Colombia Essay, Research Paper

Executive Summary

A pressing threat to the global, illegal drug trade has come directly from the country of Colombia. By 1990, drug cartels from the cities of Medellin and Cali had threatened to bring the country to a standstill. A new constitution came into effect in 1991, which provided greater judicial powers and strengthened government control. Today, drug trafficking from Colombia continues to grow — courtesy of the pragmatic Cali and Valle del Cauca cartels, bringing in an estimated $46 billion last year. The local Colombian government and the United States have tackled Colombia with many counter-narcotic actions. The arrests of many cartel leaders throughout the years from national and international counter-attacks saw great profits, but it is unlikely to radically alter the dynamics of the Colombian drug trade, yet.

Current Situation

Colombia, a country of 35 million people, rich in land and democratic traditions, was once known for emeralds, high quality flowers and the world s best coffee. In recent years, it has become synonymous drug corruption, cocaine, and violent crime. The combined, worldwide illegal sales of Colombian cocaine, heroin, and marijuana brought in about $46 billion last year. (Reuters)

Drug traffickers from Columbia seized total control of the cocaine trade in the late 1970 s. The first to dominate this trade were the organized criminal groups in Medellin,

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Colombia. These groups ruled the drug trade in Colombia and in major cities in the United States, such as Miami and New York. However, one by one, the leaders of the most violent organized group in history were brought to justice by the Colombian National Police.

With the gradual elimination of most of the major figured in the Medellin groups, ascendancy among traffickers in Colombia passed to groups based in Cali, Colombia. Unlike their predecessors in the Medellin cartel, the members of the Cali mafia avoided transparent acts of violence and instead tried to pass themselves off as legitimate businessmen. During the late 1980 s and early 1990 s, the members of the Cali Mafia generated billions of dollars in drug revenues per year.

Today s Colombia-based trafficking power is swiftly spreading, passing to experienced traffickers who have moved out from under the shadow of the Cali traffickers. Many individual organizations are now seizing opportunities to increase their own share of the drug trade. These enterprising traffickers come primarily from Valle del Cauca, located on Colombia s southeastern coast.

While traffickers in these regions operate more independently than the Cali Mafia, they nevertheless remain very powerful. Although the Valle del Cauca cartel is lesser known, they have been found to be equally dangerous. Business interests have suited the Cali and Valle del Cauca traffickers to work together. Officials estimated that the Cali and

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Valle del Cauca cartels alone were responsible for 80 percent of the cocaine that was imported into the United States in 1994. That is equivalent to 520 metric tons of cocaine, profiting over 7 billion dollars in the U.S. (Waller, D.)

Cultural Factors

Colombia s strategic location makes it a logical hub for cocaine trafficking. It shares borders with Peru and Bolivia, two countries that, along with Colombia, grow larger amounts coca. Colombia is also the only south American country with coastlines on both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean See, a wide variety of air and maritime drug smuggling routes are readily available to traffickers from Colombia. The majority of Colombia s cocaine is smuggled and sold in the Unites States, simply due to the country s wealth and close locality.

Despite Colombia s wealth of natural resources — emeralds, coffee, flowers, oil, fruit –local businessmen have struggled to survive due to competition from companies subsidized with drug money. Drug trade proved to be an important source of new wealth for the Colombia. Local food production declined, as many plantation fields became farmland for coca leaves. Farmers who had engaged in growing traditional crops such as bananas and coffee found labor to be more expensive. As more and more land and property was divulged by drug cartels, they were able to operate, legitimately, their illegal functions. Many such legitimate companies export products to the United States and the globally, with many cases, transporting drugs in shipments of legal products.

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Colombia s great strength lies in its distribution network. With limited internal border checks and access to international waters on both sides of its land, Colombia drug traffickers can easily spread its market. Every available method of transportation is used to smuggle the cocaine worldwide: airplanes, ships, trucks, and trains.

Governmental, police and army, corruption, as with any country, can be found throughout a nation. With the extent of Colombia s cartel strength and power, it can easily be declared that corruption within the nation s government be prevalent. A police raid conducted in 1994 concluded that 35 senior and 25 middle level Cali police officers were included in a cartel s payroll. Along with 130 more government agents on that list of names, the payroll showed that these corrupted officers received payments ranging from $125 to $1,250 per month. (US Gov. Printing Office, pg.19) Some Colombian army officials would also be included in many smuggling stints, supplying traffickers with weapons and guns for money. Even the president, Ernesto Samper, has spent much of the past years fighting allegations that he received money from drug cartels, a claimed $6 million, to finance his successful election campaign. (US Gov. Printing Office, pg.2)

Colombia-based cocaine trafficking organizations can be easily anticipated to remain as the dominant players in the international cocaine trade into the 21st century. Traffickers from Colombia will continue to control the supply of cocaine and dominate the wholesale markets, especially in the United States.

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Efforts In Progress

The efforts in fighting against Colombia s drug trade will be met against an out-of-control democracy. The coca fields are very heavily guarded by guerillas. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, two powers combining for over 17,000 strong members, has vast control of 40 percent of the country. (Waller, D.) The wealthy income from drug trafficking allows for these liberated parties to supply for their guerillas better artillery, better communications equipment, and better transportation than the local military, to fight against any counter-active unions.

Currently, $300 million has been approved by the U.S. Congress to be sent to the Colombian government for fighting the cartels. President Clinton has proposed granting Colombia another $1.6 billion dollars in aid over the next two years. (Reuters)

There are no easy solutions to the problem of illicit drug trade or use. Countering the flows of cocaine and other illicit drugs throughout the world requires a multi-national and multi-year effort. Creativity, energy, time, effort, resource, supply, demand and worldwide support are essentials in the fight against such a diversified network.