

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**COSTS OF THE WAR IN COLOMBIA:
A STRATEGIC VISION OF THE END OF THE CONFLICT**

by

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The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 18 MAR 2005		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED -	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Costs of the War in Colombia A Strategic Vision of the End of the Conflict				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Javier Leal				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, 17013-5050				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT See attached.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 29	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Col. Javier Fernandez Leal

TITLE: Costs of the War in Colombia: A Strategic Vision of the End of Conflict

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 18 March 2005 PAGES: 29 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This paper examines the nature of the Colombian conflict, the causes, the actors, the costs to nation, and the strategy that government of President Alvaro Uribe is pursuing to defeat the terrorists. The strategy of democratic security is designed to establish security, eliminate the causes of conflict, and establish a more just and prosperous society. To achieve this it will be essential to expand a public security forces and control territory.

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PREFACE

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

- President Dwight D. Eisenhower
April 16, 1953

Only if we are conscious of the diversity of the costs of war can we evaluate with a future perspective the major impact on politics and strategy. This paper analyzes the costs of 40 years of civil war. It proposes a way to end this painful struggle. Its data have been collected from news accounts and specialized studies. Although certain costs of war can be quantified and validated, the hidden psychological costs of war are inestimable, but real nonetheless.

The Colombian conflict generated a necessity for international cooperation and much more is needed in assistance. In November 2003, international aid had totaled only 1.4 billion dollars, of which 42% was received from the United States. This is a sad indictment of the rest of the world community and is a great detriment because of Colombia's own lack of sufficient internal resources to sustain necessary government policies and programs.

Since the end of the Cold War, many nations around the world have encountered transnational threats. Colombia then is not the only one in facing threats that jeopardize legitimate international business and banking systems and cause untold human suffering. The term "transnational" encompasses a phenomenon that cuts across national borders and one that is not directly controlled by the Colombian government. This includes terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking, smuggling of weapons and wide spread environmental degradation. Terrorist groups in Colombia, like other such groups, export their activities. So they constitute a global threat.

The background to Colombia's conflict is common to many Latin American nations; they evolved as highly stratified societies, divided between traditional rich families of Spanish descent and the vast majority of the poor, thus providing a natural constituency for insurgency. Violence may have grown out of social and political splits, but drug-trafficking and narcotics-related crimes have added to all of the countries, particularly Colombia's, volatile mix. Results of the current violence are more 35,000 people killed over the past decade, which is a cost studied more deeply in this paper.

Transnational organizations in Colombia have accrued the wealth and political power to extend their violence regionally and globally. Colombia's problems have become the world's

problems. Colombia wants to join the global community in winning the war on terrorism, which unfortunately for Colombia began as a domestic phenomenon.

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COSTS OF THE WAR IN COLOMBIA: A STRATEGIC VISION OF THE END OF CONFLICT

ORIGIN OF THE CONFLICT

Colombia's bloody period of La Violencia began in 1948,¹ international communism joined the conflict with the establishment in 1964 of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), an armed wing of the Colombian communist party. FARC still advocates a Marxist-Leninist platform of massive redistribution of land and wealth, state control of resources and industry, more government expenditures on social welfare and non military solution to the illegal drug problem. Similarly, the Cuban Revolution inspired the establishment of the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN) in 1966 advancing the same causes as FARC. These Communist groups slowly expanded throughout the 1980's, seeking to gain control of the Colombian government by all necessary means.

Since the 1980's, the conflict added a new actor and different phenomena. Self defense groups (AUC) were formed by drug-traffickers and landowners to combat insurgent kidnapping and extortion in support of drug cartels. Since then, both guerrillas and self defense groups have gradually eliminated and displaced drug traffickers, obtaining control of most of the illegal trade. Denied Soviet and Cuban financial support, these groups now are funded by income from cocaine and heroin business, which provides approximately half of the groups' annual 1.5 billion dollars income, a resource utilized to intensify their struggle. Another source of income is still nowadays kidnapping for random, representing almost the first income in the annual operational budget.

In the 1990's terrorism entered the scene and gave the illegal armed groups a potent psychological weapon to intimidate the populace. An extended number of atrocities such as kidnappings, murders, massacres, bombings, wholesale destruction of villages, explosions of pipelines,² energy towers and storage facilities. All of these were used by terrorists groups to control some regions. By 2002, terrorist groups (FARC – ELN) increased their numbers to nearly 20,000 members and the self defense groups (paramilitary) grew to 12,000. The impact affected security in the country, limiting the authority of the government to sustain control of some portions of the national territory and eroding its economy. The problems of violence and security in Colombia increased because the state lacked the necessary leadership and financial resources to initiate a strategy that addressed the political, economic, military and social dynamics of the conflict. In fact, the state had no comprehensive strategy to win the conflict.

EVOLUTION OF THE SITUATION

Faced with formidable destabilizing uprisings, some countries develop policies and strategies to counter the threat. Other countries may adopt social reforms to defuse the unrest. For fifty years, however, successions of Colombian governments have failed to devise strategies or adopt policies to eliminate the threat and stabilize the country. Indeed, many of their responses have served only to inflame the situation. The conflict imposed by FARC for more than forty years and after twenty years of dialogue between them and the government finally ended on 20 February 2002. That date marked the termination of a new peace process generated under the former government of President Andres Pastrana.

The above mentioned last attempt at peace lasted for three years and permitted the high and middle classes of Colombian society to more clearly realize how more complex and difficult it was to understand the conflict and to develop a solution. For many years, most Colombian citizens heard of the confrontation and the engagements so far away "in the Colombian mountains." The conflict did not represent a big challenge, did not affect the daily lives and did not seriously affect the economy and apparently posed no serious problems. However, the conflict grew in the rural backyard of urban Colombia. The homeland lived in a virtual nation and not in a real one. That is a major reason why Colombians as a nation did not really comprehend the roots of the conflict.

The Colombian elite no longer offer polite lip service to the peace process, they know the insurgents must be defeated once and for all. Almost magically, new President Alvaro Uribe has persuaded the nation to support a strategy for victory. Colombia will establish governmental infrastructure in remote coca – producing areas, establishing viable and reliable markets for legal products. Colombia will attract more private investment to support long-term, income-generating development. In short, Colombia will create viable social and economic alternatives to the drug trade, thereby denying the terrorists of critical funding.

Colombia will not repeat its failure to win the peace following its 1960's civil war. It will avoid the political factors that scuttled the initiatives of the 1960's National Committee of Rehabilitation. Specifically, it will not grant the prize of amnesty to leaders of the insurgency, freeing them to resume their dirty work the first opportune moment. To put an end to the war is fundamental. It is a necessary condition for a successful peace process and to rebuild the nation and improve conditions. It will note the recent example of El Salvador, where post-conflict violence (90 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) is nearly as intense as the violence of their civil war and almost double the current war time violence in Colombia. Winning the war in Colombia

will also mean ending the violence. And winning the peace is often more difficult than winning the war.

Colombia will make every effort to cut off the money flowing into its terrorist organizations. These funds purchase weapons and ammunition; they provide salary for personnel. They fund terrorist activities like bribery, blackmail, and bombings. An interdiction of their flow of money would greatly diminish their ability to sustain an armed agenda against the pressure by the legitimate military and would of course hopefully hasten their pursuit of a political solution.

It is important to examine the dispute between the FARC - ELN and the illegal self-defense groups (see figure 1) over coca growing areas. One explanation of this friction is that it is largely caused by the rapid expansion of each one's "territory" and thus the growing cultivation of coca by all parties.

YEAR	Cultivation of coca (Hectares)	Armed men FARC	Armed men AUC
1982	13,000	1,800	
1995	50,900	9,500	2,800
2002	102,000	16,900	12,000

FIGURE 1. ILLEGAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR RAPID EXPANSION

DEMOCRATIC SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY

President Uribe was sworn in as President in 2002. The enthusiastic support he received during the election process continued after his assumption of office and resulted in the immediate implementation by his government of a new "Democratic Security and Defense Policy." This policy was carefully designed as a direct response to the expressed desires of a majority of the electorate. It was executed as a national defense strategy under which the military forces designed a campaign plan to fit within the expressed military strategy of the President's administration.

The President's policy specifies objectives that guarantee the people's rights and neutralize the narco-terrorists groups:

- Consolidate state control throughout the nation, denying sanctuary to terrorists and violent insurgents;
- Protect all citizens through effective state presence and reduction of nationwide violence;

- Destroy the nation's illegal drug trade and the eliminate unlawful revenue used to finance terrorism and to generate corruption and crime;
- Build a sufficient military capability to deter insurgents and to sustain Colombia's emergent democracy.

President Uribe declared a "state of emergency"³ at the beginning of his administration; the Constitutional Court endorsed this presidential declaration. Funds were then allocated to strengthen Colombia's democratic institutions. The military modernization plan of the previous administration was adopted to enable Colombian armed forces to contain and eventually eliminate narco-terrorist violence and lawlessness. Under President Uribe's leadership, Colombia has begun to pursue his objectives, to fight back against the terrorists.

His initiatives immediately stimulated Colombia's economy: In 2003 the GDP grew by 3.7 % (It would be 4.06 % except for impacts of illegal coca cultivation). In the first quarter of 2004 the GDP grew by 3.82%. Major construction in 2003 increased by 11.61 %, then by 12.14 % in the first quarter of 2004. Private investment increased by 23.8 % in 2003, while exports increased by 7.9% and imports by 7.1 %. As a result of the economic growth Colombia added 1,241,218 new employees to the nation's payrolls in 2003.⁴ President Uribe's defense initiatives had an immediate positive effect on the nation's economy.

Supported by U.S. policies, Colombia has also dramatically eradicated coca crops and interdicted narcotics traffic. On 17 September 2004, Colombian Ambassador Dr. Luis A. Moreno,⁵ reported that "Colombia is on track to meet and surpass its goal of reducing the country's illegal coca crop by 50% from December 2000 levels within five years." Indeed, since the launching of Plan Colombia in January 2001 and through May of 2004, Colombian military and law enforcement agencies have interdicted 317 tons of cocaine with an estimated street value of U.S. \$9.5 billion. Seizures of cocaine were up 20% in 2003 and 50% in the first 5 months of 2004. One hundred and fourteen tons of cocaine were interdicted in 2003, a 20% increase from 2002. The seized cocaine had an estimated street value of US \$3.4 billion. Spraying operations have been targeted against illegal opium poppy crops. Likewise, in 2003 2,995 hectares of poppy cultivation were destroyed through aerial spraying and a significant number were manually destroyed. This effort removed approximately 9 metric tons of heroin destined for the U.S. market. During the first five months of 2004, 59,134 hectares of coca and 1,814 hectares of opium poppy were eradicated. 5,049 tons of cocaine was seized and 899 drug laboratories were destroyed.⁶ Clearly President Uribe's objective of eliminating the drug trade is being quickly and successfully implemented.

COSTS OF THE WAR TO THE NATION

Colombia's remarkable economic recovery, with its 9% increase in gross domestic product and with substantial gains in employment, has been an immediate reward from its Democratic Security Policy. Even so, Colombia's foreign debt left over from the Pastrana administration is equal to 52% of the GDP (US \$42 billion). To continue to sustain its war, Colombia needs to invest immediately an estimated 4.8 billion pesos (an increase of 1.9 % to 4.4 % of the GDP) in its military; 650 billion pesos (USD \$260 millions) in prison facilities for terrorists; 46 billion pesos (USD \$ 40 millions) in social security.

Of course, the actual costs of war are unpredictable and uncertain. The *El Colombiano* newspaper reported on 3 March 2002 that the daily cost of war was \$46,000 million pesos (USD \$18.4 millions). That same day the *El Espectador* newspaper reported that for the period 21 February to 2 March 2002 the war had cost \$300 million pesos (USD \$120 million). The war in Colombia cost to the state \$4,800 millions of dollars;⁷ this is the equivalent of 116 % of the national budget of health (USD \$ 4,113 Millions) and the 125 % of the budget in education (USD \$ 3,774 millions).

The government has sought to generate new revenues to combat terrorism. It declared a 1.2 % "security tax" on assets exceeding USD \$50,000, while raising taxes on higher income earners and corporations. These new revenues produced an additional USD\$285 million, which was used to increase Colombian forces by 6,000 new elite soldiers, to hire 10,000 new police officers and to pay 200,000 informants. The Ministry of Finance has raised USD \$232 million to pay for the war, surpassing governmental estimates of new revenues.

President Uribe has committed the Colombian government to increase defense expenditures from the current level of 4.8% of GDP to 6% of GDP by 2006. The objective is to increase the public security forces from 250,000 (150,000 military + 100,000 police) to 350,000 over the next two years. Figure 2 graphically depicts Colombia's increasing defense expenditures from 1990 to 2005.

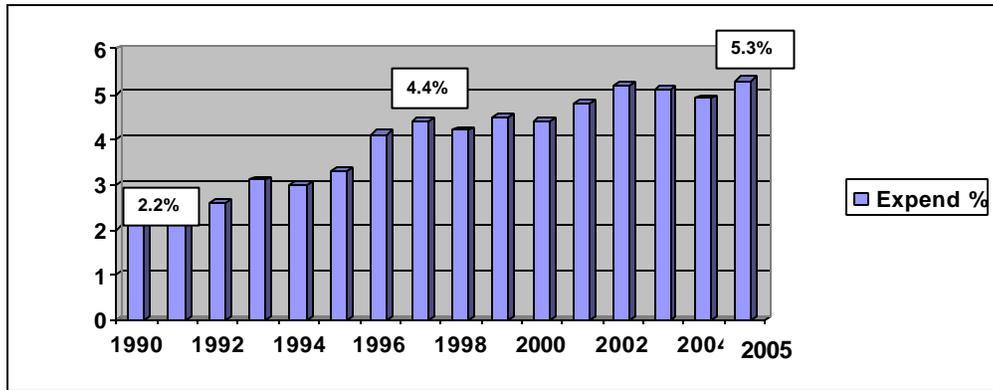


FIGURE 2. EXPENDITURE IN DEFENSE AND SECURITY IN % GDP 1990 - 2005

Colombia's economy is very fragile, so these increasing defense expenditures stress the national budget. The nation remains beset by poverty and the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. So increases in defense expenditures meet with constant criticism and resistance from social reformers. And the hard truth is that, despite on-going increases in defense spending, Colombia still is not allocating sufficient funds to win the war.

Compare the regional countries like Chile, Ecuador and Peru, Colombia's development is consistent with regional standards. However Colombia's security problems present a burden that the rest of the region does not have to bear⁸. Figure 3 graphically depicts the regional defense expenditures. Clearly, Colombia's war puts the nation at an economic disadvantage.

Country	Expenditure GDP %	Number Armed Forces /100.000 population
Chile	4,1 %	485
Colombia	4,8 %	475
Ecuador	3,0 %	454
Peru	1,6 %	377

FIGURE 3. COMPARATIVE CHART OF MILITARY EXPENDITURE VS SECURITY FORCES

COSTS OF WAR TO THE TERRORISTS

Terrorists traditionally obtain operational funds from such criminal activities as kidnapping, extortion, bank robberies, and protection taxes from coca and poppy growers and other illegal business. But cartels have extended the financial opportunities to the realm of international illicit commerce. The global demand for cocaine and heroine has enabled cartel terrorists to control a lucrative illegal industry that grows, processes, transports, and sells its products globally - all the while circumventing regulatory tariffs and other expenses of doing such business. In short, cartels have greatly expanded terrorists' ability to generate funds.

Colombia's National Planning Office Studies estimates that FARC's annual income approaches USD \$567 million. Likewise, Investigator Paul Collier estimates a higher income of USD \$700 million. In an article in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*, Guy Sorman reports that FARC yields an armed force of 30,000 personnel. He reports that FARC's total annual income approaches USD \$1.5 billion annually – 2/3s from drug trade and 1/3 from kidnapping and extortions. A diverse group of analysts contend that the Self Defense Groups have 8,000 armed personnel. For this reason, sustaining the war for any of the actors could be a serious financial problem and these statistics indicate that Colombia faces a strong, well-armed, well-resourced adversary.

Even so, recent governmental initiatives are weakening the enemy. The drastic reduction in the number of kidnappings, the loss of income previously obtained in the productive departments like Arauca, Putumayo (South Colombia) which have been restored to governmental control and the significant reduction of the planting of coca have greatly decreased the finances of all of the terrorist organizations. Reports from recovered kidnapping victims indicate that the terrorists are suffering heavy casualties (up to 20 %) and that they are desperate, demoralized, and hungry. President Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy is paying big dividends. Colombia is positioned to win this war on terrorism.

When the terrorists are defeated the Colombian government can compile in one sum and make available for peaceful purposes more than USD \$100 million annually to solving many social problems and to develop its economy.

OTHER COSTS OF THE WAR

It is also necessary to consider other costs incurred in the conflict. An analysis of those costs will provide an additional guideline in efforts to provide a solution, one must keep in mind how important it is for Colombians to understand how the conflict started, continues and hopefully, will soon end to ensure that the peace is permanent.

HUMANITARIAN COSTS

Statistics do not adequately convey the human costs of the war – the number of dead, of wounded, of maimed, of displaced, of refugees. In the past decade, more than two million Colombians have been displaced, especially farmers and minorities. Many have fled to countries like Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama. Annually from 1996 to 2002, 200,000 people left Colombia⁹, more than 87,000 of them formally applying for refugee status. Many were victims of torture. The violent practices by the insurgents continue and death is only the maximum horror. During 2003, terrorist organizations killed 105 individuals of the indigenous population. The UN reports that 12 Indian towns are near extinction. Over 816 large and small municipalities of a grand total are 1,097 in the nation have received displaced persons.

However, recent governmental initiatives have also reversed these distressing humanitarian costs. Police forces have been restored to 158 municipalities that lacked them in 2,002. Homicides, massacres and assaults have been reduced a 20.2 % reduction in homicides in 2,003. Then there have been 1,292 fewer homicides in the first half of 2,004 than occurred in the first six months of 2,003. 26.3 % fewer people were kidnapped in 2,003 than in 2,002. The trend continued into 2,004, when only 764 kidnappings were reported, compared to 1,262 reported during the same period in 2,003 a reduction of 39.5%.¹⁰ Colombia is working hard to reduce the terrible humanitarian costs of this war.

MATERIAL AND ECONOMIC COSTS

The war has severely crippled Colombia's tourism industry. Tourist spending has been lost, and Colombia's image as a scenic, adventurous travel site has been tarnished. In 2,002, Princess Cruise Lines declared Colombia a dangerous place, and 19 tourist cruise visits to Cartagena were cancelled.

As a result of the conflict, unemployment during the last decade has almost reached 20% in the seven major cities of the nation. Likewise, over 29 million Colombian languish in poverty. Displacements and injuries from the war contribute to these problems.

Colombia's traditional agribusiness has likewise suffered. In the past decade, 1.7 million hectares of farms and orchards have been abandoned. The costs of unattended soil, lost homes, lost crops, and lost equipment are inestimable. Funds from foreign countries and domestic investments have adversely affected investment during the last ten years as a result of narcoterrorism.

These distressing trends were also reversed in 2,003 when the national economy grew by 3.7 %, nearly three-quarters of a million Colombians benefited from new and restored water and

sewage services, when public services improved 89% about 2002 levels. By 2006, 98 % of the population will receive adequate services. In 2003, 341 solidarity industries were built, exceeding the goal by 136 % in the first half of 2004.

Santiago Montenegro, Director of Dirección Nacional de Planeación (DNP)¹¹, proclaimed "The Government goal is to achieve a 3.8% increase in GDP in 2004, but we hope to exceed that goal." Accordingly, buoyed by initial economic success, President Uribe encouraged economic institutions to achieve a 5 % increase in Colombia's GDP for 2004.

Economic sabotage has expanded in the past few years with the aim of expanding the fiscal deficit and preventing the state from maintaining or increasing its military expending. Infrastructures have been destroyed by terrorist groups. In 2002, 22 bridges were objective of terrorist attacks and their rebuilding will cost more than USD \$44 million.¹² The country lost approximately USD \$ 470 million as a consequence of attacks against the national infrastructure. Other structures such as energy towers and oil pipelines which suffered terrorist attacks also will have to be reconstructed.¹³

ECOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS

Destruction of Colombia's environment is both a national and global concern. Colombia's tropical forests, especially in the Amazon River Basin, have been destroyed to grow coca and to conceal laboratories. Restoration of the environment will require extensive support of the United States and the world community, eradication of coca farms has caused virtual ecocide in the regions where the fumigation is an important part of the anti-narcotics war (Plan Colombia)¹⁴ like Putumayo, Guaviare, Caquetá, Nariño, Tolima, Sur de Bolivar, Norte de Santander, Boyacá and Antioquia, These regions of south Colombia have been described as the "Lungs of the World." The peasant association estimates that for every acre of coca sprayed, from one to four acres of food producing crops are adversely affected. Innocent Colombian peasants have paid a big price for the eradication programs sponsored by Plan Colombia.

Drug crop cultivation is also environmentally costly. Crops of coca, opium poppies, and marijuana have replaced native vegetation in an area surpassing 1 million hectares, often in protected areas such as species-rich rain forests and erosion-prone cloud forests. Additional environmental damage ensues from the cultivation and processing of these crops, which involves large volumes of pesticides, fertilizers, and toxic processing chemicals that end up being washed or dumped into rivers.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to quantify the damage from drug crop eradication efforts because of the violence surrounding drug production. The Andean region is in danger of severe

tropical deforestation, and watershed pollution clearly occurs and the consequences on the variety of soils, hydrology, and biodiversity are often devastating and may delay the introduction of substitute crops for years. Growers of drug crops are located in the Colombian mountains or in remote tropical forest. Thin soils and limited access to such areas generally discourage the farming of legitimate crops. To clear the way for drug crops, forests are cleared and burned before planting coca. The fields are often abandoned for three growing seasons with the purpose of concealment from authorities. This practice accelerates deforestation, and destroys timber and other resources of forestland. The expansion of coca cultivation, production, and trafficking in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia has resulted in the destruction of, at an absolute minimum, 2.4 million hectares of fragile tropical forest in the areas.

The United States Agency for International Development has implemented alternative crops programs to provide economic and social alternatives to coca farms. However, these alternative programs are small and localized. They are not sufficient to address the damage of eradication or to effect widespread restoration of the environment or the traditional agrarian society. Figure 4 graphically depicts the emphasis from crop substitution to more indirect forms of alternative development.

Agency performance indicators	Accomplished as of December 31, 2003	Program targets through 2005	Percentage of target accomplished
Hectares of illicit crops eradicated	21,838	20,000	109
Hectares of licit crops cultivated	43,951	65,042	68
Families benefited	33,399	80,000	42
Small infrastructure projects	647	610	106

FIGURE 4. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS, FISCAL YEAR 2000 – 2005¹⁵

Plan Colombia's main purpose is to strongly support the military and police because these are the basis and defenders of a democratic society. The other really important element is the Andean Trade Preferences Act which is not aid but trade, which benefits every country. Examples of alternative development programs that have been very effective are: Over 45,000

hectares of legal crops developed since 2000; 835 infrastructure projects since 2001, including: 90 schools; 40 new water systems and 80 new municipal buildings.¹⁶

Terrorists have planted thousands of antipersonnel mines throughout the coca - region to discourage intervention into their illegal activities. Hundreds of peasants including many children are killed and maimed by these malicious devices.¹⁷ The non-conventional mines installed by terrorists groups have reached and affected the 40 % of the national territory. The office of the presidency said that in 411 municipalities belonging to 30 – 32 departments these artifacts have been detected. The Army said that between 1990 and 2002 Colombia at least of 1,800 events generated by explosive artifacts produced victims.

The percentage of soldiers and policemen killed in action by non-conventional mines in 2004 has showed an increment: One soldier of three dead and one of two wounded have fallen victims to improvised explosives. Between 1990 and 2004 there were registered 2825 victims of explosive artifacts, that means over 36 % belongs to the civilian population and a higher number of them are children. Making an explosive artifact for the terrorist costs approximately between USD \$ 5 to 10; to the government dismantling and repair damages caused to the military and civilians costs more than USD \$ 15,000 per person.

Although the studies do not distinguish between combatants or not combatants when they are they in hostilities or not, the human rights principles protect soldiers when they are at rest, leave, vacation, or in prisoner status after combat. Since 1997 at least 225 members of the Armed Forces in civilian clothes unarmed have died. These actions were during break periods, leaves or vacations. The Army has lost only 205 members killed as in defensive situations.

SOCIAL COSTS

The war has left many orphans as well as many women as heads of their families. Many have been deprived of their human rights and basic dignity. Colonist farmers, black communities, and indigenous people are largely patriarchal groups. The orphans caused by the war have increased and there are many women that are now head of the families because of the death or capture of their spouses in the war. Victims of human rights abuses and dignity are spread all over the territory and these costs are difficult to count. Those are examples of new social problems this government must face in the next two years and explains why between four and five million Colombians live in other parts of the world.¹⁸

To win the peace, Colombia's government must provide sufficient resources to restore these traditional subcultures. From August 2002 through July 2004 750,000 new scholarships were awarded to this population to launch an educational revolution, which will enable them to

recover from the ravages of the war. The government plans to double the number of scholarships by 2006. Likewise, 192 libraries have been provided for poor rural Colombian communities.

CULTURAL COSTS

Displaced persons tend to lose their cultural heritage. Whereas traditional cultures instill the values of peace, hard work, and family, displaced persons lose these values and become cynical and alienated. They are caught in the crossfire of the terrorist who displaced them and the mainstream culture that regards them as an unwanted burden. Unprepared to work in modern societies, they turn to the public welfare system for survival. Colombia's expenditures on social services have increased in the past three years by USD \$ 2 billion.

Whereas the war disrupts and destroys traditional cultures, it corrupts mainstream society at the highest levels. For example, In January 2000 the wife of the U.S. Military Commander in Bogotá pleaded guilty to cocaine trafficking. The reality is that drug traffickers will work with anyone to advance their interests.

The background of Colombia's conflict is common to many Latin American nations which evolved as highly stratified societies, split between the traditional rich families of Spanish descent and the vast majority of poor Colombians. This provided a natural constituency for insurgency. Violence may have grown out of social and political splits, but drug–trafficking and drug–related crimes have added to Colombia's volatile mix. Results of the violence are 35,000 people murdered over the past decade.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS

All armed conflicts exert unfortunate psychological pressures on combatants, innocent victims, and their families. Some become unpredictably violent; others become clinically depressed; others become dysfunctional in their families and workplaces; some are traumatized by torture. The forcible recruitment of young people by terrorists groups, including self defense groups, violates their normal development and virtually destroys their human worth. It is calculated that more that 40% of the members of terrorist groups are minors of 15 years old (or less).

Every year the amount of soldiers and policemen affected by the war has increased, that shows how the conflict has climbed in terms of violence and how difficult it is to sustain this heavy loss for families of every member of the Armed Forces who is fighting against this transnational enemy. Figure 4 shows the increments of how many were affected they are between 2000 through 2003.

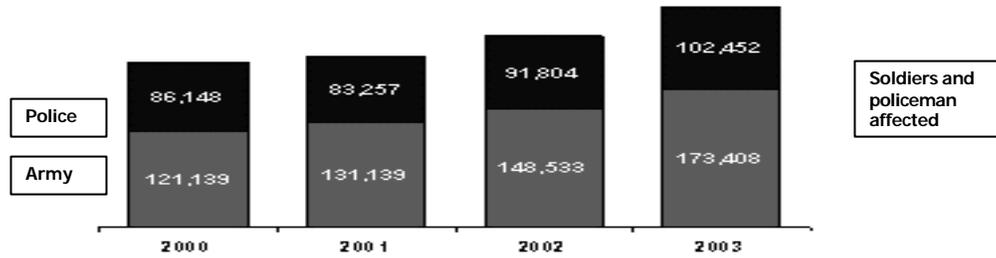


FIGURE 5. ARMED FORCES MEMBERS AFFECTED BY THE CONFLICT

SPIRITUAL COSTS

The spiritual losses are also considerable and include change of values, loss of the sense of life, sentiments of insanity, lost confidence in anyone and all places, desperation in a war that doesn't permit one to escape, vengeance, abhorrence of society, and mourning after the dead of relatives and friends. These are very heavy emotional and spiritual losses of catastrophic dimensions where many people feel lost and abandoned.

THE STRATEGIC WEAKNESS OF ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS IN COLOMBIA

The Colombian's abhorrence of the war between government forces and the various narcoterrorists groups, which has been raging throughout the country for more than forty years and has created a long period of instability, has reached its peak! The time of the "heroic guerrillero" is about to end. The concept of the poor downtrodden hero gallantly fighting oppression was for many years held up as the banner and recruiting incentive for guerrilla groups throughout Latin America. The current international context is strongly unfavorable to these illegal armed groups. The climate now is one of "no tolerance" toward violence, particularly after the attacks of 9/11 on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. The world at large, led by the U.S. Global War on Terrorism, is determined to rid the world of this wanton, chaotic violence. This has helped to shape world opinion and to designate the FARC, ELN and the other illegal so-called "self defense groups" in Colombia as the most wanted narcoterrorist groups in the international arena. The fallacy of the use of violence as a mechanism to obtain power has been amply demonstrated.

Daily, the strategic weaknesses of FARC and ELN are more evident. The insurgent groups have lost important leaders, enormous sections of territory which had been for many years under their control as well as many strategic corridors in other parts of the country. In the

last two years alone, more than four thousand of their members surrendered and have since been reinstated in Colombian society.

The significant efforts of the Colombian administration and their armed forces have tilted the balance of power more favorably toward the state and weakened the strategic posture of these illegal armed groups. The military institutions and the police have been reinforced and strengthened, thanks in large part to the deep financial sacrifices of the Colombian state as well as the polemic “Plan Colombia”.¹⁹

Recently in a meeting of regional Interpol delegates in Cartagena, one of their conclusions was described as “designed to identify active terrorist groups and their membership in specific regions, to solicit, collect and share information and intelligence, provide analytical support, and enhance the capacity of member countries to address the threats of terrorism and organized crime.” At the end of this, Jorge Noguera (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad)²⁰ said that the pressure exerted by the military, principally through Plan Patriota,²¹ has forced that terrorist group to “fall back” on other countries. “The FARC,” he said, “has gone through Argentina, Chile, Central America and other countries, where we have detected its presence through spokesmen or others who act as their representatives.” The director of the DAS said that the representatives of many countries present at the meeting had concluded that the FARC had become Latin America's “enemy number one.” He cited the delegates of Germany, Austria, Chile and Peru, indicated that in their countries there are FARC representatives engaging in a “diplomatic offensive.” That is a palpable declaration of its strategic weakness in Colombia but is the future threat for all Latin American Countries.

IMPACT OF THE GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

According to this analysis, if the FARC came out of its hidden places to engage they would find a military force much different than 1998. Another important result has been the construction of secure jails and a restructuring of the INPEC (National Jail system).²² The jails now are not rest areas or brief vacations for the captured terrorist.

The FARC organization has lost a number of combatants as well as high and middle level commanders, which are more difficult to replace. The terrorists have lost territorial control. Its attempt to urbanize the conflict resulted in some terrorist acts which had not broken the will of Colombia and its resolution to eliminate them. If the FARC continue with their strategic withdrawal, this will be very costly for it and its membership. Past experience indicates that recovery of lost territories is not an easy task. The Government little by little is recovering Arauca, Meta, Putumayo, Caquetá and Guaviare, zones highly dominated by terrorist groups.

The most important forces of the FARC have been obligated to withdraw to other zones more inhospitable and less strategically important.

Colombia, with strong support from the United States, basically eliminated the narcotic cartels in the mid 1990's. The leaders were captured and prosecuted. But this phenomenon has not affected the high unemployment rate and the superficial economy created by the drug renaissance and increasing coca production. Now Colombia is the world's leader in coca growth and in the supply of cocaine to world markets.

Initially, U.S. aid to Colombia was directed only to the detection and suppression of narcotics and not to counter-insurgency operations. The Colombian Army could not utilize this aid, particularly the UH-1N and UH-60L helicopters, in their struggle against FARC-ELN or the United Self-Defense Groups. Subsequently, the U.S. realized the true dangers of the terrorist guerrilla groups and that there was little difference between them and the narcotic traffickers. Restrictions on the use of U.S. aid have now been largely lifted.

Neighboring countries have criticized the plan as they envision the war in Colombia spreading across their borders, but they do not realize that during 40 years of conflict this enemy is no more a political armed insurgency or a largely communist organization that sought control of the government. As they grew in strength and capability in a symbiotic relationship with narcotics traffickers they increased their presence in the international drug trade and also became a transnational movement somewhat integrated with inactive and passive governments. A major risk for Colombian society comes from President Chavez of Venezuela who still affirms that Colombian guerrillas are not terrorists,²³ and refuses to use his air force to prevent against illegal aircraft crossing Venezuelan air space. This disciple of Fidel Castro²⁴ consolidated now in his country, could be giving a secure withdrawal zone to the Colombian terrorists in his territory and could also finance them. This is occurring with other movements in Bolivia and Ecuador with an obvious interest in supporting a controversial entity called "Bolivarian Revolution" composed of South American Indian groups and/or left wing movements from neighboring countries.

CONCLUSION

The Colombian problem is essentially political or cultural and the use of the military instrument alone therefore insufficient. Popular, plausible theories signal economic disparities, political inequities and cultural anachronism as the root causes of conflict.

There are many quantified costs; others are very difficult to measure in the actual circumstances of the country. But future generations will remember all that Colombians paid for,

with many mistakes along the way. It built a society more tolerant, creative and just. No compensation to the people could be accepted as valid in view of the destruction caused by the terrorists even after President Uribe had extended his hands as a signal to all groups and offered a new opportunity to the dissidents to be reinstated in society.

The Colombian government, with U.S. assistance, has already accomplished a great deal to reverse the country's decline – much of it attributed to violence fuelled by the drug trade. It has prepared conditions for an eventual, negotiated settlement with the armed illegal groups. The danger is necessary to analyze, the progress won for the state and society only could be lost if the political support of the terrorist make people convinced that Colombia must adopt a pacifist and conciliatory policy again.

The international community, including of course the United States, must understand how important the success of Plan Colombia is for the actual survival of the nation and possibly that of the region. Colombia has achieved numerous successful results and continued progress in its battle against narco-terrorism.

WORD COUNT=5,876

ENDNOTES

¹ The Violence began in the middle of 1940's, between both parties Liberals and Conservatives, during which Jorge Eliecer Gaitán was assassinated.

² Occidental Petroleum Company, known colloquially as "Oxy". The United States is training and equipping a Colombian army brigade to protect Oxy's 480 – mile pipeline linking the oil fields of Arauca, where the heart of Oxy's operations is.

³ President Uribe declared: "state of emergency" in response of the people's repressed desire for peace and stability which was endorsed by Colombia's Constitutional Court.

⁴ "Conference Toward a Communitarian State" document displayed by Colombian Embassy in Washington D.C. on 17 September 2004.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Dr Luis A. Moreno, statistics provided at the United Nations New York, on 17 September 2004.

⁷ Doctora Martha Lucía Ramirez, former Minister of Defense, when she presented a document of defense and security policy in the 2002-2003 meeting of ANIF(Asociación Nacional de Instituciones Financieras) in Bogotá, 12 August 2002.

⁸ Andres Villamizar & German Espejo, "El Gasto en Seguridad y Defensa en Colombia: De la Contención a la Ofensiva", Fundación Seguridad y Democracia. Available from: www.seguridadydemocracia.org. Bogotá, Colombia, January 2005.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ "Conference Toward a Communitarian State" document displayed by Colombian Embassy in Washington D.C. on 16 September 2004.

¹¹ DNP (Dirección Nacional de Planeación) State Organism in charge of planning and development programs to pursue the government's goals.

¹² Inviás (Instituto Nacional de Vías) institution created in 1994 with the objective to execute the politics and projects related by Colombian infrastructure. Available from www.invias.com.co,

¹³ According with Oxy pipeline Cano Limón – Coveñas has been object of terrorist attacks in 1,020 occasions through history of pipeline since 1986.

¹⁴ Plan Colombia: The US-Colombia partnership against drugs has gained a lot of success; the cultivation of coca has declined from 163,289 hectares in 2000 to 102,071 at the end of 2002, a reduction of 37 %. Dr Luis A. Moreno, statistics through the United Nations, New York 17 September, 2004.

¹⁵ Table 3, Alternative Development Goals and Accomplishments, Fiscal Years 2000-2005, GAO report to the honorable Charles E. Grassley, Caucus on international Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate. Washington ,July 2004.

¹⁶ "U.S. Department of State, "Presidential Determination of Major Illicit Drug-Producing and Drug-Transit Countries (Colombia)," Washington, D.C. , 21 September 2004.

¹⁷ In areas significantly affected by terrorists groups who indiscriminately have put those destructive devices supposedly against the troops, but many farmers and animals have fallen in this arbitrary procedure. *Colombian Army Review*, Bogotá, 13 September 2003.

¹⁸ Four to five million Colombians are living in the exterior of Colombia because of violence according to the External Relations Ministry of Colombia. Bogotá, 17 December 2003.

¹⁹ Plan designed by the former governments of US and Colombia, to deal with the complex crisis that illegal organizations deeply involved in drug trade and terrorism have produce in Colombia. This plan is not a military effort, is also a social and political strategy to recover government presence in isolated territories and integrate them with the rest of the nation

²⁰ Speech of Jorge Noguera, Director of Colombia's Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS, investigative police) Bogotá, 19 March 2004.

²¹ "Plan Patriota" is a strategic plan designed by Colombian Military Armed Forces to control vast quantity of territory at southern part of the country, to recover the rule of law and eliminate the will to fight of the narcoterrorist organizations in those areas far from being part of the Colombian dream.

²² INPEC (Instituto Nacional Penitenciario) available in www.inpec.gov.co, main page, 13 January 2005.

²³ "Chavez says Colombian Guerrillas Not Terrorist," EFE News ,Spain (29 September 2001), in Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey B. Demarest, "Colombia - A Terrorist Sanctuary,?" *Military Review*, March/April 2002, p. 25.

²⁴ Fidel Castro is the last bastion of Communism in the Caribbean region, a tyrant who brutally oppresses the Cuban people. Castro born August 13, 1926, has ruled Cuba since 1959, when the 26th of July Movement, helped overthrow the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and turn Cuba into the first socialist state in the Western Hemisphere.

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