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Backgrounder Blackhawk Helicopter Sale Request-Colombian Army

As we prepare to debate and decide on recommendations on the above noted request for Blackhawks, it is worth keeping in mind the nature and extent of the war around the drug trade that is raging in Colombia today.

That war, both as to the narco-guerrillas, and from the perspective of the equipment needed to fight that struggle, involves a clear and unmistakable vital interest for the U.S. Colombia is the source of 80% of the drugs in the world today. These drugs cost our society alone nearly \$ 70 billion dollars, each and every year, and threaten our future generations.

Some of these important factors (there are many others) should be kept in mind in viewing and evaluating this Blackhawk helicopter request.

As Bob Novak points out in his WASHINGTON POST column today, with an end to Havana and Moscow's assistance for the guerrillas in Colombia, they have turned to the narcotic traffickers for their source of financing.

These guerrillas are essential to the maintenance, protection, and support of the cocaine labs and air strips for the narcotic traffickers, whose ultimate aim is eventually our streets and schools here in the U.S.A., and cause nearly 70% of our violent crime.

They are heavily armed, and have along with the traffickers been inflicting heavy casualties on the government forces, both police and military. The Colombian National Police (CNP) alone have taken more than 3000 casualties in this real war against these guerrillas and their drug trafficker allies.

Most notably, they have recently shot down 5 Huey helicopters (another also crashed in the struggle), and some eradication airplanes, as well.

The Blackhawks enter the picture as a utility helicopter only. They are not attack helicopters. They have no more armaments than the excess UH-1H helicopters, we have previously provided to Colombia.

Both the Hueys and Blackhawks have window mount sites on both sides of the aircraft, which can take either M 60 machine guns or the mini-guns, but don't come mounted with either of these weapons. The first defensive, and the second offensive systems.

The issue with Blackhawks isn't armaments, it is lift, load, mobility, and most importantly two engines versus the one on the Huey in order to take gun fire from the narco-guerrillas and survive with one engine still operating in fire fights. These are all no small considerations in the altitudes of the Andean region.

In addition, the Black hawks can withstand a nearly 40 MPH crash coming to ground, while with a Huey coming down at that speed, we would be hard pressed to find with a big dustpan and broom.

This information on the capacity of both these helicopters was recently learned from experienced Huey and Blackhawk pilots, often based on combat experience in Vietnam. These same pilots, along with high ranking former U.S. military officers, totally agree with the CNP's assessment of their equipment needs to fight a drug war in the Andes.