at the RAND Corporation found that legalization of marijuana in California would cost Mexican drug cartels 20 percent of their annual income (currently estimated at \$6 to \$10 billion per year).<sup>69</sup>

Not all scholars are in agreement that legalization is as risk-free as some make it out to be. For example, Peter H. Reuter, professor of criminology of the University of Maryland, worries that the legalization of cocaine or other drugs would create a crisis of drug abuse and could have significant

other social, health, and economic costs.<sup>70</sup> Opponents of legalization draw parallels to the alcohol industry in the United States. For example, one U.S. government representative pointed out that the United States collects about \$9 billion annually in taxes on alcohol. Individual states within the country collect approximately \$5.6 billion more. However, this represents less than 10 percent of the estimated \$185 billion in alcohol-related social costs incurred by health care programs, the criminal justice system, and lost productivity.<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps in response to the call for reforms from Latin American officials, U.S. officials recently suggested adopting a different direction in their counternarcotic strategy. Instead of going directly after the drugs, some U.S. officials suggest that they attack the problem at its source. In May 2013, during a tour of Latin America, the President suggested making greater investment in infrastructure, education, and energy instead of interdiction efforts.<sup>72</sup> Obama said, “We also have to recognize that problems like narcotrafficking arise in part when a country is vulnerable because of poverty, because of institutions that are not working for the people, because young people don’t see a brighter future ahead.”<sup>73</sup> He urged Latin American leaders “to fight the drug war not with more guns or military aid but with greater investment in infrastructure, education and energy.”<sup>74</sup> In Cartagena, Colombia, the President attended a meeting with other Latin American heads of state where drug policy was front and center among the discussion topics. But Obama held the line on U.S. policy. “I don’t mind a debate around issues like decriminalization [but] I don’t think that legalization of drugs is going to be the answer,” he said.<sup>75</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Counterdrug policy in Latin America is under scrutiny not only from Latin American leaders but globally. In late 2013, the UN announced that it would hold a General Assembly Special Session in New York in 2016—its first in almost 10 years—to address international drug problems. The event may be an ensemble directed at the U.S. to revisit drug policy reform.<sup>76</sup> Knowing the careful political atmosphere in an election year in the United States, however, no dramatic announcements from the U.S. are likely to occur. International drug reform, Vice President Joe Biden said, is “worth discussing, but there is no possibility the Obama-Biden administration will change its policy.”<sup>77</sup>

States’ policies within the U.S. may be part of the problem. In the November 2012 elections, constituents in two U.S. states—Washington and Colorado—voted to legalize recreational use of marijuana. Eighteen other states and the District of Columbia have legalized medicinal marijuana. The rest of the country is watching closely how these two states manage their programs. Colorado officials, for example, leveled a 25 percent tax on the sale of marijuana that they claim will raise \$6.5 billion in revenue for the state’s defunct school system. The apparent hypocrisy of the situation—the U.S. promotes a hard line on drug policy among its allies but permits legalization at home—drew an international rebuke. In March 2013, the UN’s International Narcotics Control Board called on the Obama administration to end legalization of marijuana within the states, claiming it undermined international efforts to curtail trafficking.<sup>78</sup> President Santos of Colombia called the decision in Washington and Colorado a “major contradiction” in drug policies. “How can I tell the peasant that is growing marijuana in the mountains of Colombia that he will go to jail if smoking marijuana is legal in Colorado or Washington?” Santos asked.<sup>79</sup>

Within Latin America, some nations have already moved beyond the U.S.-advocated strategy. In Uruguay, President Jose Mujica pushed a marijuana legalization bill through Congress. During the policy roll-out, Uruguayan Interior Minister Eduardo Bonomi announced, “The war on drugs has failed and now we have to find another path.”<sup>80</sup> The measure, signed into law in December 2013, makes Uruguay the first country in the world to license and enforce rules for the production, distribution, and sale of marijuana for adults.<sup>81</sup>

In the future, after further examination of the issues, the decision on drug decriminalization may appear easier to resolve. One day, it may be perceived the way the U.S. Prohibition of alcohol of the 1920s is regarded today, widely accepted as a counterproductive policy that was doomed to fail. In most countries, alcohol is widely regulated by the government. Despite its role as a source of social dysfunction—domestic violence, job-productivity loss, vehicular accidents—alcohol regulation is now widely institutionalized throughout the government. Marijuana and cocaine may go the same direction over the course of time. For now, there is no clear path or consensus on the problem among nations in the Americas. As President Santos of Colombia said of the current dilemma, “So are we going to continue 50 years more? Or are there better alternatives?”<sup>82</sup> Policy changes may occur in the future, but for now it appears that we are destined to muddle through rather than make a clean break from the current war on drugs.

### Notes

Pat Paterson is a Professor of National Security Affairs at the William J. Perry Center at National Defense University. Katy Robinson is a student at the University of Michigan and a former research assistant at the Perry Center. The authors would like to thank Cody Brasher, Patrick Nigro, and Chris Warner for conducting research on the statistics in their report.

1. Most government officials believe the expression “war on drugs” is a misnomer and avoid the term. For example, on May 13, 2009, U.S. Drug Czar Gil Kerlikowske announced that the Obama administration would no longer use the phrase “war on drugs,” because it was misrepresentative of the counter-criminal strategy.

2. Martha Mendoza, “U.S. Military Expands Its Drug War in Latin America,” Associated Press, February 3, 2013.

3. Aviva Shen, “Former World Leaders Call for an End to the War on Drugs,” November 5, 2013.

4. Ibid.

5. “Global ‘War on Drugs’ a Failure, Future in Regulation, Prevention: Experts,” Agence France-Press (AFP), October 24, 2012.

6. Decriminalization means reducing or removing criminal penalties for the use of drugs. Legalization means the abolition of most forms of government control of drugs.

7. According to the National Drug Intelligence Center, drug proceeds in Mexico in 2005 ranged from \$2.9 billion to \$6.2 billion for cocaine (including Central America), \$324 million to \$736 million for heroin, \$3.9 billion to \$14.3 billion for marijuana, and \$794 million to \$1.9 billion for methamphetamine. Dependence on cocaine revenues for Colombian drug trafficking organizations is assumed to be even higher because of the costs associated with shipping larger and bulkier marijuana products. Source: United States Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States,” August 2007, GAO-07-1018, 13.

8. Estimates of cocaine trafficking between government and international institutions may vary widely. For example, the United Nations annual World Drug Report differed from U.S. reports of cocaine trafficking by as much as 20 percent. Surprisingly, estimates among U.S. government agencies such as the Department of State and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) also differ. The data we used in our report were drawn from the 2013 National Drug Control Strategy Data Supplement 2013 produced by the (U.S.): [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/ndcs\\_2013.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/ndcs_2013.pdf). It was also verified with unclassified information provided in the document “Cocaine Smuggling in 2010,” produced by ONDCP.



9. See, for example, Appendix C of Peter Hakim and Kimberly Covington, “What Is US Drug Policy?” Inter-American Dialogue, July 2012. See also Michael Walther, “Insanity: Four Decades of U.S. Counter Drug Strategy,” Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 27, 2012.
10. Liana Sun Wyler, “International Drug Control Policy: Background and U.S. Responses,” Congressional Research Service, August 13, 2013, 2.
11. Kevin Casas-Zamora, “Drugs and Democracy: Toward a Paradigm Shift,” Brookings Institution, April 22, 2009.
12. Global Commission on Drug Policy 2011 Report. Available at <http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/>.
13. “Drug War Debate Heats Up after Another Brutal Year,” Agence France-Presse (AFP), December 13, 2012.
14. The Plan Colombia assistance package failed to achieve its stated goals of reducing the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by 50 percent in six years (through 2006). From 2000 to 2006, opium poppy cultivation and heroin production declined about 50 percent. However, coca cultivation and cocaine production were about 15 and 4 percent greater in 2006 than in 2000, respectively. See United States Government Accountability Office, “Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved: U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance.” GAO Report GAO-09-71, October 6, 2008, 1 and 11. See also Nina M. Serafino, “Colombia: Plan Colombia Legislation and Assistance (FY2000–FY2001),” Congressional Research Service, Report #RL30541, July 5, 2001, 6.
15. Mary Anastasia O’Grady, “No Peace in Colombia with a War on Drugs,” Wall Street Journal, September 29, 2013.
16. “Drug War Debate Heats Up after Another Brutal Year,” Agence France-Presse (AFP), December 13, 2012. Santos’s speech was especially prescient coming from the leader of a country that has lost thousands of citizens during decades of violence. According to the National Center for Historic Memory, a Colombian government-financed research group, 220,000 Colombians died in political violence since 1958. Of those, 82 percent of the deaths were civilians. Only 18 percent of the war casualties corresponded to soldiers, policemen guerrillas, or paramilitaries.
17. Two former Mexican Presidents, Vicente Fox and Ernesto Zedillo, are among international leaders who have called for drug policy reform. Heather Haase and Coletta Youngers, “Latin American Leaders Bring Drug Policy Debate to the United Nations,” Washington Office on Latin America, September 30, 2013.
18. Not all Latin American officials are for legalization. At the OAS General Assembly meeting in Antigua, Guatemala, in June 2013, officials from Peru, Brazil, and Nicaragua spoke against legalization. See Randal C. Archibold, “In Americas, Resistance to Legal Marijuana,” New York Times, June 7, 2013, A4.
19. The FARC accounted for about 60 percent of the cocaine exported from Colombia to the United States. Source: United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), “U.S. Counternarcotics Cooperation with Venezuela Has Declined,” Report GAO-09-806, July 2009, 4. Also reported in statement of Jess T. Ford, Director International Affairs and Trade, “Challenges in Implementing Plan Colombia,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives, October 12, 2000, Report GAO-01-76T.
20. United States Government Accountability Office, “Drug Control: Narcotics Threat from Colombia Continues to Grow,” June 1999, Report GAO/NSIAD-99-136, 4-5. Also cited in Bruce Bagley, “Drug Trafficking, Political Violence and U.S. Policy in Colombia in the 1990s,” January 5, 2001, 1.
21. U.S. Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2008, 16.
22. Reported in statement of Jess T. Ford, Director International Affairs and Trade, “Challenges in Implementing Plan Colombia,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives, October 12, 2000, Report GAO-01-76T, 7.
23. United States Government Accountability Office “Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved: U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance.” Report GAO-09-71, October 6, 2008, 39.
24. Alternative crop development programs also entailed creating other employment opportunities, such as those provided by various types of agro-industry. Complementary measures included improving infrastructure, providing social services, strengthening local governments, offering access to credit, and giving marketing and distribution assistance. Reported in statement of Jess T. Ford, Director International Affairs and Trade, “Challenges in Implementing Plan Colombia,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives, October 12, 2000,” Report GAO-01-76T, 1.
25. Ibid, 12.
26. Ibid., 39.
27. Reported in statement of Jess T. Ford, “International Programs Face Significant Challenges Reducing the Supply of Illegal Drugs but Support Broad U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Domestic Policy,

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, July 21, 2010, Report GAO-10-921T. Also reported in Beittel, 5, and GAO Report GAO-09-71, 4.

28. In January 2013, Bolivia rejoined the United Nations drug control regime but this time with a specific reservation clause that precludes its requirement to criminalize the domestic personal use, consumption, possession, purchase, or cultivation of coca leaf. Source: Liana Sun Wyler, “International Drug Control Policy: Background and U.S. Responses” Congressional Research Service, August 13, 2013, 10. Also see Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Agencies Have Allotted Billions in Andean Countries, but DOD Should Improve Its Reporting of Results,” Report GAO-12-824, June 2012, 27; Antonio Regalado, “Bolivia Plants Coca, and Cocaine Follows,” Wall Street Journal, August 18, 2009.

29. Ministerio de Defensa Nacional de Colombia, “Logros de la Política Integral de Seguridad y Defensa para la Prosperidad,” Febrero 2012.

30. Office of National Drug Control Policy, National Drug Control Strategy Data Supplement, 2013 (table 121).

31. Reported in Shari Grossman, “Death and Drugs,” Harvard International Review, Fall 2005, 12.

32. Reported in statement by The Honorable Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, Caucus on International Narcotics Control, “Drug Control: U.S. Efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean,” Government Accountability Office Report B-284626, February 1, 2000, United States Senate, Washington, D.C., 7.

33. Colombian National Center for Historic Memory, <http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co>.

34. Mary Anastasia O’Grady, “No Peace in Colombia with a War on Drugs,” Wall Street Journal, September 29, 2013.

35. United States Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States,” Report GAO-07-1018, August 2007, 13.

36. Juan Forero, “Interview: Guatemala President Otto Perez Molina,” Washington Post, April 10, 2012.

37. O’Grady, “No Peace in Colombia with a War on Drugs.”

38 Alex Spillius, “War on Drugs a Failure, Says Colombian Leader,” The Telegraph (UK), June 8, 2013.

39. U.S. Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), March 2012, 213. See also “Guatemala Prez Urges Drug Legalization while Escalating War on Cartel Gangs,” Associated Press, September 25, 2012; Drug Enforcement Agency report, “Drugs of Abuse,” September 2011, 42.

40. “50 Most Violent Cities in the World, 2012 Rankings.” Security, Peace and Justice (Seguridad, Paz y Justicia), available online at: <http://www.seguridadjusticiaypaz.org.mx>.

41. United States Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Counternarcotics Cooperation with Venezuela Has Declined,” Report GAO-09-806, July 2009, 15-18.

42. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Treasury designated three senior Venezuelan government officials (including the head of Military Intelligence, the Director of Intelligence and Prevention Services, and the former Venezuelan Minister of Interior and Justice) as drug kingpins for complicity in drug trafficking. In *ibid.*, 15-18.

43. The U.S. Department of State estimates that as much as 87 percent of all cocaine flights from South America land in Honduras. See Liana Sun Wyler, “International Drug Control Policy: Background and U.S. Responses,” Congressional Research Service, August 13, 2013; 16.

44. Those designated were the Director of Venezuela’s Military Intelligence Directorate, Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios; the Director of Venezuela’s Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services, Henry de Jesus Rangel Silva; and the former Venezuelan Minister of Interior and Justice, Ramon Emilio Rodriguez Chacin. Source: United States Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Counternarcotics Cooperation with Venezuela Has Declined,” Report GAO-09-806, July 2009, 13; See also U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Targets Venezuelan Government Officials Supporting the FARC,” September 12, 2008. Also cited in U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control. “Press Release: Treasury Designates Four Venezuelan Officials for Providing Arms and Security to the FARC,” September 8, 2011.

45. Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), “Cocaine Smuggling in 2010,” January 2012, 2; See also William Neuman, “Cocaine’s Flow Is Unchecked in Venezuela.” New York Times, July 26, 2012.

46. Juan Forero, “Interview: Guatemala President Otto Perez Molina,” Washington Post, April 10, 2012.

47. Kathleen Hennessey and Tracy Wilkinson, “Obama Urges New Tack for Central America’s Drug War,” Los Angeles Times, May 4, 2013.

48. “Guatemala Prez Urges Drug Legalization while Escalating War on Cartel Gangs,” Associated Press, September 25, 2012. In 2002, the U.S. government suspended joint counternarcotic operations in Guatemala when the antinarcotics police unit in that country was disbanded because of widespread corruption within the agency and its general lack of effectiveness

in combating the country's drug problem. Reported in statement of Jess T. Ford, "International Programs Face Significant Challenges Reducing the Supply of Illegal Drugs but Support Broad U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives," Testimony before the Subcommittee on Domestic Policy, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, July 21, 2010, Washington D.C., Report #: GAO-10-921T, 7.

49. According to one scholar, the system was characterized by a "live and let live" working relationship between Mexican authorities and drug lords" through the 1990s. See Francisco E. González, "Mexico's Drug Wars Get Brutal," *Current History*, February 2009.

50. U.S. government officials now characterize Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) as the greatest organized crime threat to the United States. Mexican DTOs now "dominate the supply and wholesale distribution of most illicit drugs in the United States" and are present in more than one thousand U.S. cities. Source: "National Drug Threat Assessment 2011," National Drug Intelligence Center, 7. See also Congressional Research Service, "Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs," March 19, 2012; United States Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States," Report GAO-07-1018, August 2007, 7.

51. The list of senior Latin American officials accused of collaborating with organized crime groups is long and distinguished. In 1989, former Bolivian Minister of Interior Arce Gomez was arrested, charged with drug trafficking, and sentenced to 30 years in prison. In 1990, Panamanian President Manuel Noriega was charged with drug trafficking. In 1994, President Ernesto Samper was accused of receiving campaign funds from drug cartels. In 1997, Mexican drug czar General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo was arrested for drug trafficking and corruption. In November 2008, Mexican drug czar (from 2006 to 2008) Noe Ramirez was charged with accepting bribes from drug traffickers. In January 2009, Mexican drug czar Mariano Francisco Herran from 1997 to 2000 was charged with colluding with cartels. In 2010, the Guatemalan Chief of National Police and the country's drug czar were arrested for colluding with drug trafficking organizations. In 2011, General Rene Sanabria, Bolivia's former anti-drug police chief, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for attempting to smuggle more than 300 pounds of cocaine out of Chile. Current Suriname President Desi Bouterse was convicted in absentia in the Netherlands for drug trafficking. Despite this, he was reelected president of the country in 2010. Specifically within Mexico, according to the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INSCR) in 2002, the government arrested 25 mid-level officials from the Attorney General's Office and other agencies and, in 2006, reported that it had dismissed 945 federal employees and suspended an additional 953. Source: various reports including United States Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States," Report GAO-07-1018, August 2007, 14.

52. "New push at OAS for US to alter anti-drug approach," Associated Press, June 4, 2013. See also Dana Priest, "Mexico's changes in Anti-Drug Fight Imperil U.S. Role" *Washington Post*, April 28, 2013; "New Friction as Mexico Curbs U.S. Cooperation in Drug War," *New York Times*, April 30, 2013.

53. Based on authors' calculations of data from National Drug Control Strategy Data Supplement 2013 (table 123). Also reported in statement of Jess T. Ford, Director International Affairs and Trade, "International Programs Face Significant Challenges Reducing the Supply of Illegal Drugs but Support Broad U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives." Government Accountability Office Report GAO-10-921T, July 21, 2010, 5.

54. According to Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) officials, the tunnels found in the last six years are 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. Source: United States Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States," Report GAO-07-1018, August 2007, 18.

55. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, April 2013, [http://transborder.bts.gov/programs/international/transborder/TBDR\\_BC/TBDR\\_BC\\_Index.html](http://transborder.bts.gov/programs/international/transborder/TBDR_BC/TBDR_BC_Index.html).

56. In 1969, President Nixon authorized Operation Intercept as part of an effort to stop marijuana smuggling across the U.S.-Mexico border. It subjected every vehicle to a three-minute inspection. It tied up traffic so badly that the Mexican President requested that the U.S. cancel the program.

57. The entire process from coca cultivation to sale in the United States is estimated to take 24 months. Hence, for methodological considerations, interdiction effects that occur at different stages of the process have a delayed result on drug availability.

58. According to U.S. government statistics, the average interdiction rate from 2000 to 2013 was 25.6 percent.

59. This theory, though reductionist, is widely supported. See, for example, General Accounting Office, "Long-Standing Problems Hinder U.S. International Efforts," February 1997, 4.

60. Erika Bolstad, "Future Southcom Commander Pledges Fight against Drugs," Miami Herald, July 19, 2012.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. The June 2011 report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy called for drug policies based on solid empirical and scientific evidence (p. 5).
64. National intercept goals first reported in 2007 National Drug Control Strategy, p. 40. Summarized in 2010 National Drug Control Strategy, pp. 85-86. See also the statement of Jess T. Ford, "International Programs Face Significant Challenges Reducing the Supply of Illegal Drugs but Support Broad U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives," Testimony before the Subcommittee on Domestic Policy, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, July 21, 2010, Washington D.C., Government Accountability Office, Report GAO-10-921T.
65. Jane's Intelligence Review, "SOUTHCOMs Diminishing Military Assets Expected to Mean More Trafficking." June 2013. See also Kyle Swenson, "Sequestration Means More Drugs Will Be Arriving in South Florida," New York Times, March 7, 2013.
66. According to the ONDCP, European countries like England, Spain, Italy, and Germany account for a combined 14 percent of the worldwide cocaine demand. Source: Office of National Drug Control Policy, "Cocaine Smuggling in 2010."
67. In addition to the examples mentioned in the text, U.S. ambassadors from Bolivia and Venezuela were expelled from their respective countries in September 2008 and January 2009. Bolivia kicked out the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency in 2008. Ecuador refused to renew the U.S. lease on the Manta Forward Operating Location (FOL) despite the airbase's anti-drug flights that served the interests of all the Andean Ridge countries.
68. May 22, 2009 interview w/ Kerlikowske on KUOW radio, from Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gil\\_Kerlikowske](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gil_Kerlikowske).
69. Eduardo Porter, "Numbers Tell of Failure in Drug War," New York Times, July 4, 2012.
70. The total economic cost of drug abuse in the United States is estimated to \$180.9 billion. Data is from 2002, the most recent year this data was reported. According to ONDCP, costs include negative health and crime consequences and loss of potential productivity from disability, death, and withdrawal from the legitimate workforce. Source: United States Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotic Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States," Report GAO-07-1018, August 2007, 10.
71. Marilyn Quagliotti, "U.S. Drug Policy and the Obama Administration's Efforts to Rebalance the Way the U.S. Addresses This Global Challenge," Security and Defense Studies Review, vol. 14, 2013, 199.
72. Kathleen Hennessey and Tracy Wilkinson, Obama Urges New Tack for Central America's Drug War, Los Angeles Times, May 4, 2013. Before he became President, Obama had a different philosophy on the problem. "The war on drugs has been an utter failure. We need to rethink and decriminalize our marijuana laws. We need to rethink how we're operating the drug war," he said. Reported in Bernd Debusmann, "Obama and the Failed War on Drugs, Reuters News, April 16, 2012.
73. Michael D. Shear and Randal C. Archibold, "In Latin America, U.S. Focus Shifts from Drug War to Economy," New York Times, May 4, 2013.
74. Kathleen Hennessey and Tracy Wilkinson, "Obama Urges New Tack for Central America's Drug War," Los Angeles Times, May 4, 2013.
75. Bernd Debusmann, "Analysis: Obama and the Failed War on Drugs," Reuters, April 16, 2012.
76. Aviva Shen, Former World Leaders Call for an End to the War on Drugs, November 5, 2013. See also Heather Haase and Coletta Youngers, "Latin American Leaders Bring Drug Policy Debate to the United Nations," Washington Office on Latin America, September 30, 2013.
77. Laura Meckler and Darcy Crowe, "U.S. Drug Policy Faces Latin Dissent," Wall Street Journal, April 14, 2012.
78. Aviva Shen, "Former World Leaders Call for an End to the War on Drugs," November 5, 2013.
79. "Colombia Urges Global Approach to Legalising Drugs," Agence France-Presse (AFP), January 24, 2014.
80. "Uruguayan Official Defends Drug policy during Mexico Visit," EFE (Spain), March 7, 2013.
81. President Mujica called Uruguay's new law an "experiment." Citizens 18 years or older will be able to grow up to 6 marijuana plants, buy marijuana in "smoking clubs," and buy up to 40 grams a month in pharmacies. Source: "Uruguay Official: Legal Pot for \$1 per Gram," Associated Press, October 21, 2013. See also "Uruguay to Make Big Splash by Legalizing Marijuana," Agence France-Presse (AFP), December 7, 2013.
82. Mary Anastasia O'Grady, "No Peace in Colombia with a War on Drugs," Wall Street Journal, September 29, 2013.





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