

On February 20, 2002, rebels belonging to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) hijacked an airliner full of civilians and kidnapped a Colombian senator, which caused the breakdown of the peace negotiations between the guerrilla organization and the government. Soon afterward, the government of the United States decided to broaden the scope of the military and economic assistance that it was offering to Colombia; rather than limiting aid exclusively to counternarcotic purposes, U.S. funding could now be used to combat guerrillas directly. This represented an historic change in U.S. policy toward Colombia, which has focused on drugs since the Reagan administration. This paper examines the historical roots of the conflict in Colombia and identifies through analyses of international, national, and individual factors the major influences behind the shift in U.S. policy. It compares the situation in Colombia to past U.S. military experiences in Vietnam and El Salvador; then, based on a theoretical framework of counterinsurgency, it sets out a series of recommendations for U.S. and Colombian policymakers seeking a sustainable resolution to the war in the Andes. As it begins offering counterinsurgency aid to Colombia, the United States government must balance between helping to strengthen the Colombian state, equipping it with military and democratic training, and making it clear that this is not a U.S. war, that any solution will have to result from the actions and the sacrifices of Colombians. Peace will not be possible until Colombians make a commitment to pay for a sufficiently strong state and to enact broad social and democratic reforms that address the root problems of the conflict.

CHANGING GEARS IN COLOMBIA: A SHIFT IN U.S. POLICY UNDER  
PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

By

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# **CHANGING GEARS IN COLOMBIA: A SHIFT IN U.S. POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH**

## **Introduction**

Over the course of the past two decades, Colombia<sup>1</sup> has become one of the most significant hot spots in the Western Hemisphere. American foreign policy experts have proposed one solution after another designed to curb the production of cocaine and to introduce political stability. Unfortunately, all have failed to overcome one central fact: Colombia's conflict is a complicated one that is the result of a long history of violence among numerous internal factions. Simply attacking one aspect of the Colombian problem in piecemeal fashion has served, and will only serve, as a short-term fix at best; at worst, it will exacerbate an already catastrophic situation. There is no magic cure for this conflict which has lasted four decades, involved numerous competing forces, and cost the lives of thousands of civilians each year. The solution, however, must involve the strengthening of the Colombian state, the reduction of corruption among elite policymakers and security forces, sweeping democratic and social changes that allow all citizens to participate meaningfully in the political process, and encouraging the Colombian people to make the necessary sacrifices to achieve and sustain these changes.

Colombia today is rent by the violence of three illegal armed groups: the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which is the largest group and boasts about 18,000 fighters and an annual budget of perhaps \$500 million<sup>2</sup>; the 5,000 member leftist National Liberation Army (ELN), which focuses on economic

nationalism against multinational oil companies; and the 8,000-strong right-wing organization of paramilitary militias known as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The Colombian government does not currently have the capacity to defeat these groups militarily (the National Police and military have a combined force of 260,000, but many of these are tethered to desks or are otherwise not deployable), and in large sections of the country, one or more of the illegal groups exercise de facto control. All have been implicated in drug trafficking as a method of financing their operations, and all three are on the U.S. State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to separate the issues of drug trafficking and violence in Colombia.

The U.S. government over the past two decades considered the reduction of coca production as its primary objective in Colombia. Since nearly 90% of the cocaine consumed in the U.S. today originates in Colombia, this is the problem which (the U.S. government claimed) most directly affects the United States.<sup>4</sup> The 1980s under President Ronald Reagan marked the beginning of this primary focus on the problem of drug trafficking in U.S.-Colombia relations, with the advent of the "war on drugs". During the administration of President George H.W. Bush—which declared illegal drugs the number one problem facing the United States—the "Andean Initiative" significantly increased counternarcotic aid to Colombia to \$112.2 million in response to growing levels of coca production there. It provided military and intelligence funding and training to the Colombian national police, particularly to help target the drug-related violence of Pablo Escobar and the other Medellín traffickers.<sup>5</sup> In 2000, the Clinton administration expanded U.S. involvement in the



region under the Plan Colombia program, in which Congress appropriated \$1.3 billion in foreign aid to reduce drug production in the Andes region. This initiative placed a heavy emphasis on providing military equipment and training to the Colombian government, although it stipulated that the resources could only be used for counterdrug purposes.<sup>6</sup>

In 2002, the George W. Bush administration expanded support for regional programs to address spillover of the Colombian conflict into neighboring countries, requesting \$731 million through a new Andean Counterdrug Initiative.<sup>7</sup> Then, in an emergency supplemental request, Bush asked for and got provisions that allowed U.S. military aid to Colombia to be used directly against rebel forces for counterinsurgency purposes, rather than being limited strictly to counternarcotic operations.<sup>8</sup> This 180-degree turnaround on the counterinsurgency issue represents a dramatic shift from the foreign policy of the past 20 years, one that has been hotly contested in Congress and government circles.

It is important to examine the ramifications that may accompany the U.S. decision to escalate its involvement in the bewilderingly complex minefield of the multifactional Colombian civil war. A State Department fact sheet, produced immediately after the second President Bush assumed office, stated emphatically, “U.S. support for the Colombian military is targeted at reducing the flow of narcotics and not against guerrilla or paramilitary groups.”<sup>9</sup> Since that time, Bush officials have justified their counterinsurgency policy about-face by saying that the United States cannot tolerate the terroristic methods employed by the Colombian insurgent groups nor the massive drug production that fuels the groups’ resources.<sup>10</sup>

Members of Congress and the administration have portrayed these insurgent groups as terrorist organizations of global reach,<sup>11</sup> in an effort to incorporate them into the U.S. war on terrorism; but it is not clear that they represent a significant enough direct threat to the United States and the international community to merit this label. The Colombian government has claimed, “Like the United States in the fight against al Qaeda, we are fighting a multinational terrorist network,”<sup>12</sup> and indeed the FARC in 2001 hired a few members of the Irish Republican Army to train its members in urban warfare. There is, however, little evidence that the Colombian illegal armed groups pose any threat outside of their own country. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage admitted that the rhetorical parallels between FARC and international terrorism only go so far: “I do not mean to suggest that these groups are terrorist organizations with global reach; they are not. This is not al-Quaida [sic] or Hizballah. But the reach of their drugs is certainly global, and their nefarious means and ends to protect that trade are consistent with the methods of other terrorist groups.”<sup>13</sup>

Although there is little proof that the rebel insurgents represent a direct terroristic threat outside of Colombia, the United States does have an interest in helping to prevent the destabilization of that country and its neighbors (there have been reports of FARC presence in Venezuela, Ecuador, and other neighboring countries<sup>14</sup>). The challenge that has baffled U.S. policymakers for years is how to offer effective assistance without adopting Colombia’s war as our own. It is with this question in mind of how the U.S. should proceed with its policy toward Colombia that this paper will examine the contributing factors behind the historic shift to a

counterinsurgency policy under the second Bush administration, identifying possible solutions which take into account past experiences and are based on a theoretical foundation. To begin this examination, Figure 1 summarizes the predominant American interests that justify increasing U.S. involvement in Colombia.

**Figure 1. U.S. Interests in Colombia**

- Protect U.S. property and investment from destruction
- Protect oil resources and infrastructure to ensure consistent supply
- Reduce cocaine and heroin flow into the United States
- Reduce political instability in Colombia which could destabilize the region or cause refugees to emigrate to other countries
- Prevent terrorist acts and stop armed groups from attaining global reach
- Stop kidnappings and violent crimes which affect Americans in Colombia
- Prevent unfriendly regional powers from benefiting from a fragmented Colombia (eg. Venezuela, Cuba)

**Roots of the Colombian Problem**

**La Violencia**

Colombia's history is littered with periods of violence, upheaval, and insurgency, often resulting from regional rivalries; but the worst of these was the decades of the 1940s and 1950s, a period known as *La Violencia*. The 1948 assassination of the charismatic Populist candidate for president, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, ignited the spark of conflict that resulted in over a decade of violence. Liberals and Conservatives during this time, especially those living in the countryside, regularly massacred each other in attempts to gain political power, and most importantly, to secure land that was the key to economic prosperity. Historians estimate that over 200,000 people were killed during this period of intense factional warfare.<sup>15</sup>

In 1953, General Rojas Pinilla seized power in a military coup, vowing to end the violence. He offered an inclusive amnesty, which many combatants accepted, demobilizing voluntarily, but as the cost of his programs mounted and he sought an extended term, the traditional political parties united against him; the power elites could not risk the threat to their control that his independent policies represented. After he resigned, a transitional military junta paved the way for a plebiscite that created an intraoligarchical agreement called the National Front. This 1958 compromise, worked out by the traditional Liberal and Conservative elites, allowed the two parties to alternate control over national governmental power for a period of sixteen years.<sup>16</sup> Although this arrangement provided a superficial, top-level solution, guerrilla fighters saw little change in the oligarchical ruling structure of Colombia, and they continued the armed conflict in the countryside. FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the two primary leftist guerrilla groups operating today, are descendants of these Liberal rural fighters.

The lesson of *la Violencia* is that outside political actors have never been able to access political power because of a monopoly on control by Colombia's two traditional parties, so they have frequently resorted to violence as a means to gain attention for their political agenda. By jealously clutching access to power through patronage and massive voting machines, the Liberals and Conservatives were then and are today simply pushing the opposition out of the political arena and into the military arena.

When the creation of the National Front failed to resolve the rural violence, the United States sent an investigatory team to Colombia to examine the situation and

make recommendations. The team's recommendations to the Colombian government stated that military strength was necessary to limit the abilities of the insurgents, but that no strictly military solution would ever achieve lasting peace. Indeed, they stressed that the factions would not coexist peacefully until meaningful social and political reforms were enacted. These would include economic rehabilitation programs for those displaced during the war, promotion of a respected and truly representative democracy in lieu of the elite-centered oligarchy that had traditionally controlled the government, and land reform which would end the elites' exploitation of the peasantry through centuries-old *latifundista* practices. Traditionally, wealthy landowners grew rich from the efforts of the poor who were tied to working their land in cyclical debtor-patron relationships.<sup>17</sup>

The Colombian government at that time and since has focused only on the short-term, less painful, tactical parts of these recommendations, such as strengthening the state's ability to battle the rebels. The current Colombian government under President Uribe, as well as the U.S. government, must heed the lesson learned in *La Violencia* and over the past half-century of fighting: military capability is necessary, but not sufficient. Adequate resources must be mobilized to address the social and economic grievances that were originally at the root of the Colombian conflict. Kenneth Waltz has emphasized the value of three levels of analysis when approaching foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> In order to understand how the United States can work to encourage such changes, we will examine the international, national, and individual factors that shape U.S. policy toward Colombia.

## **International Factors: Bilateral and Multilateral**

Internal events and actors in Colombia have been the most significant international factors to shape U.S.-Colombian bilateral relations and contribute to the shift to a counterinsurgency policy for U.S. aid. Although there have been token pledges of aid from the European Union, the United Nations, and others, the U.S. State Department claims that “their disbursements are not matching their generous intent.”<sup>19</sup> For this reason, international allies and multilateral organizations—which tend to be rather critical of the military portion of the U.S. aid—have not been particularly crucial factors in U.S. deliberations over its policy toward Colombia.

### **Bilateral Issues**

The most important international impetus behind the shift to a counterinsurgency aid policy was the activity of FARC itself in February 2002. President Andrés Pastrana Arango had previously ceded a Switzerland-sized bloc of land to the rebels, calling it a demilitarized zone, in exchange for their participation in peace negotiations, which were taking place with the aid of envoys from the United States and a number of other countries and international organizations. By February, however, Colombians and international observers had grown frustrated with FARC’s lack of good faith in negotiations. The rebels were obviously stalling, having no intention to actually arrive at a consensus, but going through the motions in order to maintain their position of strength in the demilitarized zone. At the same time they sat at the peace table, the FARC leaders were escalating their violent activities, attacking public infrastructure and military installations, and killing civilians, according to the U.S. State Department.<sup>20</sup> Although peace negotiations lent some

legitimacy to the organization as a dissident political group, the fact that those at the peace table were making no attempt to act in good faith began to show that FARC had apparently abandoned its former ideological, political motivation in favor of simply defending its drug profits<sup>21</sup>, as many Colombian critics had maintained all along.

### **Turning Point.**

On February 20, FARC pushed beyond the tolerance of President Pastrana and the international community when it hijacked a Colombian airliner and kidnapped Colombian Senator Jorge Eduardo Gechen Turbay. The peace negotiations immediately fell apart, and President Pastrana ordered the military to retake the demilitarized zone, forcing the rebels out.<sup>22</sup> The collapse of the peace process, combined with abysmal progress in the reduction of coca plants that was far below the levels originally anticipated<sup>23</sup>, was interpreted around the world as a signal that there was a fundamental problem with the Plan. Many people in the military, in the U.S. and Colombian government, and elsewhere, decided that real success in Colombia would not occur unless a different approach was taken.

The events of February 20, combined with the growing international intolerance for terrorism in the wake of September 11, 2001, acted as a catalyst, giving the international community, and especially the United States, a concrete, vivid reason to support the Colombian government's decision to crack down on the armed groups. These events served as a justification for reexamining the longstanding rule against counterinsurgency military aid. The U.S. government, of course, had privately recognized for years that its military aid to Colombia could and

probably would be used for counterinsurgency purposes. Human Rights Watch reported in 1996, for example, several instances in which U.S. officials acknowledged that guerrillas and drug traffickers were intertwined and displayed a willingness to tolerate crossover in the use of U.S. aid. Then Commander of the U.S. Southern Command General Barry McCaffrey was one of these officials, saying that both counterinsurgency and counternarcotics operations deserved U.S. assistance since they are “two sides to the same coin.”<sup>24</sup> Support for a change to a more explicit policy of counterinsurgency aid had grown steadily in various circles in the U.S. throughout 2001 and early 2002, but after the collapse of the peace talks on February 20, 2002, the Bush administration began seeking counterinsurgency authority from Congress in earnest.

The administration, in typical style, began to debate internally about the counterinsurgency question while publicly maintaining zipped lips about any change in policy. Bush insiders in the wake of February 20 were careful not to categorically deny the possibility of allowing U.S. aid to be used against Colombian rebels. They did, however, doggedly stick with a non-denial denial of their plans which was similar in nature to President Bush’s tenuous claim during the summer of 2002 that “at this time I have no plan or recommendation on my desk for any action against Iraq.” Along the same lines, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said two days after the collapse of the peace talks that the United States would do what it could to help Colombia “within the parameters of our law,” adding that there was no plan to change the parameters of the law “at this point.”<sup>25</sup> Bush echoed this sentiment a week later, saying he intended to adhere to the law.<sup>26</sup>



Although administration officials were reluctant to escalate U.S. involvement any further, Congress did propose that they formulate a new plan to reflect the changing reality of the war in Colombia. A week after Bush's statement that he planned to stay within the constraints of the law, it seemed that a decision had been made to move forward with a shift to counterinsurgency aid. On March 6, Secretary of State Colin Powell acknowledged for the first time that it might be necessary to provide Colombia with "additional support that is outside of the counternarcotics basket."<sup>27</sup>

### **Colombian Leadership.**

Perhaps the most significant influence on U.S. policy toward Colombia over the past few years was former President Pastrana himself. Through his diplomatic representation in Washington under the well-heeled Ambassador Luis Alberto Moreno, and through personal appeals to U.S. policymakers and the public, Pastrana successfully sold the message that U.S. interests were tied to Colombia's fate, and later that drug trafficking and terrorism were so inextricably linked that U.S. aid should not separate the two. He arranged for numerous members of Congress and the executive branch to visit Colombia to see first hand (on escorted tours) the gravity of the situation facing the South American country and the necessity of immediate U.S. military aid. He appealed directly to the American people, invoking the war on terrorism to persuade the public that helping the Colombian government battle the insurgent rebels was crucial to hemispheric stability and the preservation of U.S. interests.<sup>28</sup>

Alvaro Uribe Velez, who succeeded Pastrana as president of Colombia in August 2002, was elected on a platform that reflected a tough attitude toward all three major armed groups. He pledged to fight terrorism in Colombia by increasing military spending, building up social programs, and creating a wide network of civilian informants. He even suggested arming one million civilians as a sort of reserve militia. In the past, Uribe had shown a willingness to try unconventional methods for resolving conflict. As governor of the department of Antioquia, wherein lies the infamous city of Medellín, he advocated the use of international conflict mediators and UN peacekeepers, and he also created civilian intelligence-gathering groups to aid the police. These networks, known as *Convivir* groups, were widely criticized for robbing civilians of their non-combatant status, which made them more legitimate targets, and for encouraging links with the illegal paramilitaries. The groups were dismantled in the late 1990s.<sup>29</sup>

President Uribe's agenda since assuming office has focused mostly on intensifying military action against the armed insurgents and will likely continue in this direction until the illegal groups are significantly weakened. Uribe's past actions, however, demonstrate a willingness to involve the international community as mediators in any negotiated resolution, perhaps engaging Organization of American States (OAS) or United Nations (UN) peacekeepers, and enhancing the chances that a meaningful peace could endure.

Strengthening the state and increasing security are both necessary, but a negotiated peace will never be sustainable unless fundamental changes are made in Colombian society. For years, many Colombians were unwilling to sacrifice much to

defeat the guerrillas or build social and state institutions to prevent the resurgence of similar rebellions, preferring instead to protect themselves and let someone else work on the larger problem. Faced with a weak state incapable of ending, or even containing, the rebellions, the middle and upper class landowners who comprised the Colombian elite either moved to the cities or resorted to violence themselves through the support of the illegal paramilitaries. As with most conflicts, many of these powerful elite families managed to benefit from the state of disorder, taking advantage of the government's weak control over the Colombian countryside in order to profit from land speculation.

Critics in Washington and Europe have complained that the Colombian elites want someone else to make the sacrifices to pay for taking care of their insurgency problem, while at the same time they retain their perquisites and untouched sovereignty. The vast majority of soldiers drafted into the Colombian military come from poor families. There are several legal loopholes that the sons of elites can use to avoid conscription; for example, anyone holding a high school diploma is exempt. Bribery is another very popular method for dealing with the unpleasantness of a draft notice—the going rate for being excused from military service has been reported at about US\$1000.<sup>30</sup> The *Washington Post* quoted U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont) as proclaiming, "The fact that Colombia's is an army of the poor, as it is in many Latin American countries, and that the elite avoid service while expecting an under-educated, poorly trained, and under-equipped army to do the fighting, must be changed."<sup>31</sup>

The army would not necessarily be better trained or equipped if all Colombians were conscripted equally, but the fact that Colombia spends less per capita on defense than other Latin American countries, and far less than would be expected during a time of war, shows that the Colombian elite are also not opening up their pocketbooks to compensate for their lack of active participation in battle. The corruption in this system must be rectified if there is any hope that people will have respect for and confidence in the Colombian state. The increased defense spending that President Uribe has proposed would probably be enough to strengthen the state to the point of victory after a few years, but for this to happen, the Colombian government, including the Congress and the executive branch, must rid itself of the corruption which absorbs large portions of these revenues and which undermines public confidence in the competence of the state.<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Gabriel Marcella takes this idea even further, arguing that it would improve the quality of the military if people from all classes were subject to the draft without exception, since those in power would be more closely tied to it: “Once all elements of society are engaged in the national cause, once the risk of combat is shared by rich and poor, the military and police will have better resources, leadership, intelligence, logistics, morale, and ultimately better support from the people of the nation. This will strengthen the Clausewitzian trinity of the people, the government, and the armed forces.”<sup>33</sup> For such a system of universal conscription to be effective, of course, it would have to have a credible system of enforcement, or middle and upper class draftees would buy their way out just as many do now.

## **Multilateral issues**

So far, the Colombian conflict has been an internal issue with significant bilateral involvement with the United States. The United States is not alone, however, in its responsibility for fueling the massive consumption of illicit drugs; Europe and South America together consume about as much cocaine as the United States.<sup>34</sup> Despite the fact that Colombia's drugs are distributed worldwide, and that the country's civil conflict threatens to spill into neighboring countries, there has been minimal international involvement beyond the aid given by the United States. The Organization of American States, the European Union, the United Nations, and other multilateral organizations have given lip service to supporting Colombia's government, especially in its attempts to enact social and democratic reform, but they have been much slower in ponying up the cash to help. According to Deputy Secretary of State Armitage's testimony in September 2002, these other nations had pledged \$600 million in aid to the Andean effort, but their actual performance had failed to fulfill this commitment.<sup>35</sup>

Effective international support for Colombia could capitalize on the tendency of Europe and the multilateral organizations to favor limiting aid to softer social and economic assistance than the U.S., which considers military assistance more readily. Pastrana's original Plan Colombia itself incorporated significant social, democratic, and economic reforms that would make quite a difference in the sustainability of any lasting solution; but the Colombian government has been much less effective at putting these portions of the Plan into action than it has with its military projects. The European countries, Japan, and the United Nations could provide the Colombians

with substantial financial and training assistance in the social and economic reform areas while the United States continues its military focus. After all, Colombia represents a significant potential trading partner for these countries, as well as a resource-rich locale for investment, if only it could achieve social stability and security for its state institutions.

### **Organizational Influences at the National Level**

Within the circles of power in the United States, the nature of the assistance to Colombia has caused a spirited debate. Much of the driving momentum behind the policy change toward more aggressive counterinsurgency aid resulted from the recognition that Plan Colombia, with its exclusive counternarcotics focus, was not working as effectively as originally hoped. Intense lobbying efforts from the Colombian government under President Andrés Pastrana helped to reinforce this message to government actors and the American people. The shift in national thinking after September 11 to a War on Terror perspective was probably the most prominent factor in the decision to accept broader authorities for U.S. aid, to include counterinsurgency.

Since the U.S. bureaucratic culture related to Colombia has been oriented exclusively toward fighting narcotics trafficking since the 1980s, a shift as fundamental as this required several years to come about. Starting with the immense escalation of aid in the late 1990s and 2000, and topped off by the collapse of peace talks in 2002, the American establishment has slowly been reorienting its organizational posture toward counterinsurgency. The Bush administration's March 21, 2002 request for authorization to allow U.S. aid to be used "to support a unified

campaign against narcotics trafficking, terrorist activities, and other threats to its national security”<sup>36</sup> directly reflects this new position, since it recognizes the inseparability of Colombian rebel groups and the terrorist methods they employ from the drug profits that provide them with funding.

### **Economic and Corporate Influences on U.S. policy**

The Bush administration decided early in 2002 to request a total of \$104 million for two years to help protect the 483-mile Caño Limón oil pipeline by providing training, equipment, and financial assistance to Colombian soldiers to guard the often-attacked conduit,<sup>37</sup> an amount which Congress subsequently appropriated. This action was an early departure from the strict policy of funding only programs that would directly reduce the drug flow. The move to protect the pipeline, which is co-owned by California-based Occidental Petroleum, indicates that protection of American corporate interests may have been a motivating factor in the U.S. government’s strategic priorities. Occidental, which spent \$215,000 on 2002 election cycle campaign contributions and \$2 million on lobbying in 2001,<sup>38</sup> is a powerful player in D.C., so it is no surprise that the oil protection measures were placed on the agenda even before the peace talks fell apart.

Of course, protection of U.S. economic interests abroad, especially those that ensure the delivery of a crucial resource like oil, is a defensible goal. Indeed, Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman justified the decision to fund the protection training for the Caño-Limon pipeline in particular, saying that this segment was attacked more frequently than any other. Terrorist acts against oil infrastructure cost the Colombian government approximately \$500 million per year in lost

royalties<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, investment in areas of weak state control by multinational corporations like Occidental has allowed the illegal armed groups to feed their coffers, demanding a “tax” to allow the companies to operate in their regions of influence. Occidental Vice President Lawrence Meriage admits, “Our contractors are forced to pay a ‘war tax’ or face the very real threat of having their equipment destroyed and their personnel attacked. Local workers at our facilities must pay ‘protection’ money or place their personal safety and that of their families at risk.”<sup>40</sup> This fact has made the oil industry, and particularly Occidental Petroleum, very eager to encourage the U.S. and Colombian governments to subsidize protection of their oil infrastructure.

In addition to U.S. oil interests in Colombia, the U.S. defense industry is another key factor in relations with Colombia, and especially in the design of U.S. foreign aid to that country. Defense contractors have long formed a solid rung on the “iron triangle” of U.S. military policy described by George C. Wilson—forming with the Pentagon and Congress the primary power structure for deciding national security policy<sup>41</sup>—and the military details of the aid to Colombia are no exception. There was significant debate over the helicopters that would be provided to Colombia, with Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Connecticut) urging that Black Hawk helicopters be used while others argued for less expensive UH-1H Super Huey helicopters, which would mean that the U.S. could provide a greater number of the aircraft. It is perhaps indicative of the significant influence of the defense industry on lawmakers that Sikorsky Company, which manufactures the Black Hawk helicopters, is located in Senator Dodd’s home state of Connecticut.<sup>42</sup> The fact that minute technical details



like the type of helicopter to be used were decided in a political forum like Congress through a lengthy period of debate has earned criticism from military personnel, including a former commander of the Colombian army, who argued that technical decisions should not be based on political considerations.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Opposition**

The U.S. aid package for Plan Colombia and the subsequent inclusion of counterinsurgency authority enjoyed relatively broad bipartisan support in Congress, but there were and are a number of organizations and groups opposing the aid for a variety of reasons. The most influential of these critics are the human rights advocacy groups, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. These organizations have been relentless in their indictment of the Colombian military for ties to and tacit support for paramilitary groups like the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), which are allegedly responsible for a large number of the brutal massacres and atrocities toward civilians in Colombia and which are also deeply involved in drug trafficking. These human rights groups, with the support of Senator Leahy and others, helped to ensure that the final aid bill was passed with a proviso that any Colombian military units that are trained by U.S. personnel must be vetted for human rights compliance and that in order to receive U.S. aid the Colombian government must take vigorous steps toward eliminating human rights violations and paramilitary ties among its soldiers.<sup>44</sup> This concern has continued with recent supplemental funding bills, in which human rights provisions play a prominent role.<sup>45</sup>

Human rights advocates have been so successful in focusing attention on the abuses of the military and the paramilitaries, sometimes to the neglect of the leftist

groups, that some scholars and officials claim that the human rights advocates are suffering from tunnel vision, or worse, from the active manipulation of the FARC. According to Russell Ramsey, a prominent U.S. scholar of Latin American military affairs, the FARC has become artful in deceiving the human rights groups and using them as political tools against the international community. Based on documentary evidence, conversations with the Colombian military and police, and his own experiences when visiting the country, Dr. Ramsey claims that the FARC has become adept at blending civilians with their own forces to create a human shield, and that the guerrillas have on a number of occasions dressed in Colombian military uniforms before killing civilians, distributing photos and videos of the acts so that the international community will perceive that the armed forces are committing human rights violations.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to human rights concerns, critics of U.S. policy toward Colombia also point to environmental and health problems associated with glyphosate, the chemical commonly known as Round-up, which is used in the aerial fumigation of coca.<sup>47</sup> Others highlight the need to focus anti-drug resources on demand reduction through treatment and prevention programs in the U.S. as a reason why U.S. military involvement in the Andes should not be escalated.<sup>48</sup> Conservative budget hawks have offered additional opposition, claiming that they do not want to see billions of dollars poured into a program that may not work.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the largest concern that critics voice is the fear of entanglement in an ongoing civil war similar to the U.S. experience in Vietnam. Those who support a sort of isolationist “not our problem” stance toward Colombia would do well to realize that precedent in American foreign

intervention is against them. A number of bitter internal conflicts around the world have received American foreign assistance, and even military personnel, when they involved fewer U.S. strategic interests than does Colombia. Senator Pat Roberts (R-Kansas) elaborates, “We have so many interests there—energy, drugs, trade, immigration. We didn’t have any of that in Kosovo, yet we fought a war there.”<sup>50</sup>

Critics of U.S. counternarcotic policy claim that the main problem is due to the flawed war on drugs itself. Manuel Noriega, the former Panamanian dictator who sees similarities between U.S. involvement in Colombia and its hypocritical behavior in Panama during the 1980s, says,

The situation in the so-called U.S. drug wars remains the same. The United States is still the greatest consumer of cocaine and heroin on the planet, but continues to pressure other, far less economically powerful countries to do what it cannot do. If the United States cannot stem the demand for cocaine, how can a relatively poor country stop the supply? The governments of Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, to name a few . . . will never be able to fight the economic power of the drug dealers.”<sup>51</sup>

Many in the United States agree with these sentiments; some argue that, like the prohibition of alcohol which supported the rise of the Chicago mafia, the prohibition of drugs is a destructive and self-defeating policy, and that many lives and much money would be saved by the legalization of drugs. Others claim that this simply indicates that the Colombian problem cannot simply be explained as a drug issue, and that authority for U.S. counterinsurgency aid is justified. It is this last

group, supported by the events in Colombia, that has been successful in convincing U.S. policymakers over the past two years to accept crossing the line into aid to fight the Colombian rebels.

### **The Influence of Key Individuals**

It is a truism of American politics that every major policy initiative owes much of its success to its proponents, both the public spokespersons and private supporters. The personalities, interests, and histories of these key individuals often have a profound effect on the final policy. Members of Congress put much of the power behind the push to extend U.S. aid to Colombia so that it could be used for counterinsurgency. Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Illinois), a consistent supporter of aid to Colombia, was instrumental in forcing through the original Plan Colombia legislation, as well as the supplemental bill that included language to broaden the mandate of U.S. aid. Senator Joe Biden (D-Delaware), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee at the time, lent key Democratic support to the military aid. Representative Cass Ballenger (R-North Carolina), who is one of the leading South America experts in Congress, helped to assemble support in the House for counterinsurgency authorities.

The political priorities and vulnerabilities of the two presidents involved in Plan Colombia and its extension—Clinton and Bush—have also affected the evolution of the U.S. assistance. It is very possible that Clinton supported the massive increase in counterdrug aid in the original Plan Colombia partly because he was politically vulnerable on the drug issue, having stretched the truth about his past marijuana activities. He may have needed to appear tough on drugs to bolster his

support among moderates. Bush's decision to request that U.S. aid be available for counterinsurgency reflects the personal stake that he has in the terrorism issue, having invested his political reputation on defeating global terrorist organizations.

A number of prominent figures have opposed the escalation of military aid to Colombia, and it was largely because of their efforts that the aid provisions contain so many safeguards and such a large "soft" aid portion, including alternative development programs and micro enterprise loans. In Congress, Senator Leahy has been one of the most outspoken critics, focusing especially on the human rights problems of the American-funded Colombian military. The army still has not managed to eliminate its deep ties with the ruthless paramilitaries, which are responsible for most of the human rights violations in Colombia. The late Senator Paul Wellstone (D-Minnesota) echoed these concerns about human rights, and tried to argue against the heavy military emphasis of the original Plan Colombia aid, proposing instead that a significant portion of the funding be shifted to domestic demand reduction techniques like drug treatment programs. The Senate overwhelmingly rejected his amendment to reallocate these funds. Senator Wellstone also raised concerns about the Colombian military, declaring that it must reform its structure, especially the favoritism and corruption that allows rich young men to avoid the mandatory year of military service that is required by law.<sup>52</sup> Representatives John Mica (R-Florida) and Danny Burton (R-Indiana) have been consistent supporters of aid to Colombia, but they, like many in the United States, have been outspoken critics of the Colombian military, believing that the National Police would be a more worthy recipient of U.S. equipment and training.

In the words of *New York Times* journalist Chris Marquis, “On Capitol Hill support for *Plan Colombia* is like ice on a frozen lake—it’s broad but thin.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, it is true that policymakers across the political spectrum recognize the serious problems in Colombia and the fact that many strategic U.S. interests are associated with that country. These decision makers do not, however, have the political will to get the United States involved in a costly, indefinite commitment to a cause that may not be successful any time soon. For this reason, no one should take the support of individual policymakers for granted; supporters can turn into opponents very quickly when the price tag gets too high. Having examined the influences on U.S. policy decisions toward Colombia from the international, national, and individual levels of analysis, it would be instructive to review examples from the past in which the United States has pursued policies similar in nature to its Colombian counterinsurgency assistance.

### **Historical Parallels**

#### **Another Vietnam?**

The memory of the doomed counterinsurgency campaign in Vietnam haunts the Washington beltway like a ghost. The fear that U.S. military involvement in Colombia could escalate into an indefinite commitment reminiscent of Vietnam is a very real one, however, and has been present in the minds of policymakers all along. An amendment by Senator Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia) in the Colombia aid legislation set a cap of 800 total military and civilian advisors who could be in Colombia at any time.<sup>54</sup>

Secretary Powell, a Vietnam veteran himself, has advised that all possible measures be taken to prevent an entangling commitment of U.S. troops to combat in Colombia. He is candid about the lessons that he learned from Vietnam, because the technique of boiling the complexities of a multifaceted, historically-rooted conflict into a single, external threat (like drugs or terrorism) that must be dealt with according to a preset formula is exactly the one that misled Americans in the 1960s. Powell says of the Vietnam conflict, “Our political leaders had led us into a war for the one-size-fits-all rationale of anticommunism, which was only a partial fit in Vietnam, where the war had its own historical roots in nationalism, anticolonialism, and civil strife beyond the East-West conflict.”<sup>55</sup> This should serve as a lesson for Colombia today, since multiple parties with competing interests, a history of violence—including 38 years of open warfare, bitter class divisions, astronomical drug profits, and deplorable socioeconomic conditions in many of the rural coca-producing regions—all combine to form a crisis that is much too complicated to be attributed simply to drugs or a terrorist attempt to take over a government.

Henry Kissinger, the former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State under Presidents Nixon and Ford, took this logic even further, warning in 2001 against a counterinsurgency policy and urging caution in the U.S. attitude toward Plan Colombia as a fix-it scheme:

As someone who served in an administration which inherited a stalemated war in Vietnam, begun as an effort to use American technology to defeat indigenous guerrillas, I am perhaps excessively sensitive to the prospect of a conflict launched with noble motives but

likely to end in stalemate, disillusionment, and an even greater threat to stability and security. The military aspect of Plan Colombia and its unilateral execution by the United States is at best a way to buy time for a hemispheric, multilateral social and political program....The United States must not cross the line to an advisory effort that makes it a participant in the conflict.<sup>56</sup>

Despite Vietnam's still sensitive position in our national memory and its apparent similarity to the Colombia, the actual similarities between the two situations are minimal, and policymakers should recognize this when they oppose aid to Colombia based on the Vietnam parallels. As Russell Ramsey explains, Colombia, unlike Vietnam, has no hostile superpower sitting right across its border; it also has a legitimate government, military, and national police; it has a much more minimal U.S. presence (U.S. advisors are counted in the dozens or hundreds, not thousands); and it represents a number of U.S. strategic interests, not simply a symbolic battlefield against an abstract foe like communism or terrorism.<sup>57</sup>

### **El Salvador**

A more useful comparison than Vietnam is the demobilization of the leftist rebels in El Salvador during the 1980s, which brought to an end an extremely bloody period of violence between the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FLMN) and the Salvadoran armed forces, which had been assisted by paramilitary death squads. The United States offered financial assistance, equipment, and training to the Salvadoran troops; but, in return, it insisted that they definitively end all ties with the death squads and with human rights abuses of their own (which they appear to have



done).<sup>58</sup> The United States also made clear that the war against the rebels was to be fought only by Salvadoran forces; U.S. trainers would not become actively involved in the conflict. As a result, the Salvadoran military increased its capacity and its public support to the point that the FLMN decided to demobilize and enter the political realm, rather than facing military defeat. This experience serves today as an example of a successful counterinsurgency campaign that achieved a peaceful resolution, both of which were made possible by a carefully constructed package of U.S. assistance and training.

Ambassador David Passage, who served as *chargé d'affaires* at the U.S. embassy in San Salvador at the time, explains the lessons from El Salvador that policymakers should take to heart when considering Colombia. First, the United States must make it clear that it is involved in a peripheral role only; success or failure rests completely on the actions of the Colombian state. Second, just as it encouraged the Salvadoran government to eliminate human rights violations and paramilitary ties, enact agrarian land reform and pursue more inclusive economic and democratic policies that loosen the monopoly of the oligarchy on resources, the United States can provide democracy-building assistance, but this will be useless if Colombia does not want the help or refuses to take on the burden of following through with broad, meaningful reform. Finally, the Colombian armed forces and police must end once and for all their ties with the paramilitaries and their acceptance of human rights abuses.<sup>59</sup>

## Looking Ahead

Nearly every American official who has spoken publicly about the escalation of involvement in Colombia has been quick to emphasize that the United States has no intent to allow American troops to participate in the fighting, and that indeed such an action would be a grave mistake. They trumpet the Byrd amendment to the original aid legislation, which restricts total U.S. military and civilian personnel present in the country in support of Plan Colombia. Many Colombians, who have long viewed American intervention somewhat guardedly, have echoed the sentiment that Americans would not be welcome combatants in their war. It is unlikely, then, that U.S. troops will voluntarily become actively involved in the conflict any time soon.

The danger of entanglement, however, lies in the possibility that events could take an unexpected turn. General James T. Hill, head of the U.S. Southern Command, pointed out that standard rules of engagement call for U.S. troops to retaliate if fired upon. Since Special Forces advisors are training Colombian military units in the war-torn state of Arauca, among other locations, the risk that they will be caught in an armed conflict with the rebels is very real; this area is one of the targets of increasing guerrilla violence.<sup>60</sup> A firefight between rebels and U.S. troops could be enough to spur policymakers to escalate to direct involvement in the crisis, or just as problematically, to abandon the fight altogether, leaving the Colombians to fend for themselves.

Such an escalation would not be as difficult as government officials have indicated. The military personnel cap of 500 only applies to those who are in South

America for the purpose of directly supporting Plan Colombia. It places no limits on military or private contractor personnel in the region or even the country who have other missions. In addition, the restriction can be waived at any time under the War Powers Resolution of 1973, in the event that U.S. forces face “imminent hostilities” (as would be the case in the firefight described above). In other words, if a U.S. Special Forces unit was fired upon while training Colombian soldiers, the unit would be able to retaliate, and the President would have the power to send in theoretically unlimited reinforcements in a move that could result in direct U.S. military involvement in the Colombian conflict.

All this is to show that the decision by the United States to allow training and aid to be used for counterinsurgency, though necessary, creates a very delicate, risky situation for American troops. Critics would point out that although this scenario is possible, even plausible, it is not likely. The United States already has a very crowded foreign policy agenda with crises in Iraq, North Korea, and Israel, so the administration in the event of hostilities in Colombia would likely make every effort to settle the problem quickly and quietly. Furthermore, the U.S. government has learned many lessons since Vietnam. Fresh from a visit to Colombia, Joe Leuer, the Deputy Dean of Academics at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security, discounts the idea that one firefight would drag U.S. forces into the mire of civil conflict: “It’s not like we’re going to get dragged into this because we’re all political neophytes who don’t understand the reactions and ramifications of what we’re doing.”<sup>61</sup>

It is obvious that the stakes are high for U.S. military personnel in Colombia as well as for that country's own well-being. The analysis to this point also shows with painful clarity that the Colombian problem is complex, and its roots are deep. What, then, should the United States be doing to help Colombia solve its own crisis, while avoiding indefinite military entanglement in this war and still protecting American interests in the country? A theoretical framework will help us to identify a number of recommendations for a solution to the Colombian conflict.

### **A Theoretical Framework for Action**

In order to analyze the situation in Colombia realistically, and to provide recommendations for action that are grounded in scholarly research, we will first examine the model that Leites and Wolf use persuasively to explain the nature of insurgencies. We will then use their model of effective counterinsurgency to evaluate the Colombian government's proposed strategy from a theoretical perspective. Finally, using this theoretical foundation and the historical background provided in the first section of this paper as points of departure, we will identify requirements that will be necessary for any solution to the Colombian crisis to be sustainable.

### **A Systemic Examination of Insurgency**

In order to make more informed decisions on an effective foreign policy toward Colombia, one must understand how insurgency works. By understanding the system of the rebellious movement, the U.S. can better help the Colombian government to reduce its negative impacts on society. Leites and Wolf describe a model of insurgency that is useful in such a systemic approach. An insurgency requires inputs, such as members, shelter, food, financing, political ideas, publicity,

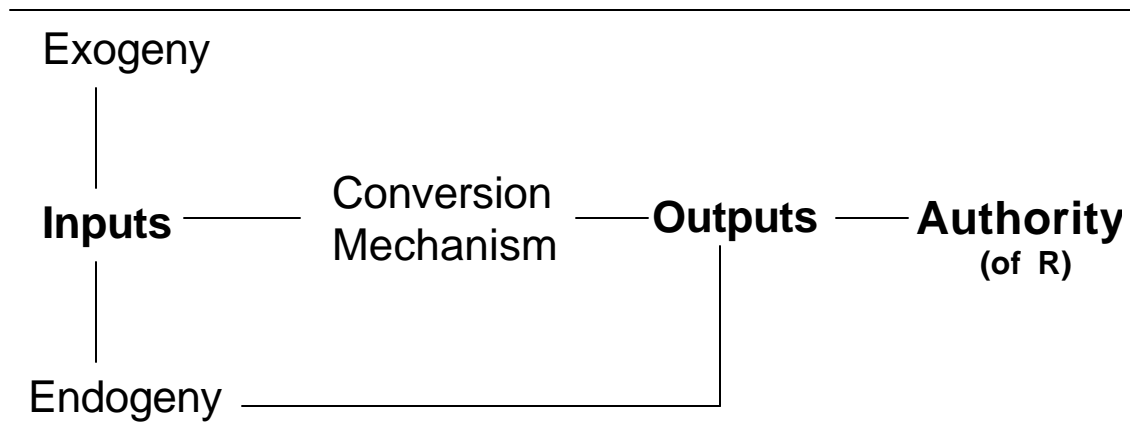
and information. All of these are obtained from external sources (like the population, foreign interests, the drug trade, etc.), referred to as exogeny, or from internal sources within the organization, referred to as endogeny. Endogenous inputs could include ideas from members of the insurgency, recruits who are the children of the rebels themselves, or the additional credibility the group might enjoy as a result of a successful output like a military mission.

All of these inputs are converted into outputs through the use of organizational structures as simple as a single decision maker or as complex as the multilayered hierarchy of training, specialized units, and logistical support that currently comprise the FARC in Colombia. The outputs that are produced, like violent acts, propaganda campaigns, administrative functions, and social benefits, determine by their strength and nature what level of authority the insurgent organization can exercise on the population and the state. The rebellious group, R, and the legitimate state, A, compete for the support of the population, which ultimately determines which group exercises greater authority. A graphical model, similar to the one that Leites and Wolf use to illustrate this system, is reproduced in Figure 2.<sup>62</sup>

For simplicity's sake, we will examine the model's applicability to illegal armed groups in Colombia, using FARC as an example. FARC draws exogenous support from many sources. It recruits rural peasants for members, either by appealing to the person's needs or by direct coercion or kidnapping. It depends on large coca plantations, kidnapping, and extortion for funding. There is also an element of endogeny in the FARC funding structure, since it leans on its own members to come up with a certain quota of *gramaje*, or tax on coca or other crops.

If the members do not meet their *gramaje* collection quota, they face severe consequences.

**Figure 2: The insurgency system**



**Source:** Based on Nathan Leites & Charles Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1970), p. 35

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All of these inputs are then processed by the organization through various conversion mechanisms; the members are indoctrinated and trained by the Secretariat to employ terrorist methods to achieve goals, the money is used to buy weapons and to support the organization's operating expenses, and inputs like ideas resulting from presence in rural areas are transformed into social aid programs designed to win the support of the people. The positive and negative outputs of this process—like crop protection, murders of opponents, and infrastructure attacks—not only are ends in themselves, but also serve to reinforce the group's ability to elicit inputs from people who are intimidated by the group's outputs.

### **Counterinsurgency Theory**

Leites and Wolf argue that a systems approach to rebellion (again considering the insurgency R and the state A) reveals four primary methods for handling counterinsurgency—each of which seeks to disrupt one of the components of the

model described in Figure 2. A brief examination of these methods will illuminate useful options for policymakers focused on the problem in Colombia. The first step is to deny external support and resources, or inputs from exogeny, to R. Although it cannot be the sole factor in U.S. policy toward Colombia, reducing the flow of drugs must be a part of the solution, integrating demand reduction programs with interdiction and supply restriction. Since narcotics represent the predominant source of external financial support for the rebels, especially for FARC, one key to weakening their ability to resist is to starve them of their external support.

The second method that Leites and Wolf discuss is to disrupt R's ability to convert inputs into insurgency outputs. In other words, A must keep R on the defensive, forcing it to devote more resources to survival rather than effective offensive military action. This second strategy relies on constant pressure, causing R to "lose sleep." In order to capitalize on this method of counterinsurgency, the Colombian state cannot repeat Pastrana's strategy of granting a demilitarized safe zone to the rebels. In fact, many of the failures of previous peace attempts in Colombia (and elsewhere) have occurred because peace negotiations were conducted which did not require disarmament; instead of opening the door to peace such talks simply provided breathing room and regrouping time for the rebels.

The third counterinsurgency method mentioned by these scholars is the traditional counterforce action which directly targets R's forces militarily, weakening or destroying their outputs. The authors note that targeting organizational leaders rather than the rank-and-file members is more likely to be effective in counterinsurgency operations than in traditional exchanges, since the capability gap

between the levels of leadership is greater. They also suggest that techniques to encourage defectors and informers to provide information and intelligence that allows the targeting of these leaders are likely to be particularly effective in this type of conflict. By this standard, then, President Uribe's policy of offering reward money and anonymity to informers who assist in the targeting of rebel leaders<sup>63</sup> is theoretically sound.

The final strategy that Leites and Wolf mention for countering insurgents is to reduce the effectiveness of R's actions for creating new endogenous and exogenous inputs by strengthening the people's and A's ability to withstand and absorb these outputs. This is done by strengthening A's capacity to provide and protect the public needs, and by making key locations less vulnerable to R's forces. Since taking office, Uribe has established military and police strongholds in strategic locations, using these as points of departure to expand government control back into lawless regions of Colombia.<sup>64</sup>

This fourth counterinsurgency method, however, is the one which still has the most unrealized potential in Colombia since reducing the effectiveness of the rebels' activities and appeal on the population necessarily calls for a reasonably satisfied populous. Finding ways to reform social and democratic institutions in order to create a state where all people are represented, individual rights are protected, and justice is not applied arbitrarily based on socioeconomic status must be a key component of any successful effort to reduce the Colombian population's support for the insurgency. Furthermore, Timothy Wickham-Crowley explains, based on a multivariate historical comparison of guerrilla movements over the past half century,



that no rebellion can survive without the sympathy and at least tacit consent of the population, especially the peasantry; likewise, no state-sponsored counterinsurgency campaign can succeed without persuading the population away from this supportive attitude. In order to do this, the state must enact policies which allow everyone basic freedoms and opportunities.<sup>65</sup>

In order to be successful, then, counterinsurgency campaigns must strengthen the military capacity of the government to inflict actual damage on the rebels, especially through a personnel-intensive military buildup. More importantly, though, the government must win the support of regional peasant groups and the general population by allowing them greater access and participation in governmental decision-making. Unless the insurgents have the ideological support of the people, the task of the state is basically to show that it can militarily defeat the rebellion and that it is willing to restructure in order to provide for the needs of the population, giving the people a feasible alternative to the guerrilla control.

Having examined the elements that comprise an insurgent group, and having reviewed some of the strategic priorities that have proven crucial to counterinsurgency campaigns in the past, we conclude by looking at a much broader picture. We will examine the most important question that policymakers in Colombia and the U.S. must now consider: how can a sustainable peace be achieved in this war-torn country?

### **What will a negotiated peace require?**

With an armed opposition as strong as the combined forces of the FARC, the ELN, the AUC, and the other irregular forces, Colombia cannot hope to develop the

capability to reclaim control of the country without making real sacrifices. The Colombian government can either choose an exclusively military strategy, which will result in the *containment* of the illegal armed groups in order to reduce the effects of their violence, or it can pursue a broad-based strategy that emphasizes not only military strength, but also political, agrarian, judicial, and social reform, a policy that may lead to the *resolution* of the problem.

Having considered what one hopes is only a worst-case scenario for the United States, and having examined the theoretical steps necessary to pursue a counterinsurgency war militarily, it is important to consider more specifically how to actually achieve what most people ultimately want: meaningful and durable peace. To this end, we will consider several components that will be necessary in any attempt to achieve lasting peace in Colombia, which is the end result that would serve U.S. interests most fully. The elements of an action agenda include:

- Strength of State
- Multidimensional Reduction of the Drug Trade
- Social Investment
- Reduction of Shortsighted and Self-Serving Policies by the Elite
- Demobilization and Peacekeeping

It would be naïve to assume that the presence of these components would be sufficient to guarantee such a result, but it seems reasonable that all are necessary, and employed together, they would certainly move the Colombian conflict closer to conclusion.

## **Strength of State**

The first necessary component is the ability of the state to provide protection and administrative control for its citizens, and it is the portion that President Uribe, with the support of U.S. aid, is currently addressing most vigorously. According to its leader, Carlos Castaño, the rightist AUC paramilitary organization has grown in size to about 8,000 members, over a thousand of which are former military and police, including 135 former officers.<sup>66</sup> This indicates that many of the legitimate enforcers of national security, frustrated by the ineffectual capacity of the state to support effective security under the constraints of its frail democratic institutions, have opted to remove themselves from these constraints, enforcing their security goals through more effective, but brutal and merciless, methods. One goal for strengthening the capacity of the state is to provide meaningful protection while still adhering to international norms of human rights. Without a state that has strong force capabilities, a repeat of President Pastrana's failure to achieve peace at the negotiating table is likely; the reason FARC did not negotiate in good faith was because it believed that it could still defeat the state militarily, or at least that it was able to survive and grow despite the government's best efforts.

## **Social investment**

Significant resources must be allocated to build public social and economic infrastructure, in addition to military presence, in areas where the state has previously exercised little control. By investing in microenterprises, institutions like town councils and business cooperatives, and public resources like hospitals, schools, roads, and potable water infrastructure, the state will be able to address Leites and

Wolf's fourth strategy: reducing the appeal and influence that the insurgents' outputs have on a needy population. Combined with strength of state which will offer protection against insurgent threats, this social investment will provide an attractive alternative for the people to choose instead of being forced into drug production by necessity and rebel coercion.

### **Multidimensional Reduction of the Drug Trade**

Programs designed to disrupt the drug trade in order to deprive the rebel groups of income must be multidimensional. The U.S. must show a real commitment to reducing domestic demand, since this desire for narcotics—not the production itself—is what drives the drug industry. Additionally, bottom-level coca farmers must have access to alternative means of earning a living once their crop is no longer available. This is where the infrastructure investment from the previous component is especially important. Alternative development programs in Colombia so far have not been administered as aggressively as the military programs, and they have focused largely on providing alternative crops for these farmers. Unfortunately, such programs often ignore the geographical realities of parts of rural Colombia where it is difficult to cultivate anything profitably that does not have the enormous economic rewards provided by coca. In these regions, alternative development should devote significant resources to training and microfinance programs, and help build the physical infrastructure necessary to support such a shift to non-agrarian alternatives.

### **Reduction of Shortsighted and Self-Serving Policies by the Elite**

The Colombian oligarchical elite must be willing to swallow the bitter medicine of real social and governmental reform, allowing all sectors of society to participate

in a meaningful fashion in the government. This will begin when all classes of society begin contributing a sufficient amount in taxes to cover the necessary costs of these social programs, when the elite Congress puts an end to its corruption and self-serving perquisites,<sup>67</sup> and when laws like the draft are enforced in a manner that applies to everyone, not just those who cannot pay a bribe to avoid service.

### **Demobilization and Peacekeeping**

Before any peace process can be successful, the Colombian state must find a more effective political channel for opposition—a sort of safety valve for frustration with the government. Since opposing voices have frequently been excluded from the political arena during Colombia's history, leading these actors to employ violent means of opposition, it is clear that a more inclusive political process is necessary. It is very likely that once a negotiated agreement is reached by the parties, international observers and perhaps OAS peacekeepers will be needed to ensure the short-term credibility of the agreement's provisions, especially considering the violence and poor-faith negotiating that have characterized previous peace attempts.<sup>68</sup> The words of then-U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his 1992 Agenda for Peace seem especially applicable to the current potential for international peacekeeping in Colombia:

Peacemaking and peace-keeping operations, to be truly successful, must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people. Through agreements ending civil strife, these may include disarming the previously warring parties and the

restoration of order, the custody and possible destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.<sup>69</sup>

These five components should form the foundation of any credible and durable plan to achieve peace in Colombia. Aid to create significant and meaningful political and social reform in Colombia is not nearly as neat and tidy a message to sell to the U.S. Congress as counternarcotics or counterterrorism; but such reform is the only way to ensure the durability of any results that are achieved in the war against drugs and terror.

The recent policy shift by the U.S. government to include counterinsurgency in the goals of its military aid to Colombia is not inherently problematic. In fact, military strength is a necessary component of an ultimately durable peace plan. What both the United States and Colombia must keep in mind, however, is that armed force is only one piece of the solution. Colombia must not neglect or underrepresent the goals of economic rehabilitation, social and democratic reform, and opportunities to incorporate dissidents' views into the political process. Furthermore, U.S. aid should not take the place of genuine commitment and sacrifice by the Colombian ruling class to build secure, sustainable institutions upon which a peaceful, respected state can be built. An end to the conflict in Colombia will never be easy, and may never be absolute; but the government of that country, given a head start by the training and

financial resources of the United States, must take all necessary steps to achieve durable peace.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> See Appendix for map of Colombia.
- <sup>2</sup> Based on various estimates; obviously, there is no way to have a completely accurate number for FARC's aggregate income. The Colombian army did, however, discover a FARC document in 1996 that revealed a budget for that year of \$400 million USD. See Maj. Luis Alberto Villamarín Pulido, *The FARC Cartel* (Bogotá: Ediciones El Faraón), p. 132
- <sup>3</sup> *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, Department of State Fact Sheet (January 30, 2003).
- <sup>4</sup> *Counternarcotics Efforts in the Andean Region*, Department of State Fact Sheet (March 16, 2001).
- <sup>5</sup> Nina M. Serafino, *Colombia: Summary and Tables on U.S. Assistance (FY 1989-FY 2003)*, CRS Report for Congress (June 28, 2002).
- <sup>6</sup> FY2001 Military Construction Appropriations bill, P.L. 106-246 (June 2000).
- <sup>7</sup> Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, testimony on the Andean Counterdrug Initiative before the U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control (September 17, 2002).
- <sup>8</sup> FY2002 Supplemental Appropriations bill, H.R. 4775 (June 6, 2002).
- <sup>9</sup> "Why Colombia Is Not the 'Next Vietnam'," U.S. Department of State Fact Sheet (February 2001)
- <sup>10</sup> Rand Beers, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "Narco-Terror: The Worldwide Connection Between Drugs and Terror," Testimony Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism and Government Information (March 13, 2002)
- <sup>11</sup> "U.S. Policy toward Colombia," Panel I of a Hearing of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee (April 11, 2002).
- <sup>12</sup> Andres Pastrana, "High Stakes in Colombia," *Washington Post* (April 15, 2002), p. A21
- <sup>13</sup> Armitage, *op cit*.
- <sup>14</sup> "U.S. Policy Toward Colombia," *op cit*. Of course, instability can flow in more than one direction; the conflict in Venezuela between President Hugo Chávez and large sectors of the population could have a destabilizing influence on Colombia in addition to Colombia's conflict causing problems in Venezuela.



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<sup>15</sup> Dennis M. Rempe, “The Past as Prologue? A History of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958-66,” monograph for Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College (March 2002)

<sup>16</sup> Alvaro Valencia Tovar, *Inseguridad y Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá, Universidad Sergio Arboleda, 1997)

<sup>17</sup> Rempe, *op cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954)

<sup>19</sup> Armitage, *op cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Richard Boucher, “Breakdown of Peace Talks Between the Government of Colombia and the FARC,” State Department Press Statement (February 21, 2002)

<sup>21</sup> Numerous documents seized by the Colombian police and armed forces during raids demonstrated FARC’s ownership, trade in, and profits resulting from narcotics, which represent the organization’s primary source of income (see Villamarín Pulido, *op cit.*) This is also not news to the Colombian public. Of those who responded to a Gallup poll conducted in four major cities, 76% believed that the FARC was heavily involved in narcotrafficking. See *Colombia: Conflicto Armado, Perspectivas de Paz y Democracia* (Miami: Latin American and Caribbean Center, 2001), p. 14

<sup>22</sup> Boucher, *op cit.*

<sup>23</sup> “Alternative Development,” *Drug Control: Efforts to Develop Alternatives to Cultivating Illicit Crops in Colombia Have Made Little Progress and Face Serious Obstacles*. Report to Congressional Requesters, GAO-02-291 (2001). The report acknowledges that USAID alternative development programs, hampered by the lack of control that the Colombian government exercises in the coca-growing region, have not come close to meeting expectations. It concludes, “Considering the serious obstacles in Colombia that have impeded meaningful progress, USAID will have difficulty spending additional funds for alternative development over the next few years. Through fiscal year 2001, USAID has spent less than 11 percent of the \$52.5 million available for alternative development in Colombia and does not plan to complete expenditure of these funds until at least fiscal year 2003.” p.

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<sup>24</sup> *Colombia’s Killer Networks* (New York, Human Rights Watch, 1996), p. 85

<sup>25</sup> Richard Boucher, State Department Daily Press Briefing (February 22, 2002)

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- <sup>26</sup> George W. Bush, "President Pleased with Charlotte Welfare-to-Work Program," Remarks to Chamber of Commerce in Charlotte, North Carolina (February 27, 2002)
- <sup>27</sup> Colin Powell, Secretary of State, Testimony before the Commerce-Justice-State subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee (March 6, 2002)
- <sup>28</sup> Pastrana, *op cit.*
- <sup>29</sup> Nina M. Serafino, Colombia: The Uribe Administration and Congressional Concerns (CRS Report for Congress, June 14, 2002)
- <sup>30</sup> Scott Wilson, "Colombian War's Uneven Burden," *Washington Post* (May 24, 2002), p. A7
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> "Colombia: Minister Londono on Government's Reform Projects," *El Espectador* (August 11, 2002)
- <sup>33</sup> Gabriel Marcella, "Introduction," in "Plan Colombia: Some Differing Perspectives," monograph for Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College (June 2001), p. 6
- <sup>34</sup> "U.S. Policy Toward the Andean Region," U.S. Department of State White Paper (May 16, 2001).
- <sup>35</sup> Armitage, *op. cit.*
- <sup>36</sup> Otto Reich, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Testimony before the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House International Affairs Committee (April 11, 2002)
- <sup>37</sup> Peter Rodman, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Testimony before the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House International Affairs Committee (April 11, 2002)
- <sup>38</sup> Alan K. Ota, "Occidental Petroleum Lobbies for Benefits from Both Parties," *CQ Weekly* (March 9, 2002), p. 660
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Lawrence P. Meriage, Vice President, Executive Services and Public Affairs, Occidental Oil and Gas Corporation, Testimony before the Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources Subcommittee of the House Government Reform Committee (February 15, 2000)
- <sup>41</sup> George C. Wilson, *This War Really Matters: Inside the Fight for Defense Dollars* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2000), p. 141
- <sup>42</sup> Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 152. There are, of course, alternative explanations for the use of the Black

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Hawks. Gen. Barry McCaffrey, former commander of the U.S. military Southern Command, has testified a number of times that he considers the Black Hawk to be the best equipped helicopter on the market for fighting purposes.

<sup>43</sup> General Alvaro Valencia Tovar, "A View from Bogotá," in "Plan Colombia: Some Differing Perspectives," monograph for Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College (June 2001), p. 22

<sup>44</sup> Miles A. Pomper, "Worried About Entanglement in Colombia, Senate Panel Slashes Clinton's Anti-Drug Aid Request," *CQ Weekly* (May 13, 2000), p. 1129

<sup>45</sup> Miles A. Pomper, "Colombia Aid Restrictions Reconsidered as Focus Shifts to War on Terrorism," *CQ Weekly* (March 9, 2002), pp. 658-661

<sup>46</sup> Russell W. Ramsey, professor, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security (WHINSEC) and Troy State University, personal interview with the author (December 16, 2002)

<sup>47</sup> Ricardo Vargas, "Anti-Drug Policies in Colombia: 25 Years of Failure," Speech given at the conference: US Anti-Drug Aid Endangers Indigenous Communities and Amazon Biodiversity, WDC-USA (November 20, 2000)

<sup>48</sup> It is true that demand reduction should be an extremely important priority in the drug war, but this does not mean that aid to Colombia means that this priority is being neglected. In fact, the 2002 U.S. National Drug Control Strategy shows that the government is already spending over \$3.5 billion on demand reduction, and that President Bush has pushed for a \$1.6 billion expansion over the next five years.

<sup>49</sup> Pomper, "Colombia Aid," *op cit.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Manuel Noriega and Peter Eisner, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega: America's Prisoner*. (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 196. This indictment does come from a biased source, since Noriega sits in jail after being ousted from power and sentenced on drug charges, but the words are reasonable nonetheless.

<sup>52</sup> Pomper, "Colombia Aid," *op cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Chris Marquis, "A View from Peoria," in "Plan Colombia: Some Differing Perspectives," monograph for Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College (June 2001), p. 40

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- <sup>54</sup> Nina M. Serafino, Colombia: Plan Colombia Legislation and Assistance (FY 2000-FY 2001) (CRS Report for Congress, July 5, 2001)
- <sup>55</sup> Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), p. 144
- <sup>56</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster), p. 93
- <sup>57</sup> Ramsey, *op cit.*
- <sup>58</sup> A CIA document, which has since been declassified, reported that political killings by both sides, but especially by the right wing death squads, declined sharply in 1984 as a result of U.S. pressure to enact judicial reform, to observe human rights, and to dismiss military personnel who did not. The right wing groups themselves also curbed abuses in order to improve their image and support base. See *El Salvador: Controlling Rightwing Terrorism*, Intelligence Estimate, Central Intelligence Agency (February 1984).
- <sup>59</sup> David Passage, "Colombia in Turmoil: How the U.S. Could Help," *Special Warfare* (Winter 2000), p. 14-15
- <sup>60</sup> Vanessa Arrington, "U.S. Commander Hails Colombia Troops," *Associated Press* (November 1, 2002)
- <sup>61</sup> Joe Leuer, Deputy Dean of Academics, WHINSEC, personal interview with the author (December 19, 2002)
- <sup>62</sup> Nathan Leites & Charles Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1970), p. 35
- <sup>63</sup> Scott Wilson, "Colombia Turns to Citizen Spies as Newest Weapon of War," *Washington Post* (August 29, 2002) p. A1
- <sup>64</sup> Scott Wilson, "U.S. Steps into the Rebels Lair," *Washington Post* (October 12, 2002) p. A20
- <sup>65</sup> Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas & Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- <sup>66</sup> Scott Wilson, Interview with Carlos Castaño, head of the AUC, for the *Washington Post* (March 12, 2001)

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<sup>67</sup> *El Espectador, op cit.*

<sup>68</sup> President Belisario Betancur in the 1980s was unable to reach a lasting agreement with leftist rebels because the insurgency groups themselves were so fractured that they were unable to present a solid negotiating authority; negotiations failed under President Ernesto Samper in the 1990s because rebels doubted his ability to exercise authority to actually enact the provisions of a potential agreement since he had a significant credibility problem; President Pastrana noted with dismay that, despite his unprecedented cessation of a huge chunk of land to the rebels, they were unwilling to negotiate in any meaningful sense.

<sup>69</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "An Agenda for Peace," Report of the Secretary-General to the U.N. Security Council (17 June 1992)

