



**STRATEGY
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**U.S. AND COLOMBIAN COUNTERDRUG EFFORTS:
*STRATEGIES AT ODDS***

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

U.S. and Colombian Counterdrug Efforts: *Strategies at Odds?*

by

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ABSTRACT

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Despite the increased involvement of U.S. assistance, illegal shipments of drugs originating from Colombia are more available in the United States than ever before. According to 1999 figures, imports of nearly 400 metric tons of cocaine, 90 percent of Colombian origin, and 75 percent of the heroin seized by U.S. officials on the East Coast is from Colombia. This massive amount of cocaine feeds the habit of 12 million drug users in the United States, contributes to 52,000 drug-related deaths per year, and leads to economic costs of \$110 billion dollars a year for health care, public safety, and the loss of productivity. Colombia's illegal drug trade constitutes a national security threat.

To confront this threat emanating from Colombia, the Clinton administration's drug strategy has placed counterdrugs as a primary focus of the US-Colombian relationship. In February 2000, the Clinton Administration requested a supplemental bill of an additional \$1.6 billion over the next three years. Each year the U.S. contributes more and more to the Colombian government to fight the drug war and each year there are more and more drugs flowing from Colombia. It should be painfully obvious that until Colombia is able to deal with its internal war with the guerillas, it will never be able to successfully wage a war against the narco-traffickers, especially when in many cases they are one and the same.

The Marxist-Leninist guerrillas have expanded significantly over the past decade as a result of a stable and lucrative source of financing its activities—the drug trade. The guerrillas extract protection money from coca growers and the operators of clandestine landing fields and laboratories, along with kidnappings. Between 65 to 70 percent of the guerrilla war chest comes from extortion and protection of drug activities. Colombia's armed forces have been losing ground to the estimated 20,000 Marxist guerrillas who effectively control large chunks of rural Colombia. Over the past 2 years, these well armed insurgents have inflicted a number of significant military defeats on government forces.

American leadership and engagement in South and Central America is vital for our security, and our nation. Over time, illegal drugs coming out of Colombia will undermine and eventually destroy our economic viability, institutions, and values. Protecting the United States from any threats to its survival as a nation remains the primary role of our military forces. Consequently, our military capabilities must be able to assist in protecting the nation from drug trafficking. Even though Colombia has nearly 240,000 security forces to fight the Marxist guerrilla groups, they are no match for the insurgent groups who are well armed and flush with cash extorted from the drug barons.

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PREFACE

In September 1999, I received a phone call from a family member in Los Angeles, California. The call was all too familiar. I was told that a distant relative had passed away and the cause of death was drug related. It was sad enough to lose a family member, but even sadder to learn that she had left a nine year old daughter behind to grow up without a mom or dad. All too often I hear from family and friends the distressing stories of how drug related incidents have claimed the young lives of people I grew up with.

In January 1999, the Coast Guard found 9,500 pounds of cocaine, with an estimated street value of \$186 million, during an inspection of a Panamanian-registered cargo ship. In August 1999, New York Police seized 1,566 pounds, or three quarters of a ton, of cocaine from a warehouse in Brooklyn worth \$89 million. In November, the Drug Enforcement Administration ran an operation called "Operation Impunity" one of the biggest drug crackdowns in recent memory. In that operation federal, state, and local authorities arrested 93 people in the United States and Mexico, seized 25,000 pounds of cocaine worth as much as \$1 billion on the streets and seized about \$26 million in cash and other assets from Mexico's largest drug cartel. These incidents are examples of the success of the drug traffickers and their ability to get illegal drugs into the United States. Conversely, it also points out the United States' failure to slow down the production, transshipment, and sale of drugs in the United States.

On a recent visit to New York City (NYC) I had the opportunity to listen to a speech given by the NYC Police Commissioner. The Commissioner relayed that the number one cause of crime in NYC is drugs, "80% of crime has a nexus to drug trafficking." I asked the commissioner if he knew where the drugs were coming from and he answered, Colombia. In most cases, as with the NYC Chief of Police, the illegal drugs that claim thousands of American lives can be traced directly back to the source. Drugs sold on the streets of Los Angeles and New York are brought in primarily through Mexico, Panama, the Caribbeans, and Venezuela. Narco-traffickers in these countries facilitate the transshipment of drugs from Colombia. Colombia is the source of 80% or more of the cocaine brought into the United States. According to *USA Today*, up until their arrest, two of the most powerful drug traffickers in the world were moving 30 tons of cocaine a month from Columbia to the streets of American cities.

The government of Colombia, with the support of the Clinton Administration, has come up with a strategy called Plan Colombia. The fundamental goal of the plan is to strengthen the State in order to regain the citizens' confidence and recuperate the basic norms of peaceful coexistence. The plan calls for peace negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest guerilla group in Colombia that has been at war with the Colombian government for the past 40 years. The FARC makes millions of dollars by protecting the coca fields, taxing cocaine production and guarding laboratories and airstrips in the southern and western regions of Colombia, where the government has no real presence and where most coca is grown. Of course the plan cannot succeed without the financial support of the international community and specifically seeks aid from the United States. I call it a plan of hope and faith because it is a gamble on the part of the Colombians and the United States that the FARC

will cooperate with the government. In my assessment, the past year of negotiations with the FARC has brought no real signs of moving closer to a peace agreement and no real accomplishment of the counterdrug goals and objectives laid out in the Colombian plan.

Meanwhile, drugs continue to pour into the United States and our communities continue to suffer the pain of losing lives as a result of drug abuse and drug related crimes. As was noted by Bruce Bagley, a professor of international studies at the University of Miami, "despite the increased involvement of the U.S. military and the use of our equipment, illegal shipments of drugs are more available in the United States, drugs are cheaper and easier to get in our country today than they were when we started this; and that anyone who thinks interdiction, no matter how much we spend on it, is going to solve this problem, is fundamentally mistaken." Bagley does not believe that a supply reduction strategy can work or will we ever be able to halt the flow of drugs from Latin America or other parts of the world into the United States. It will take a concerted effort of both supply and demand reduction operations with emphasis on the latter if we expect to get a handle on the drug problem in America.

Now that Colombia is an unmitigated disaster, the Clinton Administration is scrambling to aid Colombia's counter-narcotics efforts. In the past twenty years the U.S. has spent over \$250 billion dollars in an effort to halt the production and shipment of illicit narcotics to the United States. In the last two years the U.S. has given the Colombia government several billion dollars to combat counter-narcotics, not to be confused with aid to combat Colombia's counter-insurgency efforts. If U.S. efforts were interpreted as assisting Colombians fight an insurgency, the Administration would come under intense criticism for heading us towards another Vietnam.

Vietnam, a battle scar still fresh in the minds of many political leaders, was a nasty conflict that lost the support of the United States citizens' will to fight. A conflict that taught the military many lessons on how to and how not to conduct military operations. Yet, we find ourselves making the same incremental mistakes in Colombia. Colombia is being torn apart by violence, corruption, drug traffickers, insurgents, and paramilitary organizations and is on the verge of becoming a failed state if the government is unable to take control of the problem soon. Otherwise, the FARC supported by narco-traffickers, will soon control the country.

Although Colombians have to make most of the decisions and fight most of the battles which will determine the fate of their country, the US needs to decide what it would like to see happen and what it's prepared to do to influence the outcome. If the US is serious about wanting to see a reduction in the production and trafficking in illegal narcotics, it needs to accept the fact that no reduction is likely until Colombia's government regains control of its national territory and is able to deal with the narcotraffickers operating in their backyard.

This paper will focus on the current situation in Colombia, analyze the major flaw in the counterdrug strategy, and recommend how the Colombian government, with the support of the United States, can effectively implement Plan Colombia.

U.S. AND COLOMBIAN COUNTERDRUG EFFORTS: STRATEGIES AT ODDS?

Colombia is a country three times the size of Montana and covers 1.2 million square kilometers (about the size of Texas, New Mexico and Arkansas combined). It is the fourth largest country in land mass and the third largest populous country in Latin America after Brazil and Mexico. It has a population of 38 million people with an annual growth rate of 1.8 percent. Seventy-five percent of its 38 million people live in urban areas. About 50% of the people live in poverty, with 20% in absolute poverty. Its \$96 billion GDP places it in the middle of the major economies in Latin America. In a nation of abundant resources and land (Colombia has natural resources of coal, petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, nickel, gold, silver, copper, platinum, and emeralds)¹, 10% of the owners possess 90% of the cultivable land.

In August 1997, following the scandal surrounding President Ernesto Samper's acceptance of drug money to fund his election campaign, Colombians elected Andres Pastrana. He took office vowing to bring peace, reduce the fiscal deficit, and promote investment, savings and employment. Pastrana held relatively high ratings but by the following year his leadership was in question. By mid-1998, the unemployment rate rose to 14.8% and last year rose to 20%, its highest point in 21 years. The trade deficit of \$2.2 billion in 1996 jumped to \$3.8 billion in 1997. Colombia was one of the few Latin American Countries in the region to hold an investment grade international credit rating but today investors are leary of Colombia's instability. The *New York Times* carried an article on January 3, 2000 entitled, "Latin Stocks: A Wild Upbeat Ride." It said that Wall Street analysts generally favored investing in stocks in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Argentina, while they are generally bearish on Venezuela and Colombia, "two countries with uncertain political outlooks."²

Last year Dr. Gabriel Marcella, Professor of Third World Studies, Department of National Security and Strategy, U.S. Army War College wrote, "*Colombia is the most troubled country in the hemisphere. Law and order have broken down. Drug criminals, guerrillas, and paramilitary "self-defense" organizations are feeding a spiral of violence and corruption that makes "colombianization" a metaphor for a failing state.*"³ Dr. Marcella's research shows that nearly 10 Colombians are killed in politically related strife every day and an estimated 85 percent of the 30,000 annual homicides in Colombia are caused by pervasive criminal violence. Many of these homicides are connected to guerrilla activity. During the first nine months of 1997, guerrillas committed 23.5 percent of all politically motivated killings and more than 50% of reported kidnappings.⁴

Colombia's problems are also problems for the United States and in many ways jeopardize the United States' way of life. The amount of illegal drugs entering the U.S. is devastating. The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) reported during the decade of the 90s, the rate of substance abuse by children had risen dramatically and current rates of addiction are still troubling. The latest ONDCP figures state there are an estimated 4 million chronic drug users in America: 3.6 million chronic cocaine users (primarily crack cocaine) and 810,000 chronic heroin users.⁵ Today we are paying

accelerated health care costs for those addicts who began their cocaine use in the 1980s. The current cocaine use-rate has not changed significantly in the last seven years and the August 1998 semi-annual Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement stated that cocaine was readily available in all major metropolitan areas. Ethnographers suggest that heroin is increasingly available in many cities and although ONDCP's Summer 1998 *Pulse Check* found that heroin use rose in some cities, remained stable at high levels in other cities, and stabilized in a few cities, no city experienced a decline.⁶

According to an article written by a former State Department official, 1998 figures reported imports of 300 metric tons of cocaine with a street value of \$30 billion, 70 percent of Colombian origin, and 75 percent of the heroin seized by U.S. officials on the East Coast is from Colombia.⁷ 1999 figures reflect imports of 394 metric tons of cocaine, 90 percent of Colombian origin. Cocaine imports feed the habits of 12 million drug users in the United States (this includes the 3.6 million addicts noted above) contribute to 52,000 drug-related deaths per year, and lead to economic costs of \$110 billion dollars a year for health care, public safety, and the loss of productivity. Because of the surge in arrests related to drugs, our criminal justice system is overburdened and accounts for 50-80% of all people behind bars.⁸ Today our prisons and jails are filled with more U.S. citizens than there are in the Armed Forces. To add salt to this wound, in many cases we're accommodating those prisoners, in terms of housing, recreation, clothing, and other comforts better than our military members on the front line in Bosnia and Kosovo. When one considers the devastating effects of narco-trafficking, the only conclusion to reach is that Colombia's illegal drug trade constitutes a national security threat.

U.S. POLICY OBJECTIVES

President Clinton has openly stated that peace in Colombia is a primary policy objective of the United States. The Clinton Administration is hoping that achieving peace in Colombia will make the counternarcotics effort far more successful, reduce the "comfort level" of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and enhance the ability of the United States to trade and invest. In 1997 Colombia accounted for \$11.6 billion in two-way trade with the United States. Two years ago, Colombia was the fifth largest market for U.S. goods in Latin America, with 400 of the Fortune 500 companies doing business there.⁹ It is the fifth largest supplier of foreign oil and has the potential to play a considerably larger role if it can free itself from the guerrilla violence that is inhibiting the development of the industry.

There is no question that economic growth and integration in the Americas will greatly affect the prosperity of the United States in the 21st century. Colombia and its neighboring countries have become the fastest growing economic region in the world and our fastest growing export market. Economically, Colombia serves as a major market for U.S. exports with 41% of its exports destined for the United States.

Even though economics tend to drive our national agenda, "Americans should care about events in Colombia because 80% of the cocaine sold in America either originated in or was transported through Colombia" according to Barry McCaffrey, President Clinton's National Drug Czar.

To confront this national security threat emanating from Colombia, the Clinton administration's drug strategy has placed counterdrugs as a primary focus of the US-Colombian relationship. According to Phillip Chicola, counternarcotics is the "centerpiece and most difficult and prominent issue of our bilateral relationship". Chicola, who represents the U.S. Department of State's Office of Andean Affairs, stated that the US recognizes that the Colombian government must regain control over the coca-growing areas.¹⁰ This ties back to one of the President's five stated goals in the 1999 National Drug Strategy, to break foreign and domestic drug sources of supply. The other four goals are shield America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat; educate and enable America's youth to reject illegal drugs as well as alcohol and tobacco; increase the safety of America's citizens by substantially reducing drug-related crime and violence; and, reduce health and social costs to the public of illegal drug use.

The *National Drug Control Strategy* takes a long-term, holistic view of the nation's drug problem and recognizes the significant effect drug abuse has on the nation's public health and safety. The *Strategy* maintains that no single solution or entity can suffice to deal with the multifaceted challenge that drug abuse represents; that several solutions must be applied simultaneously; and that by focusing on the outcomes—measured in declining drug use, reduced supply, and lessening of attendant social consequences—we can achieve our goals. The *National Drug Control Strategy* proposes a multi-year conceptual framework to reduce illegal drug use and availability by 50 percent. The Strategy focuses on prevention, treatment, research, law enforcement, protection of our borders, and international cooperation.¹¹

Capitalizing on the Clinton Administration's counterdrug strategy, President Andres Pastrana visited Washington to seek financial support to pay for Colombia's counterdrug strategy. Pastrana was able to persuade President Clinton to provide Colombia with \$289 million in aid, mostly to the national police and the military. This was not a difficult task for Pastrana since at the time Colombian cocaine production had boomed over the previous year and President Clinton knew the beleaguered government of Colombia was not capable of fighting back without resources.

The amount of US resources increased significantly in 1998, with the passage of emergency supplemental funding that should have allowed Colombia to conduct a more successful counternarcotics program. Coupled with regular appropriations, total US funding for the 1999 fiscal year reached nearly \$300 million dollars and \$15 million was programmed to support alternative crop development over the next 3 years. In February 2000, the Clinton Administration requested a supplemental bill of an additional \$1.6 billion over the next three years. This bill now sits before the U.S. Congress for action.

The U.S. focus on counternarcotics has been questioned by a number of policy pundits. Professor Caesar Sereseres of the University of California at Irvine expressed his view that unless the guerrilla threat is dealt with, U.S. drug policy would fail. He urged the United States to "get its act together" and focus on the battlefield in relation to the prospects for negotiation. Failure to do so, he said, is "utterly demoralizing" and "utterly confusing" to the Colombians. To counter that argument, Rand Beers, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, U.S. Department of State,

made clear that the current U.S. policy represents a consensus within the US government that would be placed at risk if the US were to attempt to assume a counterinsurgency role.

Each year the U.S. contributes more and more to the Colombian government to fight the drug war and each year there are more and more drugs flowing from Colombia. It should be painfully obvious that until Colombia is able to deal with its internal war with the guerillas, it will never be able to successfully wage a war against the narco-traffickers, especially when in many cases they are one and the same. It should also be obvious that if the FARC really wanted to enter into meaningful peace negotiations they would not to continue to terrorize innocent civilians, kidnap foreigners, and, without remorse, murder anyone politically opposed to their views. Even President Clinton's Drug Czar doubts the FARC will come to the negotiating table. After President Pastrana cut a deal with the guerillas, ceding large swaths of territory (an area the size of Switzerland) as a concession to get the FARC to the peace table, he made it unlikely for the insurgents to come to the table. As long as the drug business remains highly profitable for narco traffickers and guerrillas the chances of a peace settlement is remote. As McCaffrey said, "Look at what they've got to lose, they've got all this money." It's time for President Pastrana to step back and consider the guerrillas' appalling record.

DOES THE FARC REALLY WANT A PEACE SETTLEMENT?

On January 7, 1999, formal peace talks began between the government and FARC. However, FARC leader Tirofijo, failed to appear at the opening ceremony, leaving President Pastrana seated alone at the table. The FARC claims that the snub was unintended. Two weeks later, citing the upsurge in paramilitary activity, the FARC froze all peace dialogues until April 20, vowing not to continue until the government acts against paramilitary groups and government and military officials believed to be linked to the right-wing militias. The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) went on a brutal killing spree and murdered over 160 people, all of them civilians. The AUC's rampage was revenge for a FARC attack on the AUC headquarters December 28, while the paramilitary group was observing its cease-fire,

In another act of good faith, on February 6, 1999, though talks with the FARC remained frozen, the Pastrana government announced a 90-day (up until May 7, 1999) extension of the guerrilla group's demilitarized zone in southern Colombia. To show their appreciation, the FARC, on Feb 25, 1999 abducted and killed three U.S. indigenous-rights activists. On March 6, 1999, the FARC admitted responsibility for the murders and asked forgiveness while blaming the act on a low-ranking field commander in the area. No one has been punished.

Even after these three obvious signs of insincerity, the Colombian government pushed forward with the peace process and on April 20, 1999, unofficial talks between government and FARC representatives took place in the demilitarized zone. FARC leaders stated the talks were still officially "frozen" while it evaluated the government's efforts against paramilitary groups. FARC officials warned Pastrana that they would end all peace talks if the government did not push back the zone's May 7, 1999 expiration date.

Between May 31 – June 4, 1999, U.S. Congress Rep. William Delahunt (D-MA) and staff members for six other members of Congress met with Colombian government officials and representatives of political parties, church groups, peace groups, human rights groups, the U.S. government, and the United Nations. They also traveled to the clearance zone to meet with FARC comandante Raúl Reyes. The U.S. delegation raised concerns about the FARC's willingness to seek a political solution, its links to the drug trade, and kidnappings and murders of U.S. citizens.

On June 20, 1999, the government announced that the formal negotiations with the FARC would begin on July 7th. But the day before the talks were to begin, the government and FARC postponed peace talks until the 19th of July. Two days later, July 8, 1999, the FARC launched a five-day offensive throughout Colombia which one army official called "the largest and most demented guerilla offensive in the past forty years." The campaign encompassed 15 towns, one of which is just 35 miles south of Bogotá. The guerrillas bombed banks, blew up bridges and energy infrastructure, blocked roads and assaulted police barracks. Government reports claimed that upwards of 300 combatants lost their lives in the fighting.¹²

On July 19, 1999 citing an inability to agree upon the creation of an international verification commission, FARC-government talks were suspended until July 30th. FARC spokesman Raúl Reyes argued that Colombia's military exaggerated the threat posed by the FARC in order to obtain foreign aid. But on July 30, 1999, the FARC attacked the town of Nariño, Antioquia. The attack was conducted by 300 guerrillas against a police station guarded by 35 police officers. The guerrillas' use of inaccurately launched bombs made from gas canisters destroyed the downtown area and killed seventeen people, including eight civilians, four of them children.

Finally on August 8, 1999, the Clinton Administration, realizing it could no longer turn a blind eye, sent Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering to Colombia on a trip aimed at gaining a clearer vision of the Colombian government's peace strategy. However, Pickering, the highest ranking U.S. official to visit Colombia in years, affirmed U.S. support for the Pastrana government and the beleaguered peace process. Pickering reportedly advised Pastrana not to make further concessions to the FARC, and asked the Colombian government to orient future U.S. assistance by drafting a plan that would eventually be brought forward as "Plan Colombia".

On December 9-17, 1999, the FARC carried out another offensive, with combat occurring in seven different departments. The death toll in that war was more than 300 for the week ending December 18, 1999. The casualty list included 10 civilians killed and more than 60 wounded in bombings. On December 17, a car bomb ripped through the business district, killing five passersby and severely wounding scores more. The FARC, not having fared so well in battle, announced a holiday cease-fire on December 20, 1999, calling off military operations until January 10, 2000 when the Peace talks would resume. That same day, December 20, as a holiday "truce" in Colombia's bloody civil war was proclaimed, the FARC ambushed an army patrol in the Northern Cesar Province and killed nine soldiers.

Just to confirm that this was no mistake, the FARC attacked army units near the town of Fundacion on Christmas Day.¹³

Those attacks followed persistent pleas by Pastrana for a Christmas truce that were regularly rejected by the FARC. But on December 20, the FARC suddenly offered "a unilateral truce in offensive actions" which Reuters news service described as "extending an olive branch to the war ravaged country." Some olive branch, considering the immediate FARC violation of its "unilateral" truce. General Fernando Tapias, chief of the Colombian armed forces, said he no longer believed in a truce. In an interview after the December 20th attacks he said, "What most affects the Colombian people is kidnapping, extortion and intimidation, and if that doesn't stop, we can't talk of a cease-fire. The phony cease-fire goes down as another illusion by well-meaning, peace-seeking President Andres Pastrana. His concessions have been met by escalated guerrilla attacks over the past year. "This truce exists only on paper,"

Actions speak louder than words and with this record one can only deduce that the FARC is not serious about the peace process that began in January 1999. In fact, they began the new year with an attack on four southern towns carried out by 300 FARC rebels ending the 20-day holiday truce.¹⁴ The insurgents have a vested interest in the continuation of the "war system". After all, it provides them with an enormous source of revenue through the protection of coca growers and drug traffickers.¹⁵ Pastrana's daring gesture in 1998 of establishing a huge demilitarized zone, far from bringing peace, has provided the Marxists with real estate to build a parallel Communist society.

Indeed, if they were serious, the FARC leaders would not insist on an end to free-market policies and a cessation to all international debt payments by Colombia before they will even consider a long-term cease-fire. The FARC's lead negotiator, Raul Reyes, said, "No more gringo military aid. No more displaced people. No more exiles. No more meddling of the North American state in the internal affairs of Colombia. No more criminalization of social protest. No more discrimination against women and ethnic communities." The rebels are demanding an overhaul of virtually every aspect of national life as a price for a negotiated settlement and have resisted demands that they give up kidnapping and drug-trafficking, their main sources of income.

Pastrana has stood firm on his belief that an agreement with the FARC can be reached before his term expires in 2002. "Peace is a long process that is not achieved from one day to the next, The important thing is to take the first step and that there exists political will to do so." Despite the reality that the peace talks stalled, Pastrana hopes that his political standing will be strengthened if he can bring the rebels to the table. He has been castigated by many Colombians – three quarters of those who responded in a recent poll said they believed that the rebels were not negotiating honestly – and some American officials have criticized Pastrana for having ceded too much without getting anything in return.

A former Minister of Defense, Gen. Harold Bedoya, complained in a recent interview that the land Pastrana gave to the FARC no longer belongs to the Colombian state, but to the narco-terrorists. "The government has removed the last vestiges of public authority from the area and handed over 200,000 Colombians to this mafia, which has taken advantage of this absurd decision to build drug laboratories

and bring in arms." One can understand Pastrana's blind faith in the peace process. Sometimes we get so close to an issue that we can't always see clearly. But the U.S. has stood back from a distance watching the failures of the peace negotiations and the atrocities committed by the FARC and still continues to support a failing strategy.

Plan Colombia paints a somewhat rosy and optimistic picture of a young Colombian economy, even though it has seen 40 years of continual growth, which has not been able to incorporate a large part of the national population into the productive processes. The Plan admits that the Colombian government has not been able to significantly reduce poverty levels (which is one of the FARC's primary issues) and recognizes that the violence and corruption fueled by drug trafficking has generated distrust among foreign investors. This distrust serves as a deterrent to the transformation and modernization of the country. In September 1999, President Pastrana visited New York and Washington to promote "Plan Colombia," a \$7.5 billion proposal that would end the conflict, curb narco trafficking, and revive the economy. Of this total -- which includes \$4 billion in police and military assistance -- Pastrana needs \$3.5 billion from donor countries like the United States. U.S. officials promise support for the "plan," but make no specific commitments.

A key piece of Plan Colombia is the counterdrug strategy, "the fight against drug trafficking constitutes the core in the strategy... The success of our strategy depends, also, on our efforts to reform and modernize our military forces in order to guarantee the application of the law and to return the sense of security to all Colombians. The aid of the United States, the European Community and the rest of the members of the international community is vital for the economic development of our country and to the counterbalance drug trafficking. We think, according to the Spanish author Miguel de Unamuno, that "faith is not to believe in the invisible, but rather to create the invisible." With this unfolding faith that we have in our own capacity and with the solidarity and aid of our international partners in the shared fight against the plague of drug trafficking, we are sure that we will create "the invisible".¹⁶

I believe it is absolutely essential that you take on any operation with a positive attitude and a belief that you can accomplish the task. However, at some point you must check to see if you're making any progress or if the plan is working. Pastrana is failing to get the FARC to seriously negotiate.

OUTNUMBERED, OUT-EQUIPPED AND OUT-FOXED

Recall President Clinton's primary policy objective of the United States, peace in Colombia. Both the Clinton and Pastrana administrations believe that a peace settlement with the guerillas will be the beginning of the end of Colombia's problems. The guerrillas number about 26,000 and comprise the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN) reputed to have 5,000 fighters, and the much smaller Popular Liberation Army (EPL). They operate in more than 100 separate "fronts" (upwards of 67 for the FARC, and 35 or so the ELN) and exercise significant influence over 50 percent of the nation's 107 municipalities.

What the United States did not expect was that the Pastrana administration would give up so much during the negotiations that it actually strengthened the hands of the FARC and weakened the

Colombian government's ability to fight a successful war against narco-trafficking. As a result of making unprecedented allowances for the FARC (five municipalities operating in a demilitarized zone), the ELN then demanded to be treated equally and threatened to stage more kidnappings and attacks on Colombian citizens if they were not given their own demilitarized zone. In fact, two months later, ELN fighters hijacked an Avianca Airlines flight, kidnapped the passengers and crew, and then tried to exchange hostages for a demilitarized zone. The Colombian government rejected their demands. Not to be left out of the party, The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), one of Colombia's most powerful paramilitary groups, kidnapped Liberal party Senator Piedad Cordoba, the head of the human rights committee, and demanded to be a part of the peace talks. President Pastrana argued that kidnapping was no way to gain political legitimacy and refused to submit to AUC's blackmail demands.

I applaud President Pastrana for standing up to the ELN and the AUC but the FARC is no better than the other two "want-to-be" political actors. Making concessions with the FARC may be in Pastrana's interest but I see it as making deals with guerrillas who provide protection to narco-traffickers. Does this not push us further behind in achieving our national objectives? And does this not bring into question whether we should continue to support a government whose strategy is actually working against ours. The Pastrana government is trying to negotiate with an organization, the FARC, that is incapable of establishing a government that provides for its people. Why not negotiate to end the conflict at your terms?

The Marxist-Leninist FARC and ELN were founded back in the 1980s and have expanded significantly since that time. The most important reason for the FARC's growth was the development of a stable and lucrative source of financing its activities—the drug trade—by extracting protection money from coca growers and the operators of clandestine landing fields and laboratories, along with kidnapping. The ELN on the other hand has been able to sustain itself and finance its operations by extorting money from oil companies, terrorizing local communities and an occasional kidnapping. However, the majority of both groups financing comes from illegal drugs. Between 65 to 70 percent of the guerrilla war chest comes from extortion and protection of drug activities, according to former Defense Minister Rafael Pardo.

Colombia's armed forces have been losing ground to the estimated 20,000 Marxist guerrillas of the FARC and the 5000 or so guerrillas of the ELN. The rebels effectively control large chunks of rural Colombia. Over the past 2 years, they have inflicted a number of significant military defeats on government forces. They are well-armed as a result of the war chest they have accumulated through drug taxes, kidnappings, and a wide range of business investments. But the guerrillas are not the only combatants against the armed forces. The most rapidly growing violent groups in the country today are right-wing paramilitary organizations that are waging war against the guerrillas, often in tactical alliance with the Colombian Army.

There are now several thousand paramilitary combatants. They are increasingly well-armed and organized, and are believed to be responsible for roughly 70 percent of the political killings. The

paramilitary groups, about half the size of the FARC, are involved in drug-trafficking, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). They operate cocaine laboratories and are partners of important international drug-trafficking organizations, according to DEA intelligence reports. Many paramilitaries originated as self-defense organizations because of the need to provide security against the guerrillas in the absence of law and order. Paramilitaries (of which the largest groups are the Autodefensas Compesinas of Cordoba and Uraba, the Peasant Self-Defense of Cordoba) now constitute a serious threat to both the rule of law and the guerrillas, often engaging in tit-for-tat reprisal strikes, with increasingly brutal consequences for noncombatants. The paramilitaries operate locally, regionally, and nationally under various commands. During the first nine months of 1998, the paramilitaries committed an estimated 76 percent of all politically motivated killings. The paramilitaries are gathering strength not from state assistance, but because they are effective at terminating petty crime and restoring order, and thus have attained the support of large landowners, fishermen, cattlemen, drug traffickers, and other elements who felt victimized by the guerrillas.

An integral part of the guerrilla threat is the scourge of corruption. For many years violence and corruption have been a problem in Colombia. But the narcorevolution of the 1980s served as a catalyst for worsening the problem by channeling financial and military resources to old foes and creating new social actors. Unfortunately the paramilitaries and the guerrillas are not the only groups with ties to the narcos. Corruption has penetrated all branches of government, from the national to the local level. Similarly, countless judges have not prosecuted narcos because of bribery or intimidation. Military officers have not been exempt from such temptations, or civil society, for that matter. The Colombian economy is far more dependent on narco-trafficking than, for instance, Mexico, and in the process of circulation, it taints virtually all social sectors.

While the government is nowhere near collapse, the momentum is clearly in favor of the guerrillas and paramilitaries. The danger is that Colombia will become increasingly balkanized and divided among regional warlords, and that the violence will spill over the borders into neighboring countries.

NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

Mexico is the lead transshipment country for Colombia's coca and heroin. Most of Mexico's drug trafficking is oriented towards smuggling illegal drugs across the border for distribution into the United States. The American Ambassador to Mexico, Jeffrey Davidow said "the world headquarters of narco-trafficking is in Mexico." Mexico's two largest border cities—Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez (Tijuana is adjacent to San Diego and Juarez is adjacent to El Paso) have experienced spiraling crime rates in the past decade as the drug cartels headquartered there have become increasingly powerful and violent. According to a Washington Post article, Tijuana is the operations center for the drug mafia controlled by the Arellana-Felix family, reputedly the most violent of Mexico's drug trafficking organizations.¹⁷

In Central America, Belize, Guatemala, and Panama are also transshipment countries for Colombia's illegal drug trade. Belize remains a significant narcotics transit country. Counternarcotics efforts in Belize are hampered by lack of manpower, training, and equipment. The relatively large

expanse of uninhabited territory and the thousands of coastal cays and inland waterways that are used by traffickers as drop-off sites for drugs contribute to the problem. The same holds true for Guatemala. Guatemala's location and scarce law enforcement resources facilitate its continued use by traffickers as a transshipment and storage point for cocaine destined for the United States via Mexico.

Panama is also a major transit point for Colombian cocaine and heroin. Cocaine passes through Panamanian territorial waters in fishing boats, "go-fast" boats, and ocean freighters. Colombian guerrilla and paramilitary units have found sanctuary in Panama's Darien Province and cross the Colombia-Panama border nearly at will. Guerrillas also rely on supply sources in Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Peru. An insurgency that once was mostly an internal Colombian problem is now fueled by enormous drug wealth and is gaining regional security significance. The withdrawal of U.S. counterdrug operations forces from Panama will challenge our ability to maintain adequate levels of support to the hemispheric drug control effort. The Departments of Defense and State must establish a new structure to support forward-based, source zone, counterdrug operations to replace access to Panama facilities.

In south America, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela are the major players. Bolivia is the world's second largest producer of cocaine. The cocaine industry in Bolivia is fragmented and dominated by trafficking organizations that manufacture, transport, and distribute cocaine base. Bolivian officials fear Marxist guerrillas infiltrating from Colombia will spread the influence of their drug-financed army, now equipped with some of the deadliest weapons available, to a new Latin American battleground. At least three members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have been spotted in Bolivia and were being hunted by government forces. The manhunt was triggered by evidence that FARC guerrillas, for the first time, sent recruiters into Bolivia. FARC, with an estimated 15,000 guerrillas, has been known to stage occasional raids across Colombia's borders into Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama. In Bolivia, continued reductions in cultivation are expected but there is cause for long term concern. The cocaine industry is still intact and coca prices remain high. Coca growers have instigated many acts of violence. Progress continues to depend on the will of the Banzer Administration to incur considerable political risk to achieve long-term coca reductions and on the availability of sufficient alternative development funds to provide coca farmers with licit income options.

Brazil is a major transit country for cocaine shipped by air, river, and maritime routes from Bolivia, Peru and Colombia to the United States. Brazil's sparsely populated Amazon region provides opportunity for traffickers to tranship drugs and chemicals by air and riverine routes. Brazil is also a major producer of precursor chemicals and sythetic drugs. Ecuador is also a major transit country for the shipment of cocaine from Colombia to the US. Traffickers use Ecuador for money laundering of drug profits and to transit precursor chemicals destined for Colombian drug labs.

Peru achieved a 26 percent decline in coca cultivation in 1998, yielding a total reduction of 56 percent in the last five years. However, the drug control situation is deteriorating. Traffickers have adjusted routes and methods to reduce the effectiveness of law enforcement and interdiction operations. Peruvian coca prices have been rising since March 1998, making alternative development and

eradication more difficult. Some farmers are returning to abandoned fields and the central growing areas are rejuvenating. Clearly, rebounding cultivation in Peru would be a setback to U.S. interests.

Venezuela is a major transport country for over 100 metric tons of cocaine shipped annually from South America to the US. Venezuela is also a transit country for chemicals used in the production of drugs from source countries. In recent years, Venezuela's vulnerable financial institutions and other sectors of the government have become targets for money laundering of illegal drug profits. Corruption in law enforcement and the judicial system is also a major problem.

A NEW GENERATION OF NARCO-TRAFFICKERS

It's difficult enough for the Pastrana administration to deal with the guerrillas and the paramilitaries but when the Colombian government has to engage against drug traffickers at the same time, the fight becomes even more difficult. Without the assistance of other countries, it may be an impossible one.

A new generation of Colombian drug traffickers, light years ahead of the traditional Medellin and Cali cartels in using the Internet and other modern technology, has sharply increased cocaine production and smuggling in the past two years, despite growing budgets for law enforcement, according to senior U.S. and Colombian intelligence officials. The nimble new organizations and their high-tech gear are reversing the gains of earlier years that crippled the older, better known cartels. Despite having more resources than ever before, the officials acknowledged that they are finding out little about the new organizations that now control the multi-billion dollar business of producing cocaine and heroin through Mexico, to consumers in the United States.

"They maintain an extremely low profile, they mix their licit and illicit businesses, they don't carry out terrorist acts and they operate small, autonomous cells. They are much harder to fight than previous groups because they are much harder to find," said Gen., Rosso Jose Serrano, director of the Colombian National Police. Unlike the previous organizations, the new Colombian traffickers contract out most of their jobs to specialists, who work on a job-to-job basis rather than as part of an integrated structure that would be easier to detect, informed sources say. Most Colombian cocaine is sold in bulk to Mexican drug trafficking organizations, which also have undergone major changes in the last several years. They assume the risk of transporting it to the United States and distributing it.

Colombian drug traffickers now control most cocaine production from the raw material to the finished product, giving them more control of the drug-marketing process and enhancing their profit when tons of cocaine over several years before being detected. According to ONDCP, new estimates show that a total of 350 metric tons of cocaine from the entire Andean region enter the United States every year.

Two of the most powerful drug traffickers in the world were arrested by Colombian police after a joint investigation with the United States distributed what authorities described as a pipeline moving 30 tons of cocaine a month from Colombia to the streets of American cities. The drug network's annual sales were estimated at a staggering \$60 billion according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. If the DEA's estimates are accurate, the Bernal-Madrival operation would account for up to 64% of all of the cocaine imported into the USA, according to recent government estimates. "The effect of this operation

is as if several CEOs of major corporations were removed", according to Attorney General Janet Reno. However, the DEA stated these arrests were only a temporary disruption at best in a vast work that had survived the demise of Cali cartels. Colombian intelligence officials said several groups fed into the organizations they dismantled, but there are several other groups as big as Bernal, who can put loads together from small organizations, and they have not been identified. U.S. officials agreed there is little intelligence on the new groups.

U.S. and Colombian officials found the traffickers were making use of the latest technology to protect and advance their business. Bernal's operation kept in touch by using Internet chat rooms protected by firewalls that made them impossible to penetrate, officials said. In addition, each part of the operation fed its information on the day's sales and drug movements to a computer on a ship off the coast of Mexico, the officials said, so that if one of the computer were taken down, it would be impossible to trace the rest of the network.

The traffickers also had access to highly sophisticated encryption technology, far beyond what law enforcement has the capacity to break quickly, sources said. These new techniques helped traffickers move hundreds of raw materials to the finished control of the drug-making process and enhanced their profits when the finished cocaine was sold to Mexican delivery specialists.

THE IMPERATIVE OF ENGAGEMENT

When President Clinton forwarded his 1999 national drug control strategy to the Congress, he wrote, "the United States remains the world's most powerful force for peace, prosperity and the universal values of democracy and freedom."¹⁸ If in fact we are the world's most powerful nation, why then are we continuing to fight a limited war on drugs? Have we not learned the lessons of fighting a limited war from our battles in Korea? Did not the longest conflict in our nation's history, Vietnam, teach us the costly lesson of incremental war? Former Ambassador David Passage, charged that U.S. policy toward Colombia showed that the United States remains "politically haunted and legislatively crippled by ghosts in its past." He stated that the United States has not come to grips with the legacy of Vietnam.

The phrase, "war on drugs" attracts attention. In reality, the counterdrug effort of the U.S. does not equate to war in the true sense of the word and in that vain should not be compared to Vietnam. However, the operational method and strategy in which we addressed the Vietnam conflict is similar to the approach we are taking in Colombia. I would also note that any threat that costs the United States 52,000 lives and billions of dollars each year is a national security concern that we should take no less serious than a war. In a 10 year period, over 100,000 Americans have died from drug use. That is more lives than we lost in the Korean, Vietnamese, and Gulf War combined. The social cost of drug use continues to climb. By 1995 the cost of drug use had reached \$110 billion, a 64% increase since 1990.¹⁹

Our strategic approach recognizes that we must lead abroad if we are to be secure at home. In the case of Colombia we must be willing to use all appropriate instruments of national power to influence the actions of other state and non-state actors. Latin American countries are reluctant and in many cases

unable, to act forcefully without American leadership. American leadership and engagement in South and Central America is vital for our security, and our nation.

The United States has a range of tools at its disposal with which to shape the international environment. The principal security concerns in the Western Hemisphere are transnational in nature, such as drug trafficking, organized crime, money laundering, illegal immigration, and terrorism. These threats produce adverse social effects that undermine the sovereignty, democracy and national security of nations in the hemisphere.

Protecting the United States from any threats to its survival as a nation remains the primary role of our military forces. In terms of the immediate physical destruction of the country, weapons of mass destruction is our primary threat. At the same time, threats like the illegal drugs coming out of Colombia that would destroy or undermine our economic viability, institutions, and values, while perhaps taking longer to have an effect, are ultimately as dangerous. Consequently, our military capabilities must also be able to assist in protecting the nation from threats such as drug trafficking.²⁰ "Protecting our citizens and critical infrastructures at home is an element of our strategy."²¹

Retired General Barry McCaffrey said Colombia may be experiencing a "worst-case scenario" in its war against the twin menace of narcotics traffickers and guerrilla organizations. But he dismissed the possibility of U.S. military intervention in South America. Only a few hundred U.S. military personnel are stationed in Colombia, none in combat roles. McCaffrey said there were no circumstances under which he would advocate an increased U.S. military presence there.

The US may be distracted and dismayed by events in the Balkans, but its interests are truly menaced by what's happening in Colombia. Yet the US has invested enormous amounts of diplomacy, prestige and military force in the Balkans despite far greater potential there for long-term engagement in what has turned out to be a big quagmire. Colombia is far more important to US national interests, overwhelmingly so in economic terms, than anything going on in the Balkans. The US does more business with Colombia each week than it does in a year with all of the countries that used to make up Yugoslavia.

McCaffrey has stressed the point that Colombian authorities have never asked the United States to increase its military presence. "They have been quite clear that only the police and the armed forces of Colombia have any role in directly applying the laws of Colombia on the ground." But Colombia has not made any significant progress in stopping the cultivation, processing and shipment of cocaine and heroine and It's not very difficult to figure out why. Before Barry McCaffrey became the National Drug Czar he commanded the U.S. Southern Command which had oversight over all of Latin America. He knows first hand that Colombian security forces in Colombia are undermanned and ill equipped. The wave of drug-fueled crime washing over Colombia means the security forces are stretched thin trying to provide "static security" to banks, bridges, radar stations and communication towers, They are hampered by a lack of mobility, he said, noting the security forces have only 150 helicopters to cover a country

larger than Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas combined. FARC battalions pay their young people \$400 to \$1,000 a month while the Colombian [army] conscript's get a couple of hundred bucks a month.

Even though Colombia has nearly 240,000 security forces to fight the two Marxist guerrilla groups (the 15,000-strong FARC and the 5,000 fighters of the ELN), the insurgent groups are well armed and flush with cash extorted from the drug barons. Coca production expanded in the last three years, raising hundreds of millions of dollars for the guerillas. Estimates range from \$215 million to \$1 billion per year that the guerrillas collect from drug activities, which gives them an advantage over the numerically superior security forces. Although a small number, the presence of an estimated 5,000 right-wing paramilitaries further complicates the security situation.

McCaffrey asserts that the FARC, the country's largest terrorist group, is a "narco-guerrilla" group. On the other hand, President Pastrana has been all over the map fighting insurgents and drug-producers in Colombia. Mr. Pastrana firmly stated, "I have always said and I repeat: I would never negotiate with narco-traffickers." At one point Pastrana argued that there is no evidence that the FARC are narco-traffickers." In a later statement he acknowledged "definitely there's a link with narco-trafficking" and the "guerillas and other violent groups." Mr. Pastrana then added, "If we defeat the narco-traffickers, we defeat the guerrillas."

Despite U.S. efforts to stem the flow of drugs and guns, the Marxist-led rebels are amassing a sophisticated arsenal from new sources in the former Soviet Bloc that is rapidly changing the balance civil war, officials say. The rebels' new firepower was put on public display late fall, when the FARC agreed to start the peace talks. Colombian and U.S. officials were stunned to see parading rebels carrying thousands of new AK-47 assault rifles, Dragunov sniper rifles, and other weapons from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Colombian, U.S. and Russian intelligence officials say that new weapons from Eastern Europe are surging into Colombia. Largely out of fear that the FARC is gaining the upper hand in conflict, the United States is rapidly escalating aid to the Colombian army. In addition to \$289 million in aid already committed for fiscal 1999, the Clinton administration is seeking a \$1.6 billion package over the next three years. There is an implicit recognition that Colombia's current situation has reached crisis proportions, with dire consequences for Colombian citizens, their government, neighboring nations, and the United States. While violence has been an important constant in Colombia's recent past, its increased tempo and scope since the early 1980s have edged Colombia toward a political abyss of civil war and the partial collapse of the state.²² The result, according to U.S. and Colombian officials is that the FARC and paramilitary groups organized to combat the guerillas have a secure arms pipeline. The rebel movement, which is conducting peace negotiations with the Colombian government, controls more than 40 percent of Colombian territory.

Colombian and U.S. officials also cited consistent intelligence reports that the FARC possesses SA-14 shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, although none has been captured. The use of such missiles, said one U.S. official, "would change the threat envelope considerably" for the U.S.-backed

military and the estimated 200 U.S. trainers who routinely rotate through Colombia around the country. In addition to the Eastern European weapons, the FARC has significantly upgraded its communications equipment, buying Japanese and European encryption technology, voice scramblers and other technology that makes interception to their communications almost impossible, Colombian and U.S. intelligence analysts say. The group also has a fleet of single-engine airplanes and several helicopters. In recent months the Colombian anti-drug police found a shipment of 480 new Ukrainian-made AK-47s near the Caribbean port of Turbo, an area controlled by the right-wing paramilitary groups. For most of its 40 years the FARC was a ragtag rural Marxist band relying on outdated weapons bought on the black market and from disbanded Central American insurgencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

There are no quick solutions to a problem that has plagued Colombia for many years. However, I offer the following as food for thought, as unpalatable as it may be to those who are unwilling to commit the military resources to get the job done.

It looks doubtful that the Colombian government will be able to bring the FARC and the ELN back to the negotiating table to work out a peace settlement in the near future. That's especially true since the FARC has vowed to return to the battlefield if the peace talks do not bring them to power and change the present system to a socialist state. According to Professor Caesar Sereseres, Colombia's guerrillas are dedicated to sustaining a status quo that allows them to operate a billion-dollar business in permissive zones behind a "democratic shield." For them, total victory would ironically spell defeat. His comments were partially supported by retired General Fred Woerner, who has been analyzing the issue of defeating guerrillas in Colombia since 1962. Woerner sees no possibility of defeating guerrillas and doesn't see why they would negotiate if the armed forces are ready to cease operations against them. Retired Ambassador David Passage agreed. In the current situation, he knew of "nothing that would hold out hope for successful peace negotiations with respect to minimal Colombian goals."

There is nothing in the current situation in Colombia to suggest that conditions exist for a viable negotiated peace between the FARC and/or ELN and the government. Caesar Sereseres believes the only way to get the FARC to the table is for the Colombian army to conduct a serious self-critique, to separate the guerrillas from the population, to link the battlefield to the negotiation process, to make the guerrilla infrastructure the primary target, and to "attrit" enough guerrillas to put the government in a good position to negotiate.

For these reasons the US must make it clear that our intentions are to severely limit US support to Colombia unless Colombia takes immediate action to cut off negotiations with any guerrilla organization that is in any way associated with drug traffickers. In Peru, President Fujimori beat both *Sendero Luminoso* and the MRTA (at least for the time being). In El Salvador and Guatemala, government forces gained sufficient strength to persuade the FMLN and URNG to negotiate peace agreements rather than be wiped out. Guerrilla forces in Colombia can be beaten as well but Pastrana is currently in no position to win. While their political support has been declining in the last decade, the insurgents constitute a

formidable military threat. Barry McCaffrey predicted that rather than trying to overthrow the Colombian government in Bogota, the guerillas and drug lords would be happy to be left to their own devices in the country side.

McCaffrey posed an excellent question, "do they really want to come into Bogota and rule, or are we seeing an enormous struggle over drug production and the money that comes from it?" Professor Marc Chernick of Georgetown University expressed the view that the conflict was not "winnable" through military means, and that a stalemate has arisen. The state cannot defeat the guerrillas, and the guerrillas cannot defeat the state. In his judgment, the only solution lay in a negotiated settlement that would be based upon a broad agenda. He suggested that the peace process could be used to achieve control of the drug trade by placing the issue of illicit crops on the negotiating table, especially since the continual conflict jeopardizes the success of alternative forms of development.

Also essential to the process is the dismantling of the paramilitaries. Paramilitary groups want the same recognition as the guerrillas but favor a nationally accepted political settlement, even as they practice extreme criminal measures to accomplish their goals. The compounding problem for the Colombian government is that the paramilitaries will not lay down arms before the guerrillas do the same. The paramilitaries are growing in strength and should be dealt with because they represent an alienated portion of the Colombian society. Many Colombian pundits believe that the paras must be included in the peace process. However, Daniel Garcia-Pena of the Woodrow Wilson Center questions whether it is feasible to include the guerrillas and the paramilitaries in the same negotiations, and suggests exploring a parallel process that would disarm and dismantle the paramilitaries. Minister of Defense Lloreda pointed out that only three representatives from the FARC were given the special legal status that will allow them to participate in negotiations.²³

Meantime, the war of attrition continues with the FARC and ELN slowly eroding Colombian government control over its national territory. Although the Colombian government is hurting from the relentless attacks of the guerrillas, it's nowhere near being decisively defeated. Neither the FARC nor the ELN are capable of seizing any major town and holding it for very long and there are no signs that the government nor the Colombian people are willing to surrender major elements of sovereignty for the sake of "bringing peace". On the other hand, there's no incentive for either the FARC or ELN to make concessions to the government. They continue to slowly enlarge the territory under their control; their losses are sustainable at current rates and they have the ability to reduce losses by reducing their activity. At present, the FARC is not strong enough to do more than increasingly embarrass government forces and their civilian leaders. However, if left unchecked the guerrillas could become strong enough to dictate conditions for a negotiated peace settlement that leaves the government empty handed. The bottom line is there is a necessary precondition for viable peace negotiations. The government of Colombia must transpose itself to make the FARC recognize that they are losing and that their best chance of avoiding total defeat is to return to the negotiating table to strike the best deal possible.

ALLIANCE OF THE AMERICAS

We need to recognize that this is not just a Colombian problem and that Colombia is only one piece of a larger problem. Once we stop drugs from flowing out of Colombia another hole in the damn will appear somewhere else. As stated earlier, Colombia's drug trade has already spilled over its borders into neighboring states. There is a fear that unless we do something soon the achievements we made in Peru and Bolivia will reverse.

As eloquently stated by former Ambassador Passage, "enough untruths have been spread about the effectiveness of the US national drug control strategy to warrant a couple of comments. At the level of national delusion, one would be hard-pressed to think of another subject where we, as a nation, have engaged in more self-deception or been subjected to more sustained deception by both US government officials responsible for conducting the "war on drugs" and Congressional advocates of even tougher (and more expensive, but likely equally futile) counternarcotics programs."²⁴

Colombian security forces are presently incapable of defeating the Guerrillas that provide protection to the narcotraffickers operating in the coca growing regions, source of two-thirds of Colombia's coca. Up until very recently, narco-guerrillas have achieved dominance of these regions because of serious shortfalls in training, force structure, leadership, intelligence, mobility, and communications in the Armed Forces and Police. The Armed Forces and Police have had a few encouraging successes against the FARC in 1999, which is largely due to the support provided by the U.S. Over the past five years the U.S. has helped the Colombian army develop a viable comprehensive strategy for dealing with the guerrillas and paramilitaries and restoring the government's control over its national territory.

We have trained the Colombian army on small unit combat and joint operations, including the national police, using army, air force and navy assets. We've also trained and equipped their forces on night combat operations. We've improved the collection, evaluation and dissemination of usable operational intelligence. We helped them develop quick reaction capabilities and created an airborne strike force to react rapidly to developing tactical situations and opportunities. We improved logistics supply and repair capabilities and spare parts inventory and improved transport capability and lift. With U.S. assistance, the Colombian army created a special Counternarcotics Battalion that will work in support of or in coordination with the CNP in their efforts to move counterdrug operations into the coca growing regions. The members of this unit have been carefully selected, fully vetted for human rights abuses, and are being trained and equipped with U.S. support. The Colombian Government has also reinvested in the isolated base at Tres Esquinas in southern Colombia to provide a center of counterdrug operations in the heart of the coca-growing region. Colombia's Joint Task Force – South is located there. Tres Esquinas will also soon be the site of the Colombian Joint Intelligence Center, which will bring together the counterdrug intelligence efforts of all the Colombian military forces and the CNP. Once the runway extension at Tres Esquinas has been completed to handle more types of aircraft, the Colombian

Air Force will be able to station additional aircraft there as required in support of police and military counterdrug operations.

The U.S. is training a Colombian Counterdrug Brigade to address the problem in Colombia. The U.S. should reconsider this strategy and broaden their operation by training an Allied Counterdrug Division capable of deploying anywhere in the Americas including the US. Many of the Latin American countries are not strong enough to take on the narco traffickers that operate within and around their countries, however, if the United States, working with the 34 democratic nations, were to jointly attack the problem we would have overwhelming success. The 34 democratic nations in the Americas and the Santiago Summit of the Americas have recognized that the lines demarcating source, transit, and consuming nations have become blurred as drug abuse and drug-production become a shared problem. If Colombia's counterdrug battalions were combined with Belize's rapid response force "Dragon Unit", Bolivia's "Diablos Rojos" response teams, Guatemala's PNC, Mexico's anti-drug units, Peru's anti-drug units, and other Latin American units, headed up by the U.S. special operations units, a quick reversal in drug cultivation, transit, and distribution would occur.

The counterdrug institutions required for successful hemispheric cooperation are beginning to be established. Many of the requisite multi-national mechanisms and processes are also in place or under development. The anti-drug action agenda signed during the 1994 Miami Summit of the Americas is being implemented. All members of the Organization of American States endorsed the 1995 Buenos Aires Communiqué on Money Laundering and the 1996 Hemispheric Anti-Drug Strategy. The hemisphere's thirty-four democratically elected heads of states agreed during the 1998 Summit of the Americas in Santiago, Chile to a Hemispheric Alliance Against Drugs. All nations agreed to broaden drug prevention efforts; cooperate in data collection and analysis, prosecutions, and extradition; establish or strengthen anti-money laundering units; and prevent the illicit diversion of chemical precursors. The centerpiece of the agreement is a commitment to create a multilateral evaluation mechanism (MEM) -- essentially, a hemispheric system of performance measurement. Now all we need to do is create a MCDF, multi-national counterdrug force.

The US needs to make clear that this is the America's war. Not just South or North America's, but all of the Americas and that it is going to be won - or lost - by the Americas. The US must not only be willing to train Latin American armed forces but to also participate in combat operations with Latin American armed forces. Our current US policy states, "US assistance to Colombia is strictly for counternarcotics purposes. We provide anti-drug assistance to the Colombian National Police and to those elements of the military, and only those elements of the military, which are directly involved in counternarcotics operations." When Congress recognized that US efforts to stamp out drug production in the producer countries was having little impact on supplies reaching the US market, we expanded counternarcotics cooperation with the Colombian government. First, we enlarged the number of Colombian entities eligible to receive training and equipment from just the counternarcotics police to other

units within the Colombian National Police. Then we added training for investigative units, then for judges and courts involved in prosecuting narcotics cases.

OVERCOMING THE VIETNAM SYNDROME

We need to finally get over the fact that our military strategy in Vietnam was seriously flawed and get on with fighting new battles in new ways. Learn from the past and don't make the same mistake twice. We need to recognize that this is a major campaign and commit the resources necessary to decisively win the engagement on the battlefield. Those who criticize proposals for US military assistance to Colombia make a basic charge that the US would risk starting down a slippery slope that could ultimately lead to our being trapped in a Vietnam-type civil war with similarly disastrous consequences.

One of the saddest results of America's involvement in Vietnam is how resistant we are to learning from it, how traumatized we remain by it, and how paralyzed our national decision-making process is by the specter, however implausible, that the US might get involved in another such experience.²⁵ There are a number of valid lessons to be learned from our national experience in Vietnam, but avoiding any efforts to positively influence the development of Latin American countries that are of importance to the US shouldn't be one of them.

SUPPLY VERSUS DEMAND:

The two major areas that the Strategy's five goals are designed to limit are the demand for drugs and the supply of drugs. It is only through a balanced array of demand reduction and supply reduction programs that we will be able to achieve a substantial reduction in drug use and availability and a major reduction in their consequences.²⁶ The aim is to cut drug availability in the United States by half over the next 10 years—and reduce the consequences of drug use and trafficking by 25 percent over the same period—through expanded prevention efforts, improved treatment programs, strengthened law enforcement and tougher interdiction.

It has to be both. We cannot reach our national goals unless we reduce the demand for drugs while simultaneously depleting the supply. However, I do believe that we must tip the scale towards the demand side of the house. If our society is not demanding illicit drugs, the availability is of little concern. Our ultimate success will require concerted efforts by the public, all levels of government and the private sector together with other governments, private groups and international organizations.²⁷ What performance measure should we use to validate our success? How will we know if this strategy is working? The only valid test of the effectiveness of our effort to stamp out the production and shipment of the stuff is its impact on street-corner availability of drugs within a 5-block radius of the average American middle school. And by all accounts, the stuff has never been more freely available, purer in quality, or cheaper in price within that 5-block radius.²⁸

Barry McCaffrey applauded 1999 Monitoring the Future (MTF) results that Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala released indicating favorable changes in youth attitudes and drug use. MTF, a major nationwide school-based study, annually reports drug use patterns and trends among 8th,

10th, and 12th graders. The survey revealed that significant improvements in attitudes occurred for the two primary drugs targeted by the Campaign. The study also marked the third year in a row that drug use rates have leveled or declined since their rapid rise in the early 1990's. The survey parallels other recent findings that state youth drug use is declining and attitudes against drugs are strengthening. Other studies conducted this year, including the HHS National Household Survey and Partnership for a Drug-Free America's Teen Partnership Attitude Tracking Survey, echo the positive results of MTF's study. MTF found that past year use of crack cocaine among 8th graders dropped 14%. Among 10th graders, the rate of past month use of crack dropped 27%.

McCaffrey stated that the findings were "extremely encouraging and serve as an indicator that the country's team effort and National Drug Strategy are working. "There has been little question that if we can convey to kids the dangers of drugs, they will tend to avoid them." The collective efforts of parents, teachers, coaches, ministers, and community coalitions all working together on the local and national levels are paying off. Through the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, we are now reaching youth and parents about seven times a week in 102 markets and in 11 languages." With 52,000 drug-related deaths annually, we cannot afford to relax our efforts in dealing with the drug problem. If we can prevent drug, tobacco, or alcohol abuse by a child through his or her teens, statistically speaking, that child will avoid chemical dependency as an adult. The positive results we've seen over the past year indicate that we are very much on the right track, but we must keep at it.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Despite the expenditure of in excess of \$250 billion over the past 20 years in an effort to halt the production and shipment of illicit narcotics to the US market, we've had little impact on the availability of cocaine or heroin in the US market. "As much of the stuff enters the US as is necessary to maintain dependable supplies at stable and affordable prices. Every change in patterns of usage (i.e., cocaine to heroin, &c) can be shown to be the result of changing consumer preferences - not changes in availability of supply."³⁰

The 2,500 people who comprise the CNP's Anti-Narcotics Division nationwide are brave and professional, but they are no match for the 20,000 FARC and ELN guerrillas, 6,000 paramilitary members, and hundreds of violent drug mafia criminals operating in Colombia. Tres Esquinas will serve as a point of departure for counterdrug operations, air interdiction of trafficker flights, and riverine patrolling but even a brigade of these soldiers will be no match for the jungle fighters of the FARC and the well organized and financed narco-traffickers. *The Washington Post* recently carried an article about Colombian Guerrillas who stormed a prison in El Bordo and freed 92 inmates. Two years ago FARC rebels stormed San Isidro Prison in Popayan and allowed 324 inmates to flee, many were FARC fighters. The FARC now holds about 350 Colombian national police and soldiers in jungle camps and are demanding the government release 400 guerrilla soldiers in exchange.³¹ Unless the GOC can contest guerrilla and paramilitary dominance in drug-producing regions, cultivation and production will continue to

expand, and the outlaw movements will continue to strengthen as a result of the enormous amounts of money generated by the drug trade.

I read an interesting article in the Philadelphia Inquirer which told a story of Pentagon planners having a recurring nightmare: It's October 2000, days before the US elections, and Colombia's Marxist guerrillas are storming the capital of Bogota –with heavy television coverage of guerrillas running through the streets as the US-supported government teeters on the brink of collapse.”³² Before this nightmare has a chance to turn into reality, the US, the only remaining superpower, must use its power and influence to build an alliance within the OAS to help resolve the crisis in Colombia. The alliance's principal goal should be that of bringing stability to Colombia and other Latin American Countries. The strategy of the alliance should focus on strengthening the government's capacity to develop and carry out social investment programs, alternative crop production, building badly needed infrastructure, ensuring protection of human rights, and resolving internal conflicts at the negotiating table and not on the battle field. Although as stated earlier, you will have to bring about certain conditions to make the parties want to come to the negotiating table.

Many Americans have narrowed U.S. options down to two choices as stated by a recent article in USA Today. The first choice, “commit United Nations or U.S. military forces to the cause of securing the country and eradicating the drug growers” or “buy up the entire Colombian drug production or crop. It might be cheaper and certainly would save American lives. I think we call this a farm subsidy.”³³

ENDNOTES

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