

**Testimony of F. Cartwright Weiland,
Assistant Secretary of State for
International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Before the
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Wednesday, July 15, 2026**

“U.S.-Colombia Bilateral Relationship & Regional Security”

Thank you Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, Members of the Subcommittee.

Eleven months ago, Colombian narcoterrorists attacked a U.S.-titled INL helicopter during a coca eradication operation in Antioquia. Thirteen police officers lost their lives from a mortar that was planted in the ground and detonated when the helicopter landed.

This was a tragedy for the families that lost loved ones, and for Colombia. But it hit home for me because earlier that summer, I had flown into the same area, on another INL bird, to observe eradication.

This proximity of events is one of many examples showing how deeply entwined U.S. interests are in Colombia’s web of violence – and my experience, along with that of the tens of thousands of Americans whose lives are destroyed or cut short by cocaine, is proof that narcoterrorist attacks aren't happening in some world far, far away. They have direct implications for, and pose a danger, to Americans.

Colombia is the source of up to 94 percent of cocaine seized in the United States and an operating base for at least five U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs).

That near and present danger is why, despite huge setbacks under the Petro administration, President Trump sought to maintain amicable relations with Colombia. That is why, even during the most difficult days, our partnership with security forces has never ebbed. And that is why we are optimistic that under President-elect Abelardo de la Espriella, our efforts to stem coca cultivation and cocaine production will reach new heights. Doing that will require us to use all tools at our disposal to rein in armed groups that profit from mayhem and whose raison d’être often involves perverse ideological crusades.

Earlier this year, for example, the FARC EP said its guerrilla members, quote, “will give [their] last drop of blood fighting against the [American] empire” end quote.

That imperialism charge is ironic because its declarants seem more intent to fight innocent civilians. One was a farmer recently driving his truck down a highway in Cauca. A gas cylinder bomb exploded just up ahead of him, striking a bus during a traffic jam. His truck went flying from the blast.

Unfortunately, and unforgivably, events like this became more commonplace in recent years. President Gustavo Petro’s failed “Total Peace” negotiations allowed narcoterrorists to regroup, drove eradication to historic lows, and paused extraditions of five heinous criminal leaders.

One result of his policies is that cocaine production potential now vastly exceeds interdiction efforts. Another is the carnage: 173 police officers and soldiers gave their lives trying to protect their country and ours.

The new President-elect de la Espriella has rightfully called what Colombia is facing a pandemic of insecurity. He has said that “Colombia and the United States, united by friendship and the principles we share, constitute an indestructible force in defense of freedom, the defeat of narcoterrorism, and the prosperity of the Americas.”

That friendship and indestructible force can be seen in the many ways my office at the State Department has mitigated the downward spiral: supporting Black Hawks and elite units that have taken down FTO leaders; providing U.S.-built vessels, drones, counter drone capabilities, and forensic software that form the backbone of Colombia’s counternarcotics operations; exchanging intelligence; and squeezing the money launderers who finance these criminal organizations.

During the Trump administration, INL had also refocused programs – ending ineffective and unaccountable ones and insisting on conditionality and burden sharing.

President-elect de la Espriella’s victory represents a genuine opportunity to reset the bilateral counternarcotics relationship after years of falling behind. We are not waiting. We have a clear, prioritized agenda ready for day one: commit to an aggressive target for reductions in coca cultivation, including through the use of

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eradication drones and a long-pending civilian eradicator contract; redouble lab destructions and cocaine seizures; clear a path to complete the five presently suspended extraditions; strengthen cooperation on illicit finance; and empower security forces and Colombia's justice system to deny impunity to narco-terrorists.

If the new government delivers, we are prepared to deepen our partnership across every dimension. The Colombian people deserve a government that fights for them. We believe they're about to get one.

We ask for this Committee's continued support for INL's Colombia programs.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

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