



Backgroundunder

Executive Summary

No. 1264

March 25, 1999

TREAD CAUTIOUSLY IN COLOMBIA'S CIVIL WAR

JOHN P. SWEENEY

After six years of ignoring the growing connection between Colombia's drug traffickers and Marxist rebels bent on toppling the country's democratically elected government, President Bill Clinton has decided to increase U.S. military aid to Colombia to step up efforts in the war on drugs. He also is backing a questionable peace plan proposed by newly elected Colombian President Andres Pastrana to negotiate with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), two Marxist guerrilla organizations that have battled the Colombian state for over three decades.

Pastrana maintains that after a peace pact is signed, the rebels will help the government fight its war on drugs. If Pastrana's initiative fails, his only options will be to surrender nearly half of Colombia to the over 20,000 well-armed FARC and ELN insurgents or to order the Colombian army to try to defeat them in battle. But U.S. defense experts estimate that it will take at least two years to train, equip, and field a modern professional Colombian army capable of defeating rebel units of between 300 and 1,000 guerrillas.

In January 1999, moreover, the FARC announced that all U.S. military and law enforcement personnel in Colombia would be considered legitimate targets to be killed or captured. Before

endorsing the Administration's decision to increase U.S. military involvement in Colombia, Congress must know how the Administration will react if the peace talks break down.

President Clinton's priorities in sending additional military aid to Colombia are unclear. Will the increased military aid be used to fight drug traffickers, or will some of it be spent training Colombian army forces to battle the rebels, who earn close to \$1 billion from drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, and other crimes each year? What measures will the Administration take if Pastrana's peace talks fail and the civil war becomes more violent? Would the President propose sending U.S. soldiers to Colombia to help keep the peace, as he has done in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia?

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The peace talks opened officially on January 7, 1999, but promptly stalled because the rebels believe they have the upper hand, both politically

and militarily. Even if Pastrana succeeds in negotiating peace, the illegal drug trade will not be affected. Cocaine and heroin are Colombia's largest export products, ahead of coffee and petroleum, and account for between 5 percent and 7 percent of the country's annual gross domestic product. If, as part of the agreement, the rebel organizations do crack down on the illegal drug trade in the areas they control, the drug traffickers will simply move their operations elsewhere.

In December 1998, the Clinton Administration acknowledged that U.S. policy in Colombia is being set by default. This is an alarming admission, given President Clinton's decision to increase U.S. military aid—including sending additional military advisers into a country where over 200 American military personnel already are stationed. Before agreeing to the President's plan, Congress should ensure that the Administration's policy is based on a clear strategy that spells out objectives and limitations so that U.S. soldiers are not sucked by default into Colombia's civil war. Specifically, Congress should:

- **Initiate a thorough review of U.S. drug policy in Latin America.** Before considering any further increases in U.S. anti-drug aid to Latin American law enforcement and military forces, Congress should ascertain whether this aid is being used properly and effectively.
- **Abolish the annual drug certification process.** Certification has become a pointless annual exercise that compresses the national drug policy debate to three or four weeks a year and poisons relations with America's most important Latin American allies and trading partners.
- **Set clear limits on U.S. military aid to Colombia.** Congress should ensure that no U.S. soldiers participate in battles between the Colombian army and drug-trafficking rebels.
- **Manage the drug-related insurgency as a law enforcement problem.** The FARC and ELN rebels are involved in drug trafficking and should be treated as organized criminals who

are an integral part of the drug threat facing the Western Hemisphere.

- **Implement a serious anti-drug assistance program with Colombia.** In demanding better results from the Colombian government, the U.S. Administration failed to provide sufficient material support, seriously undermining the anti-drug efforts of Colombian law enforcement and indirectly helping the rebels gain the upper hand in combat.
- **Agree to help train and equip a professional Colombian army.** A civil war in Colombia can threaten U.S. interests in Latin America, but it can be resolved only by the Colombians. The United States should help the democratically elected government field a modern, professional Colombian army that can defeat the rebels in combat.
- **Seek a multilateral approach to managing the Colombian crisis.** Any unilateral increase in military aid to Colombia without a counterbalancing multilateral approach that involves key Latin American countries would be repudiated as U.S. imperialism. A multilateral approach should include the participation of the Organization of American States, especially in monitoring reported human rights abuses in Colombia.

Helping Colombia end its civil war and eradicate illegal drugs is clearly in the United States' national interest, but the Clinton Administration should tread cautiously in escalating U.S. military involvement in Colombia. The President and Congress would be wise to remember that America's involvement in Vietnam began with a few dozen U.S. military advisers and a small financial investment. If the limits of U.S. military involvement in Colombia are not spelled out clearly at the outset, the risk is great that significant numbers of U.S. soldiers could be sucked by default into the Colombian quagmire.

—John P. Sweeney is Latin America Policy Analyst in The Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis International Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.



Backgrounder

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JOHN P. SWEENEY

The marriage of communist insurgency and drug trafficking in Colombia, the world's largest producer of coca leaf and cocaine, has elevated a decades-old civil conflict into a dangerous war that now threatens stability in Latin America. It also endangers vital U.S. interests in the region, including the war on drugs.

Colombia produces 80 percent of the cocaine and two-thirds of the heroin making its way into the United States.¹ According to the Colombian Finance Ministry, the illegal trade brings in between \$3 billion and \$5 billion a year, making it Colombia's top export earner.² The amount of land in Colombia devoted to the cultivation of coca—the raw material for cocaine—increased in 1998 alone by 28 percent, according to General Barry McCaffrey, head of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.³

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the United States worked closely with the Colombian police and military. In 1993, however, the Clinton Administration sharply reduced military aid to the Colombian army because of its poor record on human rights. Meanwhile, the Administration insisted that Colombia step up its drug interdic-

tion efforts and, from 1995 to 1998, imposed economic sanctions on Colombia, a policy which undermined U.S. relations with Colombia as well as with other Latin America countries.

Since the election in 1998 of Colombian President Andres Pastrana, the Clinton Administration has increased U.S. anti-drug aid to Colombia, from \$100 million in 1997 to \$289 million. Moreover, President Clinton recently announced that he will increase U.S. military aid to Colombia to step up efforts to fight the drug traffickers.⁴ He also endorsed Pastrana's plan to eradicate the drug trade through alternative crop development programs financed by the United States and other countries.

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1. Douglas Farah, "Colombian Army Fighting Legacy of Abuses," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 1999, p. A15.
 2. Reuters, "Drug Hauls and Kidnappings in Colombia Surged in 1998," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1998, p. A4.
 3. John Otis, "Despite Eradication Bid, Another Bumper Coca Crop," *The Houston Chronicle*, February 12, 1999, p. 28.

The wisdom of these decisions is questionable. Colombia is perilously close to internal collapse, in which case it could well become a Balkan-type problem for the United States. The balkanization of Colombia into politically and socially unstable mini-states—with much of the North controlled by paramilitary groups and drug traffickers, the South controlled by Marxist rebels, and the government hanging on to the urban central region that includes the important cities of Bogota, Medellin, and Cali—would contribute to a tremendous explosion in the illegal narcotics trade.

The United States should help the Colombian government end its civil turmoil peacefully and terminate the illicit drug trade. It should also help the Pastrana government disarm the paramilitary groups and encourage it to stop the systematic human rights abuses reportedly committed by members of Colombia's armed forces.

These goals are consistent with U.S. foreign policy objectives of expanding free trade, consolidating democracy, and eradicating the illegal drug trade in Latin America; greater direct U.S. military involvement in Colombia's civil war, however, is not. In addition, in January 1999, one of the rebel organizations announced that all U.S. military and law enforcement personnel in Colombia would be considered legitimate targets to be killed or captured.⁵ Furthermore, "If they are in army or police barracks and there is a fight, we will confront them, rebel leader Raul Reyes said."⁶

Congress must know how the Administration intends to react if peace talks between the government and the rebels break down and U.S. military advisers are targeted. Before obligating U.S. troops to become involved directly in fighting Colombia's drug problems and civil war, President Clinton should establish clear contingency plans to safeguard the lives of U.S. military personnel in case Pastrana's peace plan fails.

For its part, before agreeing to increase U.S. military aid to Colombia, Congress should:

- **Initiate** a comprehensive review of U.S. drug policy in Latin America;
- **Abolish** the ineffective and politically damaging drug certification process;
- **Set specific limits** on U.S. military aid to Colombia;
- **Ensure** that U.S. troops do not become involved in fighting Colombia's civil war by limiting the number of U.S. military advisers and monitoring how the military aid is spent;
- **Manage** the drug-related insurgency as a law enforcement problem;
- **Implement** a serious anti-drug assistance program, building on the one-year, \$289 million anti-drug package that Colombia received in October 1998;
- **Agree** to help train and equip a professional Colombian army; and
- **Seek** a multilateral approach to managing the Colombian crisis.

COLOMBIA'S PEACE PLAN

The centerpiece of President Pastrana's strategy to end the civil war, repair the economy, and terminate the drug trade is a negotiated peace pact with the Marxist rebels who are now involved in drug trafficking. Pastrana maintains that after a peace pact is signed, these "narco-rebels" will help wipe out the drug trade in areas they control.

As part of his "Plan Colombia," Pastrana agreed to give control of a large area of Colombia to the rebels and to fund large-scale agriculture and infrastructure development programs to substitute food crops for coca and opium poppies. Cur-

4. Although the Administration is providing \$40 million of training, intelligence, and logistical support to Colombia during 1999, U.S. military aid can be expected to increase over the next two or three years as the Colombian civil war escalates. Moreover, more military aid likely will be accompanied by an increasing number of U.S. military advisers in Colombia.

5. Agence France-Presse, "Colombian Guerrillas Warn US Advisors Could Be Targets," January 4, 1999.

6. *Ibid.*

rently, the Colombian government estimates that this crop effort will cost up to \$4 billion overall. Most of the money is to come from the United States, other unspecified countries, and multilateral organizations.

There are at least three reasons why Pastrana's peace plan is not likely to succeed.

- **First**, the Colombian government has been unable to counter the growing involvement of Marxist insurgents in drug trafficking, and the Colombian army has been unable to defeat the rebels in battle. Moreover, the rebels have little incentive to abide by a peace agreement because they believe they hold the upper hand.
- **Second**, by making major concessions to the "narco-rebels," Pastrana is conferring political status and an implicit legitimacy on their efforts.
- **Third**, even if the peace talks succeed, the illicit drug trade that funds the rebels' activities is unlikely to be deterred significantly. Even if the rebels decide to curtail drug operations in their areas, the traffickers will simply move their operations.

Clearly, President Clinton should not have endorsed this plan.

Flaws in Colombia's Peace Plan

After 34 years of fighting the Colombian government, the communist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) now control nearly half of Colombia's territory. Over 38,000 Colombians have been killed in the civil war, and between 1 million and 2 million have been displaced.

President Pastrana has stated that he wishes to end the violence and unite the country. He maintains that the rebels are not seeking permanent control of any part of Colombia's territory, but instead, once a peace pact is signed, will join the government's fight against drug trafficking.

However, the prospects for a peace accord are poor. FARC leaders say their goal is to establish political control over as much of Colombia as they can capture in order to install a Marxist Socialist regime.⁷ They will have to fight paramilitary groups to do this. Carlos Castano, who heads the largest and most violent paramilitary organization in Colombia, warned Pastrana that the paramilitaries "do not share the concept of peace at any price because we consider it dangerous for the existence of the nation and its institutions."⁸

When the official peace talks began on January 7, 1999, the FARC demanded "sweeping changes in State bodies," blamed the United States for the political violence that started in 1964, verbally attacked the International Monetary Fund, and called for a new constitutional assembly to replace the constitution approved in 1991. It also demanded that the government increase the demilitarized area under its control to include five more municipalities,⁹ that some 500 imprisoned guerrillas be freed, and that all aerial spraying of illegal drug crops inside the demilitarized area be halted immediately.

FARC commander Manuel Marulanda Velez even demanded that the government recognize the FARC as a military force. The FARC wants a new military doctrine based on the defense of Colombia's borders, a reduction in the size of Colombia's armed forces, and greater respect for human rights. It has called for revision of Colombia's military treaties, a ten-year moratorium on Colombia's foreign debt, and a drug "solution" that targets demand in the United States and other large con-

7. Tim Padgett, "The Backyard Balkans," *Time*, January 18, 1999, p. 44.

8. "Pastrana's Peace Process," *Latin American Special Report*, Vol. 6, No. 12 (October 31, 1998), at <http://www.latam-news.com>.

9. Inravisation TV-A, "FARC Reportedly Wants Demilitarized Zone Expanded," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, January 19, 1999.

WHO ARE THE REBELS?

On April 8, 1998, U.S. Marine Corps General Charles Wilhelm of the U.S. Southern Command (Southcom) warned that Colombia's armed forces are incapable of defeating Marxist guerrillas in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN).¹ Three days later, the FARC high command issued a communiqué urging "all revolutionary" forces to unite and fight U.S. involvement in Colombia and stating that "the open meddling of the empire [the United States] in Colombia's internal affairs fully justifies the armed revolutionary struggle."²

The FARC was established in 1966 as the military wing of the Colombian communist party. The smaller ELN began in the 1960s and was inspired by Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba. For more than three decades, these rebels sought to establish a Marxist Colombian state by force of arms. Until the 1980s, the FARC had fewer than 1,000 guerrillas, but over the past decade, it has grown to over 15,000 well-armed guerrillas. The ELN now boasts about 5,000 guerrillas.

Both the largest concentrations of FARC guerrillas and the biggest expanse of coca fields in Colombia are located within a regional triangle in southern Colombia. The FARC controls about 50 small ports in the Gulf of Uraba in northern Colombia, through which it smuggles weapons

and precursor chemicals for manufacturing cocaine and heroin from Panama.

The FARC and ELN control and administer about half of Colombia's national territory. More than 57 percent of the country's mayors support or obey them.³ They patrol the roads and waterways, regulate fishing, and hold trials for suspected criminals. In some areas, they have created public services and agriculture credit banks and collect funds for road improvements at toll stations.⁴

The FARC exploited the demise of the cocaine cartels in the 1980s, first by providing security to drug crops and clandestine labs, and later as coca growers and operators of illegal processing labs. Today, some rebel units own warehouses and aircraft and control clandestine airfields that formerly belonged to the Medellin or Cali cartels.⁵

The Colombian government has estimated that the FARC and ELN earned over \$900 million from drug trafficking and kidnapping in 1997. According to General Rosso Jose Serrano, chief of the Colombian National Police, the FARC completes guns-and-cash-for-drugs deals with organized crime groups in Chechnya, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.⁶

1. Thomas B. Hunter, "FARC Proposes Anti-US Unity," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (June 1, 1998), p. 16.

2. *Ibid.*

3. David Spencer, "A Lesson for Colombia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 9, No. 10 (October 1, 1997), p. 474.

4. Outside Colombia, the FARC has opened representative offices in Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, and Spain, and in 1998 sought unsuccessfully to open a sixth office in Brazil similar to what the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was allowed in Brazil during the early 1980s.

5. The Colombian National Police estimates that in 1997 about 3,155 guerrillas were directly involved in protecting drug crops, laboratories, and airstrips, as well as collecting war taxes from those associated with the drug business. Between 1994 and 1998, guerrillas fired over 160 times at Colombian police aircraft and helicopters on anti-drug operations, killing 44 anti-drug agents and wounding 75 others.

6. Jamie Dettmer, "Drug War on U.S. Streets Is Fought in Colombia," *Insight on the News*, November 24, 1997, p. 36.

sumer countries rather than interdiction of supply and production in Colombia.¹⁰

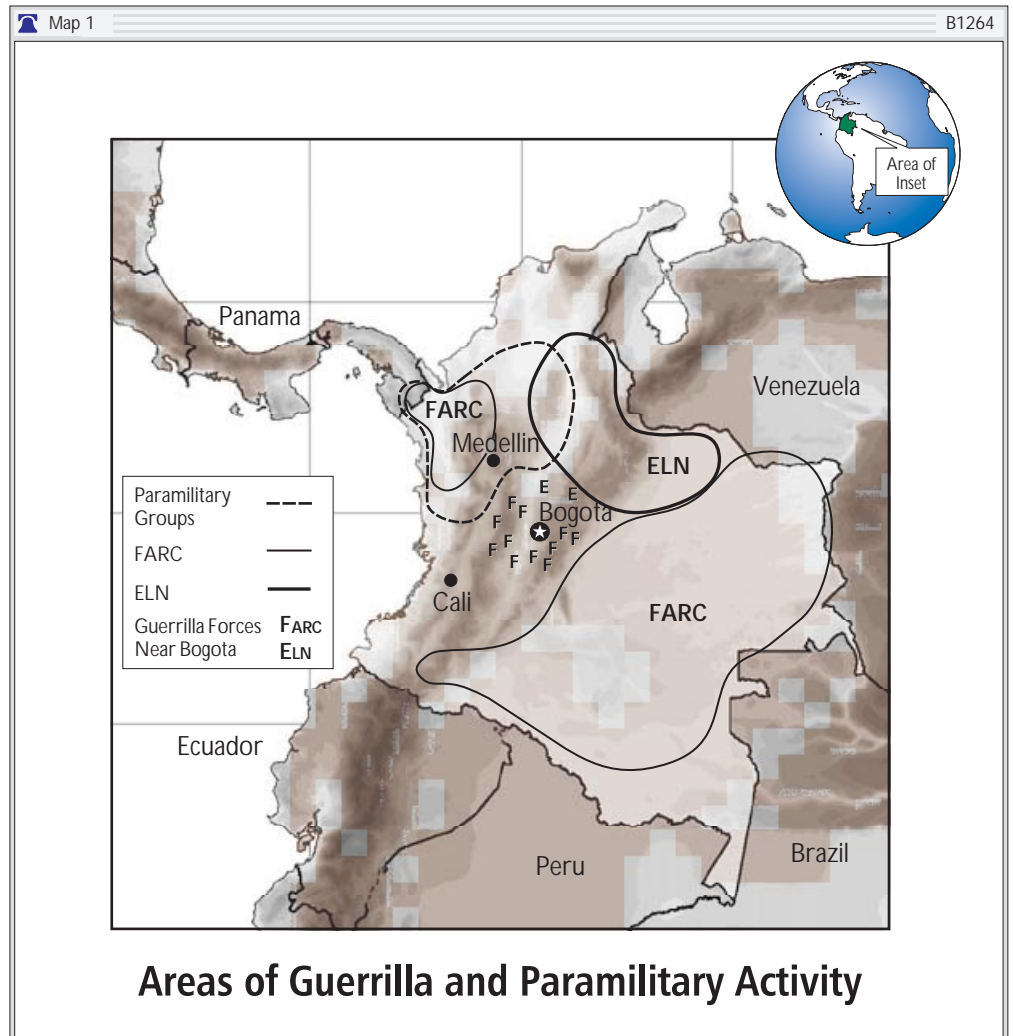
Marulanda said he intends to pursue a clear socialist agenda that “combines the best from Soviet socialism, from Chinese socialism, from Vietnamese socialism, and from Cuban socialism.”¹¹ In alluding to the increased U.S. military aid for Colombia, he added that the FARC aspires “to keep Colombia from becoming a new Vietnam.”¹²

The talks stalled after paramilitary groups killed over 130 suspected rebel sympathizers. FARC rebels gave the government until April to take firm action against the paramilitary groups. The ELN rebels broke off talks when their demands for a demilitarized zone in an area of northern Colombia that would be approximately one-fifth the size of the FARC’s zone in southern Colombia were rejected.

FARC and ELN narco-rebels have demonstrated repeatedly that they have no real incentive to lay down their arms and negotiate a peaceful resolution of the Colombian conflict. (See page 6.) They have continued to assault police and army units throughout Colombia, killing dozens of police and civilians and capturing scores of prisoners and weapons. Moreover, on March 4, 1999, the FARC viciously murdered three U.S. human rights work-

ers, including two women, by shooting them execution-style in the face and chest.¹³

Although Pastrana insists that the peace talks are starting to gather momentum, it appears more likely that the process will drag on indefinitely as the rebels try to extract additional political and economic concessions. The FARC and ELN clearly feel they have the upper hand. If the peace talks fail, Pastrana’s only options are to surrender Colombia to the rebels or order the Colombian army to fight them.



10. Bryan Bender, “2 Fronts, 1 War,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly* Vol. 31, No. 4 (January 27, 1999).

11. Semana, “Interview with FARC Leader Tirofijo,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, January 18, 1999.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Adam Thomson, “Colombia Peace Process Faces Threat,” *The Financial Times*, March 12, 1999, p. 3.

A CATALOG OF REBEL ATTACKS

Since 1994, the intensity of Colombia's guerrilla war has increased. The FARC has demonstrated during the past two years alone that it has the ability to confront and defeat Colombian army units in open combat and amass large units against multiple targets around Colombia, and the ELN has demonstrated its intentions just as clearly:¹

- On February 26, 1998, a Colombian army brigade was dispatched to break up a concentration of 600 guerrillas reportedly ready to attack Cartagena del Chaira near the Caguan River. The guerrillas organized a successful ambush. After three days, 80 soldiers had been killed, 43 captured, and the rest dispersed in the jungle.² This was the first time the FARC defeated a large, elite Colombian army unit in maneuver warfare.³
- During the first week of August 1998, before Pastrana was inaugurated, the FARC and ELN launched at least 42 attacks in 14 different sectors. More than half of these attacks involved guerrilla units of 300 to 1,000 fighters. After two weeks of fighting, 104 military and police were dead and between 129 and 158 government troops had been taken prisoner; 243 guerrillas had been killed.
- On October 18, 1998, the ELN sabotaged Colombia's main oil pipeline, causing a huge fire that destroyed the small village of Machuca; 45 people were burned to death, and another 26 died later from severe burns.⁴
- On November 2, 1998, the 120-man police detachment in Mitu, a town of 14,000 located about 400 miles from Bogota near the border with Brazil, was assaulted by up to 1,000 FARC guerrillas who arrived by river. About 80 police and 10 civilians were killed, and 40 police were taken prisoner. FARC units ambushed about 500 soldiers and police approaching the besieged town by land. At least 28 soldiers and police were killed in that attack.⁵
- On March 4, 1999, the FARC viciously murdered three U.S. human rights workers, including two women, by shooting them execution-style in the face and chest.⁶

In the majority of these attacks, the guerrillas covered their withdrawal by placing scattered land mines and ambushing groups of approaching soldiers.⁷ The FARC also is able to jam Colombian army and police communications with electronic equipment in small aircraft.

1. See F. Andy Messing (Major, Special Forces, Retired), "NDCF Colombia Report 1997," National Defense Council Foundation, February 10, 1997.
2. David Spencer, "Bogota Continues to Bleed as FARC Find Their Military Feet," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 10, No. 11 (November 1, 1998), p. 35.
3. The FARC can now field its entire force—15,000 fighters—on sustained operations for up to one week at a time. The M-16, which has replaced the Soviet-era Kalashnikoff assault rifle as the guerrillas' weapon of choice, is smuggled into Colombia from Central America by Arab smugglers operating out of Panama and Ciudad del Este, a South American city located where the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet.
4. Radio Cadena Nacional, "ELN Rebels to Continue Attacks on Oil Facilities," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, November 4, 1998.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Adam Thomson, "Colombia Peace Process Faces Threat," *The Financial Times*, March 12, 1999, p. 3.
7. "Some 100 Dead as Colombian Soldiers, Rebels Battle," Agence France-Presse, November 3, 1998.

In its present state, however, the Colombian army cannot defeat the rebels. It is a garrison army of conscripts who have little tactical and strategic training or mobility. The Colombian army is poorly trained, poorly equipped, poorly led, and severely tarnished by its long history of corruption and human rights abuses.¹⁴ For most of the past decade, it has failed to stage a single successful offensive against the rebels; in recent years, the Colombian army has lost more than 80 engagements involving 300 or more guerrillas.

Because he lacks the resources to fight the FARC and ELN successfully, Pastrana is pursuing peace with foes whose stated goals include toppling his government. Since his inauguration on August 7, 1998, Pastrana has conferred full political recognition on FARC and ELN rebels and has acknowledged their political and administrative control over nearly half of Colombia.

Additionally, on November 7, 1998, he demilitarized a region of 16,216 square miles in southern Colombia—an area twice the size of El Salvador where more than a third of Colombia's illegal narcotics crops is grown—by withdrawing all Colombian soldiers and police. Originally, the FARC-controlled zone was to be demilitarized by February 7, 1999, but Pastrana extended that deadline until the end of May 1999.

The United States should support a sensible effort by the Colombian government to end the civil war, eradicate illegal drugs, and overcome the country's economic slump. Pastrana's "Plan Colombia," however, will not achieve these objectives. Specifically:

- **It is not a peace plan.** Pastrana's peace proposal is little more than a white flag signaling the government's surrender. Instead of unifying Colombia as a single nation, Pastrana's plan is likely to balkanize it. Colombia's urban centers would remain nominally under the government's control, but most rural territory would fall under rebel and paramilitary control.

According to Pastrana, by agreeing to the plan, the rebels would give up nearly \$1 billion a year in proceeds from drug trafficking and extortion. But these lost "earnings" would need to be offset by a massive infusion of internationally financed cash and development aid. This is not a Marshall Plan, as President Pastrana would have the United States believe; it is a transfer of wealth to communist rebels that will do nothing to guarantee that their criminal activities will cease. In the United States, this would be called extortion.

- **It fails to implement serious reform.** To achieve lasting peace, Pastrana must change Colombia's institutions and legitimize and protect private property rights. He also must change the culture of institutionalized corruption, violence, and systematic abuse of human rights. Although the involvement of the FARC and ELN rebels in drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, and cattle rustling makes them criminals and not revolutionaries, the fact remains that some of their grievances against the Colombian state are valid.

Historically, the ruling political class has sought self-enrichment and ignored the needs of the people. In addition, it has ignored the need to strengthen Colombia's military with resources sufficient to defeat the communist insurgency. Significantly, both the rebels and the paramilitary forces who oppose them share similar and skeptical opinions about the new government's willingness to negotiate an agreement based on real institutional reforms.

- **It weakens the government's position while strengthening the rebels' position.** Pastrana's actions have weakened the government's negotiating position and strengthened the rebels' position. He gave up 16,216 square miles of land and began discussing a prisoner exchange months before the official peace talks began. He legitimized the FARC by acknowledging its administrative control over large parts of

14. U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," at http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/hrp_reports_mainhp.html.

Colombia and downplaying its involvement in the drug trade. And although he has replaced the high command of the armed forces with officers who are known to be honest and concerned about human rights, he has been slow to articulate a plan to modernize and strengthen the armed forces quickly.

Meanwhile, the rebels exploit his concessions to make him appear weak to Colombians and the world. For example, when the peace talks were launched officially on January 7, 1999, Pastrana sat alone at the dais while the FARC commander in chief sent a low-ranking official to read a letter that attacked the government—and branded the United States an imperial aggressor—but said little about peace.

- **It is unlikely to satisfy the different groups involved in the crisis.** All of the key parties involved in the peace process—the government, the FARC and ELN, the paramilitaries, the armed forces, and the Clinton Administration—have different expectations. Pastrana wants to demobilize the insurgency and end the political violence that is hurting the people and the economy and damaging Colombia's image. Eradicating illegal narcotics is a secondary consideration. U.S. and Colombian law enforcement officials claim that Pastrana ordered all counter-narcotics operations halted in the FARC-controlled demilitarized zone as long as the peace process is ongoing.¹⁵

The FARC and ELN rebels want to establish a Marxist government in nearly half of Colombia's territory, nationalizing banks and natural resource industries, redistributing land to millions of peasants, and expelling foreign investors. The FARC and ELN rebels "speak like a handout from the Soviet embassy in the 1970's," says Klaus Nyholm, head of the United Nations Drug Control Program in

Colombia. "They don't have any definite ideas about what they would do. Their main idea is that the [Colombian] government and the international community should come in with massive assistance."¹⁶

Meanwhile, the paramilitaries that are financed by private landowners and drug traffickers are determined to wipe out the FARC and ELN at any cost. They also oppose free-market policies that Colombia has followed since 1990. The drug traffickers want to continue doing business, regardless of who runs the country.

The Colombian army's credibility and image have been tarnished by high-level corruption in the chain of command and systematic human rights abuses. It hopes to erase this image, as well as the humiliation it has suffered from an inability to control the rebels, by destroying the rebels rather than by making peace.

The Clinton Administration is supporting the peace process to the extent that it helps to eliminate illegal drug trafficking. For example, both the Administration and Congress have warned the Colombian government that any reductions or delays in carrying out large-scale aerial spraying of illicit drug crops within the FARC's demilitarized zone would lead to a suspension of U.S. anti-drug aid.¹⁷

U.S. and Colombian business interests care less about drugs and guerrilla insurgencies than about creating a stable economic environment that is conducive to investment, growth, and profits. The FARC and ELN insurgency inflicts destruction that is equivalent to between 4 percent and 5 percent of the annual gross domestic product, scaring away billions

15. Tod Robberson, "U.S. Pins Anti-Drug Aid to Colombia's Plan for Rebel-Run Zone," *The Dallas Morning News*, February 11, 1999, p. A18.

16. John Otis, "Columbian [sic] Guerrillas Unlikely Allies in War on Drugs; U.S. Doubts Offer to Help Replace Coca and Opium with Legal Crops," *The Houston Chronicle*, February 14, 1999, p. A30.

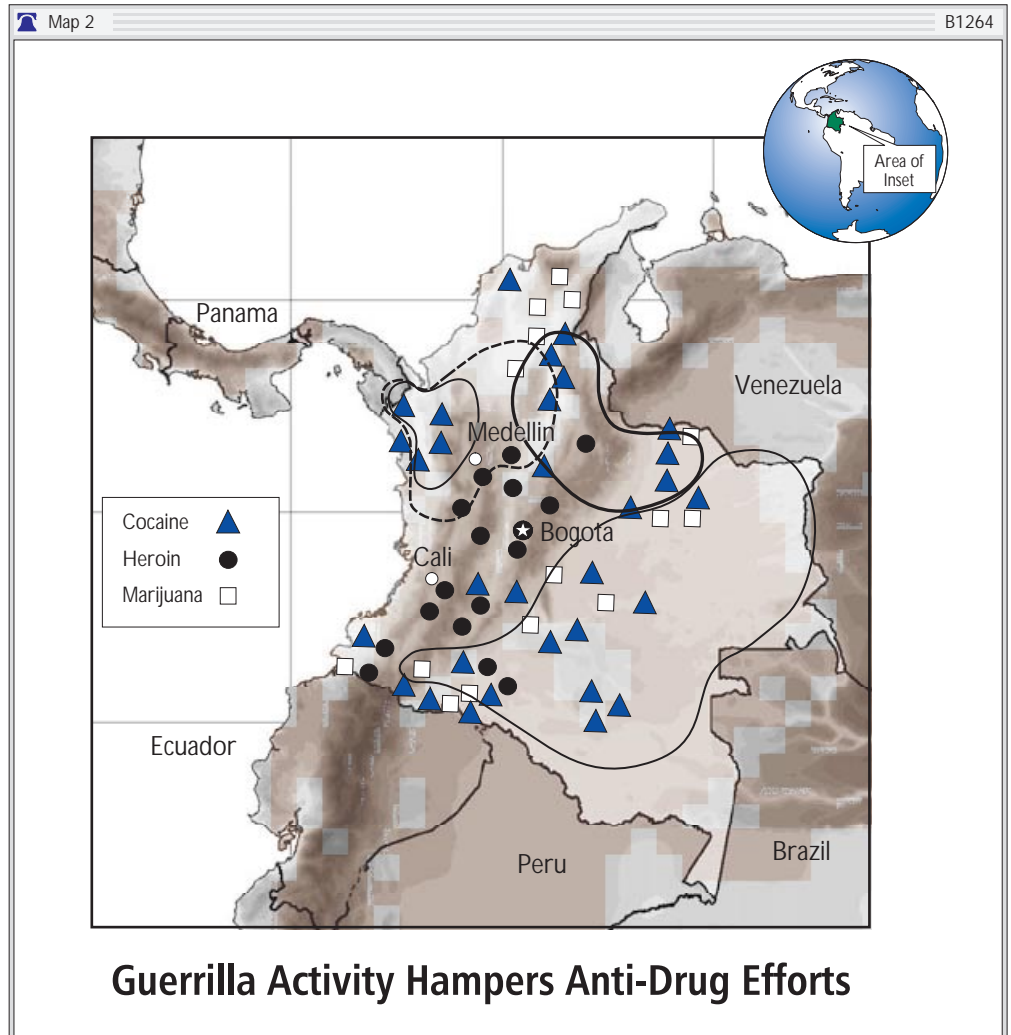
17. *Ibid.*

of dollars in potential foreign investments.

- **The rebels have no real incentive to negotiate peace and then adhere to an agreement.** One of two conditions must exist in order to conclude a successful peace agreement. Either one side is so strong that the other side is compelled to seek peace, or both sides must have a genuine desire for peace.

The guerrillas are not strong enough in military terms to capture Colombia's urban centers and topple the elected government, but they have defeated the Colombian army in jungle warfare and achieved sufficient legitimacy to shape the political agenda. The extent of the FARC's and ELN's alleged desires for peace should be weighed against their continued attacks on military and police units and their stated determination to capture and control as much of Colombia as they can.

- **The rebels are part of the drug trafficking problem.** During a visit to the United States in October 1998, Pastrana declared that the fact that guerrillas and drug crops are found in the same general areas in Colombia might be more coincidental than deliberate.¹⁸ Joe Toft, former head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) office in Colombia from 1988 to



1994, would disagree: "The rebels are in it for the money they get for providing security to the drug lords. The rebels are criminals, period."¹⁹

Nearly two-thirds of the nearly \$1 billion taken in each year by the FARC and ELN is derived from drug trafficking, and the remainder comes from activities like kidnapping, cattle rustling, and extortion. To its credit, the Clinton Administration is not buying Pastrana's argument. General Barry McCaffrey says that the FARC is "heavily involved in protecting, transporting, and in some cases operating drug labs."²⁰

18. Speech by Colombian President Andres Pastrana, National Press Club, October 30, 1998.

19. Paul Reid, "Colombia: Kaleidoscope of Violence," *The Palm Beach Post*, December 27, 1998, p. A1.

- **The alternative crop development strategy is mere window dressing.** A key element of “Plan Colombia” is a scheme to attract large-scale foreign aid to underwrite the cost of an alternative crop development program that will substitute legal food crops for coca and opium. The rebels are demanding that repressive anti-drug measures—such as aerial spraying—be suspended and U.S. anti-drug resources used instead to finance these development efforts.

However, Washington remains committed to aerial crop spraying, for which Congress approved \$200 million in October 1998, compared with only \$60 million earmarked for alternative crop development programs in Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. The United Nations estimates that Colombia will need at least \$1 billion for alternative crop development. Other estimates range as high as \$5 billion just for a regional alternative development program in southern Colombia, with no guarantee of denting the illicit drug trade.

Alternative development programs have reported some success in Bolivia and Peru, but any decline in drug cultivation usually has been offset by increased drug crop cultivation in areas outside the development zones. A large-scale effort in Colombia would have to target illicit drug cultivation across the entire nation and would cost many billions of dollars. So far, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) has pledged to contribute \$1.6 billion to a fund to support the Colombian peace process. Part of this money would be used for alternative development. The IADB already has committed \$90 million a year for a Colombian crop substitution effort called *Planta*. Additionally, the United Nations has agreed to provide Colombia \$80 million a year for such alternative development.

These amounts, however, are too insignificant to have a lasting impact on the drug trade, because no other crop is as profitable as the coca plant, which produces up to \$2,500 a year for Colombian peasants compared with about \$300 a year from legal crops. Moreover, coca and opium growers live in remote and inaccessible areas without the infrastructure to warehouse, transport, and market alternative food crops.

- **Peace with the rebels will not affect the illegal drug industry.** Even if the rebels sign and respect a peace agreement, the drug trade will continue to flourish. Drug traffickers have the capability to defend themselves against the rebels, hire paramilitaries for protection, and fight the government to a standstill. Moreover, they always have the option of moving their operations to locations outside rebel-controlled areas and beyond the reach of police and military forces.

SETTING U.S. COLOMBIA POLICY BY DEFAULT

In December 1998, a White House official told a reporter for *The Washington Post* that Colombia “poses a greater immediate threat [to America] than Bosnia did, yet it receives almost no attention. So policy is set by default.”²¹

This is a startling admission. It means that the Administration has no sound policy to deal with the growing political and security crisis presented by the turmoil and drug trafficking in Colombia. It is also alarming in light of President Clinton’s decision to increase U.S. military aid to Colombia as part of a stepped-up strategy to fight the war on drugs. If the Administration’s policy in Colombia is evolving more by reaction than by design, then the limits of U.S. military involvement in the Colombian conflict have not been determined.

20. Ian Kemp, “Military Leaders Are Replaced in Colombia,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 17 (August 19, 1998). See also Linda Robinson, Gordon Witkin, and Richard J. Newman, “Is Colombia Lost to Rebels?” *U.S. News & World Report*, May 11, 1998, p. 38.

21. Douglas Farah, “U.S. to Aid Colombian Military; Drug-Dealing Rebels Take Toll on Army,” *The Washington Post*, December 27, 1998, p. A1.

A Policy Shift. The Administration maintains that the United States will not get involved in Colombia's 34-year-old civil war. However, it has become increasingly difficult to separate Colombia's war on drugs from its war against the Marxist rebels. David Passage, the State Department's former Director of Andean Affairs, says that the United States could help the Colombian military regain control of the territory held by the rebels with "a few dozen [American] military advisers and making a small investment."²²

Although the U.S. military's involvement in the war on drugs in Latin America has been growing since the late 1980s (see the Appendix), President Clinton's decision to increase military aid to Colombia represents a significant policy shift for his Administration. From 1994 until 1998, for example, the Clinton Administration:

- **Ignored** the growing regional security threat posed by the FARC and ELN rebels involved in drug trafficking and extortion;
- **Insisted** that no linkages exist between Colombian drug traffickers and rebels;
- **Withheld** anti-drug assistance that would have helped the Colombian National Police be more effective in drug interdiction while at the same time demanding that Colombia battle its illegal drug trade more effectively;
- **Refused** to help the Colombian military because of its poor human rights record, thereby enabling the rebel insurgency to grow; and
- **Abused** the annual drug certification process in a failed effort to unseat former President Ernesto Samper, who was elected in 1994 with the help of more than \$6 million in contributions from drug traffickers.

When the Medellin cocaine cartel was destroyed in December 1993 following the death of its head, Pablo Escobar Gaviria, the Colombian government

was in a good position to attack drug traffickers effectively. However, 1994 was a presidential election year in Colombia, and the Clinton Administration made little effort to encourage outgoing President Cesar Gaviria²³ to maintain the pressure against drug traffickers by going after the Cali cartel, which at the time controlled over 80 percent of the global Colombian cocaine trade.

How Decertification Backfired. The situation in Colombia started to deteriorate rapidly in mid-1994 with the election of Ernesto Samper, a member of the incumbent Liberal Party. Samper was absolved of concerns about his drug connections after a political trial in the Colombian congress, but the U.S. Administration repudiated him and sought unsuccessfully to force his resignation by imposing sanctions from 1995 to 1998. These sanctions led to sharp reductions of U.S. aid, including anti-drug aid, which further weakened the Colombian National Police's fight against the drug traffickers.

Moreover, from 1994 to 1998, Colombia's armed forces—and particularly its army—grew significantly weaker, partly as a result of the Clinton Administration's refusal to provide military aid to Colombia's military units if even one individual in a unit was suspected of abusing human rights. Samper's ties to the Cali drug traffickers also gave the FARC and ELN an excuse to declare his administration illegitimate and refuse to engage in talks.

The Clinton Administration's campaign to oust Samper by decertifying Colombia backfired. The sanctions:

- **Inflamed** Colombian nationalism and favored his eventual absolution by the legislature;
- **Undermined** the Clinton Administration's efforts to step up the fight against drug traffickers, despite the arrest of the Cali cocaine cartel's top kingpins in 1995;

22. *Ibid.*, p. A8.

23. Gaviria currently is Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS).

- **Distracted** U.S. policymakers from the regional security threat posed by the rapid expansion of Colombia's drug-financed insurgency; and
- **Caused** a general deterioration in U.S.-Latin America relations as Mexico and other countries in the region joined Colombia in publicly repudiating the drug certification process.

The Thaw in Relations. The four-year chill in U.S.-Colombian relations began to thaw during Pastrana's official visit to Washington on October 27-30, 1998. President Clinton even proclaimed the Harvard-educated Pastrana's inauguration as "a new beginning for Colombia" and promised that the United States would help to end the civil war.²⁴ Pastrana hailed the arrival of "a new era in relations between Colombia and the United States"²⁵ and pledged to fight drug trafficking, resolve Colombia's civil war peacefully, halt the depredations of paramilitary groups, and end human rights abuses committed by the Colombian army.

The two heads of state signed a new bilateral "Alliance Against Drugs," and President Clinton pledged his support for Pastrana's peace plan. Since Pastrana's inauguration, the Administration has increased anti-drug aid to Colombia by almost 300 percent.

Behind the warm smiles and professions of friendship, however, the "new" U.S.-Colombia relationship is tenuous. Washington has serious doubts about the viability of the peace plan and is concerned that the negotiations could halt U.S.-financed operations in southern Colombia to eradicate cocaine crops and destroy clandestine jungle laboratories. The Clinton Administration doubts the Colombian government's ability to prevent the civil war from spiraling out of control if the peace process collapses. U.S. policymakers are also skeptical about whether the FARC and ELN are truly committed to peace.

And yet, despite these reservations, when the Colombian government asked the Clinton Administration to meet secretly in Costa Rica with senior FARC representatives, the answer was yes. In mid-December 1998, Philip Chicola, a mid-level official with the State Department's Office of Andean Affairs, met secretly in San Jose, Costa Rica, with a small group of FARC leaders that included Luis Edgar Devia (Raul Reyes), the FARC's coordinator of international activities. Devia's role is similar to the one played by Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams in Ireland.

The unprecedented meeting took place in the home of Alvaro Leyva, a former legislator and minister of the now-ruling Conservative Party who is in exile in Costa Rica because he is wanted by the Colombian judicial authorities for his alleged ties to the Cali drug cartel. Although the Colombian government requested that the Clinton Administration meet with the FARC, it did not participate in the meeting. The FARC then immediately embarrassed the Clinton Administration by disclosing the secret session to Colombian news media. James P. Rubin of the State Department was forced to explain lamely that the Administration's intention had been "to demonstrate our support for the Colombian peace process."²⁶

NEEDED: COLOMBIA POLICY BY DESIGN

In January 1999, the FARC announced that all U.S. military and law enforcement personnel in Colombia would be considered legitimate targets.²⁷ Congress must know how the Administration intends to react if peace talks between the government and the rebels break down and U.S. military advisers are targeted. Would President Clinton propose sending U.S. soldiers to Colombia to help keep the peace, as he has done in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia?

24. "Colombia's Pastrana, Clinton Promise to Fight Drug Trafficking," Agence France-Presse, October 29, 1998.

25. George Gedda, "Two Countries Agree to Expand Cooperation on Drugs," Associated Press, October 28, 1998.

26. Associated Press, "U.S. Met Colombian Rebels at Bogota's Request," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1999, p. A3.

27. Agence France Presse, "Colombian Guerrillas Warn US Advisors Could Be Targets."

Because of its escalating drug problem and its vital interests in Latin America, the United States must consider doing all it can to help Colombia end its decades-old civil war with the communist insurgents and battle Colombian drug traffickers effectively. Before endorsing President Clinton's decision to increase U.S. military aid to Colombia, however, Congress should require the Administration to spell out in detail the goals it expects to achieve during the next two years.

Congress should make certain that the Administration's decision to expand military aid will not draw American soldiers into the maelstrom of Colombia's ongoing civil war. It also should demand that the Administration explain the limits it will set on the growing U.S. military involvement in Colombia. Congress needs to know how long the Administration plans to give military aid to the Colombian army, how much that aid can be expected to increase, what it will include, and whether there is a clear exit strategy.

These are crucial details. Today, over 200 American soldiers are stationed in Colombia at any given moment, and this number is likely to grow if the Administration increases U.S. military aid to the Colombian army.

To design an effective Colombia policy, Congress should:

- **Initiate a thorough review of U.S. drug policy in Latin America.** Congress already is moving in this direction. On March 3, 1999, Representatives Benjamin A. Gilman (R-NY), Elton W. Gallegly (R-CA), Dan Burton (R-IN), and John L. Mica (R-FL) agreed to seek a full investigation of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement by the State Department's Office of the Inspector General, to determine how U.S. anti-drug aid is being spent in Colombia.

This is a good beginning, but congressional review of U.S. drug policy in Latin America should be expanded to include U.S. anti-drug activities in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Such a review undoubtedly would conclude that from the

U.S.-Mexico border to Tierra del Fuego, U.S. drug policy is a shambles.

The Clinton Administration has been unable to reduce the cultivation and production of illicit narcotics in Colombia, which has turned into an increasingly violent narco-state teetering on the brink of collapse. In Mexico, the Administration's much-vaunted bilateral cooperation in the war on drugs has become an annual exercise in political posturing designed to hide the fact that drug trafficking and related corruption continue to grow unchecked.

Similarly, in Central America and the Caribbean region—largely ignored by the Clinton Administration since 1993—drug traffickers are spreading their distribution networks relentlessly, overwhelming weak legal and political institutions in countries that have no hope yet of obtaining trading parity through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Without such trading parity, governments in Central America and the Caribbean cannot effectively attack the widespread poverty and lack of economic development that drug traffickers exploit. And in South America, drug traffickers have opened new markets and routes for shipping cocaine to Europe and Asia, partly to escape U.S. anti-drug monitoring and interdiction efforts in the Andean and Caribbean regions.

- **Abolish the annual drug certification process.** Congress should take a hard look at the annual drug certification process, which has become a major cause of growing tension and discord between the United States and Latin American countries.²⁸ Many policymakers support the yearly drug certification ritual as a means for continuing to apply pressure on the Administration and the governments of major drug-producing or drug-transit countries.

The Administration does not certify countries like Colombia and Mexico according to objective benchmark criteria, but on the basis of U.S. political considerations. From 1995 to 1998, the Administration dictated that Colom-

bia should be sanctioned on four consecutive occasions. However, Mexico was certified repeatedly during this period as a fully cooperating ally in the U.S. war on drugs, despite clear and compelling evidence that drugs continue to flood into the United States through Mexico, where powerful drug cartels are gaining increased control of political and legal institutions. This double standard outraged Latin Americans and produced a region-wide consensus that the U.S. drug certification process is interventionist and imperialist.

The drug certification process also compresses the drug policy debate in Congress to only three or four weeks each year. Congress should abolish this process and focus instead on working with the Administration to develop and implement an effective anti-drug policy in countries like Colombia and Mexico.

- **Set clear limits on U.S. military aid to Colombia.** The Administration should specify whether it intends to supply military aid to Colombia only during the last two years of this Administration or to extend this aid over a longer period. Under a best-case scenario, according to congressional defense analysts, it will take two years to train and equip professional Colombian soldiers; a complete overhaul and modernization of Colombia's armed forces could require up to a decade of sustained effort.

Strict limits should be imposed on any commitment of U.S. troops to Colombia. Sending additional military advisers to Colombia should not be a backdoor attempt to increase the number of U.S. soldiers there, especially if the FARC and ELN continue their war against the government and target U.S. advisers.

The crisis in Colombia is a clear threat to regional stability, but it also is one that can be resolved only by Colombians. The United States should help the Colombian government end the civil war and battle drug traffickers, but under no circumstances should U.S. military personnel take part directly in any armed confrontations against the rebels, drug traffickers, or paramilitary groups.

- **Manage the insurgency as a law enforcement problem.** Pastrana made a mistake when he conferred political legitimacy on the FARC and ELN and portrayed their insurgency as not linked to drug trafficking. The Clinton Administration suffered a greater lapse of judgment when it met secretly with FARC officials last December.

The FARC and ELN are criminals who care most about the profits they earn from drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, and cattle rustling. Moreover, in October 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that the FARC had been added to the State Department's list of terrorist organizations—and it has long been U.S. policy not to negotiate with terrorists. Instead of supporting Pastrana's decision to grant the rebels political status, the Administration should encourage Pastrana to withdraw political recognition from these groups.

- **Implement a serious anti-drug aid program.** Washington has failed to provide the Colombian authorities with the resources they need to fight drug traffickers effectively. The bulk of the U.S. anti-drug aid in Colombia is earmarked for the destruction of drug crops by aerial spraying, yet the Colombian National Police is short of helicopters to transport anti-drug police units and sustain their operations

28. The U.S. Anti-Drug Act of 1986 created the annual drug certification process that requires the President of the United States to report by March 1 which countries are and are not cooperating with America's war on drugs. Congress created the drug certification process to monitor the results of the tens of billions of dollars the United States has spent in the past three decades chasing elusive international drug traffickers. The process also was intended to serve as a carrot-and-stick policy tool for keeping U.S. pressure on major drug-producing countries like Colombia. For example, anything less than full certification—such as a national interest waiver or outright decertification—would trigger automatic cutbacks or suspensions in U.S. aid.

in the country's drug producing regions. Its 70 helicopters, including many Vietnam-vintage UH-1 (Huey) helicopters, are between 35 and 40 years old and cannot be operated safely at the altitudes where most coca plants and opium poppies are cultivated.

In October 1998, Congress approved a \$289 million package of anti-drug aid for Colombia. This package, in addition to requiring the Clinton Administration to certify that the FARC-controlled demilitarized zone was not being used as a haven for drug traffickers and illegal crop cultivation, consisted almost entirely of helicopters and other counter-narcotics assistance. It was a step in the right direction. However, congressional leaders already have warned that the aid could be suspended if the Administration verifies that the Pastrana government is allowing drug traffickers to operate unchallenged inside the demilitarized zone.

It would be a mistake for Congress or the Administration to hold up the anti-drug aid. Suspending the aid will only weaken the anti-drug effort and strengthen the rebels and drug traffickers. Instead of threatening Colombia with sanctions, the Administration should increase anti-drug assistance to bolster Colombia's efforts to fight the illegal drug trade.

- **Agree to help train and equip a professional Colombian army.** The Colombian army has about 125,000 soldiers, 55,000 of whom are committed to protecting urban centers, oil fields, and other key installations. At present, only about 30,000 soldiers are being used for counter-insurgency operations. Because it is stretched so thin, the army has established small company and platoon-sized posts wherever possible, but this has enabled the rebels to achieve local numerical superiority, a situation that is exacerbated by the lack of equipment for small Colombian units.

The Colombian military has only 20 operational helicopters and three AC-47 gunships, and part of its armored inventory dates back to 1943. This effectively reduces the army to the

status of a military constabulary with only internal security functions. Typically, soldiers go into rebel zones carrying only 80 rounds of ammunition (compared with 250 rounds per U.S. soldier).

There is no hope of making this army a professional force in just six months. In a best-case scenario, it will take at least two years and cost U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars. Colombia's Defense Ministry already has asked the Clinton Administration to underwrite the cost of a \$1.5 billion plan to train and equip professional counter-insurgency units.

- **Adopt a multilateral approach to managing Colombia's crisis.** President Clinton's decision to increase U.S. military aid to Colombia may prove unwise if the Administration fails to win the support of the Latin American countries—including Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela—that share lengthy and mostly undeveloped borders with Colombia. The perception that the United States is acting unilaterally would undermine the success of the Administration's efforts.

The United States has vital commercial interests in assuring the continued security of the Panama Canal. It has vital energy interests, in which U.S. oil firms have invested many billions of dollars, in Venezuela. It also has a compelling interest in working closely with Brazil to contain the spread of Colombian rebel or drug trafficking activity in Brazil's northern Amazon region. Similarly, Colombia's neighbors share an interest in keeping the Colombian civil crisis confined within Colombia's borders. Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela recently began to increase their military presence along their borders with Colombia and officially warned the Colombian government and rebels to keep their differences strictly inside Colombia.

Since 1994, however, the Clinton Administration's misuse of the drug certification process has strained relations between the United States and the Latin American countries that annually appear on the State Department's

International Narcotics Control Strategy Report. The Administration should work through the Organization of American States (OAS) to build hemispheric support to rid Colombia of drug traffickers and the Marxist narco-rebels. The Colombian civil war, with its drug underpinnings, threatens not only the security interests of the United States, but also the security and economic stability of many Latin American democracies.

In particular, the OAS should develop and implement a program using Latin American human rights observers to monitor and report on the activities of all groups engaged in the conflict in Colombia, including the armed forces, Marxist rebels, and paramilitary groups. For any such multilateral process to be successful in preventing the balkanization of Colombia, however, it must be credible. Therefore, to reassure all parties as to the organization's neutrality, the Secretary General of the OAS—former Colombian President Cesar Gaviria—should be replaced by someone from a different Latin American country.

CONCLUSION

Colombia is on the verge of becoming a no-win situation. If President Pastrana accepts the demands of the FARC and ELN for political and territorial autonomy, Colombia will start to break apart into Balkan-type factions, paramilitary violence will escalate rapidly, and regional stability will be threatened. If the Pastrana peace talks fail, which appears increasingly likely, Colombia will sink deeper into a vortex of violence that could spill into neighboring countries, endangering regional stability. The country is a tinderbox awaiting only a careless spark to explode in flames.

Helping the Pastrana government end Colombia's decades-old civil turbulence and eradicate the illegal drug trade is clearly in the United States' national interest. But the Clinton Administration should tread cautiously in escalating the U.S. mili-

tary's involvement in the Colombian narco-insurgency. Before it can fight the rebels effectively, the Colombian army needs to be modernized, professionally trained, and re-equipped with the arms and other equipment needed to achieve tactical and strategic mobility on the battlefield. This could take several years of sustained effort involving extensive U.S. training of Colombian military units, and could cost Americans billions of tax dollars.

The Administration's new Colombia policy should include a specific timetable for providing military aid, clear objectives and transparent methods for measuring the resulting gains (or losses) from that aid, and strict limitations on the extent of the escalating U.S. military involvement in Colombia. It also is vitally important that the Administration's new Colombia policy detail contingency plans to safeguard the lives and security of U.S. military personnel in Colombia if Pastrana's peace talks fail and the violence escalates dramatically.

Above all, the Clinton Administration must not lose sight of the fact that the conflict between the government, rebels, drug traffickers, and paramilitary forces in Colombia is fundamentally a Colombian problem that the Colombians themselves must resolve. If the limits of U.S. military involvement are not spelled out clearly at the outset, the risk is great that significant numbers of U.S. soldiers would be swallowed up by the Colombian quagmire.

The President and Congress would be wise to remember that America's involvement in Vietnam—a steadily escalating involvement that President Clinton himself opposed as a university student—began with a few dozen U.S. military advisers and a small investment.

—John P. Sweeney is Latin America Policy Analyst in The Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis International Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.

APPENDIX

AN OVERVIEW OF U.S. DRUG INTERDICTION EFFORTS IN LATIN AMERICA

The U.S. military's involvement in the war on drugs in Latin America predates the end of the Cold War. In 1981, Congress amended the Posse Comitatus Act of 1897 to allow the U.S. military to provide equipment, information, training, and advice to help law enforcement agencies fight drug traffickers; but it maintained the prohibition on military participation in searches, seizures, and arrests.

In April 1986, the Reagan Administration issued National Security Directive (NSD) 221, declaring that drug trafficking was a "lethal" threat to the United States. The directive also specified that U.S. military forces could be used for interdiction operations in other countries only if invited by the host country, directed by U.S. officials, and limited to support functions. In July 1986, the Department of Defense launched Operation Blast Furnace, sending six Army helicopters and 150 U.S. troops into Bolivia to assist in Bolivian and DEA anti-drug operations aimed at shutting down remote processing labs. Cocaine processing was disrupted temporarily, but the drug traffickers quickly replaced the destroyed labs.

The 1989 National Defense Authorization Act designated the Department of Defense as the "single lead agency" for the detection and monitoring of illegal drug shipments into the United States. The approval of this legislation coincided with the Bush Administration's Andean Initiative, a five-year, \$2.2 billion plan to dismantle drug trafficking organizations, eradicate coca crops, destroy processing labs, and stop the delivery of precursor chemicals by providing increased law enforcement, military, and economic aid to Bolivia,

Colombia, and Peru. In December 1989, when President Bush ordered Operation Just Cause and invaded Panama, he authorized the apprehension of General Manuel Noriega "and any other persons in Panama currently under indictment in the United States for drug-related offenses."²⁹

With the end of the Cold War, battling drug traffickers quickly became the U.S. military's central mission in Latin America, propelled politically by the President and Congress, and militarily by the U.S. Southern Command (Southcom).

In late 1994, the Clinton Administration issued a Presidential Decision Directive shifting the focus of the Defense Department's interdiction efforts from the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico drug transit zones to the Andean source countries of Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. Using intelligence and radar surveillance provided by the U.S. military, the Peruvian Air Force has shot down more than 24 aircraft and forced over a dozen more to land since 1995. As a result, the number of clandestine drug transport flights from Peru to Colombia fell from 752 in 1992 to 96 in 1996. The closing of the Peruvian air corridor forced drug traffickers to shift coca leaf production from Peru to Colombia.

The Pentagon's plan to fight the war on drugs calls for the U.S. military to provide the intelligence, strategic planning, resources, and training needed for Latin America's security forces to carry out anti-narcotics operations. The Pentagon is also in charge of costly interdiction efforts and participates in domestic law enforcement efforts to stem the flow of illegal drugs into the United States.³⁰

29. "The Pentagon's War on Drugs: The Ultimate Bad Trip," *The Defense Monitor*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1992), p. 3.

30. Anti-drug training is an important part of the Pentagon's strategy to fight drug trafficking in Latin America. The U.S. Army's School of the Americas at Fort Benning in Georgia began to conduct counter-drug operations training in 1989, and the program became a top priority in 1995. In the past ten years, the school has graduated more than 2,000 Latin American military and law enforcement personnel who are actively involved in the hemispheric drug war. Southcom's anti-narcotics activities focus on airborne operations (radar surveillance and tracking) and on supporting river and maritime operations.

Southcom is the spearhead of the U.S. military's anti-drug efforts in Latin America, covering both police and military anti-drug operations underway in countries like Colombia. It is responsible for a geographic area stretching from the Florida Keys to Antarctica, and encompasses about 12.5 million square miles and 411 million people. The 1997 Unified Command Plan assigned Southcom the responsibility of conducting anti-narcotics operations in the source country and transit zones of the Andes region (Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru) and the Caribbean.

However, while Southcom's geographic area of responsibility has been increased, its forward-deployed forces have been reduced by the loss of bases in Panama. In 1995, Southcom had roughly 10,000 U.S. troops forward-deployed in Panama, compared with about 4,000 at the end of 1998. To help offset the Panamanian base losses, Southcom is stationing some of its forces in Puerto Rico and

hopes to maintain a strategic presence in Honduras at the Soto Cano Air Base. Southcom is seeking to set up several small-scale forward operating locations in Central and South America and the Caribbean to replicate the counter-drug monitoring and detection missions currently flown from Howard Air Force Base in Panama.³¹

U.S. soldiers currently are in Peru training Peruvian police officers to conduct small-unit patrols. U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps experts are training and equipping an elite Peruvian counter-drug unit that would operate both on water and on land against drug traffickers. In March 1998, Southcom launched a five-year, \$60 million river patrol training program in Peru.

There also are some 200 U.S. troops stationed in Colombia, and the number could rise significantly as the Clinton Administration increases U.S. military aid to the Colombian armed forces.

31. "The Jane's Interview," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 24 (December 16, 1998).