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Counterdrug Strategy - Illusive Victory: From Blast Furnace to Green Sweep

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The logo for Military Review, featuring the word "Military" in a large, stylized red font and "Review" in a smaller, grey font below it.

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In Northern California, Bisqueen Castles mark the beginning of spring--and the start of a new campaign season for marijuana eradication operations.¹ A continent away in the Chapare region of Bolivia, the rainy season is ending allowing the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to rekindle the flames of its campaign to eradicate Andean coca plants and disrupt the drug flow to the U.S. The past five years or so have witnessed numerous large counterdrug operations such as those conducted under the aegis of U.S. embassies, DEA, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, state governors' offices, and many more.

Since Secretary Dick Cheney's staunch Department of Defense letter of September 1989, the military has been actively supporting drug law enforcement agencies at home and abroad.² In the U.S. Southern Command area, a series of Operation Support Justice actions have provided continuing military support to U.S. ambassadors' counterdrug efforts and to the host nations' counterdrug infrastructures in order to attack drugs at the source. Forces Command, by way of its continental armies and Joint Task Force 6, has been supporting major marijuana eradication operations, while the state governors' National Guards have been especially active in countering drugs at the growing source. Many of these operations are large-scale efforts involving interagency planning and civil-military cooperation in the execution of complex concepts for operations. Operations such as Green Sweep, Green Merchant, Ghost Dancer, Ghost Zone, Grizzly, Wipeout, Badge, and Blast Furnace, have become highly visible to Americans of both continents, creating some curiosity as well as outright anger at military involvement.

With another season for "whack and stack" operations fast upon us, it would be useful to look at example interagency operations, one abroad, and one at home, to explore just where these types of operations fit into our counterdrug strategies.³ Have they had any real impact on the drug threat? What is the significance of these large counterdrug operations; do they fit our objectives? Are they backed with the requisite resources and long term commitment needed to make their concepts work?

The origins of counterdrug efforts can be traced through a series of strategies to the National Security Strategy. Therein the President's strategic objective is to "reduce the flow of drugs into the United States by encouraging reduction in foreign production, combatting international traffickers and reducing demand at home...;" he would also help combat the "illicit drug trafficking" threat to friendly nations.⁴ Implementing these general goals is the National Drug Control Strategy, prepared within the Executive Office of the White House by the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

The 1992 National Drug Control Strategy is the fourth attempt to provide strategic guidance for the President's war on drugs. While the two-front approach, supply and demand, is still evident, there are some subtle shifts of emphasis that cannot be lost on the military planners who support supply reduction efforts:

- reducing the supply of drugs by sharpening the focus of the attack on drug trafficking organizations;
- identify drug trafficking networks, determining their most vulnerable points, including leadership, operations centers, communications systems, shipping capability and transportation modes, processing facilities, chemical suppliers, and financial assets and dismantling them by attacking these points simultaneously;
- coordinating law enforcement attacks, especially against the traffickers' home base of operations;
- isolating key growing areas, blocking shipment and importation of precursor and essential chemicals, destroying major processing and shipping centers, and controlling key air and riverine corridors.⁵

This strategy overlooks the fact that the U.S. is also a source for marijuana. It rightly seeks to avoid pitting law enforcement officers and supporting military personnel against the farmer who grows the drug: "Eradication programs will be undertaken only after an assessment of their effect on total...production...and the likely political consequences."⁶ It is evident that the lessons of previous large-scale eradication operations have been understood; a more sophisticated methodology seems to be evolving, as reflected in recent operations in Bolivia.

Supplementing the President's counterdrug strategy are a number of law enforcement strategies which guide counterdrug operations. DEA's Strategic Management System provides guidance for worldwide counterdrug efforts organized into sub-strategies by function: intelligence, investigations, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, etc. Operation Alliance and Project Northstar are coordinating centers with strategies for dealing with drug trafficking, the former in a four-state region of the U.S. southwestern border, the latter along the U.S.-Canadian border.⁷ An emerging theme in these drug strategies is "pursuing the producers, rather than the product."⁸ Emphasis is shifting from suppressing drug production at the growing site to targeting cartel kingpins, their financial underpinnings, transportation networks, and assets.

Military strategies guide the application of operational and non-operational support to drug law enforcement agencies, and military detection and monitoring along drug trafficking routes.⁹ Most instructive of these is the U.S. Southern Command Southern Theater Strategy with its series of plans for forward presence operations; these include guidance for counter-insurgency, nation assistance, and counterdrug operations. Under this strategy, USCINCSOUTH has developed a counterdrug campaign plan which provides support to host nations to assist them in combatting drug production and trafficking. Cuing on the National Drug Control Strategy, the SOUTHCOM counterdrug campaign targets the drug source area (Andean Ridge), transit areas in Central America, and other potential source and transit areas. "The SOUTHCOM focus is on the Ambassador and his country team--we support the Ambassadors."¹⁰ SOUTHCOM's major thrust here is to

support successful and decisive host nation counterdrug operations...[to]...destroy physical infrastructures for cultivation, processing, and transportation...[and to]...neutralize key organization personnel by capture, arrest, extradition, or imprisonment.¹¹

This seems to replicate the national strategy of targeting the producer rather than the product, suggesting that the lessons of Operations Green Sweep in California (1990) and Blast Furnace in Bolivia (1986) were useful in fine-tuning U.S. thinking about counterdrug strategies, and that conceptually we are on the right course.

Counterdrug operations conducted in Bolivia throughout the summer of 1992 provide an opportunity to see the influence of our drug strategies upon current operations and the relationship of these operations to the host nations' interests and attitudes. A history of our involvement with counterdrug efforts here could begin with the August 1983 U.S.-Bolivian treaties, which provided a basis for U.S. funding support for Bolivian counterdrug efforts. This enabled the creation of a 300-man UMOPAR (Los Leopardos-The Leopards), whose task was to eradicate the cocaine trade flourishing in the departments of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.¹² By the summer of 1984 the UMOPAR, joined by 1,500 Bolivian soldiers, entered the Chapare region of Cochabamba to tear apart the drug industry. The operations were unpopular and peasant demonstrations caused the withdrawal of the troops from the Chapare "military zone." In July 1986, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs authorized U.S. troops to provide temporary logistical support for National Police Corps find-and-destroy operations against coca-processing facilities in the Chapare region and the Beni and Santa Cruz departments.¹³ Operation "Blast Furnace" provided U.S. training assistance (aviation and counterinsurgency) and helicopter transportation to the UMOPAR and others to search out and destroy coca processing facilities (coca base and cocaine hydrochloride laboratories). Six U.S. Blackhawk helicopters and 160 U.S. support personnel arrived in Bolivia on July 14 to provide air mobility to Bolivian anti-drug forces.¹⁴

Blast Furnace was ill-fated: its focus shifted from attacking cocaine laboratories to law enforcement raids against traffickers in the villages. This caused the operation to be seen as an attack against the peasants, who "were mobilized by the narcotraffickers to violently oppose the raiders."¹⁵ Also, publicity of the action enabled narco-traffickers to leave target areas ahead of the DEA-UMOPAR. The disruptive effect of Blast Furnace was short lived: it was a matter of too few resources and too short a time. The four-month operation depressed coca prices below

production costs, but things returned to normal at the end of the operation. The positive effects, however, were long-lasting, in that a basis for joint combined interagency cooperation had been forged, and Blast Furnace was an effective training exercise for Bolivian and American personnel.¹⁶ Blast Furnace also hardened local attitudes against counterdrug forces. Coca farmers were incited by narcotraffickers and peasant union federations to support demonstrations (a problem still today). In October 1986, just before the end of Blast Furnace, around 6,000 residents of the Beni town of Santa Ana de Yacuma expelled 150 United States soldiers and UMOPAR members.¹⁷

Since 1988 DEA has continued its efforts to suppress cocaine trafficking along the Andean ridge under a United States based program called Operation Snowcap. Snowcap has provided temporary duty agents to U.S. ambassadors to support the country strategy and advise host nation counterdrug forces.¹⁸

Continued pressure by farmers, union groups, and narcotraffickers has pushed both Bolivia and U.S. counterdrug agencies toward alternative ways of attacking cocaine at the source. A tough 1988 Bolivian Antinarcotics Law (Ley 1008), passed to continue receiving U.S. assistance, served to inflame the campesino and inspire nationalist, anti-American feelings. Considerable political clout is held by the peasant coca growing syndicates organized into regional federations which are, in turn, supported by the powerful Bolivian Workers' Union.

The result has been that the Bolivian government has shied away from repressive eradication in favor of voluntary crop substitution and eradication.¹⁹ This seems to fit well enough into the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy and the operational concepts of the DEA, the U.S. State Department (International Narcotics Matters),²⁰ and the U.S. Southern Command as they support Bolivia's cocaine suppression program:

In Bolivia, the change in interdiction strategy is highly significant since it effectively redirects United States-Bolivian antinarcotics forces from the areas of coca cultivation and the initial phase of the cocaine production cycle, where the largest number of subsistence-level farmers are involved, to the more powerful and important trafficking elements in the isolated areas of Bolivia.²¹

In a sense, the focus of the strategy is on the drug trafficking organization as a center of gravity, and some of its key strengths that are not directly linked to the small farmer.

The strategy seeks to enhance investigative police work to disrupt and dismantle trafficking organizations; establish a permanent government presence throughout the Chapare; reinforce the Bolivian eradication effort with U.S. aid and military civic action projects; and block the movement of coca product out of and essential coca processing chemicals into Bolivia.²² By reducing the availability of coca paste and base product indirectly, the price should plunge far enough to encourage crop substitution. It seems reasonable to expect a drop in prices, given the successful joint Bolivia-U.S. antidrug efforts during 1990 in the Chapare. Leaf prices declined there due to operations against coca processing.²³ With Blast Furnace as a forerunner, the Snowcap Program and other interdiction efforts have adjusted to the art of the possible in Bolivia. This can be seen in the lengthy Operation Ghost Zone, which started in March with the

goal "to completely disband the drug-trafficking organizations that have operated throughout the Chapare region."²⁴ As one senior DEA official in Bolivia has said, the kingpins are the center of gravity.²⁵

Operation Ghost Zone is in line with the Document of Cartagena,²⁶ and contributes to the U.S. ambassador's strategic objective "to restrict and ultimately eliminate the production of cocaine for export to the U.S. or other markets or for domestic use [illicitly in Bolivia]."²⁷ Using human and high technology intelligence gathering, this sophisticated counterdrug operation involves about 750 Bolivian counterdrug personnel under a Special Antinarcotics Force (FELCN) (UMOPAR, police, and military). Bolivian military participation includes the Navy Blue Devils (5 riverine support vessels, 20 light patrol boats, 10 zodiac inflatable boats), and the Air Force Red Devils (22 UH1 helicopters, 5 Cesna 206 fixed wing aircraft). They are supported by about 35 Americans from the Army, Coast Guard, and Customs, with DEA as the lead agency.²⁸ They intend to suppress the export of coca base via air, land and river routes from the growing fields to distant processing labs in Pando, El Beni, and Santa Cruz Departments. Because a drug trafficker's Cesna 206B type aircraft can carry about 300 kg of paste or base, one military senior operations planner who is assisting DEA has identified this type aircraft as the center of gravity for the counter-air part of the Ghost Zone campaign.

In addition to ending the air shipment of coca paste from the Chapare, Ghost Zone also attempts to interdict movement of essential paste- and base-producing chemicals into the region, and uses intelligence and investigative police work to immobilize wholesale paste buyers and producers.²⁹ Mindful of Blast Furnace's lessons, Ghost Zone will maintain a presence throughout two growing seasons, until the October rainy season. This could be long enough to make a significant dent in the availability of coca paste to Colombian traffickers. Now enjoying some early success, operations planners are hoping to extend the campaign into 1993.

As originally framed the Ghost Zone campaign has three phases. Phase I, starting February 4, 1992, an intelligence preparation, including imagery, signal and human intelligence collection methods to identify narco-trafficking leadership, processing laboratories, and airfields. Phase II began March 28 with intensive operations to close land, sea and air lines of communications from the growing and processing areas to Colombian traffickers, dismantle trafficking organizations via raids, arrests, and seizures, and enhance Bolivian government eradication efforts. Phase III, which began May 12, is sustaining Phase II operations (ongoing as of this printing) in order to keep the pressure on narco-traffickers for a significant period of time. This is to negatively affect coca profits and to expand operations aimed at kingpin targets in areas outside the Chapare.

To take advantage of the drop in coca leaf prices caused by the Ghost Zone and previous Snowcap Operations, DIRECO (the Coca Eradication Directorate responsible for rural development in areas where alternative crops displace coca growing) has been encouraging crop substitution by offering certificates for \$2,000 for each hectare of coca destroyed.³⁰ It is uncertain how successful this effort will be, even with the pressure exerted by the Ghost Zone campaign. In the past, "eradication failed to keep pace with the expanding amount of new coca being planted by Bolivian growers."³¹

During these active counterdrug operations, routine forward presence operations (nation assistance) have been conducted under the direction of the U.S. Military Group to support the Bolivian goals for strengthening democratic institutions, and economic growth. At the center of this effort throughout the summer of 1992 are 16 major engineer projects (horizontal construction, airfield development, road improvement, hospital repairs) from eight different locations in Bolivia. Such projects are essential to reinforce DIRECO efforts in convincing the farmer that his movement to alternative farming will enjoy some long-term benefit, and that he is part of a general economic development. Yet, this seems to be the Achilles's Heel of our counterdrug strategy in Bolivia: though Ghost Zone's operational concepts are sound, the operation may rest on a foundation of faltering alternative development and Bolivia's overall slow economic development. As a senior DEA agent observed, narcotraffickers are fish swimming in a sea of coca farmers. Perhaps the success of Ghost Zone and similar campaigns is best measured by the progress of the campesino.

According to Gonzalo Mercado, Bolivia's Chairman of the legislative Chamber of Deputies Antinarcotics Committee, nothing has changed for the common peasant. The alternative development program has been limited to small groups of growers while counterdrug efforts continue. This has resulted in an environment of constant social tension in the Chapare which could spark armed struggle. "Desperation prevails among certain peasants in the Chapare Region because, despite their constant efforts to replace their crops, an appropriate response by the organizations financing alternative development is missing."³² Further exacerbating the situation has been allegations of corruption within DIRECO, which resulted in the replacement of its chairman in April.³³

Local dissatisfaction is illustrated by leaflets appearing in the Chapare in the first week of June 1992, exclaiming "Coca or Death--We Will Win." This declaration by the "Young Coca Growers Group," perhaps a fledgling subversive group or just a narcotrafficker's ploy, called for a "revolutionary and prolonged struggle in the region" and urged coca producers to "plant new plantations and to expel by force the U.S. advisers of the official policy against drugs."³⁴

This calls to mind the nagging question of the long-term effectiveness of large counterdrug operations such as Ghost Zone. Can a combined Bolivian-United States effort, well conceived, well executed, and supportive of both nations' counterdrug objectives, undermine fundamental national goals for economic development and efficient democratic institutions? Can such large and visible counterdrug operations contribute toward establishing conditions for corruption and disaffection from the legitimate institutions of government--or even insurgency? Reports of the presence of elements of the Peruvian Communist Party-Shining Path in Bolivia make this an important element in the assessment process as future strategies and operations are considered.³⁵

A preliminary assessment of the significance of Ghost Zone and its relationship to national and counterdrug strategy can be useful as the U.S. continues to plan the drug battle in overseas areas. Among positive indicators, Bolivia has demonstrated a commitment to countering illicit coca production within its domain, thereby supporting its image as a law-abiding nation and reinforcing sovereign control over its territory. According to Social Defense Under Secretary Gonzalo Torrico Flores, the FELCN has achieved "partial control over drug trafficking activity" by arresting hundreds of traffickers, largely avoiding the outbreak of violence among the coca

growers.³⁶ Ghost Zone also has provided an opportunity for U.S. drug law enforcement and military personnel to train while assisting the professional development of Bolivian police and military. The operation is also an important combined exercise in which Bolivian and U.S. officials at all levels learn each other's capabilities and limitations, perhaps clearing the way for future cooperation. Time will tell if this campaign will have lasting impact on narcotraffickers, if it contributes to the objectives of U.S. National Counterdrug Strategy, and if it makes any lasting contribution toward the well-being of Bolivians and others along the Andean Ridge.

The continuing presence of large-scale counterdrug initiatives in Andean Ridge countries prompted criticism that the U.S. was being hypocritical: we were demanding coca eradication efforts from our overseas friends while we were unwilling to take the political heat to counter marijuana growing at home. Even though DEA's Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program had been underway since 1979, then President Alan Garcia Perez of Peru openly chastised U.S. counter-cannabis efforts. The result was that Dr. William Bennett, then head of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), directed an expansion of domestic marijuana eradication efforts.³⁷ This was a reasonable initiative, since marijuana had become the U.S.'s number 1 cash crop (\$13 billion a year) with a retail price of \$20-\$30 billion a year.³⁸ Indeed, high-grade American sinsemilla is considered so good that the U.S. is now a marijuana exporting nation; by 1995, American grown crops are expected to supply half of the demand of 12 million U.S. pot smokers.³⁹

Numerous large counter-marijuana operations were enacted in 1990, with ONDCP encouragement. Most were state and local ongoing initiatives, but some were joint federal, state and local events led by DEA and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), including Operation Wipeout (DEA-State of Hawaii), Operation Badge (U.S. Forest Service-State of Kentucky), Operation Ghost Dancer (BLM in Oregon), Operation Grizzly (U.S. Forest Service-Border Patrol in California), and Operation Greensweep (BLM-State of California). All generally supported the National Drug Control Strategy by attempting to reduce the supply of drugs; they also supported immediate needs to demonstrate to Andean Ridge nations U.S. commitment to the counterdrug effort, even within its own borders. The Federal Government also sought to eliminate marijuana growing from federal lands and insure that national forests were safe for public use. Operation Greensweep provides one example of how strategic direction was translated into operational action.

Greensweep was a BLM eradication effort conducted in July and August 1990 in part of Northern California's Emerald Triangle, the King Range Nature Conservation District, where citizens of Humboldt County grow marijuana on federal land.⁴⁰ Greensweep's objective at the outset, however, was not particularly clear. Initial objectives were to arrest and prosecute marijuana growers and traffickers, eradicate plants and restore the cultivation site to original conditions. The objective then focused on removal of agribusiness paraphernalia from the forest and restoration of the growing site. The scope of sanitizing forest growing sites was not understood by the military; it became a major enterprise.

On July 29, a joint task force converged at a base camp in Humboldt County, amidst 65,000 acres of mountains and beaches. Led by BLM, it consisted of about 60 drug law enforcement agents, 110 California National Guard personnel, and 60 regular Army personnel. Law

enforcement personnel, responsible for arrests and investigations, led 5-man National Guard eradication and surveillance teams; 7th Infantry Division provided nine aircraft for transportation and medical evacuation. The California National Guard did the lion's share of the planning, administration and logistical support; and the Guard was instrumental in establishing and maintaining the base camp, with its mess, showers, command post, and provisions for medical and laundry support. The concept for operations envisioned these phases: intelligence gathering to identify cultivation sites; surveillance on cultivation sites to arrest suspects and eradicate and rehabilitate the sites; task force demobilization; evaluation.

A significant problem which plagued Greensweep from the outset was its failure to win enthusiastic local support. With marijuana a major cash crop in Humboldt County (\$500 million annually), there was little enthusiasm for "whack and stack" actions. Indeed, the Citizens Oversight Group (COG) seemed to be a catalyst for resistance to the operation. The COG was alleged by some law enforcement personnel to be the "Council of Growers," a marijuana cooperative group which shared profits, provided seed money and insurance against crop failure or eradication, and social support.⁴¹ Local press reaction was also negative. Greensweep was pictured as an "invasion." Radio station KMUD incited residents against the operation, describing daily task force activities and orchestrating a media day demonstration against the eradication effort.⁴²

Worse yet for the task force, the sheriff of Humboldt County, who had been briefed on the operation and invited to participate, became a harsh critic of the effort. He preempted federal action by conducting his own marijuana eradication near the objective area three days before Greensweep began. State officials thought that the sheriff's operation breached operational security and played to the local press.⁴³ As Greensweep got underway, the sheriff "expressed displeasure with the way the federal troops 'stormed in,' and area residents protested the 'invasion' of nearly 200 armed soldiers in camouflage fatigues and face paint as frightening for their children and horses."⁴⁴ The BLM press release on July 29 seemed to have little salutary effect.

There was some delay in establishing the base camp because seasonal weather delayed some aircraft support and the motor convoy was involved in an auto accident. At the base camp, the high frequency radio command and control net was experiencing difficulty because of mountainous terrain. Finally, about 50 protesters and other interested citizens appeared at the site, adding to the challenge of the first day.

On 30 July the day began with five BLM-National Guard patrols conducting counter-marijuana efforts in areas close to the base camp. At the same time, station KMUD identified the base camp location and actively encouraged local citizens to demonstrate there. The day's results were the seizure of 200 marijuana plants and 700 pounds of farming equipment. Three arrests for trespassing were made by BLM at the base camp (a diversion for others to photograph the camp). The next day two eradication teams were deployed and the plant count rose by 523. Task Force leaders began preparation for "media day," an opportunity to invite the press to the base camp and tell the Task Force story. KMUD was already orchestrating a "media day" demonstration.⁴⁵

Eradication continued on August 1, with 683 plants and 2.6 tons of growing paraphernalia confiscated from Federal lands. This equipment included marijuana drying shacks, fertilizer, black plastic water hoses, timers, sprinklers, water barrels, plywood, etc. At this point code words were introduced into Task Force radio nets because local citizens were attempting to disrupt operations on the air-ground frequency. A telephone was installed at the base camp to facilitate communications. Operations were halted that evening to prepare for media day.

On 2 August, 80 accredited press people arrived, accompanied by 300 demonstrators. Among the latter were representatives from Earth First!, NORMAL (National Organization for the Repeal of Marijuana Laws), and many "flower people" attending the annual Rastafarian Reggae Festival, coincidentally in progress at nearby Shelter Cove, five miles from the base camp. Nevertheless, extensive media coverage failed to help the mission, not because ubiquitous protesters captured press sympathies, but because on that day the press quickly migrated to the day's big story: Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait seemed to be more newsworthy than the "invasion" of Humboldt County.

The operation continued through August. The remaining days were punctuated with occasional protests (some violent), and general local resistance. The California Highway Patrol escorted government vehicles to preclude violent confrontations. On August 3, local civilians threatened a military laundry unit with a pistol, and a UH-60 helicopter was hit with three rounds of .22 caliber ground fire. In addition, the only access to the base camp shared the single highway to the Reggae Festival attended by nearly 15,000 people, increasing the potential for conflict. Numerous incidents with locals continued during the exercise, prompting the development of Rules of Engagement for Task Force use in protecting government property. On August 5, violent demonstrations threatened camp security, and all operations were suspended.⁴⁶

Through 7-8 August, forest fires became a significant problem, precluding continued operations by eradication teams in the northern areas of the King Range. The campaign ended August 9, 1990 with Task Force redeployment and demobilization.

The results were as follows: 1400 marijuana plants (perhaps worth \$2000 each) eradicated at 28 growing sites; 26 of these sites returned to their natural state; and 12 tons of growing equipment removed from the forest. Marijuana growers' profits were set back three years.⁴⁷ As in Bolivia, the drug farmer was not pleased with the presence of a counterdrug task force which was perceived as a military organization.⁴⁸

Experience gained and the after-action evaluation of Greensweep were helpful to other operations, especially Operation Ghost Dancer in Western Oregon, a BLM operation following on the heels of Greensweep.⁴⁹ Obvious lessons were the need for a good public affairs program to support operational objectives, thorough intelligence preparation of the operating area, consensus building among law enforcement officials down to the local level, and a resolution of the logistical burden created when forest sanitation is an objective. Most important was the need for long-term commitment to pursue the operation so as to have an impact on the drug trafficking organization. It is remarkable how these lessons are interchangeable with our counterdrug campaigns in overseas regions.

The high degree of sophistication of the marijuana growers who planted in difficult terrain inside seasonal fog banks, then camouflaged their crops, was interesting. Garden sizes were scaled to federal court work loads, which at the time declined to prosecute growers of plots under 100 plants on private land and 10 plants on public land. Growers were supported by a well-organized human intelligence network, and they used booby traps and poison feed to discourage man and beast from attacking their plants.⁵⁰

Greensweep's strategic results and lessons are significant for understanding the place of large-scale campaigns against drug crops in supporting counterdrug strategies. On the positive side, "Greensweep was very valuable to the building of partnerships with South American nations to fight illicit drug production and trafficking."⁵¹ According to ONDCP, U.S. embassies in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia sent cables stating that stateside counterdrug operations such as Greensweep were lending strength to the U.S. case for coca eradication in the Andean Ridge.

Greensweep was also an opportunity to reestablish federal control of lands given over to the drug trafficker, remarkably parallel with the counterdrug efforts in Bolivia.

In the another sense though, Greensweep had a negative side. It did not last long enough to make a difference, a problem experienced years before with Blast Furnace in Bolivia. It was expensive in resources--airplanes, people, and logistics. The biggest problem was the lack of clearly defined objectives. BLM focus shifted from eradication, arrest and prosecution to returning the land to its natural state and removing agricultural paraphernalia. Some California officials were fixed on eradication; ONDCP's strategic goal was to demonstrate resolve to attack U.S. drug source areas while the U.S. pushed its Andean friends for continued eradication overseas. Now, with such a large basis of experience in counterdrug campaigns, some concepts are evolving that may help leaders as they tackle the narco- challenge.

Operations such as Ghost Zone and Greensweep bring to mind some central issues for operational planning to support U.S. counterdrug strategy. Identifying the main source of the drug criminal's strength is an important first step that can bring necessary focus to the operation. With Blast Furnace as a lesson learned, the planners of Ghost Zone in Bolivia have zeroed-in on the narcotrafficking organization and its key leadership as the center of gravity. In a major supporting operation, i.e., the fight to control airspace and air lines of operation, the traffickers' single-engine aircraft was an important strength that had to be neutralized. The important thing for planners is the direct relationship of the objective and the center of gravity: if objectives are not clear, then it becomes difficult to focus efforts against a center of gravity, and more difficult yet to ensure that everyone understands the goals we are trying to accomplish.

In Greensweep the strategic objective was not clear to the planners, because they were perceived as changing in emphasis or priority during the very operation. Was the center of gravity the marijuana farmer or the Citizens' Oversight Group? Was it the hardware store where pot farming paraphernalia was a hot seller? Was it the bank branch office where safe deposit boxes were sold out? Was it the media which precluded a favorable showing of the operation to the outside world? A logical choice has to begin with defining the strategic objective.

Another problematic issue inherent in counterdrug operations is the close relationship between drug trafficking and drug use, and the social-political-economic environment in which this is sustained. Large-scale paramilitary counterdrug operations may well be inadequate if they do not support a long-term interagency strategy for economic development, social reform, institutional development and professionalization, and law enforcement. It is often painful for strategists to remember that successful strategies require clear objectives, suitable concepts, and sufficient resources. Ghost Zone in Bolivia is well conceived and executed, and correctly tied to the aims of U.S. and Bolivian strategies; yet, there is concern that both nations will not have the resources to support effectively strategies for national development on a scale that can transform coca traditions into alternative forms of economic development.

Within the U.S., resources are lacking to establish a presence in marijuana source areas and put an end to the "agricannabusiness." Smart growers have been moving indoors, with hydroponic technology to ensure a profit. During a period of economic difficulties, federal, state and local governments will be disinclined to support large counterdrug operations that may be politically unpopular--just as in Bolivia. It is difficult also to find convincing evidence that large counterdrug operations have any long-term impact on drug availability in the U.S. There are certainly positive benefits, but perhaps the value of these operations, much as border control efforts in the Southwestern U.S., is more in the demonstration of sovereign resolve than in the results produced.

Future U.S. trends for counterdrug operations will be small, focused actions against centers of gravity and other systemic strengths that can be disabled so as to hurt narco- trafficking organizations. Future BLM operations will be small, on a site by site basis. "We will not engage in anything this size again."⁵²

Overseas initiatives will probably continue paramilitary counterdrug operations in places such as Bolivia and Peru. Close linkage between these counterdrug campaigns and the national strategies they support will be requisite. Much like our Vietnam experience, campaign victories repeatedly won with the sweat and blood of brave people will be illusive if they are linked to hollow strategies.

Endnotes

1. Bisqueen Castles are small frame structures covered with clear plastic (polyethylene) to form a hothouse that is used by marijuana growers to get an early jump on the growing season. They are easy to spot from the air, as camouflage tends to reduce their effectiveness in gathering the springtime sunlight.[BACK](#)

2. Richard B. Cheney, Secretary of Defense, Letter, Department of Defense Guidance for Implementation of the President's National Drug Control Strategy," Washington, DC, September 18, 1989. Cheney issued a series of letters September 18, which included memoranda for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Subject: Initial Additional Actions to Implement the National Drug Control Strategy and the Related DOD Guidance) and for the Commanders of the Unified and Specified Commands. The letters said that the "...detection and countering of the production,

trafficking and use of illegal drugs is a high priority national security mission of the Department of Defense."[BACK](#)

3. "Whack and stack" refers to cutting plants by hand, then placing them in piles for burning, a labor-intensive operation that is difficult to sustain. During Operation Wipeout, August-October 1990 in the Hawaiian Islands, experimental eradication by DEA using a heliborne spot spray system proved to be very efficient. Glyphosate (commercial name Round Up) was used with a sticking agent (soap) and Red Dye Number 23 (used in lipstick). Growers were forced off public land into more expensive indoor facilities; the price of marijuana went up from \$2,500 to \$6,000 a pound. This resulted in 25 arrests, seizure of \$1,200,000 in assets and the destruction of 388,005 sinsemilla (high quality, high THC content) marijuana plants. See U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, *1990 Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program* (Washington: December 1990), pp 21 and 30; also Office of National Drug Control Policy, Supply Reduction Working Group, Public Lands Drug Control Committee report "1990 After Action Assessment Seminar" (San Francisco: January 30-31, 1991, pp. 6-8.[BACK](#)

4. George Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington: The White House, August 1991, pp.3-4.[BACK](#)

5. George Bush, *National Drug Control Strategy*, Washington: The White House, January 1992, p. 9.[BACK](#)

6. Ibid.[BACK](#)

7. Operation Alliance, *Southwest Border Drug Control Strategy II*, El Paso, Texas, June 1992. Operation Alliance is a coordinating headquarters for the Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), established by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Its task is to facilitate coordinated federal, state and local counterdrug actions in high threat counties of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Project Northstar is the US-Canada border counterpart to Operation Alliance. It is a multi-agency coordinating headquarters which operates through East, Central, and Western Regional Joint Coordinating Groups. Membership includes law enforcement organizations from Canada and federal, state and local drug law enforcement elements across the Northern U.S.[BACK](#)

8. Drug Enforcement Administration, *Strategic Management System*, Washington, February 26, 1991, p. 11.2.[BACK](#)

9. Operational support to drug law enforcement agencies involves units and personnel involved in reconnaissance and surveillance, ground and air mobility, equipment operation and maintenance, intelligence preparation and fusion, planning and staff support, engineer construction, research and development, language/translation. Non-operational support is equipment loan or transfer and training in formal service schools.[BACK](#)

10. George A. Joulwan, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, comments to staff during counterdrug modeling and war-gaming initiative conducted at the Joint Warfare Center, Hurlburt Field, Florida, April 30, 1992.[BACK](#)

11. U.S. Commander-in-Chief Southern Command, SCJ5, Information Briefing, "USCINCSO Counterdrug Campaign Plan," as presented at Joint Warfare Center, Hurlburt Field, Florida, April 30, 1992.[BACK](#)

12. UMOPAR has had a reputation for being tough and sometimes corrupt--especially in the Chapare region. Today the force has about 640 members.[BACK](#)

13. Rex A. Hudson and Dennis M. Hanratty, eds., *Bolivia, A Country Study* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1991), p.261.[BACK](#)

14. U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Operation Snowcap, Past, Present, and Future*, Hearing, 101st Cong., 2d Sess., Prepared Statement, Operations Division, Drug Enforcement Administration, May 23, 1990 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1990), p. 1.[BACK](#)

15. John T. Fishel, Lieutenant Colonel, USAR, "Developing A Drug War Strategy, Lessons Learned from Operation Blast Furnace," *Military Review*, June 1991, p. 64. This article provides a thorough analysis of the problems of planning and conducting a large counterdrug operation in overseas areas. It offers some valuable lessons for future planning.[BACK](#)

16. Michael H. Abbott, Colonel, U.S. Army, with Murl D. Munger, "U.S. Army Involvement in Counterdrug Operations--A Matter of Politics or National Security?," U.S. Army War College Military Studies Program Paper (Carlisle, PA: March 30, 1988). The author was the aviation battalion commander who deployed assets to Bolivia in support of Blast Furnace. His conclusion is that "the introduction of U.S. military forces into the sovereign territory of a source country is neither an effective nor appropriate approach."[BACK](#)

17. Hudson and Hanratty, p. 265. Santa Ana De Yacuma has been a safe haven for narcotraffickers; a large Bolivian operation was conducted in 1991 to reaffirm government sovereignty over the town.[BACK](#)

18. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Government Operations, 101st Cong., 2d Sess., House Report 101-673, "Stopping the Flood of Cocaine with Operation Snowcap: Is It Working?" (Washington: August 14, 1990), p. 22. The report states: "...Operation Snowcap is a joint U.S.-host country effort to curb the flow of cocaine from the producing and processing countries of South America.... primarily a joint law enforcement effort, it is conducted by means of paramilitary tactics. DOD provides training to host country antinarcotics police and logistical support for interdiction activities...[and]...participates on a cost-reimbursable basis, with NAU [the in-country narcotics assistance section (unit) of Department of State's International Narcotics Matters] paying for all DOD services, supplies, and personnel." [BACK](#)

19. Hudson and Hanratty, p. 266. The Law of Regulations for Coca and Controlled Substances of 1988 targets coca production and trafficking. It identified legal and illegal zones of coca production, prohibited the use of herbicides for eradication, allowed for eradication of 48,000 hectares of coca, and toughened the penalties for traffickers, sowers and harvesters, transporters, and coca stompers (see p. 258).[BACK](#)

20. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington: March 1992), p.20. The Report provides a summary of current policy and strategy: "...increase the law enforcement and security activities of the illicit drug source and transit countries and improve their ability to take effective action against trafficking organizations.... work with and motivate other countries..."[BACK](#)
21. "Stopping the Flood of Cocaine with Operation Snowcap: Is It Working?", p. 53.[BACK](#)
22. U.S. Embassy Bolivia, Operations Planning Group, "Operation Ghost Zone," briefing slide 5, "Objectives," provided August 28, 1992.[BACK](#)
23. Drug Enforcement Administration, *Worldwide Cocaine Situation, 1990* (Washington: January 1991), p.25. Leaf prices declined in 1990 from a pre-1990 average of \$29 a carga (hundred-pound weight), to about \$6-12 per carga.[BACK](#)
24. Douglas Farah, "U.S., Bolivia Mount Massive Drug Raid," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 1992.[BACK](#)
25. Interview with senior DEA planning official by LTC Dan Karris, U.S. Army, Low Intensity Conflict Proponencies Directorate, Combined Arms Command, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in La Paz, Bolivia, August 28, 1992.[BACK](#)
26. The Document of Cartagena, agreed by the Andean Ridge nations and the U.S. at the Andean Summit, February 15, 1990 at Cartagena, Colombia is a multilateral expression of consensus to disrupt and destroy the cocaine trafficking which emanates from the source and processing countries.[BACK](#)
27. James D. Hallums, Colonel, U.S. Army, Commander U.S. Military Group, Bolivia, briefing to Dr. Graham Turbiville, Jr (Regional Military Studies Coordinator, Foreign Military Studies Office), La Paz, Bolivia, November, 1991.[BACK](#)
28. Farah.[BACK](#)
29. U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, *Coca Cultivation and Cocaine Processing: An Overview*, (Washington: February, 1991), p. 8. "There are a number of chemicals and solvents which play vital roles in the processing of coca leaves to paste, base and HCL [Cocaine Hydrochloride--the white powder we know as cocaine]." The chemicals used in the processing step are coca leaves to paste, kerosene, sulfuric acid, sodium bicarbonate; coca paste to cocaine base, sulfuric acid, potassium permanganate, ammonia hydroxide; cocaine base to cocaine hydrochloride powder, ethyl ether, acetone, hydrochloric acid. Pages 8-10 of above reference provide a good description of cocaine processing.[BACK](#)
30. *Stopping the Flood of Cocaine With Operation Snowcap: Is It Working?*, pp. 47-68. Based on a bilateral agreement with the U.S., Bolivia initiated a program of voluntary eradication in August, 1987. Farmers were to get \$1,650 provided by the Bolivian Government for alternative development. The U.S. would provide the farmer \$350 for labor, giving the farmer a total of

\$2,000 per hectare eradicated. Coca eradication is conducted by DIRECO, a 160-man Coca Reduction Agency funded by the U.S. through the State Department's International Narcotics Matters. DIRECO measures the crop, decides what is to be paid, and issues certificates redeemable as eradication progress is demonstrated by the farmer. The program has problems: the Government is often slow to pay the farmer; farmers can take the money, then plant new fields elsewhere; and in the big picture, even with this eradication program, Bolivia has enjoyed an annual increase in hectares due to new planting.[BACK](#)

31. *Stopping the Flood of Cocaine with Operation Snowcap: Is It Working?*, pp. 65-6.[BACK](#)

32. Gonzalo Mercado, Chairman, Chamber of Deputies Antinarcotics Committee, *La Razon*, La Paz: June 9, 1992, p. A11, translated in JPRS-TDD-92-027-L, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, June 30, 1992, pp. 6-7.[BACK](#)

33. "Reports of Corruption Within National Coca Board," Television Boliviana Network, La Paz: March 24, 1992, translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, JPRS-TDD-92-014-L, March 31, 1992, p. 10. It was alleged that trucks loaded with coca leaf were seized by DIRECO, then the coca leaf was resold elsewhere. See also JPRS-TDD-92-015-L, April 7, 1992, p. 15.[BACK](#)

34. "Minister on 'Young Coca Growers' Group,' *La Razon*, La Paz: June 9, 1992, p. All, translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, JPRS-TDD-92-027-L, June 30, 1992, p. 6. In this news article, Interior Minister Carlos Saavedra Bruno said that "Comments like 'Coca or Death' are part of Bolivia's past," and he discounted the possibility that the Young Coca Growers' Group might be a budding subversive organization.[BACK](#)

35. "Shining Path Interested in Spreading [Spreading] to Bolivia," *La Republica*, Lima: July 16, 1992, pp. 13-15, translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report, Latin America, FBIS-LAT-92-144, July 27, 1992, p. 17. "There are signs that the Shining Path is infiltrating our country," said Bolivian Interior Under Secretary Marco Antonio Oviedo Huerta. In this article, he goes on to say that Shining Path members are using Bolivia as a resting place and as a supply corridor for smuggling weapons. While two Peruvians arrested in 1990 belonged to the MRTA (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement), there does not appear to be strong evidence that the Shining Path is seeking support from Bolivian subversive organizations. The article concludes that guerrilla propaganda, whether from Peru or Bolivia, has not been well received by the coca farmer.[BACK](#)

36. "Official Denies Reactivation of Drug Activity," *El Mundo*, Santa Cruz: June 9, 1992, National Section, translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, JPRS-TDD-92-027-L, June 30, 1992, pp. 5-6.[BACK](#)

37. U.S., Executive Office of the Whitehouse, Office of National Drug Control Policy, *Public Lands Drug Control Committee, 1990 After Action Assessment Seminar* (San Francisco: January 30-31, 1991), p.1.[BACK](#)

38. John P. Sutton, DEA agent, as quoted in "Army Troops Join Marijuana Raids," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1990.[BACK](#)

39. U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, *1990 Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program* (Washington: December 1990), p. 32. The most selective marijuana is sinsemilla (Spanish, sin semilla--without seed), prepared from the unpolinated female cannabis plant. Sinsemilla contains about 19% delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the isomer of tetrahydrocannabinol which produces marijuana's psychoactive effect. Wild cannabis, or ditchweed, contains about .5% THC, and imported Mexican, Jamaican, and Colombian varieties range from .5% to 7%.[BACK](#)

40. This area is circumscribed by the borders of Humboldt, Trinity, and Mendocino Counties. The triangle-shaped area is emerald, some would say, because of its beautiful green forests, which include redwood stands. Others relate the Emerald Triangle to the green marijuana plant which has been introduced into the natural flora--and to the crop of green dollar bills which help sustain the region.[BACK](#)

41. "Operation Greensweep" Information Briefing provided by senior official, California National Guard, to author, Sacramento: November 26, 1990.[BACK](#)

42. California National Guard, "Operation Greensweep After Action Review," briefing to military officials, slide 18, no date, as located in archives of National Interagency Counternarcotics Institute, San Luis Obispo, California.[BACK](#)

43. California National Guard brief, "Operation Greensweep After Action Review," p. 16. Herein it is suggested that the lack of success in getting arrests in the Greensweep operation was attributed to the sheriffs' operation which forewarned the growers, enabling them to stay clear of the action.[BACK](#)

44. Mark A. Stein, "Army Troops Join Marijuana Raids," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1990.[BACK](#)

45. California National Guard briefing, "Operation Greensweep After Action Review," p. 21.[BACK](#)

46. California National Guard briefing, "Counternarcotics Operations," paper slide unnumbered, "Greensweep Summary," 4 and 5 August 1990, as located in archives of National Interagency Counternarcotics Institute, San Luis Obispo, California.[BACK](#)

47. California National Guard, Office of Public Affairs ("CAPO-CD-PAO) TV Tape, "Counterdrug Videos," "Operation Greensweep," Sacramento: September 1991.[BACK](#)

48. Unfortunately drug law enforcement agents participating in these types of counterdrug efforts are prone to wear military camouflage fatigues. This makes it almost impossible for the local people to tell the difference between soldiers who are supporting and law officers who are arresting.[BACK](#)

49. Ghost Dancer was conducted in Oregon, west of the Cascade Mountain Range from the northern border with Washington to the southern border with California. A good description of this interagency operation is provided by Henry J. Richter, *Operation Ghost Dancer: The Use of Active Duty Army forces in Marijuana Eradication*, Military Studies Project, U.S. Army War College (Carlisle, PA: March 11, 1991).[BACK](#)

50. Generally, marijuana growers in the West have cultivated a self-serving image of peaceful folk, meaning no harm to others, growing pot for their own purposes. They avoid law enforcement personnel. In the East, such as in Kentucky, the grower tends to be more aggressive, and gunshots and booby traps are meant to do harm. According to one Bureau of Indian Affairs leader from its Marijuana Eradication and Reconnaissance Team (MERT), drug law enforcement on the Indian reservations is often accompanied by high degrees of violence.[BACK](#)

51. U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive office of the President, *Public Lands Drug Control Committee, 1990 After Action Assessment Seminar* (San Francisco: January 30-31, 1991), p. 3.[BACK](#)

52. Statement to author by regional BLM official at Public Lands After Action Seminar, San Francisco, January 30, 1991.[BACK](#)