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The proposed sale of UH-60 "Blackhawk" helicopters to the Colombian Army will enhance our counternarcotics objectives in Colombia and reinforce an integrated air strategy that has the Police (operating UH-1's) focusing on less dangerous missions and the Army flying missions where combat is more likely.

The Colombian army needs these helicopters to carry out counterinsurgency operations and counternarcotics operations such as the recent and very successful operation "Conquest". This counternarcotics operation, conducted by the Colombia Army, illustrates why the Army needs aviation support. The Army's "mobile" brigade is mobile in name only and had to request helicopter support from the Air Force. Given the limited assets of the air force it is not clear how much longer the air force will be able to support this ambitious counternarcotics operation.

I must make it clear that the distinction between counterinsurgency and counternarcotics missions, while never black and white, is becoming increasingly blurred. As external support for the guerrilla's has disappeared, the guerrilla have increasingly turned to the narco-traffickers as a key source of income. These guerrillas, long essential to the maintenance and security and support of cocaine labs, are now more directly involved directly in the cocaine trade (insert the percentages quoted by Amb Frechette at linear). They are skilled, well armed, and ruthless. They have attacked the , killed judges, prosecutors and other government officials. The CNP alone has suffered over 3,000 casualties in this very real war. In recent months they have shoot down five UH-1's and an eradication airplane.

Some may argue that if the US is to provide UH-60 helicopters to Colombia they should go to the police instead of the Army. This argument ignores the fact that that the CNP is successfully operating UH-1 helicopters; helicopters that that are adequate for the CNP's counternarcotics mission. Introducing another, much more complex aircraft would add significant burden to he police training maintenance and logistics programs. Meanwhile, the Colombian Armed Forces are already operating the UH-60 and if the army purchases the proposed 10 to 12 blackhawks they should be expected to make follow-on purchases in the future. Ultimately we would see standardized aircraft for the police (UH-1) Army (UH-60) and the Air Force (UH-60).

There are significant differences between the UH-1 and the UH-60 in terms of operating altitude, lift capability, speed, and cargo space. However, the most significant difference is survivability during combat operations. UH-60's have redundant aircraft controls and other systems, a more crashworthy structure, two engines, and key parts of the aircraft; flight controls, the drive train and rotor blades, are designed to operate even after being hit with small arms fire. Clearly this aircraft must be operated by the Colombian force most likely to be engaged in Combat, the Colombian Army. On the other hand, both are

utility helicopters, armed with door mounted machine guns or miniguns for their own protection. Neither is an attack helicopter.

This is not to say that the CNP does not fly very dangerous combat missions, only that the CNP is, to a degree, less likely to find themselves in pitched fire-fights than the Army, which has primary responsibility for counterinsurgency missions. For counternarcotics missions where the danger posed by significant ground fire is high, the Army operating the more survivable blackhawks should be responsible for aviation support.

Such an operating scheme will allow the Army to conduct missions which have more of a guerrilla component, and higher probability of ground fire, while the police conduct missions which have more of a counternarcotics component. On the other hand, if the police operate the more survivable blackhawks; we would not be surprised to see the CNP assigned more dangerous missions, including counterinsurgency missions, due to the blackhawks survivability.

Just this May, guerrillas shot down a CNP eradication airplane. The mountainous terrain, altitude of the crash site, and presence of ground fire dictated that a helicopter more powerful and survivable than a UH-1 rescue the pilot and recover the downed aircraft. The Colombian Air Force quickly responded with blackhawks, successfully rescuing the pilot and recovering the thrush.

The department of State is successfully supporting the Colombian National Police fleet of UH-1 helicopters, as well as the UH-1,s in Peru, Panama, Bolivia, Pakistan and (where else). The training, maintenance, and logistics system is tailored to support UH-1's and introducing another aircraft -- especially one as complicated, sophisticated and difficult to maintain as the UH-60 -- would unnecessarily complicate the support program. I should also mention that the Department recently sent six additional UH-1's to Colombia and is pursuing options to upgrade the performance of the UH-1's we support. The upgrades would improve performance on hot days and at high altitude, conditions which typify the counternarcotics operating environment in Latin America.