

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

November 7, 2003

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In response to your note suggesting that we approach the Congress for removal of restrictions on use of counter-narcotics (CN) helicopters in Colombia for a larger number of counter-terrorism (CT) missions, you may know that I had to fight to justify the use of CN helicopters for CT missions in the first place. As a result, we have an agreement with our oversight committees to make clear that the United States Ambassador clears on all proposed CT missions case-by-case when the use of INL/State's CN helicopters is requested. This protects the interests of the United States and Colombian Governments, but is also the basis for the expanded authorities to use CN helos for any CT missions. We have every reason to believe that the process by which the U.S. Ambassador 'triages' requests for CN helos for CT missions has, to date, been working well. With respect to our committees, I do not see them setting aside our hard-fought understanding. I see little point in approaching our committees for a change that is both unlikely and, in any event, unnecessary.

That said, let me offer a new idea. Plainly, I think we both agree that there is a need for maximum flexibility in using State/INL and Colombian Army (COLAR)-maintained helicopters for both CN and CT missions. To date, our primary CN mission has not been eroded by periodic requests for helicopters to meet CT needs within the expanded authority. Ambassador Wood is effectively "triaging" requests. I even understand that General Hill recently indicated to Colombian General Mora his view that this process adequately addresses counter-terrorism support.

At the same time, we have confirmed operational readiness (C/R) rates for COLAR-maintained helos are substantially lower than for State/INL-maintained helos. As a result, I have instructed INL and the Embassy to explore new ways to maximize CN and CT missions through possible joint maintenance, faster

The Honorable
Donald H. Rumsfeld,
Secretary of Defense.

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spare parts delivery and expedited Embassy mission clearance. We can also encourage the COLAR to make more efficient joint use of the Colombian Air Force fleet. By pursuing these efforts, we should be able to improve blade time available in the lead up to President Uribe's Plan Patriota.

In short, my sense is that we can help the COLAR increase readiness and blade hour availability of the FMS UH-60 fleet by focusing on existing facilities at Tolemaida and improving maintenance of the twelve COLAR UH-60s. I would suggest we work together to expedite these initiatives.

We understand the Department of Defense is seeking to identify \$108 million in additional funding for Colombia during FY 2004 and that this would include approximately \$12 million to get the COLAR UH-60 helicopter fleet up to par, and for approximately \$1.7 million per month thereafter for operations and maintenance. This O/R improvement could allow more flying hours for the COLAR. If DOD can provide the funding this year, as the Deputies Committee has asked, State would plan on seeking to maintain this support through its FMF budget in FY 2005.

I welcome further ideas, but would suggest going to the Hill on this is probably not necessary at this time.

Sincerely,



Colin L. Powell

COORDINATION

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Mike McMurray November 18, 2003
For Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA)

Joint Staff Division Chief, CCSA, (J5) Col. Jan Ithier November 18, 2003

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