

## **U.S. Efforts to Support Plan Colombia**

**Marc Grossman, Under Secretary for Political Affairs**

Roundtable Discussion

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**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** First of all, thank you all very much for taking time to come. I had a chance to talk to the press a little bit in Colombia when I was there last week, but I also just wanted to meet all of you and tell you what we did there and answer any questions you all might have about what we're doing and what we're trying to accomplish.

I don't know if you all followed the trip, but I was in Colombia last Wednesday and had a chance to visit President Uribe, then met President Uribe and some of his senior cabinet colleagues. We saw the Vice President, Minister of Defense, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Interior and Justice. I had a chance also then to have lunch with the Foreign Minister. I met also with a group of businesspeople, and ended the day with a group of human rights and democracy and rule of law NGOs.

In all the places I had the same proposition to make to people, which is that the United States supports Colombian efforts to defend Colombian democracy, that we support the efforts of the new government to bring more resources to security, that we wanted to continue our effort to support Plan Colombia.

I reported to people on the new authorities and the new money that had been given to us by the Congress and in every place made as strong a case as I possibly could that Colombia would never be successful in defending its democracy unless part and parcel of the effort was a real focus on human rights and democracy and rule of law.

And what I would report to you is that in all cases, in all the meetings and all the things that I did, I thought the response to that message was a positive one. President Uribe talked about his vision for Colombia, which very much includes issues of human rights and democracy and rule of law, and I was glad to hear that.

In terms of a couple of specifics, we also talked to President Uribe and his senior leadership about the questions of narcoterrorism and narcotrafficking, and I think they are very committed with the United States and the international community to keeping focused on issues of narcotics. And obviously with the business group they were delighted with the President's signature on the 6th of August of the renewal of ATPA. And we talked about whether people are already taking advantage of it, which they were, and then how Colombians might take advantage of the expanded ATPA in the future.

With the human rights and democracy and rule of law groups, I had a chance to listen to them. They are obviously clearly focused on the implementation of some of President Uribe's ideas, how they will be implemented in terms of democracy and human rights.

As in February, one of the things that really struck me was how important it is to those groups, to the human rights groups, to the democracy groups, that the United States stay involved in Colombia and keep training Colombian military forces. I think all of those groups also were committed to the idea that the Colombian Government needed to extend its authority throughout Colombia so that the FARC and the ELN and the AUC are not terrorizing Colombians and that a way to do that was for the United States to train more military units because the units we train are, I think arguably, the best units in the Colombian military, and focus on human rights, focus on democracy and focus on getting the job done.

One other point, and that is we're looking forward, obviously, now to President Uribe's visit to the United States, once for the United Nations General Assembly, I think he told me, and then again there's a lot of talk about him coming to Washington in the third week of September.

I'd be glad to take a few questions, please.

**QUESTION:** Let me just follow up on your point about the need to set up authority in the country by the Colombian authorities and the US role in that. Are you talking about training more battalions? I mean, are you talking about more units, more battalions? What number is it?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** We've already trained one counter-narcotics brigade. We thought that was very successful. And the proposition we made to the Congress was that we would train a second counter-narcotics brigade and one that would deal with infrastructure protection.

**QUESTION:** And that's all? Nothing else?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** That's correct. That's where we are for now. And that's the money the Congress has given us and that's the authorities that we have. There's some work to do to get those authorities and to spend that money, and we'll be doing that.

But we believe that if we can assist the Colombians in extending the power of government through Colombia, then we will have accomplished something. And certainly our experience with the first counter-narcotics brigade that we've trained has been very positive, and positive not just in their operations, but in their commitment to human rights and democracy. We are very proud to say, and the human rights groups agree, that there has not been one kind of credible allegation of a human rights violation against that brigade, and we're very proud of that.

**QUESTION:** Recently, the Minister of Defense of Colombia said that she wanted military allies to work in a military alliance with some countries in the region to try to contain movements of FARC or ELN or counter-terrorism at the borders that usually use the territories as a way of smuggling drugs, weapons or (inaudible). Initially, the answer from the region was kind of distant. Brazil and Panama rejected it and Venezuela and others are kind of being cautious about it.

What do you think about that proposal and the answer that the (inaudible) region?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** We didn't discuss that with the Defense Minister. She didn't make that a part of her presentation to us.

But what we did talk about -- with the President and the Defense Minister and the Foreign Minister -- about their desire to have better relations between Colombia and countries in the region. And we certainly support that. We think that Colombia and the regional states ought to be getting along and that the regional states can do more to help Colombia with this problem. I noticed, I think it was yesterday, in the press that Ecuador was going to be closing its border at night, starting I think in early September, to try to cut down on some of this narcotics and terrorist trafficking that goes across.

And so I think that if Colombians can work together more successfully with the countries in the region, it would be a good thing, but we didn't talk about it specifically.

**QUESTION:** What were your impressions of President Uribe?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I found him to be very focused, very well organized, and very, very oriented toward results. And one of the things that he stressed in his meeting with me and stressed in public was his desire to see things get done.

And finally, I found him committed to a Colombia that respects democracy, human rights and the rule of law. I really felt that in all of his statements and all of his comments to me and to his ministers that was a very important part of his presentation, and we appreciated that.

**QUESTION:** What do you think of his proposal for this network of informants around the country? Do you have any concerns about that, that it might lead to abuses?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Well, obviously, we want -- and I think President Uribe wants -- all of the efforts of the Government of Colombia to be done in such a way that promote and protect democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In the end, have to decide for themselves what they are going to do.

**QUESTION:** In terms of the ICC, we read about the proposal you made to the Colombian Government where, at least that was what it was called. What would happen? I mean, I understand that the law would not allow the president, if the time

came, to give military assistance to a country that didn't sign that bilateral agreement. So in a lot of senses, it seems like for a lot of groups like human rights have called that, like, kind of an extortion or something from the US to make Colombia sign that agreement because if it doesn't sign it, it won't get the money.

But what type of consequences might there be if Colombia doesn't agree to sign the Article 98 agreement with the US?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** You're jumping way ahead here. Let's just be clear about where we are. First of all, in terms of the ICC, the United States, is a great supporter of these international efforts to bring people to justice. We've supported a tribunal in Rwanda. We're big supporters of the ICTY in the former Yugoslavia. But we do have problems with the ICC and we've put those all out in the public.

What we have said to people is we respect your decision to join the ICC and to support the ICC, but we'd just ask you to respect, in turn, our decision not to. And the treaty in Article 98 provides for these bilateral agreements to be done to protect our citizens and to protect other citizens as well, but we're looking at it from the perspective of the United States. And so we'd like to do that.

And so the proposition we made to Colombia, and to every other country in the world -- I think it's really worth stressing here, this is not about Colombia, we've made the same proposition to every single country in the world -- is here is an opportunity through Article 98 of the ICC Treaty to sign a bilateral agreement, and we'd like to do that with you. And so now the Colombians have to consider that proposition and decide what they're going to do.

**QUESTION:** What answer do you get from them?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** That they would certainly consider it.

**QUESTION:** Or would everything else be on hold until that agreement is signed?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** No, we're proceeding. We're going to proceed now. I mean, don't forget there are other parts of the law for new authorities and the new money that need to be met. There are certain conditions that the Colombians need to meet in terms of international security strategy, in terms of doing more for themselves.

And we also owe the Congress, according to the law, a strategy of our own of what we're doing in Colombia. So people are working on those things at the moment.

**QUESTION:** But the law does require a waiver from the President in case, when the time comes to get the money, the military aid, to Colombia -- if that agreement is not in place, then the President should do a waiver.

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** See, I think you're jumping way ahead. What we've done now is we've made a proposition to the Colombians that they sign one of these Article 98 agreements, and let's see what the Colombians have to say in response.

**QUESTION:** Is there a deadline for the Foreign Minister?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** No, we'd like to do this as soon as we can. But again, I want to stress as you write the story, that that's true of every country in the world. In other words, although we're talking about Colombia, my answers on the ICC relate to everybody. We've made exactly the same proposition to all countries around the world. And my answer would be the same if we were talking about any country. If anybody asks me, you know, how soon would you like to do this, I'd say as soon as possible.

**QUESTION:** You said that you believed that you can assist Colombia to extend the power flow throughout the country. Besides the training of the new battalion and the infrastructure brigade, what other help do you think that you can give Colombia in the next four or five years?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** A very good question. We sometimes focus on the military aspects of Plan Colombia -- and they are important and they will help extend the grip of authority around Colombia. But all the other things that we're doing; for example, we have helped 330,000 internally displaced people in Colombia, and I think when we do that, to assist the government. And so we've opened 20 houses of justice in Colombia, which extends the capacity of the Colombian state to provide justice to people.

We've helped almost 2,000 journalists and labor leaders, political leaders, who were under attack by terrorists and other radicals to live their lives. And I think that helps extend the rule of law throughout Colombia. One of the most interesting things that we've put into the supplemental which the President signed was money to help build police stations so that the police stations can withstand attacks from the FARC, the AUC and the ELM. And that helps extend the writ of government and the rule of law around Colombia. So, and I would say the same thing in terms of the work we're doing against narcotics, not just on the military side, but in terms of alternative development.

We now have 11,000 families in Colombia who are working with AID to voluntarily eradicate poppy or coca from their land. And they've voluntarily eradicated about 5,000 acres. That helps extend, it seems to me, the rule of law and the writ of sense in Colombia. So it's all of these things.

**QUESTION:** Are you expecting to ask Congress for more aid to Colombia in the near future?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I don't know the answer to that question. Only the President, can decide on his budget. And we want to do right what we're doing now. So I really can't speculate about the future. And part of it depends upon what success we have. I mean, one of the reasons, that we were successful in arguing to the Congress to do more this time, both in new authorities and in new money, was because the first counter-narcotics brigade had been so successful. So we'll see. I think if we have more success, the Colombian Government will be more successful, we'll be more successful.

Please.

**QUESTION:** Where do we stand now on the aerial interdiction program? I assume you spoke about that.

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I did.

**QUESTION:** Is it likely to start in the autumn, in fall, as has been predicted?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Well first, let me just say that the Colombians urged us to restart as soon as possible. The ONDCP Chief, Walters, has said that he hoped that we can get back into this business in the fall. And I certainly agree with that. We've still got some work to do. Because we don't want to ever be in a position where we -- we want to be able to avoid the kind of tragedy that we had in Peru last year. I mean every human being, I think, would like to do everything they can to avoid that.

So there have been some studies. There have been some new procedures. We have some Colombian pilots, actually, now in training in Oklahoma. And when we believe that we have a program that is efficient and safe and sensible, then our President will review it and decide whether we can go forward.

**QUESTION:** It seems that you don't agree a lot with Walters' mid-fall announcement of the --

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I just did. I said I agreed with it.

**QUESTION:** That it's going to be in that timeframe?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Or, what he said was, is that was our target. And -  
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**QUESTION:** It is?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Yes. All I added was that this has to go back to our President to decide. But, I mean, all the pieces of the program, everybody's working on it. So we'll get it done as soon as we can.

**QUESTION:** Right. But it does seem -- it's kind of hard for us to understand why it's taking so long. There were some proposals several months ago that reported the, set the guidelines for a safe program. What's, what needs to be done to those proposals to finish them off?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** This takes a long time because we want to make sure we have a safe and secure program. It takes a long time because you need the right equipment, you can't go down to the car dealership and buy this kind of equipment. And if you want to have a really safe and secure program, it requires a lot of training and making sure that you have the right people. And so, as responsible government officials, to make a proposition to our President that we go back into this program, we want to make the proposition to him on the basis of the best kind -- of the best that we can do. And that's what we're doing.

**QUESTION:** Do you know how many people are in training at the moment?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I'm sorry, I don't. No.

**QUESTION:** But is that, are the people in training enough to restart the program?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** And also on the, how's the crop spraying going now? I'm not quite sure about the sort of seasonal variations on this, but where do we stand now on this?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I think when we come back we are spraying again. We've spraying, I can get you the -- we sprayed roughly 84,000 hectares of coca cultivation last year, up from 58,000 in the year 2000. And we've already sprayed over 70,000 hectares of coca this year.

**QUESTION:** Of coca this year?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Is there a target for this year?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** The target is 150,000.

**QUESTION:** For this year.

**QUESTION:** Okay, for this year.

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** For this year. And I was struck on a number of occasions by President Uribe's strong commitment to both parts of the antidrug effort -- spraying and alternative development.

**QUESTION:** Is there any sign that, I mean, 70,000 so far this year is obviously a good deal more than 84,000 in the whole of last year. Is there any sign that it's having an effect?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I think it's absolutely having an effect. I have argued, and I think this is right, that you can't have a successful anti-drug program unless you're doing both spraying and alternative development. One without the other isn't working. And if you see the numbers of people who have the kind of radical increase in the number of families that have signed up with AID for their program, which sat at about 1500 or 1600 last year, and is now at 11,000, I think people are starting to understand that they have to get out of the drug business. And that if they're prepared to get out of the drug business, we're prepared to help them do something different.

Please.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Did you have a chance to look at a story that appeared in *The L.A. Times* this week discussing alternative development and (inaudible), that the program has paramilitaries asking people that they should join the program?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I was sort of baffled by that article in the sense that for us it's pretty clear. The paramilitary, especially the AUC, is a terrorist organization. And what we want people to do is get out of the drug business, to get into alternative development, and if they don't want to get out of the drug business, then the government of Colombia, with our assistance is prepared to spray those crops.

And so our objective is to get people out of that business. So I found that article actually kind of confusing.

**QUESTION:** And what if they were obedient? I mean, what if they all of a sudden decided that they would fight drugs? It will help the US interests and then, you know, they are just crops.

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Well, we declared them a Foreign Terrorist Organization for a reason. And there's a whole list of criteria of things that got them on that list. And those would be things they would have to do to get off that list. So the AUC is a terrorist organization, in my view. And being in favor of one or another part of the things that the United States likes doesn't make them not a terrorist organization from my perspective.

I will take one more.

Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. The attacks on the 7th of August to the house of the President (inaudible), and you show that FARC is going to a more urban type of terrorism and is capable of striking from a distance and things like that. Yesterday there were intercepts,

public intercepts, from leaders of FARC speaking to one another saying that they are planning to launch more, heavier attacks or to US interests or US personnel in Colombia. Are you worried about this situation?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Well, we've been concerned about the FARC for a very, very long time. They also are an organization on our Foreign Terrorist List and they didn't get there by accident. And so our ambassador in Colombia and all our people in Colombia pay a lot of attention to their security and the security of all Americans in Colombia. And those of us here in Washington, our job is to do all we can to help our ambassador and our people there be safe.

**QUESTION:** You said that the spraying was absolutely having an effect, but the only effect that really matters is an effect on production. Is there any, is there any quantifiable effect on production?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Well, if we've taken, you know, 5,000 hectares of coca and poppy out of production, in terms of alternative, and moved it into alternative development or taken it out at production, I think that's the beginning of a --

**QUESTION:** Well, often it seems that for every area that you spray, a new area springs up somewhere else, so production doesn't actually go down, then.

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Well, but I think part of -- one part of that reason is that people have, people have not yet come to believe that the spraying program would be consistent and would be there year after year after year. And I think that's one of the things that we have to convince people of.

You know, I would rather convince people that they should voluntarily eradicate their land and go do something else. But I think for those people who choose to stay in the drug business, they need to believe that year after year after year, place after place, that we're going to spray.

**QUESTION:** Do you rule out absolutely the possibility of US troops in Colombia?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Yes, we have. Combat troops? Yes.

**QUESTION:** Yes. And did you speak about that possibility in the future with the Colombian authorities?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Absolutely not, no. In fact, I made a point of saying to all the Colombian authorities and, I believe, to the press as well, and I know to the democracy and human rights groups, that when we went to the Congress to seek new authorities and new money, we explicitly asked that the caps on US personnel and the human rights conditions remain on our new authorities and our new money. So one of the very first things out of my mouth in my testimony was that we were not there to break the caps and we were not there to change the human rights rules or certification.

Indeed, we wanted the caps to stay and we wanted the human rights certifications to stay.

**QUESTION:** Could I just ask for a clarification? I'm sorry.

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Okay. Yes. Sure.

**QUESTION:** You mentioned that you have helped journalists and labor leaders to live their lives. How are you helping them? What happened?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** There's a number of ways, actually. Some people we have been able to rebuild or put in security apparatus in their office -- you know, make their offices stronger, put up surveillance equipment in their offices. For other people we've actually purchased armored cars. For other people we've provided protection.

And at the high end, actually, we have provided for some people, a way to get out of Colombia for some time. So it's a range of things depending, obviously, on the threat, but that number as of now -- about 2,000 or 2,200 people who have been threatened by the FARC, the AUC, the ELN whom we've tried to help in very specific and individual ways so they can continue to participate in civil society.

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Good? Okay? Thanks a lot.

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