

January 15, 2002 7:58 AM

RETTON
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TO: Paul Wolfowitz
FROM: Donald Rumsfeld *DR*
SUBJECT: Colombia

Here is an article on Colombia. It appears there is some legislative change we may need or interpretation, so that we can deal with terrorism in Colombia using the capabilities that were authorized for drug funds. It seems to me that the problems are intermixed.

Colombia

What do you propose?

Thanks.

Attach.
01/15/02 DeYoung, *Washington Post*, "U.S. Eyes Shift in Colombia Policy"

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Please respond by _____

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U.S. Eyes Shift in Colombia Policy

Greater Aid for War Against Leftist Guerrillas Sought

By Karen DeYoung
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, January 15, 2002; Page A01

The Bush administration is considering expanding U.S. counternarcotics assistance to Colombia to give more aid to that country's counterinsurgency war against leftist guerrillas, according to administration officials.

Proposals under high-level discussion include increased intelligence sharing on guerrilla activities around the country and training of an additional battalion of Colombian troops to serve as a rapid-reaction force protecting vital infrastructure, including pipelines used by U.S. oil companies, against guerrilla attack.

The U.S. military has trained three such battalions in the past two years, but they have been restricted to counternarcotics activities, as has virtually all U.S. military assistance in Colombia. U.S.-provided military equipment, including helicopters, is also limited under law to counternarcotics use, although the Colombian government is pressing for those restrictions to be lifted.

Officials stressed that none of the proposals include the possibility of direct American combat involvement in Colombia. But expansion of U.S. assistance and training beyond the fight against production and export of illegal drugs would represent a quantum leap in a highly sensitive area of U.S. policy. Since massive amounts of U.S. military aid began flowing to Colombia less than two years ago, Congress has repeatedly warned against "mission creep" into a Vietnam-like counterinsurgency war.

High-level consideration of the proposals, one official said, is a direct result of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. "Before then, there would have been no debate, or only a very limited debate, about whether to even think about extending beyond counternarcotics aid," the official said. "At least now, these are debatable propositions."

The momentum begun with September's attacks moved into high gear last weekend, after Colombian President Andres Pastrana unexpectedly suspended three-year-old peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's largest guerrilla group. Pastrana ordered FARC troops to evacuate the Switzerland-sized zone he granted the rebel group in 1998 to encourage negotiations.

His announcement sent Colombian army troops to mass near the zone in preparations for reoccupying it and driving out the FARC if a deadline set at 9:30 last night passed without substantive rebel concessions. Right-wing paramilitary troops fighting their own war against the guerrillas, in frequent alliance with the army, were also prepared to move, and there were widespread fears of impending civilian massacres. For its part, the FARC was expected to launch attacks throughout the country.

Pastrana's ultimatum sent senior U.S. officials into urgent weekend discussions over what one called "authorizations and resources" — what the United States was equipped and allowed to do under law and congressional restrictions in aiding the Colombian military. Officials were in the middle of an interagency meeting on the subject late yesterday afternoon when news arrived that the 9:30 p.m. deadline had been suspended, at least temporarily, following last-ditch mediation by a group of international diplomats working with the United Nations in Colombia.

Whether peace talks get back on track or not, however, Colombia's multi-front war will continue, and "it is fair to say we are looking for other ways to help" the government prevail, said another administration official, who, like all those contacted, declined to be identified. At the very least, officials said, there are now six days to think about it before Pastrana's next deadline arrives Sunday.

The Pastrana government, which will leave office following elections this summer, has argued with increasing urgency that the United States must have a more comprehensive military program in Colombia. When the Bush administration, which made few changes in the bipartisan Colombia policy inherited from its predecessor, launched a policy review several months ago, a number of officials, led by senior civilians in the Defense Department, argued that the line drawn between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency was an artificial one that lessened the effectiveness of U.S. aid.

Both the Clinton administration's Plan Colombia, the \$1.3 billion Colombia aid package passed by Congress in 2000, and the Bush administration's \$625 million Andean Regional Initiative, approved in December, came with sharp congressional restrictions on how the aid could be used.

U.S.-trained troops and military equipment, and most U.S. intelligence, are restricted to the fight against narcotics trafficking in Colombia, which provides more than 90 percent of all cocaine and a major part of the heroin in this country. Colombian troops eligible for U.S. training have to be thoroughly vetted for past human rights abuse and association with the paramilitaries. But since the Colombian military has been slow to move against those with paramilitary ties, and all three of Colombia's insurgent groups are deeply involved in the drug business, the lines have been difficult to maintain.

Intelligence cooperation became even more problematic after the suspension of U.S. drug surveillance and tracking flights over both Colombia and Peru last spring, when a CIA-guided Peruvian Air Force fighter shot down an aircraft carrying American missionaries in the mistaken belief they were drug traffickers. Although the administration completed its investigation into the matter last summer, it has taken no action to reinstitute the intelligence sharing or flights.

Under the proposals being discussed, that intelligence cooperation would be reactivated and expanded to include information on guerrilla activities outside the bounds of counterdrug actions. A battalion of as many as 1,000 Colombian troops would be trained as a rapid-reaction force to protect infrastructure, and consideration would be given to providing additional equipment to the Colombian army for that purpose.

Officials said the assistance could be justified under "force protection" doctrines already in place. That justification would be made easier, they said, by President Bush's inclusion of all three Colombian insurgency groups on the administration's new lists of international terrorist organizations.

Whether the anti-terrorist rationale would fly with Congress "has yet to be tested," said one official.

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