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DEAD-END DRUG WARS

by Peter R. Andreas, Eva C. Bertram, Morris J. Blachman, and Kenneth E. Sharpe

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have led to a fundamental reevaluation of U.S. security interests. In Latin America, the perceived security threat of the 1990s is not a revolutionary government or an insurgency with alleged Soviet ties but a substance: illegal drugs.

The spread of crack cocaine and the dramatic escalation of drug-related violence in the 1980s led first Ronald Reagan and then George Bush to "declare war" on drugs. By the end of the decade, more Americans identified drugs as the number-one threat to the country than any other problem. In September 1989, President George Bush devoted his first nationally televised address to the drug problem, outlining a National Drug Control Strategy that called for "an assault on every front." Efforts to curb the cocaine supply at the source of production were stepped up, and the Andean cocaine-producing countries of Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru became a first "front" in the U.S. drug war abroad. Under the \$2.2 billion, five-year "Andean Initiative," U.S. aid and advisers have poured into the region. Drug-related military aid jumped from approximately \$5 million in 1988 to more than \$140 million in 1990.

The Andean region has now replaced Central America as the leading recipient of U.S. military aid in the hemisphere. The Joint Chiefs of Staff's "Military Net Assessment" presented to Congress in March 1991 highlights the seriousness of the Pentagon's approach to the drug war: "Counternarcotics" leads the list of likely future conflicts.

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But the premises and methods guiding the administration's Andean drug control strategy are neither new nor untested and, unfortunately, have a long record of failure. After more than a decade of U.S. efforts to reduce the cocaine supply, more cocaine is produced in more places than ever before. Curiously, the U.S. response to failure has been to escalate rather than reevaluate.

U.S. counternarcotics strategists recognize that the success of the drug war in the Andes depends upon local actors—governments, police, militaries, and peasant producers—possessing the will and the capability to curb production and stop trafficking. Drug-war strategists widely acknowledge that these conditions are currently lacking in the Andean countries. Yet without providing any compelling argument or evidence, they maintain the unquestioned presumption that greater U.S. aid, training, and equipment can create them. The logic of escalation in the drug war is in fact strikingly similar to the arguments advanced when U.S. counterinsurgency strategies, undercut by ineffective and uncommitted governments and security forces, were failing in Vietnam: “We’ve just begun to fight.” “We’re turning the corner.” Since failure can so easily be used to justify further escalation, how do we know whether we are really turning the corner or simply running around a vicious circle?

The president's National Drug Control Strategy recognizes that America's drug problem has both a demand side and a supply side: Americans are able and eager to buy drugs, and drugs are cheap and readily available. The strategy, however, continues the supply-side approach of decades of past U.S. counternarcotics efforts: About 70 per cent of 1991 federal antidrug dollars target supply reduction, while the remainder is invested in demand-side measures of treatment and prevention. The assumption is that severely restricting supply will lower demand for drugs by making them scarcer and more expensive. Supply-side tactics have included law enforcement programs to disrupt distribution at home and interdiction efforts on U.S. borders. Abroad, the United States has aimed to seize drug shipments by land, sea, and air, to disable trafficking net-

works, and to destroy the drug supply at its source of production.

"The logic is simple," Bush said in a May 1988 campaign speech, "The cheapest and safest way to eradicate narcotics is to destroy them at their source....We need to wipe out crops wherever they are grown and take out labs wherever they exist." For more than a decade the main foreign targets in the war on drugs have been the Andean cocaine-producing countries.

The U.S. drug war there has been built on the twin components of law enforcement and economic assistance. The enforcement component seeks to cut supply by eradicating coca crops, destroying processing laboratories, blocking the transport of processing chemicals, and interdicting drug shipments. Traffickers are to be arrested and prosecuted, their assets seized, and their networks dismantled.

Past U.S. drug control efforts emphasized aid to Andean civilian law enforcement agencies and judiciaries. Meager results led to a search for ways to increase enforcement capabilities; an early step was to "militarize" the police. Beginning in 1983, the United States helped establish special counternarcotics units in Bolivia and Peru—paramilitary police squads later trained by U.S. Special Forces personnel. When this strategy proved ineffective, U.S. narcotics officials turned to Andean militaries, backed by U.S. equipment and training, to do the job.

Law enforcement has been coupled with economic assistance. A 1990 report by the Office of National Drug Control Policy emphasizes that "economic strategies and resources are required to provide the general conditions for a healthy and viable legal economy throughout the region as well as provide viable alternatives for those currently engaged in illicit drug cultivation."

The track record of American enforcement and economic assistance efforts, however, has been dismal. The United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) estimates that cocaine production in South America skyrocketed from approximately 397 tons in 1988 to 990 tons in 1990. Production is expected to increase by another 10 per cent over 1991. "Coca cultivation is now approaching 200,000 tons of coca

leaf a year, enough to satisfy four times the annual estimated U.S. cocaine market," according to a congressional report.¹

Coca eradication programs have consistently failed even to keep pace with new growth. Interdiction efforts have yielded equally poor results: In Peru and Bolivia, for example, less than 1 per cent of coca paste and base was seized in 1989.

Enforcement efforts in Colombia have shown periodic signs of success, but even these have been short-lived. In the months following the Colombian government's renowned fall 1989 crackdown, cocaine processing and trafficking dropped by more than 70 per cent. Production quickly recovered, however, reaching 80 per cent of the previous level within six months. Even more significant was the State Department Office of the Inspector General's conclusion earlier, in March 1989, that U.S. efforts in the Andes "have had little impact on the availability of illicit narcotics in the United States."

U.S. counternarcotics strategies have not only failed to significantly reduce supply but have been costly to the region and to other American interests there. U.S. aid has allied the United States with corrupt and brutal security forces in the region. Peru has either topped or run second on the United Nations' list of forced "disappearances" for the past five years; its military was condemned by the U.S. State Department's 1990 Country Report for "widespread and egregious human rights violations." Aiding such security forces further strengthens historically antidemocratic institutions against fragile civilian governments and undermines the interests North Americans share with the people of the Andes in promoting democracy.

The Andean Initiative

Despite the record of supply-reduction failures and damaging consequences for democracy and human rights, the Bush administration's

¹U.S. Congress, House Committee on Government Operations, U.S. Anti-Narcotics Activities in the Andean Region, 101st Cong., 2d Sess., 1990, H. Rept. 101-991, 18. Peter R. Andreas and Eva C. Bertram assisted in the preparation of this report.

response has been escalation, not reconsideration. Interpreting past failure as a consequence of inadequate funding coupled with insufficient local political will and institutional capacity, the administration is implementing a "new and improved" supply-reduction strategy. The president's Andean Initiative provides unprecedented levels of U.S. aid for Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru to escalate enforcement and economic assistance efforts.

The major shift from past antidrug efforts is the dramatic extension of militarization: The United States has signed separate military assistance pacts with Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru, assigning a leading role to their respective military forces in the war on drugs and committing extensive U.S. assistance. The militarization of the drug war also requires a significantly expanded training role for the U.S. Defense Department, and American advisers have already been sent to the region.² In Peru, where the administration has concluded that the Shining Path guerrillas are impeding drug enforcement, the United States will support counterinsurgency.

Once Andean governments implement this militarized enforcement strategy, significant economic assistance will follow. Projected to comprise about half of the \$2.2 billion designated for the region, most of this aid is targeted at balance-of-payments support, not alternative development programs. The governments of Bolivia and Peru publicly resisted initial American efforts to draw their militaries into the drug control campaign, yet their desperate need for economic help has given them little choice but to sign the antidrug accords.

Will the escalation succeed? Preliminary evidence indicates a continuation of previous trends: increased success in terms of crops eradicated, labs destroyed, and traffickers arrested, but little or no impact on overall levels of supply. Official reports of failure to achieve real supply reductions continue to mount. The State

²See Charles Call, *Clear and Present Dangers: The U.S. Military and the War on Drugs in the Andes*, *Washington Office on Latin America*, October 1991.

Department's March 1991 report acknowledged that the department had underestimated the potential dry leaf coca harvest over the last five years by about one-third. The report projected a large increase in Peru's coca production and noted that even with increased law enforcement efforts in Bolivia, "trafficking organizations have kept pace by diversifying their marketing of refined cocaine." Recent successes in curbing the operations of the Medellín cartel in Colombia, meanwhile, have led only to an increased market share for the competing Cali cartel. According to DEA chief Robert Bonner, the Cali cartel boosted its market share from 30 per cent to 75 per cent in the 10 months after the government cracked down on Medellín in mid-1989.

Missing: Official Will and Capability

U.S. drug strategists recognize that these trends will not be reversed unless Andean governments and security forces acquire the capability and will to fight the U.S. drug war. "Strengthening political will and institutional capability," notes the 1990 report of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, "is a requisite for all further [counternarcotics] actions" in the Andean region. Andean militaries and police are presently no match for narco-trafficking organizations operating transnationally and backed by private armies, advanced weaponry, and highly sophisticated intelligence systems. Security forces in the region are further hamstrung by operational inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

A November 1989 raid on the Bolivian town of San Ramón, touted by the U.S. embassy as "the largest counternarcotics enforcement operation in recent times," is a case in point. The raid was compromised by a tip-off; the targeted traffickers fled the site hours before the operation. Less than five kilos of cocaine were seized. The 20 Bolivians detained during the raid were released for lack of evidence, and the cost of the operation was more than \$100,000.

Countless examples of inefficiency and mismanagement led the DEA in a December 1989 internal review to emphasize the need for "institution-building":

All members of the study team agree that "institution-building," or helping host country law en-

forcement agencies develop to the point of operational self-sufficiency has been an objective of the United States foreign policy for many years....Despite significant achievements, institution building in the [Andean drug-producing] countries is incomplete. No...country is currently able to routinely conduct operations against coca processors without a U.S. presence.

The Bush administration's belief that the United States can manufacture the institutional capability needed for Andean governments to carry out U.S. objectives provides the rationale for the current strategy. But what leverage does the United States have to create such capability? In certain areas, Washington can and may make a difference. It can invest resources in training judiciaries, establishing new courts for drug proceedings, and offering technical assistance for crop substitution. It can improve the efficiency of police and military enforcement with training, intelligence, and equipment. The size and operational capacity of the counter-narcotics units will grow, and improved efficiency should lead to measurable, short-term successes: an increase in the levels of crops eradicated, coca paste seized, labs destroyed, and traffickers arrested.

But such *efficiency* does not automatically translate into institutional *effectiveness* in meeting stated objectives—in this case, cocaine supply reduction. This gap between efficiency and effectiveness is clouded by the very measures of “success” favored by policy advocates. There is a tendency to emphasize the number of crops eradicated and not the amount of new coca planted; the number of labs destroyed and not the number rebuilt or the total processing capacity; the number of seizures and not the totals being shipped; the number of arrests and not the continued effectiveness of the trafficking networks. Washington's measures of efficiency are as misleading in assessing genuine progress in the Andean drug war as “body counts” were in measuring U.S. success in the Vietnam war. With such measures, there is no failure, only milestones that fail to mark progress toward any meaningful goal.

These misleading measures obscure a deeper problem: No degree of technical capability among Andean drug enforcement agencies can

achieve the stated objectives of the U.S. Andean strategy without political will—that is, unless government and military officials are committed to making our war their war. And their will to fight the U.S. war seems notably absent. Kirk Kotula, Bolivia program officer for the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, noted in a January 1990 memo that the Bolivian government's performance "in almost every area indicates total lack of commitment to the anti-drug war." The DEA has reached similar conclusions about Peru.

The reasons for the lack of Andean commitment to the U.S. drug war are not hard to identify. The Andean economic and political context makes it rational for political leaders, military and law enforcement officials, and countless peasant producers to follow strategies at odds with American counternarcotics objectives. The limits on U.S. ability to create the Andean will to fight America's drug war may be far greater than even the most pragmatic U.S. drug strategists have calculated.

The primary concerns of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori and Bolivian President Jaime Paz Zamora are to ensure economic and political stability in long-impooverished nations suffering from high unemployment, enormous foreign debts, and falling wages. In the last decade, both Peru and Bolivia have experienced the worst economic crises in their histories. Immediate economic and political interests dictate against a crackdown on coca, both nations' most significant and dependable source of dollars and jobs. The Peruvian coca industry brings in approximately \$1 billion annually, or 30 per cent of the total value of legal exports, and employs some 15 per cent of the national work force. The Bolivian situation is starker. Bolivia's \$600 million in annual coca revenues is equivalent to the value of all its other exports combined. The coca industry employs 300,000 Bolivians, or 20 per cent of the adult work force.

A swift and effective blow to the coca economy would have a devastating economic and political impact. The livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of citizens would be threatened, triggering massive social unrest. Paz Zamora has compared the effect of eliminating the

Bolivian coca industry to that of laying off 50 million Americans by closing down a single industry.

The political impact of fighting the U.S. drug war is further complicated in Peru by the Shining Path insurgency. Peru's coca-rich Upper Huallaga Valley is effectively controlled by the Shining Path; the guerrillas portray themselves as protectors of the peasant growers, often serving as intermediaries on their behalf with the traffickers. Peruvians fear an aggressive narcotics control effort would increase the threat posed by the guerrillas by driving peasants into their ranks. Peruvian politicians, according to a 1989 DEA internal review, have said that

Peru can live with the narcotics problem for the next fifty years, but may not survive the next two years if the economic and insurgent problems are not dealt with now....The will to deal with the drug issues, when faced with problems that threaten the immediate survival of the country, remains the most difficult issue.

The question of political will is more complex but equally at issue in Colombia. The government of President César Gaviria Trujillo draws a clear distinction between narco-terrorism and narco-trafficking. Its priority is not to eliminate drug trafficking per se, but to end the violence associated with the drug trade, which has taken an extraordinarily heavy toll in lives and on internal stability. In the "total war" declared by the Medellín drug cartel in 1989, more than 400 police officers, 100 judges and judicial assistants, and 11 journalists were killed in one year. The government's crackdown on the Medellín group has been formidable, but Colombian officials show little commitment to stopping the drug-trafficking activities of a broad range of other drug networks that, unlike Medellín, have not used paramilitary violence to threaten the government.

The difficulty in creating political will is not lost on U.S. narcotics officials. "Political will, pragmatically speaking, I would define as getting governments to do something they don't want to do," stated State Department narcotics specialist Daniel Chaij in April 1989. He and others, however, proceed as though the right mixture of carrots and sticks can make Andean

governments act in accordance with U.S. strategy. They fail to understand the systemic character of the problem: Any U.S. drug strategy designed to significantly reduce the supply of cocaine at its source threatens the immediate economic viability of Andean countries and the political survival of Andean leaders.

Certainly, Andean governments share an interest in receiving U.S. aid and support: Offering millions of dollars in desperately needed aid in return for promises to fight the drug war, not surprisingly, has generated formal commitments and varying levels of cooperation from each of the Andean countries. But the lack of real commitment to U.S. antidrug objectives suggests that only those components of the drug policy that serve existing local interests—such as economic assistance and counter-insurgency support—will be actively pursued.

Andean will to wage the drug war is further undermined by the competing interests of the law enforcement and military institutions charged with carrying out the U.S. counter-narcotics strategy. Military and police, for example, frequently refuse to cooperate and even sabotage each other's operations. U.S. field reports document the interagency conflicts as police and military forces vie for resources, prestige, and power in each of the three nations in a pattern not uncommon among Latin security forces.

In some instances, notably in Peru, these interagency conflicts are exacerbated by the contradictory missions of police and military forces. The Peruvian military is absorbed in a campaign against the Shining Path; the responsibilities of the police, meanwhile, include narcotics control missions conducted independently or with DEA assistance. The conflict is played out in the Upper Huallaga Valley. The military's interest is in driving a wedge between the insurgents and the coca-growing peasants whom the guerrillas claim to protect; military forces therefore are reluctant to alienate the growers and have generally permitted them to grow coca unimpeded. The police and the DEA, on the other hand, seek to disrupt both growing and trafficking. Serious conflicts have resulted: U.S. officials acknowledge a pattern of incidents, including armed attacks, in which

Peruvian military forces have thwarted DEA operations.

As General Alberto Arciniega Hubi, formerly regional commander in the valley, explained, "There are 150,000 *campesinos cocaleros* in the zone. Each of them is a potential *subversivo*. Eradicate his field and the next day he'll be one." He further noted that "most of my troops come from this area. In effect, the police were wiping out the livelihood of their families, while I was asking them to fight Shining Path, which was sworn to protect the growers. Shining Path looked like heroes."

Administration attempts to link the anti-guerrilla and antidrug objectives may win military aid from a U.S. Congress alarmed by drugs, but they sidestep the fundamental contradiction between fighting the drug war and fighting the Shining Path. In Peru, the military's primary mission will remain counterinsurgency, although officials will gladly pay lip service to the drug war to gain U.S. aid. Likewise, in Colombia, the clear priority of the military is to battle insurgents, not drugs. In fact, Colombian military officials told U.S. congressional staff members that \$38.5 million of the \$40.3 million in counternarcotics assistance allocated for 1990 would provide most of the logistical support for a major counterinsurgency operation in an area not known for drug trafficking.

The logic of escalation in the drug war is strikingly similar to the arguments advanced when U.S. counterinsurgency strategies were failing in Vietnam and elsewhere.

Can a well-crafted U.S. policy solve the problems of institutional rivalry and conflicting missions that undermine the will of the Andean countries to fight the U.S. drug war? There may be some specific actions the United States can take that would have salutary effects on the margins, but the limits of U.S. leverage in the Andean context are obvious. A December 1989 report by DEA agents in Peru is particularly telling:

Without the DEA presence, the Peruvians would not move against the traffickers. If given an airlift capability, the Peruvians would be more likely to move against the insurgents than the traffickers. Without U.S. presence, human rights violations, to include the slaughter of insurgents or traffickers, is likely.

While the United States may succeed in winning apparent compliance with its objectives and tactics, once American agents turn their backs, security forces will revert to their own mission and methods.

Perhaps the most insidious and uncontrollable factor undermining the local commitment to carry out the U.S. counternarcotics strategy is the drug-related corruption that runs through the militaries and law enforcement agencies of all three Andean countries. According to a December 1989 DEA memorandum, "corruption is a major factor within the police, the military and the judiciary" in Peru. The State Department reported in March 1991 that in Bolivia "widespread corruption, compounded by [government] weakness in policy implementation, further combine to hamper [Bolivia's] counter-narcotics effectiveness."

Forms of corruption are wide-ranging. Officials tip off narcotics traffickers before antidrug operations. They re-sell seized coca products for a profit after a raid. They accept payoffs to allow arrested traffickers to escape, or to permit drugs and processing chemicals to be transported through checkpoints. Corruption most commonly involves individuals who accept money simply to look the other way or conveniently disappear during a drug transaction. The motivation is not complicated. In November 1989 congressional testimony, retired Special Forces commander General Robert Kingston described a conversation between a U.S. border patrol agent and a Peruvian official at a checkpoint in Peru:

A colonel from Lima said, I have the opportunity while I'm here to make \$70,000 by looking the other way at certain times. You have a family, they are protected in the United States, you have a proper pension plan. My family is not protected and I don't have the proper pension plan and I will never have the opportunity to make \$70,000 as long as I live. I am going to make it.

A senior officer in Peru earns about \$240 a month. It should therefore be no surprise that officers now bribe their superiors to get assigned to coca-producing zones once avoided at all costs.

Corruption becomes more insidious, however, when elements of an institution are complicit in the traffic itself, and the institution acts as a shield against individual accountability. In Peru, according to U.S. Special Forces commander Colonel Robert Jacobelly, "We know as a fact that the Army gets payments for letting traffickers use airstrips."

Bank records located after the capture and killing of Colombian trafficker José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha revealed that he had provided multimillion-dollar payoffs to entire brigades of the Colombian army. In one well-known 1983 case, a Colombian special forces company helped relocate an entire cocaine-processing operation that was threatened by guerrilla attacks. The operation took almost a month and involved nearly 50 army personnel, including six officers; each was paid between \$500 and \$2,500 by the traffickers. Asked why he did not act to seize the cocaine laboratory, the chief of staff of the Colombian Seventh Brigade responded that "it is not the mission" of the army to fight drugs but rather to battle insurgents.

Corruption reaches its most dangerous form when national leaders use the power of the state to further personal stakes in the drug trade. Although Panama's Manuel Antonio Noriega provides the most notorious example of state-level drug corruption, one of the Andean nations has had its own drug dictator. Andean expert Gustavo Gorriti testified before Congress that the 1980–81 regime of Luis García Meza in Bolivia "was without doubt the most important case in which political power—the control of a country—was used to further, protect, and engage in narcotics trafficking."

Unless the corruption deeply embedded in the government, police, and military can be addressed, many of the very agents on which the United States relies to carry out its strategy will subvert the U.S. drug war in pursuit of personal and institutional interests in the drug

trade. The United States has distressingly little leverage in tempering this problem. The United States can and on occasion has secured the removal of individual officials accused of corruption. But such steps are merely temporizing measures perceived by Andean leaders as necessary to secure continued U.S. assistance. They do not address the systemic problem of drug-related corruption: the high profits of the drug trade. Government salaries cannot compete with traffickers' bribes. Moreover, an intensified antinarcotics campaign heightens the risks involved in the drug trade, thereby increasing the need for traffickers to rely on bribes and pay-offs. The more aggressive the counternarcotics campaign, the greater the corruption and the higher the institutional stakes in the drug trade—and in subverting the U.S. drug war.

Narcotics officials acknowledge that problems such as corruption pose tremendous obstacles to the success of U.S. policy. As a December 1989 DEA report observes, "The 'moral' factors of corruption and national will are more complex [than the 'physical' factors of training and equipment], requiring progress in tangible and intangible areas beyond the scope of law enforcement." Yet the administration's policy rests on the assumption that focusing on the "physical" aspects will improve the "moral" factors. As the 1990 report of the Office of National Drug Control Policy stated, "increased military and law enforcement capability...can strengthen a country's national will to initiate and sustain counternarcotics programs." In fact, the effect can be precisely the opposite: An increased capability can make corruption even more profitable—and institutional will to fight drugs even more elusive.

The Logic of Peasant Production

The success of the U.S. drug strategy is conditioned not only on the will and ability of political elites and institutions, but on the actions of vast segments of the Andean population engaged in the cocaine economy. The United States and the Andean governments must convince hundreds of thousands of people to stop growing, processing, and shipping coca products. The current strategy relies on the same "carrot and stick" approach to peasant

production that has underpinned previously unsuccessful U.S. efforts in the region.

The United States seeks to provide peasants with “carrots,” through incentives to substitute other crops for coca, despite its profitability. The program of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) offers macro-level economic assistance, alternative development and income substitution, narcotics awareness and education, and administration of justice. Funds are used, for example, to identify potential new crops and to provide seeds for distribution. But U.S. officials concede the failure of Andean crop substitution programs: In Peru, for example, \$25 million has been invested in the Upper Huallaga Valley over a decade, with no signs of success. Representative Lawrence Smith (D-Florida) stated flatly, “We have put a lot of money into crop substitution and it has gone absolutely nowhere.”

The enforcement “stick” seeks to raise the risks and costs of illegal coca growing and processing activities through crop eradication, interdiction of coca products, and destruction of processing labs. Yet these tactics have failed to stem the increase in the overall coca supply. Despite periodic price swings, the profits to be gained from growing, processing, and transporting coca products have remained far higher than alternative economic pursuits.

The U.S. response to this poor record has been, once again, to change the emphasis but escalate the strategy. In recent years U.S. drug strategists have largely abandoned the difficult and time-consuming process of forcible manual eradication of coca crops, for example, in favor of coca seedbed destruction and “voluntary” eradication programs. The United States has set its sights on increased lab destruction rather than targeting primitive processing pits. Rhetorical and financial support for the economic assistance “carrot” is also mounting in Washington. Congressional critics looking for less-dangerous and cheaper alternatives to militarizing the drug war pin their hopes on rural development programs, including crop substitution. Such assistance may be good for the region’s people, but as an effective instrument of drug-supply reduction it is doomed.

Consider the market from an Andean peas-

ant's perspective: Coca brings many times the price of competing crops. Easy to harvest and process into paste, coca does not require transport by poor farmers to distant markets: Traffickers fly into remote airstrips regularly and pay peasants up front in dollars. Government intervention in the market to raise the risks of coca growing and enhance the attraction of economic alternatives is unlikely to change this logic; and localized, short-term successes do nothing to affect the rationale of other peasants—in other regions or other countries—who may choose to enter the lucrative market. Consequently, neither the crop-substitution carrot nor the enforcement stick can fundamentally transform the rational interests that poor peasants have in producing the high-profit coca crop.

AID officials acknowledge the impossibility of defying the logic of the market as long as profits remain high. "No single crop can approach the returns from coca production at current prices, and coca growers may suffer short term income losses as they move into legitimate occupations," testified AID official Frederick Schieck in June 1989. Faced with the severe limitations of economic assistance programs, he and others look to enforcement. "Efforts to provide alternative crops and incomes," Schieck emphasized, "cannot succeed unless there is sustained and effective enforcement and interdiction." But enforcement, too, is doomed to fail.

Peasants have developed sophisticated counterstrategies to circumvent drug enforcement efforts. Growers scale down and hide crops or replant in new regions. Processors downsize, camouflage, and relocate labs. The ineffectiveness of enforcement measures is compounded with peasant political responses: Coca growers have resisted eradication efforts not only through strikes and blockades organized by powerful regional coca growers' federations, but at times through armed resistance.

Drug enforcers increasingly find they are squeezing a balloon: "Successful" enforcement in one area causes—and even creates incentives for—production and processing to pop up in another. The drug strategy ultimately exacerbates the very problem it tries to solve as it

encourages the spread of coca production, not only within the current producing countries but across borders: DEA agents acknowledge the increasing spread of cocaine processing and trafficking to Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela.

The Counterinsurgency Parallel

What debate there is in Washington over drug policy is proceeding in predictable ways. Conservative advocates of the use of force push for greater spending on enforcement and increased militarization. More moderate voices insist that economic development, crop substitution, and technical assistance would be more effective—and less destructive to human life and political democracy. The most serious debates are over the mix and levels of U.S. aid targeted for enforcement versus economic assistance.

But neither of these approaches, nor any mixture of them, can succeed, given that the major actors in the region are not only uncommitted to the U.S. drug war but have both rational and venal interests in thwarting it. Administration officials continue to argue that more arms, more training, and more technical assistance will solve the problem. If challenged, they drag out the false pragmatism of those unable to defend a failed policy through reasoned argument: “We can’t know that the policy won’t work until we try harder.”

But we do not have to wait for more evidence from the Andean drug war front: The current counternarcotics strategy is built on the same flawed premises as U.S. counterinsurgency strategies that have so often foundered on repeated failures to create the needed will and capability among local elites and populations.

Counterinsurgency (CI) and counternarcotics (CN) strategies are distinct. The first aims to defeat a guerrilla movement seeking support among the peasant population; the second aims to arrest and prosecute drug traffickers who offer lucrative markets for the peasants. There are, however, important and troubling parallels between CI’s military strategies for defeating guerrillas through search and destroy missions and wars of attrition, and the increasing use of such “low intensity conflict” against drug traffickers. And just as CI strategists seek to woo

peasants away from the guerrillas by winning their “hearts and minds” through local development projects, land reform, and technical assistance, so too do CN strategists look to economic reforms and “civic action” programs to lure peasants away from profitable coca production. Not surprisingly, counternarcotics policy planners at the U.S. Southern Command and elsewhere have self-consciously borrowed from counterinsurgency theory and experience.

But what is most important here is the common understanding counterinsurgency strategists share with today’s counternarcotics planners: If the strategy is to work, governments must have the ability and will to carry out the military and reform strategies, and peasants must have the will and ability to support the government and reject the insurgents (or traffickers). Efforts to build up local institutions to fight the U.S. drug war parallel the process earlier CI strategists called “nation-building”: attempts to create institutions with funds for judicial and electoral reform, economic development, and administrative training. Military institution building meant training in intelligence, operations, and human rights. But as Michael Shafer has demonstrated in his 1988 counterinsurgency study *Deadly Paradigms*, limited success in improving operational efficiency did not translate into effectiveness because the will to carry out the U.S. CI strategy was absent and could not be created. Also, government officials often had other, more important interests that made it rational for them to act contrary to U.S. objectives.

U.S. training, for example, unquestionably created more skillful and efficient government administrators. But corruption was often so systemic that these skills were used to protect “bought” positions and reap personal profit. U.S. efforts to tame rampant corruption have historically failed in Vietnam and elsewhere, as journalist Neil Sheehan pointed out in *A Bright Shining Lie* (1988). U.S. pressure occasionally resulted in the removal of an individual, but “this was a trick. The man would be put in a staff job for a while and then given another province or district....No Saigon official was taken off the wheel of corruption. He revolved on it.” Little wonder that the head of DEA

activities in Bolivia, Don Ferrarone, pulled a well-marked copy of Sheehan's book from his bookshelf to illustrate to a *New York Times* reporter the problems of corruption his office is now facing.

U.S. counterinsurgency efforts saw perhaps their greatest institution-building successes in the improved operational efficiency of local militaries. Yet it was here, too, that the United States failed most dramatically in trying to create the commitment to meet U.S. objectives.

As early as the 1950s and the 1960s, U.S. policymakers felt that Third World militaries could help the process of modernization and nation building. U.S. training programs at U.S. staff colleges and later at the School of the Americas in Panama sought to professionalize the militaries and expose them to "democratic" values and attitudes.

But what did Latin American militaries do with their U.S. training? In Bolivia, officers involved in civic action later helped overthrow the civilian government in 1964 and establish an 18-year period of authoritarian rule. In fact, throughout Central and South America, these early U.S. efforts to involve the military in nation building led the military to intervene in politics.

With the increasing militarization of the U.S. counterinsurgency strategy, militaries lost any commitment to winning over the population. Modernizing the Salvadoran security forces, for example, often meant creating a more efficient instrument of repression despite U.S. training in professionalism and human rights. Some of the worst human rights abuses in El Salvador were carried out by members of U.S.-trained units such as the Atlacatl Battalion, whose most notorious crime was the November 1989 murder of six Jesuit priests. In Honduras, it was the soldiers of Battalion 316, trained in Texas as part of a CIA program to "professionalize" the security forces, who formed a major right-wing death squad.

U.S. efforts to curb Latin human rights abuses ran headlong into conflicting military interests. Latin military officers understood that real respect for civilian control would mean submitting themselves to laws that could punish them, politicians who could cut their budgets, and

institutional accountability that could end the widespread corruption by which they profited.

Despite the evidence, U.S. strategists nevertheless clung to the idea that proper training could “create in them an awareness of the political process of nation-building” and make them “advocates of democracy and agents for carrying forward the developmental process,” according to a key 1962 Kennedy administration policy paper. When this failed, the ultimate myth was that the United States could use the leverage of U.S. aid to force change. As this analysis put it, governments facing expulsion “have no practical alternative to accepting the U.S. recommendations, particularly if specific reforms become prerequisites to the continuance of U.S. aid.” But time and again this assessment has proven wrong. U.S. leverage is limited as long as these militaries know that defeating the insurgency (and, increasingly, winning the drug war) is considered a vital national security matter and that Washington is therefore unlikely to pull the aid plug.

The experience of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts thus provides an instructive critique of current drug war strategy. The lesson is not the impossibility of defeating insurgents: Insurgents have been defeated by governments that were able and willing to make reforms and thus gain the support of the population—and by governments and militaries with the will and ability to sufficiently brutalize and repress their populations to contain (even if temporarily) local insurgent movements. The real lesson is that the local capability and will to conduct an effective strategy cannot be manufactured by the United States where they do not exist. Indeed, winning the commitment of local governments and militaries to fight the drug trade by which so many benefit can only be more difficult than securing the commitment of local elites to fight insurgents who threaten their existence.

The Politics of Denial

Tragically, the powerful lessons of failures in counterinsurgency strategy and years of unsuccessful counternarcotics campaigns have yet to penetrate the Washington policy debate. The Bush administration and Congress remain stubbornly committed to an Andean drug-control

strategy that assumes that the right mixture of carrots and sticks can create the necessary local will and capability to carry out U.S. policy objectives. Faced with the evidence of failure—readily available from congressional reports and hearings, DEA and State Department documents, newspaper accounts, and testimony from U.S. field agents—the response is a politics of denial. Past failures are either blithely dismissed or used to justify further escalation. While the mixture of policy tools may be slightly altered, there has been no fundamental reevaluation of the reasoning behind the supply-reduction strategy.

To admit the uncomfortable truth that no policy to reduce supply at the source of production can work without the full commitment of local actors, and that this commitment cannot be created by the United States, is to acknowledge that a supply-side strategy abroad cannot succeed in solving the problems of drug abuse and violence at home. Few drug officials would risk the budgets of their agencies, let alone their jobs, to argue that what they are doing is destined to fail. Perhaps most important, few politicians would be willing to risk being labeled “soft” on drugs or to surrender the convenience of blaming a foreign enemy.

To overcome this politics of denial and approach a solution to the drug problem, we must begin a real debate. The first step would be to force the Bush administration to confront the fatal flaws in its supply-reduction strategy. The will and ability of Andean governments, militaries, police, and peasants to wage the U.S. drug war do not exist, and years of U.S. attempts have failed to create them. Arms, training, and money may make local security forces more efficient, but the historical record is clear: Efficiency is not the same as effectiveness; better armed and trained security forces are not necessarily less corrupt or more respectful of human rights—or more capable of reducing the drug supply. The administration’s “evidence” of success—the number of labs destroyed or tons of cocaine seized—must be exposed as the misleading “body counts” of the drug war.

Policymakers must, finally, confront the analysis of critics such as RAND economist Peter Reuter, who has demonstrated the futility of

source-country efforts by showing that there is little relationship between supply reduction in the Andes and demand reduction at home: "Even if source country governments are willing to support them," Reuter testified before Congress in October 1989, "these programs offer little prospect for substantially affecting U.S. cocaine problems." Because the largest portion of the price on the street is added on after the drug enters the United States, Reuter has shown, even an inconceivable 50 per cent reduction in Andean supply would have only a negligible impact on domestic street prices. Even an overwhelmingly successful U.S. Andean strategy would thus contribute little to the ultimate aim of U.S. policy—raising cocaine prices and reducing consumption in North America.

The truth would be a difficult pill for policymakers to swallow: There is no Andean supply-reduction strategy that can significantly lower the demand for drugs at home. The supply-reduction policy defies both the logic of the market and the rational interests of local governments and populations. To continue to frame the central issue as how to reduce the foreign supply at the source is to mistake the means for the end and to virtually guarantee continued failure. In other words, the drug problem should be largely in the domain of domestic policy, not foreign policy.

The required shift in drug policy does not mean abandoning the Andes. The United States can take immediate actions to end practices that actually fuel the drug trade: Lax export controls, for example, make the United States the source of a significant proportion of the chemicals used for the processing of cocaine and the majority of the arms used by Andean drug traffickers.

Further, the United States has important interests in the Andes, such as strengthening fragile democracies, encouraging equitable growth and development, and discouraging violence and human rights abuses. If American policymakers were not obsessed with drug-supply reduction, political space would be created for effective policies that genuinely serve U.S. and regional interests. Andean leaders have requested and deserve assistance in

strengthening judicial and other institutions threatened by the vast power of the drug cartels—even though such assistance may not reduce the cocaine supply to the United States. The economic development assistance needed to provide immediate relief in the Andes should not be conditioned on acceptance of military assistance or “progress” in the U.S. drug war.

Such foreign policies, however, cannot be allowed to obscure the focus of U.S. national concern with drug abuse, addiction, and violence. The central goals of drug policy are to reduce domestic drug consumption and curb drug-related violence. It is wasteful and inhumane to devote millions of antidrug dollars to Andean militaries when so many addicts in the United States who seek help are turned away from treatment centers for lack of space. U.S. drug policy must finally confront the hard fact that many drug dealers and users will not “just say no” to drugs unless they have something better to say “yes” to, such as a decent job, a decent school, and a chance for a decent life. Aid for the underdeveloped territories in American inner cities is desperately needed to alleviate the conditions that make drug abuse and dealing so compelling.

The problems of drug abuse and drug dealing suggest the need for a domestic policy of treatment, education, and urban development. Such a policy cannot take shape without much debate and discussion among community leaders, health officials, and policymakers. And this new dialogue cannot even begin until the United States abandons its foolish and costly obsession with solving the nation’s drug problem in the distant jungles of South America.