



Backgroundunder

Executive Summary

No. 1435

April 26, 2001

HELPING COLOMBIA FIX ITS PLAN TO CURB DRUG TRAFFICKING, VIOLENCE, AND INSURGENCY

STEPHEN JOHNSON

President Bush is asking Congress to authorize \$731 million for counternarcotics and alternative development efforts in Colombia and other Latin American countries. In addition to the \$1.3 billion emergency assistance package Congress approved last August, these funds would be used to support a plan designed by Colombian President Andrés Pastrana in 1999 to combat the dramatic increase in drug-related violence and guerrilla warfare ravaging Colombia and spilling over into neighboring countries.

Its broad approach and good intentions notwithstanding, efforts under *Plan Colombia* have not succeeded in reducing either the violence or the drug trafficking. Before any new funds are released, the White House and Congress should review *Plan Colombia*, encourage the Pastrana government to correct its deficiencies, and reallocate U.S. assistance in ways that would better address the complicated problems facing this troubled country, its neighbors, and even the United States.

A Flawed Strategy. Colombia's vast rural landscape (roughly the size of Texas and Oklahoma combined) and weak, centralized government provide an ideal environment for illicit crop cultivation and trafficking. Its political establishment has long tolerated criminal behavior by drug lords, guerrillas, and self-defense groups that have

sprung up to fill the gap in public safety left by the government. Narcoguerrillas and paramilitaries now operate in more than 70 percent of the countryside. Fueled by increasing drug profits, their activities are also spilling over into Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. Beyond the northern Andes, Colombian drug trafficking flourishes in the Caribbean and Central America, and Mexico is now the primary conduit for two-thirds of the Colombian cocaine and most of the Colombian heroin entering the United States.

Since the 1980s, U.S.–Colombian relations have focused mostly on reducing drug trafficking. *Plan Colombia* was Colombia's first attempt to combine counternarcotics assistance with state reform, alternative development, and regional interdiction. The plan was developed, however, as part of a strategy to win a fourfold increase in U.S. aid. To satisfy a broad spectrum of lawmakers and human rights activists, U.S. assistance had to target drugs

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(an objective on which most could agree), restrict the use of American training and equipment to this goal, and help improve the human rights performance of Colombian security forces.

Neither the plan nor U.S. assistance, however, addressed the state's failure to protect ordinary citizens. Links between the guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and drug lords were downplayed. The plan glossed over regional interdiction to the point that little coordination with neighboring countries had taken place a year and a half after it was written, and serious negotiations to secure funding commitments for the \$7.5 billion program were not conducted until after the plan was unveiled and pitched to the U.S. Congress. Both Colombia's ability to pay its \$4 billion share and European countries' willingness to contribute \$2 billion were overestimated, leaving the United States as the plan's main backer.

A New Blueprint for U.S. Assistance. Colombia's stability is crucial to the stability of the Western Hemisphere. As one of Latin America's oldest democracies, it is America's fourth largest trade market in the region and eighth largest source of crude oil. Should the government fail and a Marxist-led "narcocracy" rise, the rest of the Americas would be significantly affected. As a major supporter of *Plan Colombia*, the United States should:

- **Encourage Pastrana to transform the dialogue into a credible peace process.** Current talks with the guerrilla rebels are aimed at buying time, not reintegrating these illegal armies into society. The creation of demilitarized zones under their authority should be limited, and the talks should be focused on cease-fires, an end to violence, prisoner exchanges, and demobilization.
- **Help Colombia strengthen its security forces.** Colombia's guerrillas and paramilitary groups need motivation to agree to peaceful reintegration into a law-abiding society. To achieve this outcome, the government must regain the monopoly of force.
- **Renew trade preferences but condition further liberalization on market reforms.** The White House should support renewal of

the Andean Trade Preferences Act to help legitimate enterprises replace drug smuggling. Further liberalization should be keyed to economic reforms to unleash the country's productive capacity and create employment.

- **Reallocate assistance to strengthen local governments, the rule of law, and civil society.** Colombia will be stronger when its local jurisdictions (departments) and municipalities play an equal role in governing the country, its courts function more transparently, and its people can participate more easily in electoral politics. The United States should help the Colombian government implement democratic reforms.
- **Encourage regional cooperation and develop a comprehensive Andean strategy.** The Administration should form a regional working group to share intelligence and facilitate coordination between national military and police forces to apprehend drug traffickers and members of illegal paramilitary forces.
- **Show good faith by reducing the domestic demand for cocaine and heroin** and making a stronger effort to bring money launderers to justice. The inefficient assistance pipeline managed by the State Department, which continues to send outdated ammunition to the Colombian police, must be reorganized.

Conclusion. As recently as last year, conventional wisdom said Colombia's problems of drug trafficking and rampant crime were a containment issue. Now, with guerrillas operating in as much as 70 percent of Colombia's territory and cocaine producers contributing anywhere from 3 percent to 8 percent of Colombia's gross domestic product (GDP), the state is in peril. The Bush Administration should establish the guidelines for a new relationship with Colombia that leverages *Plan Colombia's* strong points with a greater focus on targeting resources where they will have the greatest effect.

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Background

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HELPING COLOMBIA FIX ITS PLAN TO CURB DRUG TRAFFICKING, VIOLENCE, AND INSURGENCY

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Colombia, America's fourth largest trading partner in Latin America, is the world's largest exporter of cocaine and heroin and a focal point for money laundering and arms trafficking in the Western Hemisphere. Its government has waged a losing battle against insurgents and drug traffickers for over two decades, and drug-related violence is now spilling into neighboring countries.

In 1999, the Clinton Administration backed new Colombian President Andrés Pastrana's agenda to curb drug smuggling. *Plan Colombia* included provisions for more aggressive eradication and interdiction efforts, encouraging rural guerrillas to disarm through peace talks, replacing coca farmers' lost income with alternative crop and employment programs, and strengthening the country's historically weak government.¹ Of the plan's expected \$7.5 billion cost, the Clinton Administration committed \$1.3 billion for eradication and interdiction, the European Community was asked to commit \$2 billion for alternate crop development and government reform, and Colombia committed \$4 billion.

In the two years since it was introduced, however, *Plan Colombia* has failed to move the country toward these goals. The reasons are rooted in a number of deficiencies embodied in the plan itself. For example, the plan treats narcotraffickers and rebels as separate problems when in fact their activities are deeply intertwined. It also neglects the issue of trafficking and violence spilling over the borders into Colombia's neighbors and does little to strengthen crucial layers of government.

Moreover, the United States has turned out to be plan's the only reliable backer. The allied nations have been slow to commit their funds, and

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1. During his campaign for president, Pastrana promised a \$5.4 billion "Marshall-type" plan to finance development and help end civil conflict. *Plan Colombia* brought a number of his ideas together in a comprehensive document. See Andrés Pastrana Arango, *Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State*, Republic of Colombia, October 1999.

the Colombian government—strapped for cash by a depressed economy—cannot pay its share. More troubling, *Plan Colombia* relies on a peace process that is based on poorly structured dialogue between the government and the rebels. So far, however, no one seems to have devised a better alternative.

Already, the Bush Administration is seeking \$731 million in addition to President Clinton's earlier request (see Table 1). But no money should be released until the Administration finds a better way to reduce the consumption of drugs that come from Colombia, help Colombia rein in drug-related violence, and encourage this nation of 40 million people to deal more forthrightly with its troubles. The new approach should build on the strongest elements of *Plan Colombia* while correcting its weaknesses. The Administration should also take steps to foster regional cooperation on drug and arms interdiction and promote a regional working group to develop the protocols for sharing intelligence and coordinating army and police activities, offer to help Colombia's neighbors bolster their security forces to help reduce violence and trafficking along their borders, and ask Congress to consider helping the region develop more democratic and accountable governments through civil society programs and economic strength through trade preferences.

COLOMBIA'S PROBLEMS AFFECT THE HEMISPHERE

No one can doubt that Colombia's difficulties affect the rest of the Americas. North America—particularly the United States—is the number one consumer of Colombian cocaine and heroin,

Table 1 B1435

Andean Counterdrug Initiative FY 2002 Request (In Millions of Dollars)

	Interdiction	Alternative Development/ Institution Building	Total
Colombia	\$252	\$147	\$399
Peru	77	79	156
Bolivia	54	47	101
Ecuador	19	20	39
Brazil	15	-	15
Venezuela	10	-	10
Panama	11	-	11
Total	438	293	731

Source: U.S. Department of State, *Summary and Highlights: International Affairs Function 150, Fiscal Year 2002*, p. 23.

followed by South America and Europe.² Drug use elevates the cost of public health care and the level of criminality and violence wherever it is prevalent. In the United States, millions of users spend about \$63 billion on cocaine each year, and one in four prison inmates are narcotics offenders. Pure cocaine is worth about \$100 million per metric ton on U.S. streets,³ which means the wholesale industry is capable of earning as much as \$50 billion annually⁴—or as much as the gross domestic product (GDP) of Peru.

Coca cultivation has tripled since 1996, and Colombian producers reportedly collect from \$3 billion to \$8 billion in revenue⁵—the larger figure being roughly equivalent to the economy of Bolivia. Not only do these immense sums enable drug kingpins to corrupt public officials at every level of Colombia's government, but they prop up an economy that is battered by 20 percent unemployment and the constant destruction of infrastructure by marauding guerrillas.⁶

2. United Nations, Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2000*, p. 196.

3. U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2000, p. 41.

4. "Global Sales of Colombian Drugs Seen at \$46 Bln in '99," Reuters, March 20, 1999, at http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20000320/wl/colombia_drugs_1.html (March 21, 2000).

Colombia has a long history of tolerating impunity within its borders. Since gaining its independence from Spain in 1819, it has experienced numerous revolts and two major civil conflicts that took hundreds of thousands of lives. Since the 1960s, it has tolerated Latin America's longest-running insurgency. The two largest groups of Colombian insurgents are the Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The FARC is the largest organization, with some 17,000 armed combatants and perhaps 10,000 followers in support roles.⁷ The ELN, which now boasts about 4,000 members, regularly bombs oil pipelines and the electrical power grid.⁸

Initially, the FARC purported to represent squatters and established an agrarian agenda for seizing power, redistributing land, nationalizing key industries, and abolishing free market policies. Member fronts supported themselves through extortion, kidnapping, and protecting drug crops. Today, the FARC attacks police and army units and civilian municipalities, forces rural farmers to grow drug crops, and even engages in cultivation itself.

The ELN has suffered a number of military defeats since 1998 and is losing followers. Nevertheless, President Pastrana has tried to entice it into dialogue by offering it control of a safe haven or *despeje* in southern Bolívar department (state). Local residents have forced the government to put this effort on hold by vigorously protesting the establishment of the *despeje*.⁹

In addition to the insurgents, paramilitary self-defense groups are operating throughout

Colombia, and their ranks are growing as rural inhabitants become increasingly impatient with the government's inability to neutralize guerrilla activities. These paramilitary groups originally were inspired by the military as an aid in counter-insurgency efforts, but they became synonymous with death squads and were outlawed in 1989. Nevertheless, their ranks have grown from about 800 in the early 1990s to more than 8,000 in 2000. The largest of them, the United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC), acts as an umbrella for several small groups operating in north-central Colombia. They protect drug traffickers and attack rebels and suspected sympathizers. The AUC is led by Carlos Castaño.

According to the government, paramilitary groups were responsible for 53 percent of the attacks on civilian populations last year, while the FARC and the ELN committed the other 47 percent and accounted for more than 1,600 kidnappings.

The drug- and guerrilla-inspired violence also spills over into Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela:

- Last August, Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso established a \$10 million *Plan Cobra* to help secure his country's border with Colombia against traffickers spilling into the largely unpatrolled upper Amazon River basin. Arms pipelines running through Brazil and Paraguay reportedly involve Iranian-backed Hezbollah terrorists.

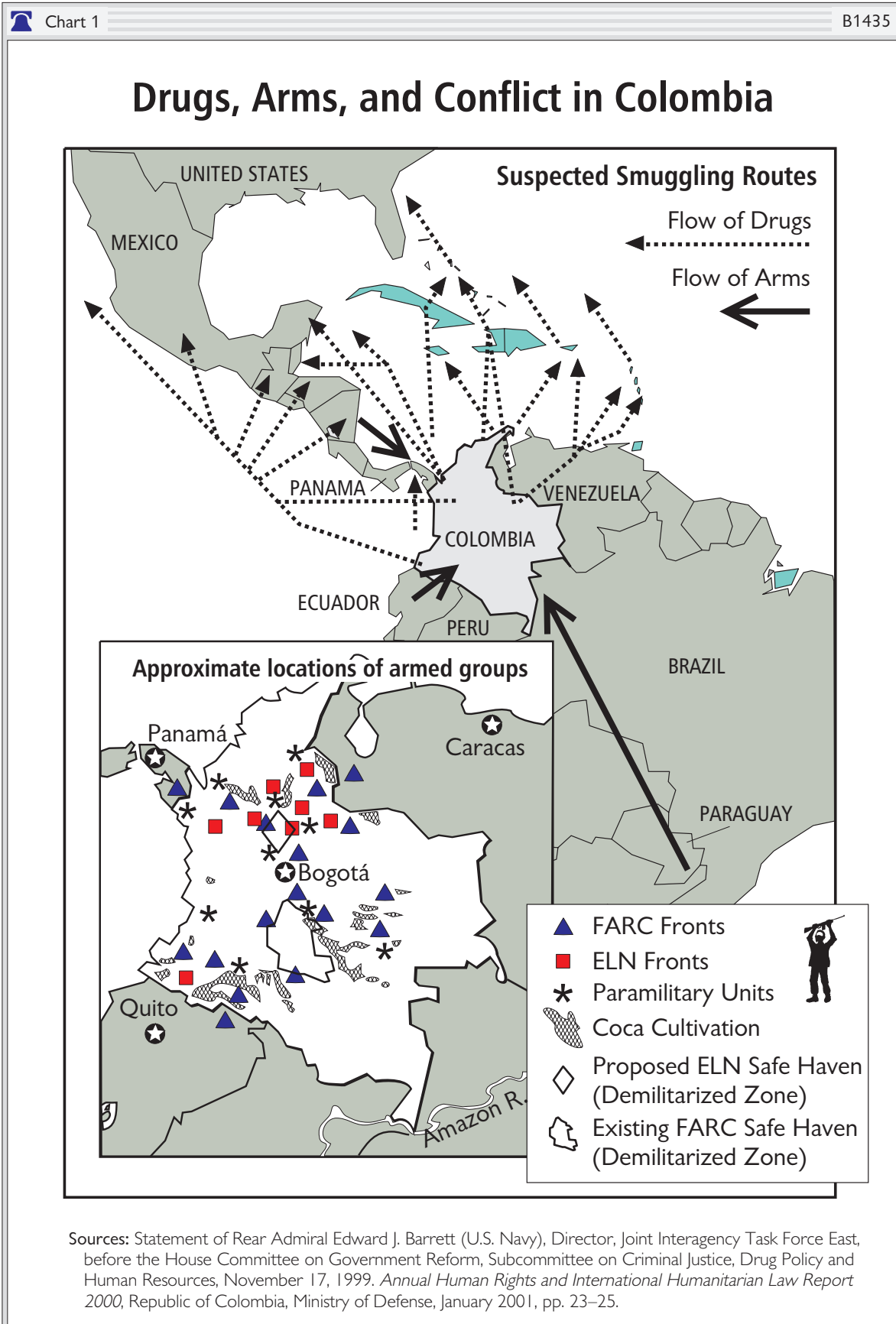
5. *Ibid.* and James L. Zackrisson, *Crisis? What Crisis? Security Issues in Colombia*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, at <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/cris2.html> (February 25, 2000).

6. Despite high unemployment, occasional natural disasters, and frequent damage to the power grid and strategic oil pipelines by rebel forces, Colombia has never had to renegotiate its debt, unlike its neighbors. See *Toward Greater Peace and Security in Colombia*, Council on Foreign Relations and the Inter-American Dialogue, 2000, p. 15.

7. The FARC was founded in the Magdalena River valley in 1965 by members of Colombia's Communist Party, which included the group's current leader, Manuel Tirofijo ("Sureshot") Marulanda Velez.

8. The ELN was founded in the Magdalena River valley in 1964 by Fabio Vasquez Castaño, with help from Cuban advisers and supplies. Its operations were decidedly more terrorist, and its followers initially came from the urban middle class. In the mid-1980s, the ELN had about 500 armed combatants.

9. See "Blockades Threaten Colombia Peace Plans," CNN News, at <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/americas/02/16/colombia.blockades.ap/index.html> (February 16, 2001).



- FARC rebels are so prevalent in northeastern Ecuador that the Sucumbios district is known as the “storehouse of the FARC” where insurgents go to relax and obtain supplies.
- Although the ELN and the FARC have operated out of Panama’s isolated Darien province for years, the pace of their kidnappings, murders, and skirmishes has increased. Though officially neutral toward Colombia’s civil conflicts, Panama has asked the United States for assistance in training security forces to combat these activities and gain greater territorial control.
- FARC guerrillas also have invaded western Venezuela to the point that Colombian paramilitary groups are training Venezuelan counterparts to repel them.¹⁰

In addition, Mexico is fighting a difficult battle against its domestic cartels that are responsible for moving two-thirds of all Colombian cocaine into the United States, and U.S. embassy officials in El Salvador complain that increased trafficking and drug violence taxes the resources of that country’s fledgling civilian police force.¹¹

Millions Flee the Violence. Colombia’s problems have encouraged large-scale migration. Within the last decade alone, some 3.5 million citizens have left the country. About 300,000 continue to flee each year, and an estimated 100,000 seek safety in the United States.¹²

Should narcoguerrillas succeed in controlling Colombia in the future, these

A Chronology of Inconsistent U.S. Policy

From 1989 to 1993, the United States helped the Colombian government pursue the Medellin and Cali drug cartels. But in 1993, the Clinton Administration and Congress cut the staffing level of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and slashed budgets for interdiction assistance. Since then, counternarcotics support from Washington has had little long-lasting effect.

The election of President Ernesto Samper (whose campaign reportedly received \$6 million from drug traffickers) in 1994 led the White House both to decertify Colombia as a nation that was cooperating on counternarcotics and to withhold needed training and equipment from the Colombian security forces. Eventually, the security assistance was restored, but only to support counternarcotics operations.

1993: President Clinton signs Presidential Decision Directive No. 14, ordering federal agencies to destroy transnational crime organizations.

1994: U.S. military and law enforcement assistance is scaled back in Colombia; ONDCP staff is cut from 112 to 25.

1996: The White House replaces the ONDCP director and begins adding staff.

1996–1997: The Clinton Administration decertifies Colombia on counternarcotics cooperation and withholds security assistance.

1998: Security assistance is restored with the election of President Andrés Pastrana but is restricted to use against traffickers.

1999: Colombia’s security situation deteriorates; U.S. officials advise Pastrana on an expanded agenda called *Plan Colombia*.

2000: The Clinton Administration calls for a \$1.6 billion emergency assistance package for *Plan Colombia*—making Colombia the world’s third largest recipient of U.S. aid.

10. See María V. Cristancho, “La Guerra se pasa a las fronteras ‘calientes,’” *El Tiempo*, at http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/04-003-2001/poli_0.html (March 5, 2001).

11. From conversations with U.S. officials in El Salvador, October 2000.

12. Anthony Faiola, “South America’s Expanding Exodus: Economic, Political Crises Spur Migration of Rich and Poor,” *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2000, p. A1.

displacements and migrations could turn into a human tidal wave that would depress the economies and destabilize the societies of Colombia's South American and Central American neighbors and significantly affect Mexico, Caribbean states, and the United States. High poverty and unstable governments in the northern Andes already offer fertile ground for "criminocracies." If the United States and Colombia's other hemispheric neighbors fail to help Colombia resolve its problems, their costs for dealing with the consequences will increase significantly.

THE PLAN'S UNFOCUSED STRATEGY

Since the 1980s, the U.S. relationship with Colombia has concentrated almost exclusively on how to reduce drug trafficking rather than on the root problems of weak governance. *Plan Colombia* was novel in that it introduced issues like the rule of law and economic recovery as objectives. Even so, when U.S. officials advised the Pastrana administration in writing the formal plan in 1999, both sides recognized that a threefold increase in coca production was strengthening the hands of drug lords and guerrillas. Colombia was becoming increasingly unstable, and a blueprint was needed to guide the government's response and to convince the U.S. Congress that quadrupling assistance was warranted. Thus, *Plan Colombia* was written with a North American audience in mind.

Therein lies the problem. To appeal to a broad segment of the American public and the U.S. Congress, the plan had to focus on stemming the tide of illicit drugs, not on fuzzy notions of how to strengthen a wobbly government or on old ideas of how to defeat communist insurgents. To neutralize opposition from liberal lawmakers or the international human rights community, the plan had to separate the treatment of traffickers from punishment of the rebels and pretend there

was little linkage between them. To make it even more attractive, it had to suggest that the bulk of financial assistance would come from Colombia and other countries rather than from the U.S. Treasury.

This orientation emphasized marketing strategies at the expense of substance and created a flawed agenda. For example:

- Plan Colombia fails to address the state's responsibilities to citizens effectively.** Although it seemed comprehensive—listing strategies to bolster the Colombian economy, combat narco trafficking, reform the judicial sector, and encourage social development—the plan lacked details on how the government would address violence and its own weaknesses, which the polls say concern ordinary Colombians the most.¹³ Last year, Colombia reported 25,660 murders,¹⁴ a steep increase from 10,000 in 1984, which correlates to the boom in drug trafficking.¹⁵ Guerrilla and paramilitary attacks against civilians and kidnapping also increased drastically.

Plan Colombia promised to address these problems largely by curbing the illegal narcotics trade, but it presented neither a plan for expanding Colombia's security forces nor details on reforming the backlogged and opaque civil justice system. It failed to address the key problem of weak state and municipal governments and a highly bureaucratized, centralized system. Without public security and the delivery of government services beyond the major urban areas, most of Colombia will remain besieged.
- Linkages between drug traffickers and rebels are suppressed.** The closest *Plan Colombia* comes to describing the insurgents' ties with the illicit drug industry is to claim

13. Latinobarometro, "Opinión pública latinoamericana," at <http://www.latinobarometro.cl> (November 16, 2000).

14. See U.S. Department of State, *Colombia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices—2000*, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/wha/index.cfm?docid=741> (March 1, 2001), and *Colombia: 1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, at http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/colombia.html (February 16, 2001).

15. Republic of Colombia, Ministry of National Defense, *Annual Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Report—2000*, January 2001, p. 76.

that 30 percent of their income comes from “taxes” they collect to protect coca crops.¹⁶ That may be a low figure considering monthly earnings of between \$75 million and \$100 million, which guerrillas would be hard-pressed to achieve through extortion and kidnapping ransoms.¹⁷ Moreover, insurgents have made money by protecting crops, airstrips, and cocaine labs for nearly three decades, and there are now complaints that the FARC is producing cocaine inside its own safe haven.¹⁸ The distinction is crucial, because *Plan Colombia* deals with the guerrillas through a “peace process,” while narcotraffickers and members of self-defense groups are subject to arrest.

- **The purpose of the peace dialogue is vague and its scope too broad.** Three months after Pastrana took office, he withdrew police and army units from a 16,000-square-mile area south of Bogotá and created a safe haven (*despeje*) for the FARC. Moreover, he has proposed another for the ELN that would be the size of Delaware. Pastrana neither set preconditions nor established an agenda for the peace talks, perhaps hoping the guerrillas would agree to a cease-fire and eventually bargain for permanent peace. The seemingly bold move failed to produce any progress beyond temporary truces while guerrilla-perpetrated massacres and kidnappings remained at a constant level. (See box on page 8.)

This year, President Pastrana has sided with the FARC on its request to give international observers seats at the dialogue table. Most of the observers came from Europe¹⁹ and met together for the first time on March 8. Their presence has helped to create a surreal atmosphere of legitimacy for the FARC by endorsing its proposal for manual coca eradication that would never be certifiably implemented in the areas the FARC controls but would give the rebels a break from the more effective aerial efforts.²⁰ Thus, while dragging their heels to help Colombia financially, European diplomats are persuading Pastrana to make conflicting commitments that eventually could derail *Plan Colombia* altogether.

Colombians overwhelmingly disapprove of the government’s dialogue with these rebels. Most recently, 88 percent of Colombians polled believed that the FARC *despeje* failed to achieve its purpose. A Gallup poll showed that FARC leader Manuel Marulanda and ELN chief Nicolas Rodríguez Bautista have a 3 percent favorable rating, compared with 11 percent for AUC leader Carlos Castaño and 75 percent for former National Police Chief General Rosso José Serrano.²¹

- ***Plan Colombia* glosses over regional worries.** Objective Number Five in *Plan Colombia’s* counter-drug strategy calls for the integration of national efforts into a regional and interna-

16. Pastrana Arango, *Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State*, p. 24.

17. According to Representative Dan Burton (R-IN), they “are not rural simpletons sporting rusty hunting rifles. They are the best equipped, best trained, best clothed, and best financed terrorist organization in Latin America. . . . Despite their claims to the contrary, both organizations are heavily involved in drug trafficking.” See Dan Burton, “Forgotten Hostages,” *The Washington Times*, July 9, 1999. See also G. Andrew Macklin, “Frontline of the Drug War,” *The Washington Times*, September 22, 1996, p. B1.

18. Statement by Senator Enrique Gomez Hurtado at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., August 28, 2000.

19. Fourteen of the 23 countries and multilateral entities represented were European. See “Quiénes asisten el encuentro?” *El Tiempo*, at http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/08-03-2001/poli_1.html (March 8, 2001).

20. See “Texto de la declaración de los diplomáticos,” *El Tiempo*, at http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/09-03-2001/prip_19.html (March 9, 2001).

21. See “Colombia/Paz: Encuesta No a Prorroga de Area Neutral Si FARC No ‘Descongela’ Proceso,” EFE News Services, December 3, 2000, and “Colombia-Encuesta ‘Tirofijo’ Personaje con Opinión Mas Desfavorable Según Sondeo,” EFE News Services, January 10, 2001.

DIALOGUE WITHOUT A ROAD MAP

When Andrés Pastrana campaigned for president of Colombia, he pledged to bring peace to an embattled nation. His vision in the original *Plan Colombia* included an economic stimulus package of foreign assistance and a dialogue with rebel forces that were operating in about 40 percent of Colombia's rugged countryside. Three months after taking office, Pastrana offered the FARC autonomous authority over a safe haven (*despeje*) the size of Costa Rica, in accordance with a 1997 law to promote negotiations with rebel groups. He proposed a similar arrangement for the ELN, but protests by local residents have blocked its creation.

Despite the establishment of the FARC *despeje*, negotiations failed to produce even the framework for a peace agreement. Pastrana has indulged the FARC without receiving anything in return, largely giving it the upper hand. The rebels operate in about 70 percent of Colombia, earn about \$75 million a month from criminal activities such as drug trafficking, and cannot be defeated by the current Colombian security forces. The object of the peace dialogue has been to reach an accommodation to stem the violence without bringing the rebels to justice or incorporating them into Colombian society. Thus, Colombia has embarked on the road to Balkanization.

1998: Pastrana withdraws police and military units from five communities near San Vicente del Caguán and cedes the area to the FARC

for 90 days. FARC patrols reportedly steal 8,000 head of cattle from local ranchers.¹

1999: After talks initially break down, Pastrana extends the *despeje*. Both sides present agendas, and the dialogue continues over procedural issues.

2000: The government arranges for FARC leaders to visit six European countries to see examples of democratic socialism. They return unimpressed. Government and ELN leaders meet in Geneva to discuss creating a second demilitarized zone. Envoys from Cuba, France, Norway, and Spain attend the July meeting. Talks with the FARC continue over procedural matters until November, when the FARC accuses the government of doing nothing to halt the activities of the self-defense groups targeting the FARC and walks out.

2001: On February 8, Pastrana renews the *despeje* for seven months and personally meets with FARC leader Marulanda in San Vicente del Caguán. Pastrana concedes that Colombian self-defense groups are the common enemy of both the guerrillas and the government and agrees to allow foreign diplomats to observe the dialogue. On March 8, observers from 22 countries sit in on the talks. On February 16, local residents in Barrancabermeja block roads to protest government plans to cede a *despeje* to the ELN.

1. Cesar García, "As Colombian Troops Pull Out, Residents Await Rebels," Associated Press, November 7, 1998.

tional strategy. Those vague arrangements supposedly were to be facilitated by the United States, which manages aviation tracking radar in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, and elsewhere, but coordination and cooperation with police and army units in surrounding countries has yet to take shape. Local security forces are lacking in Panama's Darien province. Ecuador, preoccupied with domestic unrest, has done

little to push the FARC out of its northeastern quadrant. Venezuelan President Chávez has been unwilling to herd the FARC out of western Venezuela. Brazilian President Cardoso is attempting to strengthen Brazilian forces and keep violence and trafficking out of the upper reaches of the Amazon basin. Without a regional and international strategy

supported by all of Colombia's neighbors, *Plan Colombia* will not succeed.

- **Funding commitments for the effort were based on hope.** The United States provided its full share of \$1.3 billion in an emergency spending package passed in August 2000. The Colombian government, however, has admitted that its conflict-inspired recession will prevent it from covering its \$4 billion commitment, and the European community announced last December that it would appropriate only \$250 million of the \$2 billion it was to contribute because it objected to aerial fumigation and U.S. aid to Colombia's security forces.²² Spain—which has major investments in Latin America—recently broke with that policy and has spearheaded an effort to obtain additional funds from Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom. Even so, *Plan Colombia* is likely to fall short by some \$1 billion.²³

A BLUEPRINT FOR U.S.—COLOMBIA ASSISTANCE

For all its problems, Colombia is still one of Latin America's oldest and hardest-working democracies. The fourth largest trade partner of the United States in Latin America, it accounts for about \$11 billion in two-way trade. It is the eighth largest supplier of crude oil to the United States, and with Venezuela and Ecuador accounts for 20 percent of the petroleum the United States imports each year.²⁴ Not all of its politicians are corrupt, nor all of its citizens outlaws. In the past 10 years, more than 5,000 poorly paid police officers have valiantly given their lives trying to contain the country's drug-inspired violence.

Despite its drawbacks, *Plan Colombia* offered a fresh, comprehensive approach to solving the country's problems and reducing its significant role in transnational crime. However, it is based on a shifting railbed of aimless peace talks and is close to jumping the track. The policy of drug interdiction is too limited when the problem is multidimensional. *Plan Colombia* envisions aid from a community of supporters, but those donors are now reluctant to invest in it, and some are even working against a democratic solution at the dialogue table. Without a course correction, several billion dollars of U.S. assistance to curb criminality and violence in the region may be lost, making the sacrifice of countless Colombian lives in vain.

To help reshape *Plan Colombia* into a more effective strategy, the Bush Administration should signal a clean break from the past. Specifically, it should:

- **Encourage Pastrana to transform the dialogue into a credible peace process.** Current talks with the FARC rebels are aimed only at accommodating them by giving them space and engaging them in discussions over procedure to the exclusion of vital interests. The focus must change. The guerrillas and self-defense forces should negotiate only the terms of their re-entry into a law-abiding pluralistic society.²⁵

The Bush Administration should withdraw previous U.S. endorsements of President Pastrana's "land-for-peace" approach. Instead of extending the FARC's stay in the demilitarized zone south of Bogotá (see map), a timetable should be created to reestablish government authority, designating a smaller area within the zone for demobilization. The Pastrana admin-

22. As a whole, the European Community has opposed *Plan Colombia*, reflecting sympathies toward the Marxist guerrillas and generally more tolerant views of cocaine and heroin use in such countries as Switzerland and the Netherlands.

23. Nora Boustany, "Diplomatic Dispatches: Spain's Global Vision," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 2001, p. A24.

24. U.S. Department of State, "Why Americans Should Care About Plan Colombia," fact sheet, February 21, 2001.

25. The government must develop an effective counterinsurgency strategy or eventually may have to consider including self-defense groups in any further dialogue. This point is elucidated in an interview with the former commander of El Salvador's rebel forces, Joaquín Villalobos. See "Las negociaciones de paz son complejas pero terrenales," *Semana*, at <http://216.35.197.109/984/actualidad/ZZZWNIN05KC.asp> (March 14, 2001).

istration should be encouraged to convert plans for a proposed *despeje* for the ELN in southern Bolívar and Antioquía departments into a plan to provide a similar location for demobilization and reintegration.

The Administration should also encourage Pastrana and foreign parties involved in the process to play a more responsible role by (1) contributing their fair share to *Plan Colombia*; (2) helping to bring all parties, including the paramilitaries, to the negotiating table; and (3) establishing a timetable for disarmament. Any non-contributing nation or diplomatic entity that finds this arrangement unacceptable should be encouraged to withdraw from any role in deciding the outcome.

- **Help Colombia to strengthen and professionalize its security forces.** For the government to be successful in negotiating peace, it must gain the upper hand by retaking the monopoly of force that it once exercised but that is now in the grip of criminal and militant actors. New estimates put the combined FARC and ELN strength at close to 21,000 combatants, with half again as many providing some kind of logistical support. Paramilitary forces that numbered less than 1,000 in 1992 now have as many as 8,000 armed members as public outrage grows over the government's inability to curb guerrilla massacres, kidnappings, thefts, and destruction of infrastructure. The Colombian army's strength is about 121,000, but only 40,000 are effectively in combat positions, including three projected counternarcotics battalions. There are about 112,000 Colombian police officers for the entire country. This might sound impressive, but the police are needed for public security everywhere, and the army must defend static positions.

Both the army and police need to boost their troop strength. The only strategy that can reduce the level of violence in the long run and serve both Colombian and U.S. interests is to encourage Colombian efforts to strengthen and professionalize these institutions. This is not a military solution, but no other remedy can be effective without public order. Only when the army has established an effective presence and provides the cover for civilian law enforcement will the police be able to spread a more durable permanent public security net to arrest traffickers and support a permanent government presence in Colombia's many rural municipalities.²⁶

- **Renew trade preferences but condition liberalization on market reforms to unleash individual productivity.** When Pastrana met with President Bush in February, he asked for trade preferences to stabilize the Colombian economy and for more money to pay for the parts of *Plan Colombia* his government could not afford. The President should sign the new Andean Trade Preference Expansion Act (S. 525), sponsored by Senators Bob Graham (D-FL), Mike DeWine (R-OH), and nine other cosponsors, which would replace the one due to expire in December 2001. Moreover, he should explore further liberalization efforts to stimulate Colombia's recovery from its current 5 percent economic contraction.

The Administration also should encourage the Pastrana government to ease regulatory burdens on the creation of small to medium-sized businesses and to simplify procedures for registering private property. This would allow more jobs to be created and increase the individual capacity for productivity.²⁷ The Administration should reevaluate U.S. support for crop substitution programs,

26. Representative Dan Burton, chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform, makes the point directly: "Holding the countryside has never been the mission of the [Colombian National Police]. That mission is the responsibility of the Colombian Army. It is obvious the Colombian Army has had numerous problems holding the countryside. The Colombian Government may actually control less than half of its territory. It would be a great asset to the CNP if the Colombian Army was actually able to provide security assistance to the CNP while it establishes and enforces the rule of law." See Representative Dan Burton, "Statement on Plan Colombia," October 19, 2000.

which prod farmers to grow alternative crops for already saturated markets. The fact is that 75 percent of Colombians live in urban areas while most coca is cultivated by itinerant farmers on land that is typically unsuitable for other marketable crops.²⁸ It would make more sense to open up new opportunities for these individuals in other sectors of the economy.

- **Reallocate U.S. assistance to strengthen local governments, the rule of law, and civil society.** Most local governments depend on the national government for revenue; they manage few services on their own and are predictably unaccountable to their constituents—all of which makes them prey to criminals and illegal armies. Colombia's overloaded justice system functions neither effectively nor transparently. It is backlogged to the point that half of its 21,000 prisoners have not yet been sentenced. Many citizens distrust the government altogether.

To enhance governability, the United States should encourage Colombia's political establishment to devolve more authority to subordinate levels of government in order to enhance local decisionmaking. Through its Administration of Justice program, the United States should help Colombia improve the judicial process, enhance prosecutorial functions, and permit transparent oral trials. Furthermore, *Casas de Justicia*, a promising concept already providing access to mediation services and public defenders in 14 marginal neighborhoods, should be expanded beyond the urban areas into the more than 1,000 rural municipalities.

Since better government is possible only when civil society expects and supports effective

institutions, Washington should fund relatively inexpensive civic education programs to help inform politicians and citizens of their rights and responsibilities. The National Endowment for Democracy, through its affiliated organizations, the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, should offer to assist Colombia's political parties to renew grassroots contacts and strengthen the democratic process. But time is growing short: The FARC is already recruiting members for its Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia—a Marxist urban front dedicated to cultivating guerrilla support in the cities.²⁹

- **Encourage regional cooperation and develop a comprehensive Andean strategy.** Washington should foster real regional cooperation in drug and arms interdiction. The Bush Administration should offer to help surrounding states bolster their security forces along the Colombian border to reduce violence and trafficking, should promote the formation of a regional working group to devise arrangements to share intelligence and coordinate army and police actions, and should establish a U.S. interagency working group to develop a comprehensive Andean strategy. Congress should consider ways to address some of the same problems that Colombia's neighbors face by providing trade preferences as well as civil society programs that would encourage the development of more democratic and accountable governments.
- **Show good faith by reducing the domestic demand for cocaine and heroin.** In the wake of former President Clinton's pardons of convicted drug offenders like Harvey Weinig, who reportedly laundered money for the Cali cartel,

27. As advocated by Confecámaras, the Colombian Confederation of Chambers of Commerce, which is developing programs to encourage the growth of small and medium-sized businesses, improve local governance, and generate employment for Colombia's displaced rural workers.

28. For an interesting account of how coca cultivation moves from one area to the next, see Juan Forero, "In the War on Coca, Colombian Growers Simply Move Along," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2000 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/17/world/17COLO.html> (March 20, 2001).

29. Tom Marks, "Colombian Reality," *Armed Forces Journal International*, March 2001, p. 22.

President Bush must do more to reduce domestic demand for cocaine and heroin. His Administration should make a whole-hearted effort to bring U.S. money launderers to justice. It should clear the clogged, inefficient assistance pipeline that so far has failed to deliver most of last year's \$1.3 billion emergency request to Colombia.³⁰ The program managed by the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs continues to send outdated ammunition to the Colombian National Police to use in new, U.S.-supplied Blackhawk helicopters.³¹ The Bureau should be reorganized to develop a better purchasing and delivery mechanism. Finally, both the White House and Congress should review the effectiveness of aerial eradication with a general-purpose herbicide that kills plants indiscriminately but has only a temporary effect. Definitive research on naturally occurring mycoherbicides that remain active over several years, like the fungus attacking coca plants in Peru, should be accelerated.

CONCLUSION

The politics of making deals with violent unaccountable actors is subverting Colombia. Drug kingpins and rebels have incomes rivaling the economies of small countries. Their firepower matches that of the government's security forces. They operate in nearly half of the national territory, and the FARC has dominion over an area the size of Costa Rica. As the strength of the irregular armies increases, the Pastrana government will find it ever more difficult to deal with them, let

alone to cooperate with neighbors like the United States to reduce the flow of illicit drugs. If the balance of power shifts in favor of the outlaws, the breakup of Colombia into zones controlled by local chieftains and narcobandits will become inevitable.

The White House must abandon the Clinton Administration's scattershot approach in dealing with Colombia's contributions to drug trafficking and international crime. However unfocused, *Plan Colombia* is still viable. Better defined, its measures could help to solve some of the country's most urgent problems and reduce the threat that crime and violence pose to the region and the hemisphere. The plan must clearly seek to disarm the country's irregular armies, make the elected government the sole proprietor of the use of force, improve weak governance, restore the once-vibrant economy through market incentives, and coordinate the efforts of neighboring governments to prevent the spread of drug-related violence.

Although bleak, the situation is not hopeless. Colombia is a country rich in natural resources and native talent. A model for establishing a new social contract, a more transparent government, and an open economy now exists in Mexico. Few observers would have thought that was possible a decade ago. The United States should encourage Colombia's leadership to demonstrate the same resolve and walk a new path.

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30. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results*, GAO-01-26, October 17, 2000.

31. Representative Benjamin A. Gilman, statement before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, March 2, 2001.