

Executive Summary Background

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Helping Colombia Sustain Progress Toward Peace

Stephen Johnson

Plan Colombia—a six-year, U.S.-backed plan to help Colombia combat drug trafficking and terrorism and strengthen public institutions—is slated to end in 2006. Initially, the plan lacked details and offered sanctuary to violent guerrillas, but in 2002, newly elected President Alvaro Uribe Vélez brought to bear the political will needed to improve the strategy and bring illegal armed groups to justice.

Thanks to expanded public security, unemployment is down, the economy is growing, justice reforms are taking hold, drug production has decreased, and rural rebels have demobilized in record numbers. Yet Colombia needs to expand terrorism-free zones, deploy more soldiers and police to bring all rebel armies to justice, speed up institutional reforms, and obtain better cooperation from international allies. As a partner in this effort, the United States should:

- **Help** Colombia strengthen its military and police forces to defeat rural terrorist armies,
- **Prioritize** development support for improving government accountability and effectiveness,
- **Press** Colombia to undertake stronger economic reforms and advance free trade,
- **Promote** more sustainable drug crop eradication strategies, and
- **Encourage** neighbors and international allies to cooperate more closely in curbing regional narcoterrorism.

A History of Instability. Historically, weak government and law enforcement have helped Colombia to become a major smuggling nation. During the drug-boom years of the 1970s, Colombia became the primary source of marijuana reaching American cities. As producers switched to coca and became more prosperous, the countryside became more violent. The first Bush Administration responded by launching a five-year, \$2 billion Andean counternarcotics initiative that helped Colombia defeat major smuggling cartels.

Dismissive of these efforts, the succeeding Clinton Administration cut funding, decertified Colombia as cooperating on narcotics after President Ernesto Samper was accused of taking campaign contributions from drug lords, and withheld security assistance for two years. During the interim period, bandit armies like the communist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) took over much of the trafficking.

In 1998, President Andrés Pastrana made resumption of U.S. security assistance a priority. His government authored Plan Colombia, which

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outlined a partnership with the United States to reduce trafficking and end rural conflict by strengthening the economy, reducing public debt, modernizing the security forces, reforming institutions, securing foreign partnerships, promoting alternate industries, improving health and education, and achieving a negotiated peace with armed rural groups. In 2000, the United States reversed course, approving \$1.3 billion in emergency support for Plan Colombia and pursuing a comprehensive partnership in reforming the Colombian state instead of narrowly targeting narcotics trafficking.

Although skeptical of President Pastrana's peace strategy of giving sanctuary to the FARC rebels in hopes they would disarm, President George W. Bush pressed Congress for additional assistance as well as the more expansive Andean Regional and Andean Counternarcotics initiatives that included Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil. In 2002, the flawed peace process was discarded, and Alvaro Uribe was elected president after pledging a more serious effort against narcoterrorism.

Partial Success. Uribe doubled aerial drug crop eradication and collected a \$780 million war tax to pay for two new army battalions. As a consequence, mayors and police are back in all 1,098 municipalities. Cultivation of coca crops has declined by 33 percent, and cultivation of the opium poppy has declined by 25 percent. From 2003 to 2004, terrorist attacks declined by 42 percent while demobilizations and desertions from rebel and paramilitary groups rose from 1,934 to 2,489.

Even though peace negotiations with the Marxist rebels have not yet advanced, the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces (AUC) have begun a bloc-by-bloc demobilization. In June 2005, the Colombian congress passed a justice and peace law that offered leniency to most former combatants, balanced by punishment for those who committed grievous crimes. Moreover, increased security and certainty have boosted public confidence and helped the national economy to recover from a recession in 1999, growing by 3.9 percent in 2003. Unemployment fell from a high of 20.5 percent in 2000 to 15 percent in 2004.

The Road Ahead. Despite this welcome progress, Colombia is not yet strong enough to stamp out drug trafficking or force the Marxist rebels to demobilize. Moreover, social and economic reforms need more resources, and public institutions must improve at a faster pace for life in small towns to improve noticeably. To help Colombia achieve its goals, the Bush Administration should continue Plan Colombia funding. However, it should target the \$550 million provided this year to help Colombia to:

- **Expand its security forces** to surround and defeat illegal armed bands. The United States should help the Colombian government to provide better air mobility and training.
- **Improve local governance** to consolidate state authority in terrorism-free zones.
- **Strengthen property rights, ease burdensome business regulations, and advance free trade**, thereby allowing small businesses to flourish and create jobs.
- **Promote more varied drug crop eradication strategies** through manual efforts, confiscating cultivated areas, and researching coca-specific mycoherbicides.
- **Encourage more cooperation from regional and international allies** in curbing regional narcoterrorism by denying territory to narcoterrorists.

Conclusion. Colombia is an important trade partner and democratic linchpin in South America. It was a disintegrating state in the 1990s and has managed to turn itself around with help from the United States and other allies. Continuing this partnership will sustain stable markets for U.S. businesses and reduce the regional instability caused by lawlessness and narcoterrorism.

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Background

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Helping Colombia Sustain Progress Toward Peace

Stephen Johnson

Plan Colombia—a six-year, U.S.-backed plan to help Colombia combat drug trafficking and terrorism and strengthen public institutions—is slated to end in 2006. Developed in 1999, the plan was supposed to boost economic growth, modernize the country's security forces, strengthen the rule of law, and promote internal peace to curb drug smuggling and internal conflict.

What the plan lacked was details on how to achieve its objectives. Its centerpiece was a flawed peace strategy that provided a Switzerland-sized sanctuary for Colombia's largest guerrilla army while relying on the rebels' goodwill to demobilize. Then, in 2002, the election of President Alvaro Uribe brought to bear the political will needed to improve the strategy and bring illegal armed groups to justice.

Today, unemployment is down, the economy is growing, security forces are larger and more professional, justice reforms have taken hold, drug crop cultivation has decreased, and rural armed groups have demobilized in record numbers.

However, these successes do not mean that Colombia has solved its problems. Security forces are still far too weak to bring rebel armies to justice. Institutional reforms affect only the capital and a few scattered municipalities. Displaced persons still need jobs and homes. Aerial fumigation of drug crops is not sustainable, and international cooperation remains feeble outside of support from the United States. Colombia can solve some of these problems, but to solve all of them will still require outside help.

Talking Points

- Since 1998, the United States has partnered with Colombia to reduce drug trafficking and terrorism that spills beyond its borders.
- Plan Colombia, a six-year strategy, has been mostly successful in expanding Colombia's terrorism-free zones, encouraging irregular armies to demobilize, and strengthening the rule of law. Phase I of Plan Colombia will run out in 2006.
- More than 12,000 rebel and paramilitary combatants have demobilized, terrorist attacks have dropped by 57 percent in two years, and economic growth has jumped from a 4.2 percent contraction in 1999 to a 3.9 percent expansion in 2003.
- To ensure regional stability, America should support expanded efforts to bring Colombia's bandits to justice, improve governance, advance commerce and trade to create jobs, and encourage more cooperation from Colombia's neighbors in defeating drug trafficking and terrorism.

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Recognizing that a stable Colombia is in the U.S. national interest, and as a partner in helping it defeat terrorism and international crime, the Bush Administration should:

- **Help** Colombia to strengthen its security forces to bring bandit armies to justice;
- **Improve** support for Colombia's efforts to establish effective, accountable government;
- **Urge** Colombia to implement economic reforms to create opportunity for displaced and marginalized populations;
- **Advance** free trade between Colombia and the United States;
- **Encourage** Colombia to develop a more sustainable, varied drug crop eradication program; and
- **Encourage** neighbors and international allies to cooperate more closely on countering narco-terrorists and helping Colombia to strengthen its institutions and economy.

A History of Instability

Colombia is one of Latin America's oldest democracies, but ineffective government has destabilized it periodically throughout its history. Weak, centralized authority was the result of a compromise between two early political movements: One favored free trade, and the other wanted to preserve the monopolies and privileges of large estate holders.

Without institutions that could have resolved factional differences, violence erupted. In 1899, the War of a Thousand Days broke out over a domestic policy dispute and killed some 100,000 citizens. In 1948, the assassination of a popular politician ignited a civil war between the Liberal and Conservative Parties that took 300,000 lives. Afterward, rural resistance groups laid the foundation for Marxist insurgencies that evolved in

the 1960s—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN).

Weak law enforcement also allowed Colombia to become a major smuggling nation. During the drug-boom years of the 1970s, it surpassed Mexico as the primary source of marijuana for American cities. Ten years later, Colombian farmers followed the lead of Bolivian and Peruvian cultivators and changed to coca as cocaine and crack became popular on American streets.¹ As producers became more prosperous, the countryside became more violent. Newly rich drug lords organized personal armies and declared war on all who opposed them.

In 1989, kingpins assassinated presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, a highly regarded rule-of-law advocate who opposed drug trafficking. In response, the first Bush Administration boosted counternarcotics assistance from \$10 million to \$75 million and launched a five-year, \$2 billion Andean counterdrug initiative.² Although Colombia's big cartels were defeated, small, independent producers took up the slack, leaving drug production relatively unchanged.

Believing that President Bush's anti-drug initiative had not entirely achieved its goals, the succeeding Clinton Administration halved security assistance and sharply reduced the staff of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Shortly thereafter, relations between the United States and Colombia deteriorated with the election of President Ernesto Samper, who reportedly received millions of dollars in campaign contributions from the kingpins. In 1996, the United States decertified Colombia as cooperating on narcotics and withdrew assistance for two years.

Blueprint Confronts a "Nightmare." During the lapse in U.S. cooperation, independent traffick-

1. The estimated number of Americans using illicit drugs peaked at 25 million in 1979; the number of cocaine users surged to 5.7 million in 1985. In 2003, past-month illicit drug users numbered 19.5 million, including 2.3 million cocaine users. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse–Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), at www.oas.samhsa.gov/p0000016.htm (May 17, 2005).
2. U.S. Agency for International Development and Office of National Drug Control Policy, cited in Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 34.

ers cemented alliances with the communist FARC and ELN rebels and the paramilitary groups now known as the United Self-Defense Forces (AUC). After taking office in 1998, President Andrés Pastrana made resumption of U.S. assistance a priority, suggesting a Marshall Plan for Colombia that would include an alternative development program to replace drug crops with legitimate ones and reduce the share of drug money in the national economy.

In a policy reversal, U.S. diplomats helped Pastrana shape what became known as Plan Colombia. It obliged the United States to provide approximately \$3 billion in security assistance and development aid over six years, beginning in 2000. Colombia would contribute \$4 billion of its own money. Two months after the plan was published, President Clinton's Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey called Colombia "out of control" and a "flipping nightmare," cheerleading new assistance on the basis of keeping illegal drugs out of the United States.³

Besides a strategy to reduce trafficking, Plan Colombia was a comprehensive blueprint to establish a modern state and end rural anarchy. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Strengthen the economy and provide jobs,
2. Impose fiscal restraint and reduce public debt,
3. Modernize and restructure Colombian security forces,
4. Establish the rule of law through justice-sector reform and protect human rights,
5. Secure a partnership with consumer nations to reduce the production and consumption of narcotics,
6. Promote development of alternative crops and industries,
7. Strengthen local government,
8. Improve education and public health systems,
9. Achieve a negotiated peace with irregular armed groups, and

10. Secure balanced international cooperation in counternarcotics efforts.

Despite the comprehensiveness, it was flawed by meager detail and a peace process that gave the FARC a 16,000-acre safe haven south of Bogotá, where its leaders set up new headquarters, trained recruits, and produced drugs. During that time, the number of FARC combatants increased, violent acts spiked, and the opposing AUC coalesced as a third major illegal armed group. Even so, President Clinton secured bipartisan congressional approval for \$1.3 billion in emergency funding by August 2000.

Although skeptical of President Pastrana's peace strategy, incoming President George W. Bush obtained additional assistance for Colombia through his more expansive Andean Regional and Andean Counternarcotics initiatives, which included Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil. In February 2002, the peace process collapsed after FARC leaders repeatedly refused a cease-fire and President Pastrana ordered them out of the sanctuary. Finally, the May election of hard-line presidential candidate Alvaro Uribe Vélez signaled that Colombians were more serious about solving their internal problems.

Uribe's Record

Three years into his four-year term, President Uribe has stuck to his campaign promises to make government more effective and pressure illegal armed groups to a negotiated peace. In his first six months, he doubled aerial drug crop eradication efforts and collected a \$780 million war tax to pay for two new army battalions and train a network of 1 million civilian informants.

Colombia's spending on defense and security increased from 3.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2000 to 4.5 percent in 2004. Mayors and police are back in all 1,098 municipalities.⁴ Moreover, the national police have deployed 25 150-person mobile squadrons to reinforce security in rural drug and conflict zones. Cultivation of coca

3. Jerry Seper, "Drug Czar Rips Clinton, Congress on Funding; Wanted \$1 billion in Aid for Colombia," *The Washington Times*, December 2, 1999, p. A13.

4. Interview with Interior and Justice Minister Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, Bogotá, Colombia, February 22, 2005.

crops has declined by 33 percent, and cultivation of the opium poppy has declined by 25 percent. Not surprisingly, approval ratings for the army and police stand at 82 percent and 74 percent, respectively, while President Uribe's approval rating hovers at 70 percent.⁵

Turning Around a Failing State. To complement Plan Colombia, the Uribe administration established its own National Development Plan 2002–2006 to promote what it calls a communitarian state—a society in which citizens participate in and are better served by public institutions. Its four objectives are to provide democratic security (a term the president uses to describe extending legitimate authority over national territory), economic development to generate jobs, social equity to raise each citizen's stake in society, and more accountable government.

So far, the government has made its greatest strides in improving public security. Despite continued attacks on soldiers, irregular bands have been pushed further into the rugged countryside to the point that the ELN is hardly a threat. In 2004, security forces captured several mid-level FARC leaders. In January 2004, Colombian and Ecuadoran forces arrested FARC general staff member Ricardo Palmera (alias Simón Trinidad) in a medical clinic south of Quito, Ecuador; a month later, FARC commander Nayibe Rojas Valderrama (known as "Sonia"), who was in charge of the Southern Bloc's coca trade, was arrested. In December 2004, Venezuelan soldiers pursuing a bounty captured FARC commander Rodrigo Granda in Caracas and delivered him to Colombian authori-

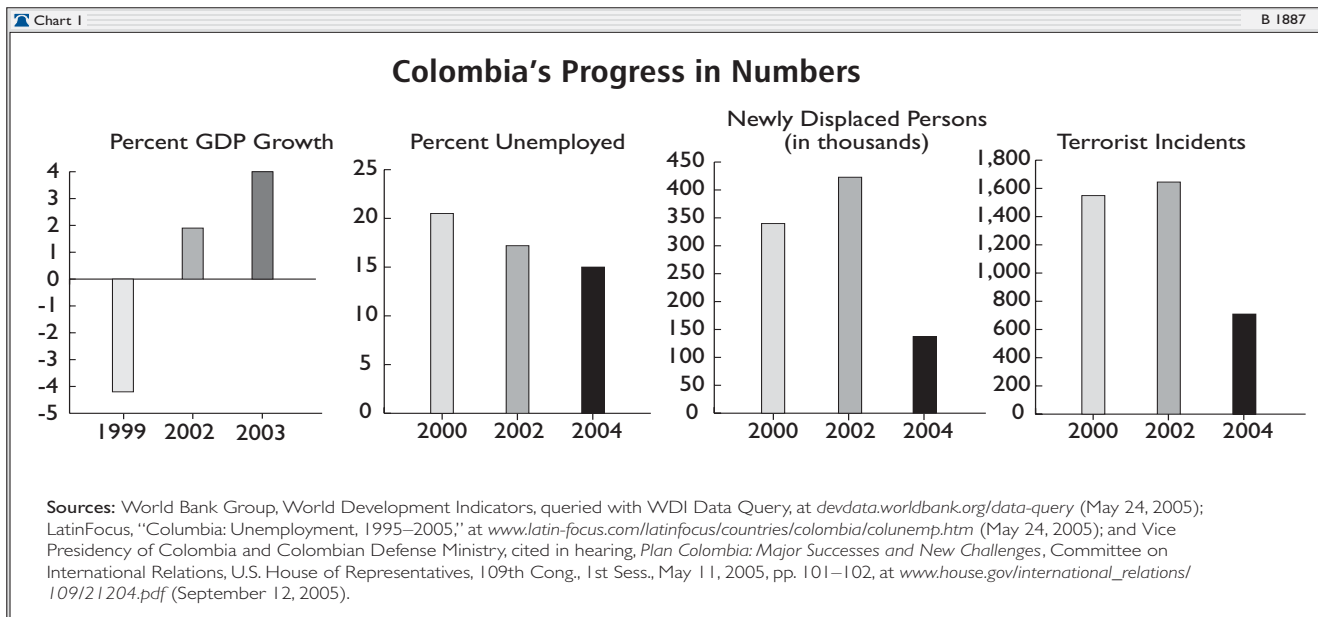
ties, embarrassing President Hugo Chávez, who is friendly with the FARC.⁶

Peace negotiations with the Marxist rebels have not progressed, except for preliminary talks with the ELN, but formal demobilization of the AUC is proceeding. About 800 combatants of the Nutibara Bloc near Medellín laid down their arms in November 2003. In May 2004, a zone near Santafé de Ralito in northwest Colombia was identified for paramilitaries to disarm under state protection.⁷

In June 2005, Colombia's congress passed a justice and peace law that offered leniency for most former combatants, balanced by punishment for those who had committed grievous crimes. The law was widely debated and approved by ample majorities in both chambers. It provides a framework for demobilization, disarmament, separation of leaders from followers, identification of ex-terrorists, and assistance for reinsertion into society. The government reports that 12,054 irregular combatants have demobilized from August 2002 to May 2005, including 2,360 AUC, 3,687 FARC, and 976 ELN combatants who demobilized on an individual basis.⁸ Furthermore, affected areas have experienced immediate benefits. For example, the murder rate in the city of Medellín has dropped 68 percent since 2002.⁹

Meanwhile, Vice Minister of Defense Andrés Peñate has described the return of state authorities to municipalities in contested zones in terms of a new insurgency, which now obliges rural villagers to collaborate with the police and army much as they did with rebel and paramilitary forces.¹⁰ The

5. December 2004 Gallup poll results, cited in hearing, *Plan Colombia: Major Successes and New Challenges*, Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., May 11, 2005, p. 101, at www.house.gov/international_relations/109/21204.pdf (September 12, 2005).
6. Granda reportedly received Venezuelan citizenship and took up residence in Caracas, where he served as the FARC's emissary. Intercepted e-mails suggest that he provided advice to criminals who kidnapped former Paraguayan President Raúl Cubas's daughter in Asunción in September 2004. See Steven Dudley, "Guerrilla Leader Traveled Openly," *The Miami Herald*, August 7, 2005, at www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/world/americas/12320600.htm (September 15, 2005).
7. Paramilitary disarmament was scheduled to be completed by December 31, 2005.
8. Presidencia de la República de Colombia, Oficina de Comunicaciones, "Resultados," at www.presidencia.gov.co/resultados/index.htm (May 31, 2005).
9. Adolfo A. Franco, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, U.S. Agency for International Development, "Plan Colombia—Accomplishments," prepared statement in hearing, *Plan Colombia*, pp. 37–42.



government has also begun to extend public services. In 2004, a government campaign in 14 communities provided 44,000 people with medical treatment, dental care, and food packages and registered citizens for identity cards. According to Colombia's government, 80,000 rural families have received food aid and health assistance, while 49,000 youth in major cities have undergone government-sponsored job training.

Security and certainty have helped the national economy to recover from a 4.2 percent contraction in 1999, growing by 3.9 percent in 2003.¹¹ Unemployment fell from a high of 20.5 percent in 2000 to 15 percent in 2004.¹² Full employment is up from 9.7 million workers in 2001 to 11.3 million in 2005.¹³ Interest rates on credit for commercial transactions have dropped from 35 percent in 1999 to 7.5 percent in 2004.¹⁴ (See Chart 1.)

Imposing Law and Order. In 2003, Colombia's congress enacted a new criminal code that replaced written inquisitional trials with oral adversarial procedures. Cadres of new public prosecutors, judges, forensic investigators, and public defenders have been entering the system. The conversion took effect in Bogotá and cities in the coffee-growing region on January 1, 2005, and will expand across the country through 2008.

Shortly after oral procedures took effect in the capital, cases that took up to four years under the written system were being processed in less than 60 days. Consequently, an estimated 75 percent went to plea-bargaining, while complaints and arrests dropped by about 30 percent. Legislators are now considering proposals to extend oral procedures to civil and labor courts.¹⁵

10. Andrés Peñate, Vice Minister of Defense, "Reasons for CCAI Success," speech at the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, Washington, D.C., March 29, 2005.

11. World Bank Group, "Colombia Data Profile," at www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/countrydata.html (July 12, 2005).

12. LatinFocus, "Colombia: Unemployment, 1995–2005," at www.latin-focus.com/latinfocus/countries/colombia/colunemp.htm (May 24, 2005).

13. Ministerio de Hacienda y Crédito Público, "Colombia's Economic and Fiscal Sustainability," April 2005, p. 13.

14. LatinFocus, "Colombia: Interest Rates, 1995–2005," at www.latin-focus.com/latinfocus/countries/colombia/colinter.htm (May 24, 2005).

None of this is cheap. Basic reforms will cost \$68 million by the program's end in 2008. Some 1,500 courtrooms, which were unnecessary under the old code, must be built, along with facilities for 24-hour prosecutor services, forensic labs, administrative offices, and information systems to schedule cases, transcribe testimony, and archive evidence. Nineteen courtrooms are operating, with 10 more to be built this year.¹⁶

Under Plan Colombia, the Interior and Justice Ministry has also established 38 of 43 planned neighborhood justice centers (Casas de Justicia). At these centers, citizens in marginal neighborhoods or conflict zones can resolve minor disputes through arbitration or conciliation.¹⁷ In addition, completion of 15 new prisons has increased the penal system's capacity by 25,000 prisoners.¹⁸

Colombia's security forces have improved their respect for human rights to the point that they enjoy the highest approval ratings in the country. However, abuses still occur, mainly at the hands of drug lords, guerrillas, and self-defense forces. The attorney general's office has opened 11 satellite human rights units to investigate and prosecute offenses from all perpetrators. To prevent abuses, the government is establishing an early-warning system of observer units to warn the national police, army, and other institutions of emerging situations that could result in massacres or forced displacements. The government also provides special

protection for nearly 3,000 human rights workers, labor leaders, and local government officials.

The Long Road Ahead

Although impressive, Colombia's achievements are just a beginning. Security forces are not strong enough to defeat the country's bandit armies or stamp out drug trafficking, demobilization is still a work in progress, social and economic reforms need muscle, and public institutions need to improve at a faster pace.

More Troops and Patrols Needed. In 2000, President Andrés Pastrana approved changes that facilitated the removal of some 400 members of the military who had reportedly engaged in human rights abuses. In 2002, President Uribe collected a war tax that generated \$780 million for defense. The joint U.S.–Colombian Air Bridge Denial Program resumed in 2003, forcing down or destroying 28 aircraft suspected of ferrying drugs. By the end of 2005, the military and police will have some 374,000 troops, a 34 percent increase over 2002 levels. This number will include 15 mobile army brigades, seven high mountain brigades, 54 mobile police squadrons, and 5,000 peasant soldiers.¹⁹

Mobility and troop strength alone, however, are not sufficient to defeat the rebels. The Colombian Air Force does not have suitable fixed-wing transports.²⁰ Two-thirds of the country's 76-ship helicopter fleet was provided by the United States and is frequently grounded by backlogged maintenance and U.S.-imposed restraints.²¹ For its part, the

15. Interview with Attorney General Luis Camilo Osorio, Bogotá, Colombia, February 24, 2005.

16. The city of Pereira, northwest of Bogotá, has a new courtroom, prosecutor, and forensic facilities thanks to sales of seized assets of drug traffickers.

17. Neighborhood justice centers cost about \$275,000 each to equip. They were funded initially by USAID, but Colombia's Interior and Justice Ministry is increasingly picking up the bill. Bogotá, the capital, is paying for 20 of these centers on its own.

18. Interview with Interior and Justice Minister Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, Bogotá, February 22, 2005.

19. U.S. Southern Command, "Colombia Progress Info Sheet," December 2004.

20. Colombia's fleet of Aviocar CN-235s and U.S. C-130s is too complex and expensive to maintain in flyable condition. The Colombian air force's turboprop-equipped C-47s are cheaper to operate and more capable of landing on short fields, but they still require contract maintenance.

21. The polyglot fleet includes UH-60A and L Blackhawk, UH-1 Huey, UH-1N, Huey II, Hughes 500, and Russian MI-17 models. Colombian military and police authorities must obtain concurrence from the U.S. Embassy Narcotics Assistance Section before any use of U.S.-provided assets against narcotrafficker and terrorist targets.

Colombian army often fails to gather and exploit intelligence and tends to confront guerrillas with small units as opposed to massively encircling them.

In June, FARC rebels blew up an oil pipeline and a bridge, toppled electrical towers, blocked highway traffic, and killed 22 soldiers at an army base in southern Colombia before reportedly retreating across the Putumayo River into neighboring Ecuador. Since January 2005, more than 400 soldiers and police have been killed. According to Colombian security analyst Alfredo Rangel, President Uribe should double the number of police patrols and army combatants to rein in bandits.²²

The government also needs to develop the capability to collect and analyze military and police intelligence in a coordinated way. Although tactically effective, Colombia's various intelligence agencies need a framework to organize functions and define legal limits. For now, their efforts are ad hoc, duplicative, and lacking in the analysis that would make information useful to cabinet ministers and the president.²³

The jungles that border Venezuela (Vichada, Guainía, and Vaupés departments) and Ecuador (Putumayo department) still mask active rendezvous points for arms and narcotics exchanges.²⁴ (See Map 1.) Rebels earn an estimated \$300 million

to \$1 billion per year, mostly from narcotics trafficking, although extortion and kidnapping still account for some revenue.²⁵ Even though Defense Ministry estimates indicate that the FARC's strength is down to about 12,000 in 2005 from a high of 16,900 in 2002, it is still flush with cash. Agricultural development cannot occur in territories controlled by bandit armies. As a result, these programs have lagged, and less than half of the U.S. development funds budgeted for the purpose has been put to use.

At best, Colombia's neighbors are marginally cooperative.²⁶ Venezuelan soldiers have reportedly sold arms to the FARC and AUC. Several insurgent camps are located in Venezuela, and news reports, videos, and documents suggest official promises from the Venezuelan government to provide supplies and refuge to the FARC.²⁷ Along the Ecuadoran border from the Andean ridge eastward, FARC rest and resupply camps have reportedly been operating for years. Ecuadoran President Lucio Gutiérrez promised to pursue them, but after his ouster in April 2005, Ecuador's caretaker government reversed his policy.²⁸

Recently, Ecuadoran police revealed the existence of at least seven Colombian and Mexican trafficking networks that were using Ecuador to stockpile drugs and ship them out in fishing boats.²⁹ Besides the United States, only Brazil is

22. Alfredo Rangel Suarez, director, Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, discussion of his institute's findings at The Heritage Foundation, September 7, 2005.

23. For a thorough analysis, see Andrés Villamizar, *La reforma de la inteligencia—Un imperativo democrático*, Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, Bogotá, 2004.

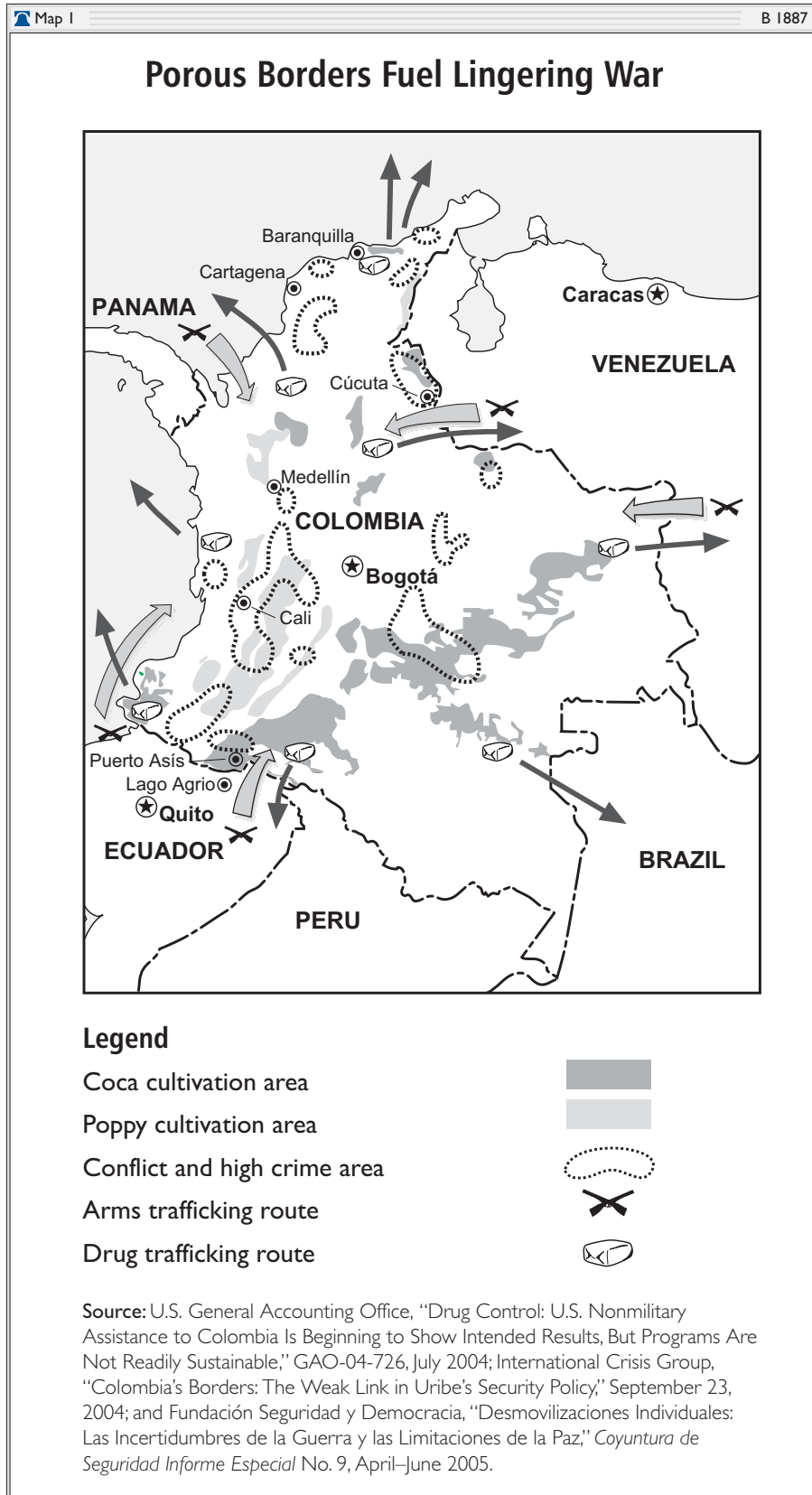
24. International Crisis Group, "Colombia's Borders: The Weak Link in Uribe's Security Policy," September 23, 2004, pp. 5 and 12.

25. For an in-depth discussion of the wide range of estimates, see International Crisis Group, "War and Drugs in Colombia," *Latin America Report* No. 11, January 27, 2005.

26. Thirty-seven trafficking routes have been identified through and around Panama, 25 through Ecuador, 21 through Venezuela, and 14 that cross the border with Brazil. See Alfredo Rangel, "La Sostenibilidad Militar de la Seguridad," in Alfredo Rangel, ed., *Sostenibilidad de la Seguridad Democrática*, Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, Bogotá, February 23, 2005, p. 53.

27. "Colombia evaluará supuestos nexos entre Farc y militares venezolanos," *El Tiempo*, January 31, 2002, at www.terra.com.co/actualidad/internacional/31-01-2002/nota47739.html (March 27, 2002), and Martin Arostegui, "Report: Venezuela Aids FARC Rebels," United Press International, September 10, 2003. More recently, in August 2005, two Venezuelan National Guardsmen were arrested in Colombia for allegedly selling arms to the FARC. See Agence France-Press, "Colombian Forces Arrest Two Venezuelans Suspected of Aiding FARC Rebels," August 31, 2005.

28. On July 1, 2005, Foreign Minister Antonio Parra declared Ecuador's neutrality in the war between Colombia and its rebels.



A Defector's View of the FARC

Carlos Alberto Ploter was a member in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia for 10 years, rising to become a political commander in the José María Córdoba Bloc, comprising 10 combat fronts. He says that he joined the FARC to open political space at a time when leftist candidates for public office were being assassinated. He demobilized voluntarily in 2003, convinced that the country had changed while the FARC had subordinated its political goals to making money. In a lecture at The Heritage Foundation, and later in testimony before the U.S. Congress, he offered the following insights.

Growth and the Distortion of Political Goals. “In ten years, I saw a small army develop into a large one and alongside its growth and spread over the countryside, political thoughts and ideological concepts were being twisted into economic ones and not toward changing the country.... We were used in a [M]anichean way to amass small quantities of territory where we could become the authority and generate a small fortune. Thus, the idea of social transformation was perverted into the accumulation of capital.”

The Combatants. “Most of the guerrillas do not join out of political or ideological convictions—they don't know what ‘Che’ [Guevara] said or that a guerrilla is supposed to be ‘a social transformer.’ They join because life in the country is very hard. And within the rebels they can have breakfast, lunch, food, healthcare when they get sick, and something that is important for peasants—a uniform and a weapon that gives them power over their peers.”

Achilles' Heel. “Interdiction has been a key element of Plan Patriota in the south of the country. Up to now, I think [the state] has succeeded in shooting down about 12 airplanes. Indisputably, that will affect the FARC's budget. Any armed group in the jungle needs money in its pockets because arms dealers don't sell on credit. Other suppliers don't either. You need cash. What the interdiction has done is block the FARC from selling drugs and obtaining dollars to pay for war. [Interdiction] slows the growth of the armed confrontation. But it needs to be combined with other actions. Neither the international community nor the Colombian state should think that only one concentrated measure can liquidate the FARC. Ultimately, a combination of actions will weaken the FARC and cause it to fold.”

On Deploying Sophisticated Weapons. “The FARC thinks about using ground-to-air missiles that would be versatile and accurate enough to repel aerial attacks. But it doesn't deploy them. This is not the ‘right moment.’ I think the FARC believes, ‘well, if we take out a SAM-7 and bring down a plane, it will invite an overwhelming response that will close down our operations.’ I believe they are saving them and that is normal for military operations. One can't expend all one's arms in a moment in which the masses are not ready for confrontation, nor in which there aren't enough men to reach the strategic phase. But yes, the FARC is considering a system that will counter the state's air attacks.”¹

1. Carlos Alberto Ploter, “Inside Colombia's Guerrillas,” lecture at The Heritage Foundation, June 16, 2004.

collaborating actively with Colombia to pursue drug traffickers and terrorist bands. Last year, it enacted laws to allow its air force to shoot down suspected drug flights. In 2005, it permitted joint air interdiction exercises with Colombia.³⁰

Limited Pressure, Limited Results. Unable to force demobilization by defeating guerrilla and narco-terrorist groups, the Colombian government has adopted a carrot-and-stick approach, balancing leniency with continued pursuit. Critics like Human Rights Watch complain that this approach leaves little incentive for combatants to confess all of their crimes.³¹

In addition, sentences can be reduced by the amount of time spent in concentration areas like El Ralito, where former combatants are allowed occasional visits to nearby villages for recreation. Colombia has extradited high-profile drug traffickers and guerrillas like Palmera and Rojas Valderama to the United States but has declined to extradite others like AUC leader Salvatore Mancuso even though Colombian law rejects a connection between political crimes and drug trafficking.

There are technical issues as well. Special prosecutors will have 60 days to investigate and report findings on each ex-combatant, but the attorney general's office may not have enough trained personnel to meet this constraint.

Obstacles confront former combatants returning to society. Unpopular guerrillas cannot return to home communities, where they are known. Many feel compelled to change their names and histories even though their attitudes and speech patterns may give them away. Few employers are willing to hire them. Some are psychologically bruised, especially those recruited as teenagers. Some report abuse by senior cadres, some sense betrayal by propaganda promises that turned out to be false, and others feel remorse for crimes they were forced to commit.³² Demobilized combatants are at risk of returning to lives of violence, crime, and gangs unless they successfully make the transition to full-time employment.

Social Fallout. Colombia has an estimated 2 million displaced persons, the third largest number in the world behind Sudan and Angola.³³ Of the total, about 800,000 are children, nearly half of whom do not attend school, presenting the potential for social and labor problems in the future.³⁴ The Colombian government has been able to provide humanitarian assistance only to half of the displaced population, partly because many of the displaced lack identification cards.

In 1999, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees established mobile registration units, which provided 52,000 people with identity documents by 2003.³⁵ However, the internally displaced are

29. "Carteles convierten a Ecuador en principal bodega de droga," *El Tiempo*, September 22, 2005, at eltiempo.terra.com.co/hist_imp/HISTORICO_IMPRESO/inte_hist/2005-09-22/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR_HIST-2540667.html (September 22, 2005).
30. James Painter, "Colombia War Colours Regional Ties," BBC News, July 14, 2005, at newswww.bbc.net.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4675485.stm (August 17, 2005).
31. Human Rights Watch, "Colombia: Demobilizations Legitimize Paramilitary Power," August 1, 2005, at hrw.org/english/docs/2005/08/01/colomb11547.htm (September 22, 2005).
32. Interviews with demobilized rebels, Bogotá, February 23, 2005.
33. According to the United Nations, 1.5 million people in Colombia are registered as internally displaced, although estimates range from 2 million to 3.5 million. See International Committee of the Red Cross, "IDPs in Colombia: A Joint Needs Assessment by the ICRC and the World Food Programme," April 22, 2005, p. 2, and "Reports That Displaced Youth Are Abused and Exploited in Colombia's Cities Concern UN," *UN Daily News*, May 17, 2005, p. 6, at www.un.org/news/dh/pdf/english/2005/17052005.pdf (August 26, 2005).
34. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Country Reports on Human Rights—2004: Colombia*, February 28, 2005 at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41754.htm (May 26, 2005).
35. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Colombia, UNHCR's Protection and Assistance Programme for IDPs and Refugees, 2003," July 2003.

not always easy to reach. Most cannot return to their places of origin in the countryside and have migrated to cities, where they have no marketable work skills. While the economy has improved and general unemployment has fallen, the outlook for resettlement has improved only slightly.

Native and Afro-Colombians have also been disproportionately affected. Indigenous groups account for 2 percent of the population, and Afro-Colombians comprise 26 percent. Both groups live mostly in Pacific coast departments. Fighting and aerial eradication in the east and south have pushed terrorist armies and itinerant drug farmers into their communities. Afro-Colombians from Chocó department report that only two municipalities had coca cultivation in 2000. In 2005, all 31 municipalities register coca crops. Colombian state presence is scant in these areas, and neither security nor alternative development is enough to recover tranquility or access to former communal lands.

Although Colombia's economy is based on free-market principles, lingering judicial uncertainty in contract disputes, excessive regulation, and weak property rights make it difficult for citizens in any marginal group to start businesses or to compete successfully with established businesses. Colombians in the top 20 percent of the resource scale still receive 60 percent of the national income.³⁶ Non-governmental organizations like the Colombian Confederation of Chambers of Commerce offer resources and workshops, and they advocate policy changes that would help small businesses.³⁷ Yet the creation of a truly open, opportunity-based market requires swift action on institutional reform.

Reluctant Cooperation. The European Union could be more supportive of Colombian efforts,

given that it is a major consumer of Andean cocaine and heroin. While demand for treatment has declined in North America, it has risen in Europe.³⁸ Plan Colombia's authors had hoped the European Community would contribute \$2 billion to peaceful development programs. To date, the EU has committed only 342 million euros (about \$412 million).³⁹ In its place, the United States has had to increase its non-military assistance.

To their credit, several countries—including the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Canada—participate in drug interdiction missions in the Caribbean. Canada has ongoing programs to assist internally displaced persons and strengthen local government, worth \$15 million. According to the Colombian Foreign Ministry, Japan pledged \$1.1 million in 2004 to aid Colombia's displaced population. South Korea has promised aid for the demobilization effort. Meanwhile, the World Bank has committed \$3.3 billion in loans from 2003 to 2006, but that has not made up for the shortfall.

Evolving Partnership

Since 1998, the United States and Colombia have engaged in a more positive, productive partnership, moving from a single-issue focus to more comprehensive relations. Funded in 2000, Plan Colombia marked a transition beyond drugs to a reform strategy that targeted root causes. In 2002, the Bush Administration secured congressional approval to support Colombia's fight against local terrorists and integrated country-specific policies into a regional approach under the twin rubrics of Andean Counternarcotic and Andean Regional Initiatives (ACI and ARI). As a result, Colombia is far better off than it was in the preceding decade. For its part, Washington has spent more than \$4 billion.

36. This "contrasts sharply with Sweden, where the top 20 percent of the population receive 34 percent of the national income." World Bank, "Colombia: Country Brief," at [Inweb18.worldbank.org/LAC/LAC.nsf/ECADocByUnid/9460541E7BBE140185256DFD0063A948?OpenDocument](http://web18.worldbank.org/LAC/LAC.nsf/ECADocByUnid/9460541E7BBE140185256DFD0063A948?OpenDocument) (July 12, 2005).

37. For details on the challenge, see Eugenio Marulanda Gómez, *Hacia la reactivación económica* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Básica Confeccámaras, 1999).

38. United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime, *Analysis*, Vol. 1 of *World Drug Report 2005*, p. 6, at www.unodc.org/unodc/en/world_drug_report.html (September 14, 2005).

39. European Commission, "The EU's relations with Colombia: 3rd Meeting of the Support Group of the Peace Process," April 30, 2001, at europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/colombia/3msg/index.htm (August 26, 2005).

Critics who are focused on drug trafficking argue that Plan Colombia has failed because cocaine is still cheap and available.⁴⁰ However, their simplistic argument ignores the many other factors that affect cocaine prices. Recent increases in coca leaf production in Peru and Bolivia,⁴¹ stockpiling of surplus drug production in hidden pits known as *huacas* along trafficking routes (a practice similar to warehousing of surplus coffee crops), and declining cocaine use in America would keep prices low.

Even after discounting misplaced criticism, U.S. efforts could be improved. For example, the U.S.–Colombian partnership is hobbled by bureaucratic tangles. Since the 1990s, drug eradication in Colombia has been managed by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs in the U.S. Department of State because senior leaders in the Department of Defense (DOD) do not consider it a military function. Because of the Department's bureaucratic management, dozens of coca fumigation planes have been reportedly lost during the last decade with few replacements arriving in a timely fashion.

Moreover, U.S. lawmakers have restricted the use of U.S.-provided equipment such as helicopters and arms, requiring authorization from the U.S. embassy before deployment.⁴² The U.S. executive branch's fear of working with defectors—because they are former terrorists—limits creative exploitation of their knowledge and experience. It also blocks timely U.S. support for the demobilization program.

Furthermore, the State Department gives Foreign Service officers scant specialty training in mil-

itary operations, law enforcement, and program management. Thus, the embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) chiefs and personnel must learn on the job.⁴³ Frequent staff rotations at this hardship post transfer key officers just when they gain expertise. Dependent on American decision-making and embassy-managed contractors, Colombian forces would have trouble picking up these operations if U.S. funding were suddenly cut.

The State Department and Congress could program resources more flexibly. Since 2000, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has reportedly used only \$84 million of \$207 million authorized for alternative development programs to cultivate legal substitute crops and start legitimate businesses. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), crop substitution and industrial development cannot take place in areas where bandit armies still control the countryside, including 40 percent of the land southeast of the Andes. For the time being, some of this funding should be redirected to help Colombia improve local governance and protect vulnerable populations.

According to the GAO, crops and goods need to be tailored to market needs. There is only limited demand for more coffee and palm hearts. Wood products crafted in the humid Putumayo department crack when transported to drier climates. Meanwhile, the GAO notes that reductions in funding for 12 interrelated rule-of-law programs have halted key institutional reforms that affect public security.⁴⁴ Without an efficient justice system to process criminals and resolve disputes, public order lasts only as long as the police and army are

40. For an example of a narrowly focused assessment and using data out of context, see Joseph Contreras, "Failed 'Plan': After Five Years and Billions of U.S. Aid in the Drug War, Cocaine Production Still Thrives," *Newsweek*, August 29, 2005, at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9025208/site/newsweek/ (August 31, 2005).

41. United Nations, *Analysis*, p. 9.

42. This is an outgrowth of the Leahy Amendment, a provision proposed by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in the 1996 international affairs budget, which prohibits U.S. training and military equipment grants to foreign security forces that have engaged in human rights abuses. In Colombia's case, units and personnel have had to be judged to be clean of human rights violations before receiving U.S. training or equipment. However, U.S. policymakers have interpreted it broadly to include end-use monitoring so that vetted troops and U.S.-provided equipment could be used only for counternarcotics and, more recently, counterterrorism missions.

43. However, public diplomacy and administrative officers receive specialty and program management training.

Grading Plan Colombia

As a comprehensive blueprint to reduce drug trafficking, improve public safety, make government more effective, and promote economic growth, Plan Colombia has produced mixed results. On balance, however, it has succeeded.

1. **The economy and jobs.** Mostly successful. The economy has grown steadily, and unemployment has fallen.
2. **Fiscal restraint and debt reduction.** Mostly successful. Tax collection is more effective, and public spending is better targeted and controlled.
3. **Modernization of security forces.** Some success. Security forces are better than before, but more needs to be done.
4. **Rule of law and human rights.** Some success, but another work in progress.
5. **Partnership with drug-consuming nations.** Some success. Some countries cooperate, others deny that they have a problem, and some neighbors have acquiesced to narcoterrorist groups.
6. **Alternative crops and industries.** So far unsuccessful. Absent rural security and suitable business strategies, the situation will not improve.
7. **Strengthening of local government.** Initial success. More needs to be done.
8. **Education and health systems.** Mostly unsuccessful. These efforts are still challenged by displaced populations and demobilization.
9. **Peace with irregular armed groups.** Some success. The AUC is demobilizing, but FARC rebels are taking over AUC territory and have refused to demobilize.
10. **International cooperation in counternarcotics efforts.** Partial success on interdiction. This is the result of combined efforts of the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and partner nations including the United States and Brazil.

present in large numbers.

Absent political will from Andean partners like Ecuador and Bolivia, regional approaches are unrealistic. Cabinet ministers in Ecuador's weak caretaker government are reportedly targets for extortion and influence by the FARC and Venezuelan diplomats. Since President Lucio Gutierrez left, the government has withdrawn troops from the Colombian border and may curtail permission for the U.S. military to use Manta airbase for air surveillance operations. Cooperation is declining in Bolivia, now polarized by populist activists who seek to roll back free-market economic gains. Paraguay has quietly cooperated in fighting drug traf-

fickers and the FARC, but not to the same extent as Ecuador and Bolivia in the past. Further cooperation is certainly not guaranteed.

Beyond Plan Colombia

Colombia shows how festering social problems eventually require billion-dollar solutions. Successive governments had opportunities to disband rural resistance groups that sprang up after the 1948 war between the Liberals and Conservatives. In fact, a military program that organized civilian defense groups to gather intelligence, combined with civic action programs to address the employment needs of rural residents, seemed to be work-

44. U.S. General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: U.S. Nonmilitary Assistance to Colombia Is Beginning to Show Intended Results, But Programs Are Not Readily Sustainable*, GAO-04-726, July 2004.

ing in the 1960s. Yet the government abandoned it and instead sent the army to protect large estates. As a result, Colombia's insurgency grew stronger, and small farmers organized their own defenses.

Now the Colombian government is taking these problems much more seriously, having invited U.S. involvement, which has evolved from self-interested concern over drug smuggling to helping the government address the root causes of its narcotics and terrorist problems. In January 2004, the Uribe administration outlined its Plan Colombia Phase II strategy and funding requirements. Costing Colombia and its partners an additional \$7 billion, it would combat terrorism and international crime, continue social and economic reactivation, further strengthen public institutions, and ostensibly conclude demobilization and reintegration of illegal armed groups.⁴⁵

In principle, the Bush Administration is right to ask Congress for \$550 million to continue support for Plan Colombia in fiscal year 2006. However, for progress to advance beyond the current plateau, Colombia and its U.S. partner need to adjust their strategies to remedy systemic problems and confront new realities. For its part, Colombia needs to:

- **Increase military and police strength** to match industrialized-nation standards of 400 police per 100,000 inhabitants and one soldier per three square kilometers, or about 170,000 police and 350,000 soldiers.⁴⁶ Moreover, mid-level officers with conflict experience should be promoted to leadership positions to improve senior-level decision-making.
- **Expand safe zones** to enable inhabitants to travel more freely beyond Bogotá and to other major cities so that alternative development can take place.
- **Ensure punishment for paramilitary and guerrilla leaders** and combatants guilty of heinous crimes to discourage continued criminal activity in rural areas.
- **Formally organize intelligence efforts** to

improve tactical response and strategic planning. Colombia's congress should establish a legal basis for national efforts and create a directorate that fuses and analyzes police and military information for use by senior political leaders.

- **Reform laws and regulations** that inhibit the creation of new businesses and hamper the registration of land and private property. Colombia needs to become more like Chile in promoting small entrepreneurs and investing in human capital.
- **Improve access to education** for rural and displaced populations to discourage reversion to violent criminal or guerrilla activity.
- **Accelerate justice system reforms** to reduce crime rates and allow government services and private businesses to return to the countryside.

As a partner in Plan Colombia, the United States should ensure that its contribution is more timely, adaptable, and focused on helping Colombia to become more self-sustaining. Specifically, the Bush Administration and Congress should:

- **Help Colombia strengthen its security forces** to bring bandit armies to justice. Colombia's army must be capable of surrounding and defeating illegal armed bands as well as cutting off their sources of income and weapons. This will require more soldiers, better air mobility, and greater Colombian participation in interdiction operations. First, the United States should provide some of the resources to train 170,000 new army and police troops. To improve mobility, the Defense Department should help Colombia acquire inexpensive air transports as opposed to the high-maintenance surplus C-130s that the Pentagon has supplied. U.S. planners could advise Colombia on standardizing its hodge-podge helicopter fleet with fewer models to simplify logistical support and facilitate a simulator purchase to reduce training costs.

To increase Colombian participation in drug

45. Roger F. Noriega, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, in hearing, *Plan Colombia*, p. 89.

46. Rangel, *Sostenibilidad de la Seguridad Democrática*, p. 65.

and weapons interdiction, U.S. equipment donations should include more radars and simple, easily maintained maritime patrol aircraft with extended loiter capability. U.S. Southern Command should also help Colombia develop a sustainable, native, airborne intelligence collection capability.

- **Unclog bilateral bottlenecks.** Unless U.S. policymakers transfer counternarcotics and counterterrorism liaison to an operational agency like DOD, the State Department's NAS officers must receive technical training in applicable military operations, law enforcement, and program management to be more effective. U.S. lawmakers should streamline procedures for obtaining U.S. embassy permission to use U.S.-provided equipment and training to reduce reaction time to kidnappings and rebel attacks. In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice and Congress should lift limits on collaborating with defectors and demobilized combatants so that Colombian security forces can exploit their special knowledge. These entities should also collaborate on a simple, legal framework for giving U.S. support to Colombia's demobilization effort.
- **Shift resources to improve rural governance immediately.** Unused funds for alternative development should be shifted to justice reform, human rights, and municipal governance programs to speed progress in these priority areas. Because of their size, these programs could bog down before 2008, when all 1,098 municipalities are expected to have access to reformed courts and justice facilities. Without more robust government services in smaller communities, Colombians may not perceive a difference under legitimate state authority as compared to life under rebel rule.
- **Advance economic reforms** to create opportunities for displaced and marginalized citizens. Despite GDP growth, Colombia is still a society of haves and have-nots. USAID trade capacity programs should urge reform of bur-

densome business regulations that freeze out small enterprises and continue support for local non-governmental organizations that educate prospective entrepreneurs, particularly those that work with internal migrants and rural populations.

- **Advance free trade.** The Andean Free Trade Agreement that the U.S. Trade Representative is negotiating with Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia would permanently lower the cost of doing legitimate business and benefit U.S.-Colombian commerce in the long term. Approved in 2002, the U.S. Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act has helped to boost the Colombian economy. Today, the U.S. market receives 44 percent of all Colombian exports, of which approximately 70 percent enter the U.S. duty-free. However, these preferences will expire in 2006.
- **Promote more sustainable drug eradication.** Securing the countryside and establishing land ownership is crucial to eradication and follow-up verification efforts. As crop producers move up in mountainous terrain, aerial fumigation becomes less effective and more risky. Manual methods may prove effective if landowners fear that property planted with drug crops will be confiscated and if migrant growers are apprehended for trespassing. Colombian and American authorities should also sponsor research on mycoherbicides (natural funguses) that attack specific plants. Recent discoveries of robust new coca strains suggest that traffickers are already exploiting bioengineering.⁴⁷
- **Encourage allies to be more cooperative.** America's new partnership with Colombia has been successful because it is more comprehensive than previous relations that focused solely on counternarcotics efforts. On a smaller scale, similar partnerships could work with Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, paving the way for more effective cooperation against international

47. Andy Webb-Vidal, "It's Super-Coca! Modified Bush Boosts Narcotics Output," *Financial Times*, Asia edition, December 7, 2004, p. 4.

crime and terrorism. The United States could help support the Organization of American States mission (established in 2004) to monitor Colombia's demobilization process, boosting neighborhood involvement in its outcome; the mission needs to double the number of current observers and establish more outposts near conflict areas. And, at U.S. urging, Colombia could seek Brazilian assistance in developing better air surveillance capabilities to curb narcotics and arms smuggling.

Beyond the hemisphere, the United States should press European nations, which are experiencing rising drug consumption and have considerable investments in Colombia, to contribute more to strengthen institutions and develop alternative industries.

Conclusion

Despite a flawed peace process under President Pastrana and U.S. bureaucratic bumbles, Plan Colombia has been largely successful. Colombia was a disintegrating state in the 1990s and has managed to turn itself around. As the United States' fourth largest trade partner in Latin America, it helps to sustain stable markets for U.S. businesses that export to Central and South America. The plan has reduced regional instability, which would have imposed higher costs in terms of harboring displaced populations and combating larger, more entrenched criminal armies. The next step is to encourage Colombia to sustain its forward momentum.

Some of the toughest battles, however, are still to come. The FARC, Colombia's major remaining terrorist group, is beginning to feel the pinch. For that

reason, its smugglers are making a maximum effort to rush drug crops to market, while combatants are attacking army outposts, villages, and infrastructure to suggest that President Uribe's democratic security strategy is not working. The blitz coincides with a supreme court review of a new law permitting presidential re-election and the approaching 2006 presidential contest.

Next door, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez denies supporting the FARC while his generals call Plan Colombia a threat.⁴⁸ The hemispheric left, led by Chávez and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, views the FARC as a progressive force and wants the U.S.–Colombian partnership to end. The more Colombia is successful in establishing peace and a broadly prosperous society, the harder these adversaries will try to undermine it. Indeed, Colombia is a tempting target, rich in resources, human talent, respected universities, and a vibrant civil society.

Despite budgetary priorities to help stabilize the Middle East and recover from recent natural disasters at home, the United States should not be tempted to reduce support for Plan Colombia at this time. History suggests that Colombia's rural terrorist armies will take advantage of the hiatus to regain their strength and fight harder to stamp out democracy and markets in the neighborhood.

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48. Associated Press, "General venezolano dice que Plan Colombia es 'amenaza latente,'" *El Nuevo Herald*, September 13, 2005, at www.miami.com/mld/elnuevo/news/breaking_news/12626316.htm (September 13, 2005).