Security Assistance and Counternarcotics Operations in Bolivia

By

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Historically, U.S. security assistance programs in Bolivia have had similar objectives to those in many other countries, i.e., to provide the armed forces with surplus or outdated U.S. equipment through grants or credit purchases. In the past, the Bolivian Army obtained jeeps, trucks, 75mm howitzers, and personal weapons (M-1, Colt 45, etc), while the Air Force (FAB) received aircraft such as the C-47, C-54, and F-86F. The FAB also had an extensive training program with the U.S. Air Force through the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA) as well as through formal schools such as those which provide pilot training.

In 1989, President Bush identified the Andean ridge countries of Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and, to a lesser extent, Ecuador, as major partners in his drive to stem the flow of illegal narcotics to the U.S. He and the Congress dramatically re-shaped and increased funding for traditional economic and military aid programs to hit directly at the source of drugs; the programs also served to augment strengthened police forces, and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and military forces within the CONUS. President Bush outlined his objectives through National Security Directive No. 18, the "Bennett Plan," and in documents released after the Cartegena Summit in Bolivia in early 1990. This article will address recent changes in the security assistance programs offered through DOD and their application in pursuit of these new national objectives.

BACKGROUND

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America with a per capita GNP of $616 (1989). Although it is the size of Texas and California combined, about one-half of the country is either very mountainous or high plateau, while the remainder is forest or jungle covered. Partially as a result of these features, Bolivia's road and rail networks are insufficient, and transportation is a major problem. Air and river routes are often the only ways into large areas, such as the El Beni and the Pando regions in the north, especially during the rainy season which can last up to six months per year. Bolivia's extensive river system totals more miles than the U.S. has shoreline and is a vital transportation network.

Bolivia grows nearly 30 percent of the world's coca leaves which, after considerable processing, can be turned into cocaine. While coca has been a traditional crop in Bolivia for centuries, legal cultivation now is limited to a small area. Most of the coca

production destined for the cocaine trade is mostly found in the 250 square mile Chapare region, between Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. Some of the illegal labs are in the Chapare; most extend up through the Santa Cruz region to the Beni and Pando regions bordering Peru and Brazil.

FOREIGN MILITARY FINANCING PROGRAM (FMFP)

Recently, security assistance programs for Bolivia experienced a dramatic change and increase in funding. From a baseline of FY88, when Bolivia received no funding because it did not meet the coca eradication goals set by the U.S Congress, assistance rose to $5 million in FY89, and then soared to $33.228 million in FY90, and is expected to remain about constant at $35 million for FY91. Moreover, the uses of the assistance funds changed as rapidly as the total amount changed. FY89 ($5M) represented the first time that Congress earmarked funds exclusively for counternarcotics programs. A further provision in FY89 mandated that $500K go to the UMOPAR, or Bolivian national rural police, for its counternarcotics operations. Due to real fiscal difficulties in the Ministries of Defense and Aeronautics, the remaining $4.5M was used solely to pay past due bills. The Army used its share to pay $2M towards a cash purchase of trucks. The FAB used its $1M to pay an overdue bill from the cash purchase of 7 C-130As. Because the FAB was so delinquent on its payments, DSAA swept all remaining funds from the trust fund to pay the C-130 debt, thereby depriving the Navy of any funding. In essence, FY89 funding gave the Bolivian military nothing positive; only old bills were paid.

Beginning in FY90, however, Bolivia began receiving funds exclusively under the FMFP. All assistance funds (except IMET) were earmarked for counternarcotics programs. To become eligible for these FMFP funds, the Bolivian military and government had to first pledge their cooperation in continuing counternarcotics operations. Negotiations were conducted to define the Bolivian military's role in combined counternarcotics programs, with the MILGROUP as the lead DOD organization. Negotiations were complicated by the deep distrust between the Bolivian military and the national police, as well as a reluctance of the Army leadership to involve the Army in counternarcotics operations for fear of corrupting the institution. After several months of hammering out an accord, Annex III to the Annual Narcotics Document was signed by President Bush and President Paz Zamora. Annex III spells out in some detail the military and police programs that are to be developed through security assistance. It is the blueprint for all participating U.S. agencies [e.g. State/International Narcotics Matters (INM), DEA, and DOD], as well as the Bolivian military and police.

Congress originally set Bolivia's FY90 security assistance budget at $33.228 million. When it became evident that Peru's new government would not sign a counternarcotics accord with the U.S., Peru's FY9O funds were divided among Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador, with Bolivia receiving an extra $5 million. Further, President Bush exercised his Section 506(a)(2) Drawdown Authority to allocate an additional $7.9 million to Bolivia, bringing Bolivia's total FY90 funding up to $46.028 million. (As a matter of comparison, the entire Bolivian military budget is around $112 million.) The budget was divided to provide roughly $14.9 million for the ground campaign, $2.7 million for the riverine program, and the rest to the FAB.

FY90/91 PROGRAMS

FY90 programs were designed to address deficiencies in the Bolivian military infrastructure and in operations and maintenance funding—equipment is not properly maintained, the troops are poorly equipped and in need of uniforms and personal equipment, and much training, especially for the conscripts, is perfunctory.

Bolivian Counternarcotics forces will be assigned to the already existing Special Force for the Fight Against Narcotics Trafficking (SFFANT). The SFFANT is headed by a retired military

general and staffed with elements from the national rural police (UMOPAR), the FAB, the Navy, and soon, the Army.

Bolivian Air Force (FAB) Programs. Even before the signing of Annex III, the FAB was already involved in the *lucha* or the fight against narcotraffickers. The FAB contribution to the SFFANT, the helicopter Special Task Force called the *Diablos Rojos*, or Red Devils, began flying six State Department-owned UH-IH "Hueys" in 1988 supporting DEA and UMOPAR field operations. The group's missions are always flown by members of the FAB, in contrast with the counternarcotics helicopter fleets in Colombia and Peru, which have U.S. civilian contract pilots. The Red Devils are the only night-qualified, rotary wing force in any Latin American air force. The group has flown over 13,200 hours of accident free flying since 1988, and won two consecutive USAF flying safety awards, while often flying in combat conditions. FY90/91 funds and Section 506 allocations are being used to procure 16 additional UH-1H helicopters, spare parts, maintenance equipment, uniforms, fuel, and training for the group as funding shifts from INM to DOD. Section 506 was particularly effective because it provided long lead time equipment quickly (by law, within 120 days of presidential signing), and gave immediate proof to the Bolivians that the U.S. was serious about expanding the counternarcotics program.

Bolivian Air Force T-33s

With transportation such a problem in Bolivia, air assets become even more critical. Two C-130B aircraft were obtained through Section 506, and a civilian support team was funded from the FMFP to provide counternarcotics operations with a significant airlift capability. C-130As have already been used in large-scale UMOPAR/DEA raids on the trafficker-controlled towns of Santa Ana and San Ramon. The C-130Bs are assigned to the SFFANT and dedicated to counternarcotics operations and routine logistics support of UMOPAR, DEA, and, eventually the Army and Navy. Two C-47 turbo aircraft are being purchased to augment the larger C-130Bs. O&M funds will be provided for all aircraft assigned to the SFFANT.

Narcotraffickers have to use the air for transportation just as the counternarcotics forces do. Air interdiction of narcotrafficker aircraft and disruption of their operations will be accomplished by the refurbished FAB Pilatus PC-7 fighter/trainer fleet. Beginning with FY91 funds, existing FAB T-33s will also be refurbished to complement the slower and shorter-ranged PC-7s.

Navy Programs The Bolivian Navy consists of about 3,000 personnel, 53 of which make up the Blue Devils, the Navy's contribution to the SFFANT. The Blue Devils have used Zodiacs and Boston Whaler type patrol boats to work three major river systems. Thanks to FY90/91 FMPP funds, berthing and maintenance facilities are being expanded in Trinidad, Riberalta, and Puerto Villarroel. U.S Navy SEALS have begun an aggressive training program. An extensive riverine program is also being implemented, designed to deny the uncontested use of Bolivian waterways to the narcotraffickers, especially for the transport of precursor chemicals.

National Police (UMOPAR) Programs. The 650 man UMOPAR, based in the Chapare, has been the spearhead in counternarcotics operations since 1988. The UMOPAR have organized along U.S. Army lines and have been trained by U.S. Special Forces for extended field operations. The UMOPAR will be expanded to approximately 860 troops; additional equipment and facilities will be provided.

Army Programs. The 25 000 man Army is the largest and most powerful of the Bolivian military services. Initially, the Army will have one strike battalion trained by U S. Special Forces dedicated to the SFFANT; a second will be trained in FY92. To increase the quality of existing infrastructure and to aid in civic actions, the Army will develop an engineering battalion consisting of two engineering companies, a separate quarry section, its own organic maintenance and logistics support, and a well drilling section. This battalion will be used to serve the Army and the civilian population, refurbishing barracks and roads as well as schools and hospitals. A supply and transportation battalion will be equipped with HMMWVs and 2 I/2 ton trucks. FMFP funds will also provide for significant amounts of personal equipment, weapons, ammunition, and fuel.

The security assistance program in Bolivia is aggressive and ambitious, It is designed to make a significant contribution to closing off the flow of illegal drugs to the United States at a small cost to American taxpayers. Although complicated, the combining of the short-term benefits of Section 506(a)(2) with carefully thought-out FMFP plus the flexibility of INM funding has provided a maximum return and a more viable operational force.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lieutenant Colonel Colenda is currently serving as the Chief of the Air Force Section, United States Military Group-Bolivia, and he is a command pilot. In May, 1991, Colonel Colenda will leave Bolivia for an assignment as a USAF research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA. A 1972 Air Force Academy graduate, he holds a Master of Arts Degree in Economics and a Masters of Business Administration, both from the University of Oklahoma.