

Fox, Edward, "US, UN Offer Contrasting Narratives on Bolivia's Coca Production", *InSight Crime*, Estados Unidos / Colombia, 17 de septiembre de 2012.

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#### Manual coca eradication in Bolivia

After being blacklisted by the US for failing in its counternarcotics efforts, the latest UNODC report shows Bolivia's coca production falling while eradication is increasing, raising questions of why there are such contrasting narratives.

On September 17, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released a report on coca production in Bolivia for 2011, finding that the area under coca cultivation had decreased 13 percent from 31,000 hectares in 2010 to 27,200 hectares last year. What's more, seizures and eradication increased. According to the report, 10,500 hectares of coca were eradicated in 2011 compared to 8,200 in 2010, while seizures of cocaine hydrochloride (HCI) grew 65 percent from 3.4 tons in 2010 to 5.6 tons last year.

In the press statement for the report's release, the UNODC noted that their representative in Bolivia, Cesar Guedes, "welcomed the positive trend and thanked the [Bolivian] Government for its drug control efforts."

Just three days prior to the UNODC publication, the White House published its annual Presidential Memorandum on Major Illicit Drug Transit and Producing Countries, criticizing Bolivia's efforts. The document designated "Bolivia, Burma, and Venezuela as countries that have failed demonstrably during the previous 12 months to adhere to their obligations under international counternarcotics agreements."

Speaking in the city of Oruro, Bolivian President Evo Morales responded to the White House declarations, stating, "the United States has no morality, authority or ethics that would allow it to speak about the war on drugs ... Because the biggest market for cocaine and other drugs is in the United States," reported EFE.

### **InSight Crime Analysis**

Perhaps the most curious element to the opposing narratives from the US and the UN is the fact that their statistics on Bolivia are almost identical. The White House Office of National Drug Control Police (ONDCP) found that between 2010 and 2011, the area under cultivation dropped from 34,000 hectares to 30,000 while eradication grew from 8,200 hectares to 10,509.

The most controversial point in the ONDCP findings was that, despite falling cultivation levels, the production potential spiked to 265 tons, overtaking Colombia which has an area of coca cultivation close to three times higher, based on the ONDCP's own numbers. The reason for this is the use of so-called "Colombian methods" in production, a far more efficient process of extracting cocaine alkaloid from the coca leaf, which results in a higher ratio of cocaine per hectare. There has been no explanation as to why the Colombians are not using the "Colombian method."

Accusations of corrupt ties between high-level officials in the Bolivian government and drug traffickers over the last year, along with the apparent presence of foreign cartels, may have played a role in the US decision to blacklist the country. The UNODC data revealing an increase in HCI seizures last year suggests that the government is working in earnest to tackle drug trafficking. In addition, the government announced the creation, in August, of an ecological unit to remove coca being cultivated in the country's national parks.

Another issue with the statistics is the lack of transparency over US analytical methods. UNODC provides a detailed breakdown of its methodology while the US remains opaque about how it arrives at its estimates and conclusions. This hinders any thorough analysis of differences between the two and leaves the US open to accusations of politicizing its results, something which cannot be ruled out due to the frosty relations between the two nations. Morales expelled DEA agents in 2008 and has sought to legalize coca, which the US opposes.

If indeed cocaine production in Bolivia is increasing, one contributing factor may be the so-called "cockroach effect." Rather than placing responsibility solely on the government in question there must be recognition that HCI labs have been found throughout Latin America, from Argentina to Honduras, a sign that as efforts against production in Colombia have increased, traffickers moved operations elsewhere.