



## **COLOMBIA IN CRISIS**

By Andrew Miller

### **Key Points**

Violence and warfare in Colombia are often blamed on the drug trade, but their roots run much deeper and go back well over five decades.

The overwhelming majority of victims are noncombatant civilians. In the last 10 years, more than 35,000 unarmed civilians have been murdered or "disappeared."

Despite rich natural resources, Colombia's wealth is unevenly distributed, with large sectors of the population in deep misery.

Colombia, an oil exporter and leading producer of coffee, is rich in natural and cultural resources. Unfortunately, it is also a country plagued by violence, is the world leader in the production of cocaine entering the U.S., and is a major source of heroin. Although violence is often blamed on Colombia's large-scale drug trade dating from the mid-1970s, politically motivated killings and peasant massacres significantly predate the drug era. The violence has historic roots in the concentration of resources in the hands of Colombia's powerful political and economic elite, desperate conditions among the poor, and a political culture that has no tolerance for dissent.

Colombia has been ruled for decades by two political parties, Liberal and Conservative, whose struggles have led to civil wars and regional conflicts. During the last period of inter-party conflict known as La Violencia (from 1948 to 1953) some 145,000 people were killed. For years following, the two parties

collaborated in a power sharing arrangement that excluded other political views. The hegemony enjoyed by these two parties exacerbated Colombia's inequitable distribution of wealth.

With the current economic crisis, including a 78% unemployment/underemployment rate, drug trafficking and political struggle are attractive options. Today, a fierce counterinsurgency war pits the Colombian state forces and their paramilitary allies against two major guerrilla forces, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The FARC and ELN control significant portions of the countryside. They remain wary of any negotiated peace process that would disarm the guerrillas without also disarming the paramilitaries, reining in the armed forces, and creating conditions for rule of law and economic, social, and political transformation. In the mid-1980s, after former FARC militants and other left-wing groups joined the Patriotic Union political party, more than 2,500 of their members, candidates, and elected officials were systematically assassinated.

The Colombian military's drive to reduce the guerrillas' support in the countryside has included indiscriminate killings and massacres of civilians. In the last ten years, more than 35,000 noncombatants have been murdered or "disappeared," overwhelmingly by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Increasingly, these missions have been outsourced to paramilitary groups that operate in heavily militarized areas and coordinate their operations with the army. The proportion of abuses directly attributable to the armed forces has declined in recent years, while abuses by their paramilitary allies have escalated dramatically.

These abuses have resulted in massive internal displacement and refugee flows into Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Guerrilla forces-which carry out mass abductions, forced recruitment of minors, indiscriminate attacks, selective killings, and massacres-have also contributed to internal displacement. More than 1.5 million people have fled their lands over the past 15 years, with an estimated 300,000 displaced in 2000 alone. Since 1996, another one million, mainly wealthy and educated Colombians, have gone into exile-nearly half to

the United States. In addition to peasants and others living in areas of guerrilla activity, victims include perceived or actual government opponents: lawyers, judges, peasant activists, trade unionists, teachers, and students. Human rights defenders are under fire, with at least 30 being killed or "disappeared" in the last four years. For their part, the guerrillas target those suspected of collaborating with the armed forces or the paramilitaries, and they fund their insurgency in part by taking hostages for ransom. Guerrilla and paramilitary groups seized about 1,500 hostages in 2000. Drug traffickers have also targeted those who oppose their operations. With their wealth, drug traffickers have become large landowners and have come into direct conflict with guerrillas and peasants. These drug traffickers have historically collaborated with the armed forces in creating and financing paramilitary death squads.

Shortly before taking office in 1998, Colombian President Andres Pastrana met with Manuel Marulanda, the head of FARC, and initiated the latest round of peace attempts. As a gesture to FARC, the government removed its troops from more than 16,000 square miles in south-central Colombia. Substantive talks between the government and FARC started, following a brief cease-fire at the end of 1999. Similar efforts are under way with the ELN but have been met with strong resistance. In 1999, the Pastrana administration unveiled its multidimensional proposal, "Plan Colombia," contingent upon the provision of aid from the U.S. and European countries. With the conflict intensifying even as peace talks proceeded in 2000, the Clinton administration and U.S. Congress responded with an aid package heavily weighted toward security assistance—a focus that has continued into the Bush administration.

## Problems with Current U.S. Policy

### Key Problems

U.S. policy presses for control of human rights abuses, yet it bolsters a military implicated in violations.

U.S. military aid is officially for counternarcotics operations but in practice it is used for counterinsurgency operations.

The narcoguerrilla thesis was devised as an argument to support aid to the Colombian army when the U.S. Congress wanted nothing to do with counterinsurgency.

According to the State Department, "the fight against drugs remains the principal U.S. national interest in Colombia." Yet for the Colombian army, the principal fight is against leftist guerrillas. In recent years, the misleading but politically expedient term narcoguerrilla has been coined to merge these two fights. While Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has expressed misgivings about using the military to fight drugs, arguing that illicit drug use is "overwhelmingly a demand problem," the Bush administration has asked for additional military appropriations for counternarcotics operations under the rubric of Plan Colombia.

The current counterdrug program continues the history of U.S. support for Colombia's security forces. Since at least the 1960s, Washington has provided assistance for Colombia's anti-guerrilla operations, first in the name of fighting communism and later to fight drugs. Colombian armed forces have received U.S. training at the Army School of the Americas and the Special Warfare Center, as well as in-country training by U.S. military advisers and Special Operations Forces. (see FPIF, Military Training for Latin America). In addition, the U.S. has supplied Colombia's security forces with arms, munitions, helicopters, and other equipment.

Since 1989, when the cold war ended and then-President George Bush declared drug trafficking to be a national security threat, Colombia has been the number one recipient of U.S. military aid in the Americas. In 1994 and 1995, Congress began to direct the bulk of U.S. aid to the Colombian National Police's Directorate of Anti-Narcotics Operations (DANTI), in part due to the Colombian military's abysmal human rights record.

Although there have been no documented reports of recent human rights abuses by DANTI operatives, the human rights community has cautioned that it is too early to give DANTI a clean bill of health.

A marked deterioration of Colombia's armed conflict has gone hand in hand with increased U.S. military aid. In 1996, Congress passed the Leahy Law prohibiting many forms of U.S. aid from going to security force units (both military and police) implicated in human rights violations. This law passed after government documents obtained by human rights groups proved that the U.S. had given aid to Colombian army units implicated in rights violations. Although the Leahy Law blocked some aid, ironically it was also used in 1998 to justify the release of military aid frozen since 1994 because the administration concluded that there were no credible reports linking recipient Colombian army units to violations.

To help address congressional and public concerns that U.S. aid is supporting counterinsurgency operations, the Colombian military created a special counternarcotics brigade which is being trained by U.S. special forces. The brigade will eventually consist of three battalions, each with 600 to 950 soldiers.

Despite such attempts to erect a firewall between antidrug and anti-guerrilla operations, some officials in Washington and Colombia have, since the 1980s, promoted the concept of the narcoguerrilla. While it is increasingly true in recent years some FARC and ELN forces have profited from drug trafficking, the simplistic narcoguerrilla notion obscures the separate identities and goals of drug traffickers and guerrillas-as well as the reality that parts of Colombia's armed forces, paramilitaries, and political elite are also tied to the drug cartels.

Drug traffickers and guerrillas often operate in the same regions and have some converging interests. Many guerrilla units tax and help protect drug cultivation, just as they do other businesses in areas under their control. Drug traffickers are equal-opportunity corrupters: they try to work with anyone who will to advance their interests. Some paramilitary leaders, including the Castao brothers, have also been identified as narco-traffickers. Amnesty International USA filed suit against the CIA in mid-2000 in an effort to obtain information about suspected ties between the U.S. government and the Castao family, which has been involved in paramilitary violence and narcotics trafficking. Former President Samper allegedly received \$6 million from narco-traffickers for

his presidential campaign. In January 2000, the wife of Colonel Hiatt, the U.S. military group commander in Bogota, pleaded guilty to heroin trafficking.

Officials in Washington describe increased U.S. support for Plan Colombia as embracing the peace process and the development option while pursuing the counternarcotics imperative. However, U.S. assistance is overwhelmingly military, and is likely to undermine peace efforts by reassuring hard-line elements in Colombia that they can defeat the guerrillas. In July 2000, President Clinton signed a \$1.3 billion emergency counterdrug package, earmarking roughly \$860 million in aid for Colombia. This special package, together with already appropriated funds, meant the Clinton administration authorized an extraordinary \$1.2 billion in counternarcotics aid to Colombia during 2000 and 2001. Roughly 80% of this aid was designated for military equipment and training.

In April 2001, the Bush administration proposed an additional \$800 million in counternarcotics assistance for the Andean region. This request includes \$399 million for Colombia through the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) program, of which \$252.5 million is proposed for interdiction and \$146.5 million for alternative development and institution building. This does not include additional funding from the Pentagon and other agencies. In the past several years, the Pentagon has supplied roughly \$150 million annually in direct military aid to Colombia, above and beyond the INL monies.

Meanwhile, the human rights situation continues to deteriorate, with some Colombian analysts describing the situation as genocide. In January 2001 alone, 27 massacres were carried out by army-backed paramilitaries, resulting in several hundred deaths. At this rate, 2001 will be the bloodiest year for Colombia in recent history.

Toward a New Foreign Policy

## Key Recommendations

The U.S. should fully support Colombia's peace process and evaluate any proposal in terms of its effect on the process, discarding proposals that will jeopardize peace.

End use monitoring of security assistance and human rights vetting and monitoring need to be fully staffed and financially supported. Washington should eliminate any policy proposals that contradict human rights protection or could negatively impact the local population.

In April 2001, over 100 Latin Americans-former heads of state, cabinet ministers, legislators, prominent authors, intellectuals, and civic leaders-called on President Bush to go back to the drawing board with his military-oriented support for Plan Colombia. In a letter, they charged that the U.S.-backed antidrug campaign is fueling a bloody war, poisoning food crops and the environment, and forcing tens of thousands of poor farmers off their land. President Bush would do well to heed their advice, incorporating the following principles.

### Support the peace process

Although no one is arguing that the peace process is proceeding smoothly, most observers in Colombia agree that it must move forward and deserves strong support. To escalate U.S. military involvement even as the parties engage in negotiations is a contradiction. Washington should increase political support for the process and ensure that adequate financial resources are available.

### Continue implementation of the Leahy Law

U.S. security assistance should continue to be closely scrutinized to ensure that no units of the Colombian security forces-armed forces, intelligence units, and police forces-implicated in violations receive any U.S. aid. Washington should

assist Colombian efforts to prosecute those responsible for violations. Appropriate resources should be made available to ensure the best human rights vetting and end-use monitoring possible.

Furthermore, Washington should publicly disclose the security force units slated to receive U.S. aid (including units being considered) to ensure full public discussion.

Vigorously pressure for concrete action against paramilitary groups Washington should press for effective steps to dismantle paramilitary groups, such as: suspending any active-duty officer charged by the Colombian Attorney General's office with paramilitary collaboration or human rights violations; executing the Attorney General's detention orders of paramilitary members; prosecuting in civilian courts any officers charged with paramilitary involvement or human rights violations; and fully implementing the often-announced but still undeployed (since 1989) Bloque de Busqueda, designed to find and detain paramilitary members.

Promote and support the rule of law

Even if the conflict in Colombia were to end overnight, human rights problems would not disappear. Human rights abuses are not all linked to the war. The so-called social cleansing killings, for instance, are targeting street children, among others. Resources should be made available to strengthen the Colombian judiciary and to protect its members from attack. Any intelligence personnel implicated in violations should be turned over to Colombian civilian authorities for prosecution.

Support civil society

Human rights advocates and other sectors of civil society striving to support the peace process, human rights, and the rule of law need to be defended. U.S. assistance should support Colombian government efforts to protect civil society groups at risk of attack.



Specifically, Washington should ask for periodic and public progress reports on the implementation of the Colombian government's commitment to investigate attacks against human rights advocates, to install security infrastructure for groups at risk, and to prosecute those implicated in such attacks.

#### Eliminate proposals contradictory to human rights

Washington's acknowledgement that its support for Plan Colombia with its "push into southern Colombia" will create more displaced populations is a clear sign that the U.S. aid package has a fatal flaw. All programs should be evaluated in light of their impact on the local population. Those proposals deemed harmful should be discarded. Clear, periodic, detailed, and public reporting requirements should be added, and more resources made available for end-use monitoring and human rights compliance. Reevaluate counternarcotics strategies for Colombia and other source countries. As long as cocaine commands high prices on the world market and factors like undeveloped infrastructure limit alternative economic opportunities, peasants are going to grow coca and are going to participate in the lucrative drug trade. The U.S. government should work closely with the Colombian government and local authorities to ensure that alternative development programs and infrastructure investment reach and serve the local communities. Aerial spraying in Colombia needs to cease and a public evaluation commence as to its environmental, economic, and human impacts. In addition, Washington needs to open a broad, public, and rational discussion-devoid of finger pointing and political labeling-to evaluate the merits of other forms of dealing with the drug problem. This discussion should fully explore expanding demand-side programs, including public education and treatment in the United States.

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## Militarization of the U.S. Drug Control Program

By Gina Amatangelo

### Key Points

The U.S. has enlisted Latin America's militaries as its pivotal partners in international drug control.

Protecting national security is used as the rationale behind the militarization of U.S. counternarcotics efforts-and is strengthened by campaigns labeling insurgents "Narco guerrillas."

Militarization and increased funding for the war on drugs have failed to stem the flow of narcotics into the United States.

At a time when fledgling civilian governments in Latin America are struggling to keep security forces in check, the U.S. has enlisted the region's militaries as its pivotal partners in international drug control. This militarization, which begins at the U.S.-Mexico border, is undermining recent trends toward greater democratization and respect for human rights while doing little to stanch the flow of drugs into the United States.

Washington's militarization of its antidrug efforts is the product of a U.S. drug control strategy that has historically emphasized reducing the supply of illegal narcotics rather than addressing the U.S. demand for drugs. In 1971, three years after the first declared "war on drugs," President Richard Nixon took a crucial step toward militarization by proclaiming drug trafficking a national security threat. "Protecting the national security" has remained the rallying cry for providing more money and firepower to wage the war on drugs. Since the 1970s, U.S. spending on the drug war has risen from less than \$1 billion to more than \$19.2 billion annually. According to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, between 1994 and 2001, spending on

international efforts increased by 175% and spending on interdiction programs increased by 68%.

In the early 1980s, President Ronald Reagan raised the curtain on a rapid expansion of U.S. antidrug efforts that continues unabated today. Reagan justified the expansion, in part, by developing the narcoguerrilla theory, which bolstered the national security rationale by positing ties between Cuba, the Colombian drug cartels and leftist guerrillas, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Though this charge was largely fictitious in the 1980s, in Colombia today the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the armed forces are all involved with the drug cartels and are using drug money to help finance their wars.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 1989 designated the Pentagon as the "single lead agency" for the detection and monitoring of illicit drug shipments into the United States. Soon thereafter President George Bush announced his Andean Initiative, a \$2.2-billion, five-year plan to stop the cocaine trade at its source. Although U.S. military personnel had been involved in training, equipping, and transporting foreign antinarcotics personnel since the early 1980s, the Andean strategy opened the door to a dramatic expansion of this role and to a significant infusion of U.S. assistance to police and military forces in the region.

The Andean Initiative placed the spotlight on Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Yet the vast majority of the Pentagon's international drug spending still went into its detection and monitoring operation in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico transit zones, the cost of which, according to a September 1993 General Accounting Office report, eventually swelled "out of proportion to the benefits it provided."

In late 1993, President Clinton shifted the emphasis of military operations, at least in terms of strategy if not spending. The focus shifted from interdicting cocaine as it moved through the transit zones into the U.S to dismantling the so-called "air bridge" that connects coca growers and coca paste manufacturers in Peru and Bolivia with Colombian refiners and distributors. As a result, drug traffickers quickly abandoned air routes in favor of the region's labyrinth of

waterways. The Pentagon responded by supporting interdiction operations that targeted the waterways in both source countries and neighboring nations.

Coca cultivation in Colombia has risen sharply in response to recent declines in Peru and Bolivia, earning Colombia the dubious distinction of being the world's number one coca source. In 2000, the U.S. significantly escalated funding for militarized counternarcotics programs in the Andean region with a \$1.3 billion supplemental for Colombia and neighboring countries. Seventy-five percent of the funds allocated for Colombia went to security forces, and nearly 50% of the funds allocated for neighboring countries were directed toward military and police forces. The Bush administration has requested \$730 million in the FY 2002 budget to expand counterdrug, alternative development, and government reform programs in the Andean region.

Today, the vast majority of Washington's international antinarcotics spending goes to Latin America and the Caribbean, where thousands of U.S. troops are annually deployed in support of the drug war, operating ground-based radar, flying monitoring aircraft, providing operation and intelligence support, and training host-nation security forces.

Despite this militarization and the massive funding for Washington's drug war, illegal drugs still flood the United States. In fact, illegal drugs are more readily available now, at a higher purity and lower cost, than they were when the drug war was launched.

## Problems with Current U.S. Policy

### Key Problems

Militarization of counternarcotics efforts in Latin America undermines recent trends toward democratization and greater respect for human rights while threatening regional security.

Resources and training provided to the region's armed forces to support their new role in domestic drug control operations often circumvent congressional oversight and human rights restrictions.

U.S. military personnel work side by side with armed forces, some of whom are implicated in human rights violations and drug trafficking.

Drug trafficking poses a serious threat to regional security and has a corrosive impact throughout the hemisphere, corrupting democratic institutions, skewing local economies, and increasing political violence. However, the U.S. should increase efforts to strengthen democratic institutions against such threats rather than fueling the flames of violence in the region by strengthening military power.

Washington's ambitious strategy to "attack narcotics trafficking in Colombia on all fronts" underscores the fundamental problem with the U.S. approach to international drug control. The plan is premised on the Pentagon forging closer ties to Colombia's military with the aim of building what Gen. Charles E. Wilhelm, commander of U.S. military forces in Latin America and the Caribbean, describes as "marriage for life."

U.S. policymakers apparently believe that local militaries are their most capable and reliable allies in the war on drugs. In several Latin American countries, the resources and training that Washington provides to local armed forces in order to support their new role in domestic drug control operations—often in circumvention of congressional restrictions and oversight—are eroding the efforts of civilian-elected governments to consolidate their power.

In most democracies, counternarcotics operations are a law enforcement function reserved for civilian police, but the U.S. government prefers to use foreign military forces. When Washington does recruit police, it provides them with heavy arms and combat training inappropriate for the domestic, civilian role that police should play, thereby continuing to fuel human rights abuses. During the 1970s, Congress halted police aid programs because of widespread human rights abuses by U.S.-trained police in Latin America. But in the 1980s these

programs resumed in Central America and have since spread to many other countries.

The militarization of counternarcotics efforts in Latin America not only undermines efforts to promote human rights and democracy, it also threatens regional security. In Colombia, where the line between fighting drug trafficking and combating insurgents is blurred, Washington risks becoming mired in the hemisphere's longest-running guerrilla war. Citing the threat posed by Colombia's guerrillas, who earn much of their income by protecting coca and poppy fields and clandestine drug laboratories, the Pentagon expanded its operations in neighboring Andean nations. Colombia's neighbors have expressed concern about the spillover of refugees, violence, and drug production and trafficking that is occurring as a result of the maelstrom in southern Colombia.

Assistance to Latin American security forces stems from a tangled web of training and aid programs administered by a variety of government agencies. Despite efforts to increase the availability of information about the programs, it is still often difficult to ascertain the exact extent and nature of U.S. antidrug assistance and to determine whether Washington is complying with congressional oversight and human rights requirements.

The perils posed by the lack of adequate controls can be seen throughout the region. In 2000, after a heated congressional debate about the likelihood of the U.S. being dragged into the Colombian counterinsurgency war, U.S. Black Hawk helicopters were used in combat to defend security forces from guerrillas in drug producing areas-despite tight congressional restrictions on the use of the equipment.

Even when programs are covered by restrictions, U.S. military personnel and administration officials are reluctant to enforce them. Units receiving U.S. training are supposed to be vetted to ensure that they include no one accused of human rights violations. But screening, when it occurs, is cursory. In 2000, President Clinton invoked a national security interest waiver in order to deliver

aid to the Colombian military despite the fact that the Colombian government had failed to meet the majority of the human rights requirements stipulated by Congress, signaling that the U.S. is willing to turn a blind eye to abuse in the name of other objectives.

As a result of the lack of both oversight and restrictions regarding some aid programs and of ineffective implementation of regulations when they do exist, U.S. troops work side by side with accused human rights violators throughout the region. As Colombian sociologist Ricardo Vargas Meza, who has warned about the growing risk of "a dirty war" in his country, notes, "Washington lights one candle for God and another one for the devil."

Human rights violators are not the only devil Washington is collaborating with. Ironically, the U.S. decision to engage armed forces as its principal allies in the drug war has meant that the Pentagon is now providing counternarcotics assistance to militaries implicated in drug-related corruption, including those in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Even as the Department of Defense plans further expansion of its counternarcotics operations in Latin America, many within its ranks are reluctant recruits in these efforts and are vocal about their reticence. These critics, like their civilian counterparts, question the underlying rationale for the mission, its effectiveness, and its impact on the region's democratic institutions. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said in his confirmation hearing: "I am one who believes that the drug problem is probably overwhelmingly a demand problem... if demand persists, it's going to find ways to get what it wants, and if it isn't from Colombia, it will be from somewhere else." Department of Defense officials also question the strategies and tactics being used to carry out the mission, arguing that they undermine the desired result. The Pentagon, according to former drug policy coordinator Brian Sheridan, has been asked to address a "terrible social problem" with a "series of lousy policy options"-an untenable situation that has many military planners "looking for the exit doors on this issue."

Toward a New Foreign Policy

## Key Recommendations

The Bush administration must develop a broad, clearly defined strategy for strengthening civilian governments and reducing the role of the armed forces in Latin America.

The U.S. should cease counternarcotics assistance to Latin American militaries and orient antidrug assistance for civilian police forces in order to strengthen their capacity to perform sound criminal investigations targeting drug traffickers.

Though oversight of programs has improved in recent years, greater control needs to be exercised over the programs under which training, equipment, and financial assistance are provided to Latin American forces for antidrug operations.

The Bush administration should be developing a broad, clearly defined strategy for strengthening civilian governments and reducing the role of the armed forces in the region, but the opposite seems to be happening. The U.S. is interacting with nearly every military in the hemisphere, training more than 10,000 security personnel each year. A third of these training programs are financed through counternarcotics budgets.

Similarly, the U.S. Southern Command (Southcom), searching for a new *raison d'être*, was quick to fill the post-cold war policy void by enlisting Latin American militaries as part of its counternarcotics strategy. The U.S. has negotiated arrangements to upgrade and utilize existing airfields as "Forward Operating Locations" in Aruba, Curacao, Ecuador, and El Salvador, which will be used for counternarcotics, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance flights. These bases are intended to replace Howard Air Force Base in Panama, which was closed in 1999 when the U.S. government's contract with the Panamanian government expired. In July 2000, Congress approved \$116.5 million for upgrades to the Forward Operating Locations as part of the Colombia emergency aid package. The U.S. plans to use the bases for at least 10 years,



allowing the Pentagon to establish stronger ties with local security forces. The bases have already generated controversy in some Latin American countries, most notably in Ecuador, where some sectors of the population consider the base to be a threat to national sovereignty that will drag Ecuador into Colombia's war.

Washington lawmakers are moving in the wrong direction. The U.S. must act to reduce (not merely redefine) the role of militaries within societies. Currently, Washington is providing the training, resources, and doctrinal rationale for armed forces to take on new tasks (building roads and schools, offering health services, protecting the environment, controlling drugs) rather than acting to limit their role to the defense of national borders.

Given the problems and risks associated with the militarization of antinarcotics programs in Latin America, Washington should cease financial and political support for Latin American military involvement in drug control operations.

The U.S. should reevaluate its costly, militarized, supply-side drug control programs, which have failed to produce results for the past 15 years. Rather than counterbalancing by merely increasing funding for programs aimed at promoting democracy and human rights while pursuing a militarized strategy that puts democracy and regional security at risk, Washington should take its international drug control strategy back to the drawing board. The Bush administration has an opportunity to adopt a new approach to drug control and ensure that budget priorities reflect the administration's stated belief that the supply of drugs will continue as long as demand persists. The U.S. can still provide critical support to its Latin American neighbors in their efforts to curb the drug trade and the related violence that it causes. But rather than directing assistance to militaries throughout the region, assistance should be directed toward building the capacity of civilian institutions to investigate and prosecute crime, strengthening respect for human rights and the rule of law, and spurring economic development.

But in the current political atmosphere in Washington, where drug control policy is fueled by the fear of being labeled "soft" on drugs, it is unlikely that either the White House or Congress will act to reduce the counternarcotics roles played by U.S. and Latin American militaries, despite their ineffectiveness in combating drug trafficking. Though oversight of these programs has improved somewhat in recent years, at minimum Washington needs to exercise greater control over the programs under which it provides training, equipment, and financial assistance to Latin American forces for antidrug operations. Since 1998, Congress has required the state and defense departments to annually compile a comprehensive foreign military training report listing all U.S. trainees worldwide.

Human rights advocates have welcomed this effort as an important step toward congressional and public oversight of the training programs, but several problems should be addressed to increase the utility of these reports. The Latin America Working Group (LAWG) recommends the declassification of information about completed training exercises, clarification of course descriptions, and standardization of reporting across funding categories. LAWG also recommends that the Defense Department's Section 1004 authority, now one of the main sources for funding counternarcotics training programs for Latin American security forces, not be reauthorized. To increase transparency, these training programs should be funded through the State Department, which has more thorough reporting requirements.

## Alternative Development

### Don't End Colombia's War

By Jason Thor Hagen

Washington's contribution to Plan Colombia has been widely criticized for its emphasis on interdiction and aerial eradication at the expense of alternative development in the areas where coca and opium poppy are grown. Alternative development, as conceived in Plan Colombia, is offered to small farmers (those with less than three hectares of coca) who voluntarily eradicate their illegal

plants within twelve months in exchange for credit, technical advice, and marketing assistance as they switch exclusively to legal crops or the care of livestock. Although the bulk of alternative development funds go to crop substitution, infrastructure improvements in roads, potable water, sewerage, electricity, education, and health services are also planned for the long term. Critics of Plan Colombia, such as the European Parliament, have called for increased spending on rural infrastructure and social programs as an alternative to the military buildup currently underway. The Bush administration seems to be responding positively to these critiques, and has proposed more spending on alternative development in the Andean region.

Yet, it would be unwise to bet on such schemes as a way of bringing peace to Colombia or stopping the flow of drugs to the United States. Even if the U.S. and Colombian governments were to take alternative development seriously, there are staggering obstacles to overcome.

Colombia consistently ranks as one of the world's most corrupt countries, and Colombians are particularly distrustful of agricultural institutions, which have long been used by political bosses to distribute pork. Even bureaucracies created and managed under the oversight of international financial institutions are notoriously corrupt and inefficient, and they have failed to earn the confidence of peasants, who constitute the vast majority of Colombian farmers.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is working closely with PLANTE, the Colombian government's alternative development agency. PLANTE was created in 1996 to work on issues of crop substitution and productive infrastructure in remote areas where coca is grown. However, it has been understaffed and underfunded since its inception, it has done very little for coca growers, and it is now suffering severe financial difficulties. It also lacks the technical expertise necessary for the ambitious undertaking that USAID envisions.

There has been no meaningful coordination between PLANTE personnel and the pilots spraying pesticides on coca fields during the past several months.

At times, they seem to be in direct conflict. Many agricultural projects (such as rubber, cacao, and plantain trees as well as yucca, corn, vegetable gardens, livestock, and fish ponds) sponsored by international development organizations have been affected by aerial spraying. Peasants participating in PLANTE's own projects have seen thousands of acres of their crops destroyed, and many have reverted to coca cultivation. Their confidence in legal markets, tenuous to begin with, has been severely undermined.

Furthermore, the money designated for alternative development has not yet materialized, after eight months of assurances to hundreds of peasants who have signed pacts. By failing to deliver on early promises, PLANTE and USAID are compromising the entire long-term effort and will face diminishing cooperation in the future.

Unfortunately, even if fumigation were to end and the money for alternative development were to arrive, many of the underlying causes of the war would remain. Living among competing armed actors, peasants' planting decisions are often determined more by intimidation than by free will or economic rationality. For similar reasons, many are reluctant to participate in local government and community decision making, which USAID claims is critical for positive results. The designers of alternative development have not sufficiently recognized the constraints posed by the hostilities into which their projects are inserted. In particular, they have not addressed the ways in which those hostilities limit the freedom of unarmed peasants.

Unlike Peru and Bolivia, which enjoyed limited success with alternative development in the 1990s, Colombia is in the midst of a complex, forty-year-old civil war driven by intense battles over land and raw materials (such as gold, emeralds, coal, forest products, biological resources, and most ominously, oil). Colombia is also challenged by decentralized drug mafias, new international rules governing trade, and deep structural problems in agriculture: most notably, the concentration of underutilized, but farmable, land in the hands of a few.

With Colombia's economic opening in the early 1990s, agriculture suffered one of its deepest slumps ever, a predicament from which it has yet to recover. Corn, cotton, soybeans, rice, wheat, and barley, among others, were unable to compete with cheaper, subsidized goods from abroad, and established commercial farmers throughout the country protested, demanding credit and markets for their goods. Nearly 700,000 hectares (of 3.7 million total) fell out of production, unemployment skyrocketed in some areas, and land became even more concentrated among livestock owners.

Colombia experienced a five-fold increase in agricultural imports, and even in valleys and plains with sophisticated infrastructure and a long history of farming, there is little new investment in many crops. Pilot alternative development programs sponsored by PLANTE and USAID in these very areas have enjoyed only moderate success. It is unrealistic to expect positive results in violent frontier areas, where most of the coca is grown, basic services are lacking, and government presence is ephemeral.

USAID gives food security projects, such as fish ponds, only one-tenth of the funding assigned to commercial activities. Apparently, both governments believe that it is more important for peasants to produce for the market, irrespective of international prices, than to produce for their own sustenance. Hence, any new crops introduced to the coca growing regions must have clear potential for success at the international level to ensure a steady income for small farmers. USAID is supporting cattle raising most heavily, followed by enterprises in African palm, rubber, and cacao. Some of these crops will require years of unproductive growth to reach maturity, and private producer associations with political clout and marketing know-how have expressed little interest in assisting PLANTE. Government programs are therefore alone in trying to persuade coca growers to take up legal crops, and thus far, they have relied on the "stick" of fumigation rather than the "carrot" of alternative development.

Beyond the challenges unique to Colombia or the Andean region lingers the universal and permanent "balloon effect" of drug production. The prohibition of

cocaine and heroin create breathtaking incentives for entrepreneurs, and there will always be small farmers willing to take the calculated risk of growing illegal plants, even if reliable markets for legal crops exist. Those farmers, often desperately poor, will simply move further into the jungle and across national borders if drugs are coveted by foreigners with money to burn.

Opponents of Plan Colombia's military excesses mean well in proposing humane scenarios, such as alternative development, as a means of alleviating conflict in Colombia and stemming the flow of drugs to the United States. However, they should recognize that alternative development, as currently designed by USAID, is unlikely to yield benefits in Colombia, even if it were better bankrolled. At its best, the U.S. program for alternative development is a high-minded but context-blind failure of foreign development policy. At its worst, it acts as a cover for a confused counterinsurgency debacle, crude military interests, and the preservation of one of the world's most unequal distributions of land and wealth.

Those concerned about illegal drugs entering the U.S. should focus on the U.S. demand for drugs. Through such an approach, positive results are more likely, and costs can be better controlled. Those who desire peace in Colombia should press for judicial reform, land redistribution, and respect for human rights. And we should all ask hard questions about U.S. interests in Colombia and determine who benefits from the militarized antidrug strategies that are, to many observers, an obvious failure and a national embarrassment.

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