

Colombia's Antidrug Efforts and the "Failed Demonstrably" Designation

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On September 15, 2025, President Trump [determined](#) Colombia had "failed demonstrably," for the first time in nearly 30 years, to meet its international counternarcotics obligations and to take the measures required by [Section 489\(a\)\(1\)](#) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (hereafter FAA). This process is sometimes referred to as "decertification." Pursuant to this designation, President Trump also [determined](#), in accordance with Section 706(3)(A) of P.L. 107-228, that continuing U.S. assistance to Colombia in FY2026 is vital to U.S. national interests. Nevertheless, U.S. [diplomatic disputes](#) and [drug policy differences](#) with the government of President Gustavo Petro, whose "political leadership" the [Presidential Determination](#) faults for Colombia's "failed" counternarcotics efforts, could intensify.

Congress may consider the impact of Colombia's designation on bilateral security and counternarcotics cooperation as it considers whether to fund FY2026 assistance in support of such efforts. Congress also may assess how the designation may affect [U.S.-Colombia relations](#) and political conditions in Colombia in the lead-up to a presidential election scheduled for May 2026.

Designation and Assistance Restrictions

Pursuant to 22 USC 2291j-1, the President is to report to Congress not later than September 15 of each year his determination on the list of major illicit drug producing and drug transit countries as defined in [22 USC 2291\(e\)](#). The President's report also is to identify any such countries found during the previous 12 months to have "failed demonstrably" at making "substantial efforts" to counter illicit drugs by meeting the goals of and adhering to bilateral and international counternarcotics commitments, as well as taking legal and law enforcement measures to prevent and punish public corruption that facilitates illicit drug production and trafficking. Pursuant to 22 USC 2291j-1, countries determined by the President to have failed demonstrably in their counternarcotics efforts are barred from receiving certain U.S. assistance at the start of the following fiscal year, unless the President determines that provision of such aid is "vital to the national interests of the United States."

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Types of U.S. Assistance Withheld

Pursuant to Section 481(e)(4) of the FAA ([22 USC 2291\(e\)](#)), U.S. assistance that can be withheld from designated countries includes

- most forms of bilateral assistance authorized in the FAA (other than emergency, humanitarian, and counternarcotics assistance);
- arms sales and financing under the Arms Export Control Act;
- financing under the Export-Import Bank Act of 1945;
- certain provisions of agricultural commodities;
- assistance that furthers the objectives of the Human Rights and Democracy Fund;
- assistance to combat trafficking in persons; and
- certain global health assistance.

Withholding exceptions for counternarcotics-related assistance generally apply to funding provided through the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) foreign assistance account, as well as narcotics-related alternative development assistance and narcotics-related Economic Support Fund (ESF) assistance. The same exemption applies to funds for U.S. military-led security cooperation programs and activities to support foreign country drug interdiction and counter-drug activities.

Designation with a Waiver

Since the United States began designating countries in 1986, the United States has, with a few exceptions, restricted assistance only from countries with which it has adversarial relationships and to which it provides little assistance. Although the United States has issued a waiver from foreign aid restrictions, Colombia's decertification may, nonetheless, have [political](#) and [diplomatic](#) ramifications.

Colombia has been a key U.S. security partner in South America for decades, though counternarcotics cooperation has been tested by President Petro's opposition to forced coca eradication and his government's [peace negotiations](#) with armed groups. [Plan Colombia](#), a U.S.-funded counternarcotics and security initiative, supported Colombia to modernize its security forces, regain territory from illegally armed groups, and end a 50-year civil conflict. U.S. assistance has also helped Colombia to become a leader of multinational maritime interdiction operations, serve as the primary U.S. and regional source of drug-related intelligence, and train security forces from other countries. While cooperation with Colombian security forces has continued, Congress has [reduced assistance](#) to Colombia and placed additional conditions on that assistance since Petro took office. The Presidential Determination [praised](#) "Colombia's security institutions and municipal authorities," while criticizing President Petro's drug policies and "failed attempts to seek accommodations with narco-terrorist groups."

President Petro has reportedly [halted](#) U.S. weapons purchases while denouncing the U.S. decertification and [questioning](#) what the U.S. government had done to address domestic fentanyl and cocaine consumption. He reportedly vowed to [ignore](#) U.S. pressure to use forced eradication on coca crops, despite coca crop eradication levels having [declined](#) by 83% from 2022 through 2024 and violence related to eradication efforts having occurred. In August 2025, for example, armed groups reportedly used a drone to [shoot down](#) an antinarcotics helicopter, killing 12 Colombian police eradicators.

While some analysts [are uncertain](#) of how decertification might affect future U.S.-Colombia relations, others expect it to [worsen political polarization](#) ahead of upcoming elections. Some assert that there are several indicators that the United States and Colombia will continue to partner on antidrug efforts, including the waiver permitting the continuation of assistance and [statements](#) by President Trump that he

would change the designation if Colombia improves its coca eradication efforts and works with the United States to bring criminal leaders to justice. Others argue that Petro has strongly opposed U.S.-backed drug policies to penalize coca growers and publicly criticized U.S. military strikes in Venezuela. With Colombia's security conditions are [worsening](#), some observers assert that Petro may pursue closer ties with the [People's Republic of China](#), which has offered [security cooperation](#) to countries in the region.

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