



## **Erasing the Lines**

### Trends in U.S. Military Programs in Latin America

#### **Executive Summary**

Last year, our "Blurring the Lines" report discussed the confusion of military and policing roles in Latin America amid weakening civilian oversight of U.S. military assistance programs. Today, these trends are intensifying. The Defense Department is expanding its control over foreign military training programs that were once the exclusive province of the Department of State, lessening congressional oversight, and weakening the relationship between military assistance and foreign policy goals. In Central America, the U.S. government is encouraging military involvement in new internal missions—including policing functions—by accompanying a regional realignment of military roles in response to “emerging” threats.

The year also saw human rights groups carrying out an intense effort to apply conditions in the law governing military aid to Colombia, as well as a Bush Administration attempt to lift a fifteen-year-old ban on military aid to Guatemala. The most widespread challenge to the region’s military aid, however, came from conservative U.S. lawmakers. In their effort to punish countries that refuse to exempt U.S. soldiers from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, they have triggered partial military and economic aid cutoffs to a number of Latin American countries.

The United States’ close partnership with Colombia deepened this year, the final year of “Plan Colombia,” as aid continued at the same high level. Meanwhile, policy and aid to the rest of the Andes is adrift, as U.S. security and civilian officials failed to address in sensible ways the challenges posed by shaky public confidence in democratic institutions, elected leaders who openly criticize U.S. policies, and the growth of populist movements.

#### **1. The Defense Department makes a play for greater control over foreign military training programs.**

The Pentagon has requested broad new authority to train and equip foreign military and police forces from a pool of \$750 million in contingency funds. This proposal, still pending in the Defense Authorization bill as we went to press, could result in significantly weakened congressional oversight and reduce the State Department’s control over an important and sometimes risky foreign policy tool.

#### **2. A new counterterrorism program increases the Defense Department’s role in foreign military training.**

Whether or not the Pentagon obtains this new authority, a new program gives the Defense Department a greater training role. The Counterterrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), begun after September 11<sup>th</sup>, has become one of the most significant sources of training funds worldwide and the fourth-largest source in Latin America, training over 1,000 troops from the region in 2004. Through the CTFP and counternarcotics programs, the Defense budget funded 57% of all Latin Americans who received training at U.S. expense.

### **3. U.S. military aid still nearly equals economic aid to the region.**

As recently as the late 1990s, economic aid was more than double military aid; during the Cold War, the ratio was even higher. But in recent years, helped along by the advent of the largely military “Plan Colombia,” military aid has grown while economic aid has stagnated. During FY06, the United States is slated to provide \$1.03 billion in economic aid and at least \$908 million in military aid.

Latin America remains the largest recipient of U.S. military training worldwide (the official statistics do not include training of Iraq’s new army), though Afghanistan supplanted Colombia in 2004 as the number-one source of trainees.

### **4. The “securitization” of social issues muddies the waters.**

The lines separating military and civilian governance roles, firmly drawn by many Latin American governments after decades of conflict, are in danger of being erased. One dynamic leading to the confusion of these roles is the OAS’s new doctrine of “multi-dimensional security,” which greatly broadens the range of problems that might be considered security threats. While broadening the idea of what makes states and individuals secure is a positive concept in theory, in practice it could be used to justify military responses to social ills.

### **5. The U.S. and Central American militaries contemplate a role in combating gang violence.**

Central American governments are developing national and regional rapid reaction forces that combine their police forces and militaries, and are focused largely on issues more appropriate to the police, such as gang violence. The United States is failing to send a clear message that there should be a division between police and military roles, and indeed DOD officials have indicated they believe the restructuring of such roles in Central America is necessary. Gang violence is a serious problem, but one which needs to be dealt with by investing in urban areas with gang problems, improving policing and judicial systems, and providing programs for at-risk youth.

### **6. “Enduring Friendship” maritime program could blur lines at sea.**

The Bush Administration is promoting a maritime cooperation effort, “Enduring Friendship,” for which Congress just approved an initial \$4 million. The initiative, aiming at improving regional capabilities to fight “trafficking in aliens, narcotics, arms and other contraband,” could expand military involvement into missions already covered by civilian agencies.

### **7. Human rights groups struggle to apply human rights provisions in U.S. law.**

Twelve and a half percent of military aid for Colombia through the Foreign Operations law was put on hold for the first seven months of 2005, as the State Department was not prepared to certify that Colombia met the law’s human rights conditions. While the aid was eventually released days before Colombia’s president met with President Bush, this delay represented growing concern by the State Department and human rights groups regarding cases allegedly involving direct violations by the Colombian Army.

For the first time since military aid to Guatemala was suspended in 1990, \$3.2 million in non-lethal military aid resumed in March 2005. However, the Bush Administration’s effort to lift the ban on International Military Education and Training for Guatemala was blocked by the Congress over concerns about lack of sufficient progress on military reform.

## **8. U.S. insistence that U.S. soldiers be protected from International Criminal Court limits aid to region.**

Ironically, the most significant current limitation on U.S. military training to the Western Hemisphere stems not from human rights concerns but from U.S. conservatives interested in protecting U.S. soldiers from the International Criminal Court (ICC). The American Servicemembers' Protection Act, passed in 2002, cuts off non-drug, Foreign Operations-budget military aid and training to countries that are signatories to the Rome Statute establishing the ICC, unless the country has signed an "Article 98" agreement pledging not to seek prosecution of U.S. citizens in the ICC. These sanctions were extended in FY05 to include one category of economic aid, Economic Support Funds (ESF), which fund programs to strengthen judicial systems, support fair elections, and promote local governance.

Despite U.S. arm-twisting, a surprising number of Latin American countries ratifying the Rome Statute have refused to sign Article 98 agreements, triggering partial military and economic aid cutoffs. A dozen Latin American countries ratifying the Rome Statute are not included in the State Department's public list of countries signing Article 98 agreements, although it is possible some may have done so privately. The ICC is a popular cause in Latin America precisely because judicial systems have often failed to bring justice, and civil society groups have turned to the international system for relief. The ASPA reinforces the image of the United States as a bully and sends absolutely the wrong human rights message, undercutting efforts to address impunity.

## **9. U.S. policy fails to comprehend rise of Andean populist movements.**

As it has since the launch of Plan Colombia in 2000, the Andean region still accounts for more than 85% of all military and police assistance to the hemisphere. This year saw dramatically increased expressions of concern by U.S. policymakers about "radical populist" movements that seek to "roll back the democratic progress of the past two decades."

While there are real concerns about the weakness of democratic governance in the Andean region, the United States should not overreact to regional populist movements. In particular, it would be unwise to view these movements as threats worthy of increased or re-tooled military assistance. The Bush Administration should be less concerned about Venezuelan influence in Bolivia and Ecuador, and recognize that populist movements are homegrown. They reflect popular disenchantment with elected government institutions, which have been weakened by years of structural adjustment and budget cuts, and perceived as corrupt and unable to foster adequate livelihoods for their citizens. It is time to try smarter diplomacy, a principled focus on the importance of democratic institutions' continuity, and more economic aid to help governments become more responsive and accountable.

## **10. U.S. drug policy in Colombia at a standstill, involvement in the war grows**

Colombia continues to be Latin America's number-one recipient of U.S. military and policy assistance, with over \$600 million expected to be delivered in 2005. This makes Colombia, by a wide margin, the world's largest military-aid recipient outside the Middle East. This military assistance continues at a level four times the U.S. contribution for economic aid. Non-drug military aid programs are receiving an increasing focus. U.S. Special Forces have trained thousands of members of the Colombian Army's 18<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Mobile Brigades in Arauca province, while U.S. logistics and intelligence personnel continue to support Plan Patriota, a major offensive against insurgents in southern Colombia. Critics of Plan Patriota point out its failure to capture senior guerrilla leaders; its heavy-handed treatment of the civilian population; and the lack of increased social investment in re-taken areas. Moreover, while over 10,000 right-wing paramilitaries have demobilized following peace talks with the government, there is a high degree of skepticism about whether the paramilitaries' underlying financial, military and drug-trafficking structures are being fully dismantled.