

## Colombia's human security crisis

Adam ISACSON

One of Colombia's oldest and most frequently cited human rights groups, the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), compiles thorough statistics on the human rights situation in this South American country. In its most recently published report, the CCJ found that political violence in Colombia claimed 3,538 lives between April and September 2000—twenty people per day. As recently as early 1998, the CCJ was reporting ten political murders per day. Fed by a brutal, multi-front war between the security forces, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army) guerrilla groups, and the AUC (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia) paramilitary organization, the intensity of Colombia's political violence has doubled in less than three years.<sup>1</sup>

The CCJ report adds, 'five of the twenty daily victims were killed in combat, including civilians and combatants. The other fifteen were killed in their homes, in the street or at their place of work. More than fifteen percent of them lost their life due to the actions of the guerrillas. The other 85 percent died at the hands of the Colombian state and the paramilitaries'.<sup>2</sup>

In 2001, the conflict forced 342,000 people from their homes—about 1,000 people every day, according to Colombia's Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES).<sup>3</sup> In the last ten years, approximately 1.2 million people have been forcibly displaced, out of a population of 40 million; the majority are children.<sup>4</sup> By most measures, only Sudan and Angola have larger internally displaced populations. About eight people per day are kidnapped for ransom, mostly by leftist guerrillas.<sup>5</sup> Yet the conflict only accounts for a fraction of the killing in what is one of the world's most violent countries: in all, 26,250 people were murdered in Colombia in 2000, at least 75% of them by common criminals, not political groups.<sup>6</sup> The increasing violence and lawlessness place Colombia's crisis at the top of the Western Hemisphere's human security agenda.

### *A divided country*

By rights, Colombia should be neither a poor nor a violent place. It is blessed with a wealth of natural resources, from oil to minerals to forests. It has extensive coasts on two oceans, and its people are known for their energy and inventiveness. It is tragic that a country with so many natural advantages should be the site of so much bloodletting.

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Adam Isacson, a senior associate at the Center for International Policy in Washington, DC, monitors U.S. military assistance to the Western Hemisphere and coordinates an educational programme on U.S. policy toward Colombia. [isacson@ciponline.org](mailto:isacson@ciponline.org)

Looked at another way, though, Colombia is a very difficult place to govern, with a population so deeply divided that it might appear almost pre-programmed for conflict. One of the starkest divisions is economic. With the top 10% earning forty-two times what the bottom 10% earns each year, Colombia is one of the world's most economically unequal countries.<sup>7</sup> About 3% of landholders control 70% of all farmland.<sup>8</sup> These numbers are reflected in Colombia's social reality; as in much of Latin America, a small, non-inclusive elite has historically dominated the economy and political system.

Ethnicity is another societal fault line. One out of every three Colombians is non-European and non-mestizo. At least 26% of the population is Afro-Colombian and 5% is indigenous.<sup>9</sup> These ethnic groups, however, are barely represented among the country's economic and political power-holders.

The country has also been kept divided by its geography. Twice the size of France, Colombia is broken up by three chains of the Andes Mountains, rivers, swamps, jungles and other natural barriers

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that keep people apart and make Bogotá, the capital, seem very far away. The central government has always been weak, exerting little control over much of the country's territory and providing very few services beyond a few cities. Local strongmen—whether generals, landowners, political bosses, 'narcos', leaders of paramilitary groups or guerrilla fronts—have frequently held more regional power than the national government.

With all these divisions, wars have been frequent. Colombia fought major civil wars in 1828, 1839–42, and 1899–1903 (the 'Thousand Days' War', which claimed 100,000 lives, and during which Colombia lost its province of Panama to a U.S.-backed independence movement). About 300,000 died during a decade of rural political-party violence that began in 1948, a period that Colombians simply call '*la violencia*'.

### **The combatants**

*La violencia* never came to a definitive end. Both of Colombia's main leftist guerrilla groups are nearly forty years old. Both are involved in peace talks with the Colombian government. Together, they are responsible for about 15% of all conflict-related murders and the majority of kidnappings; their routine violations of international humanitarian law have drained nearly all sources of domestic and international political support.

The larger of the two is FARC, with at least 17,000 members and significant power in much of the countryside. FARC was founded in 1964, a lineal descendant of Liberal Party and Communist peasant self-defence groups that operated in rural Colombia during *la violencia*.

FARC grew rapidly during the 1990s, to the point where by 1996 it was able to carry out battalion-size hit-and-run attacks on military installations and small cities. This is mostly due to the guerrillas' practice of forcibly 'taxing' all economic activity wherever it is strong enough to do so. Taxes on the rapidly growing number of coca producers in rural Colombia explain much of the expansion in the guerrillas' war chest and, as a result, their increased military might.

FARC and the Colombian government were engaged in peace negotiations from January 1999 to February 2002. The talks, which were not accompanied by a cease-fire, achieved very little and collapsed in an atmosphere of mistrust and escalating guerrilla and paramilitary violence.

Colombia's second-largest guerrilla group is the ELN. Formed in the mid-1960s by radical students and priests following the Cuban model of guerrilla rebellion, the group today has about 3,000 members.

The ELN takes less funding from the drug trade, and a paramilitary campaign of massacres and forced displacements have cost the group control over some of its historical strongholds in the past few years. The ELN has especially targeted foreign multinationals doing business in Colombia, frequently attacking the country's oil and energy infrastructure. The group is in the early phases of a peace process with the government, with a series of meetings in Cuba planned during the first half of 2002.

While FARC began its operations in southern Colombia, both groups have operated extensively north and west of the Andes, where the vast majority of Colombians live. By the early 1980s, years of guerrilla extortions and kidnappings had exhausted many of the cattle ranchers and landowners in departments like Antioquia, Córdoba, Sucre, Bolívar, Cesar and Santander. Many were willing to sell their properties at depressed prices, and at the time they had a ready supply of buyers. Colombia in the early 1980s was becoming a centre for processing and smuggling cocaine, and a newly rich wave of drug lords needed legitimate investments—namely land—to launder their profits. With so many willing buyers and sellers, Colombia witnessed what some analysts have called a 'reverse land reform' in its northern departments.<sup>10</sup>

These drug lords turned cattle ranchers, along with whatever original landowners remained, adopted a different approach to the guerrillas who were extorting them. They organized and armed so-called self-defence groups, what today we call paramilitaries.

Groups like 'Death to Kidnappers' (MAS) and the 'Peasant Self-Defence Groups of Córdoba and Urabá' (ACCU) were trained and organized with significant input from the Colombian army throughout the 1980s. Military officers helped create local groups, shared intelligence and carried out joint operations with the self-defence squads.

It soon became evident, though, that the paramilitaries did not attack guerrillas very often. The groups' preferred targets were civilians in guerrilla-controlled areas, which they viewed as the FARC and ELN base of support, the sea in which the guerrillas swim. Their numerous massacres, forced displacements and assassinations of leftist political leaders caused the paramilitaries to be declared illegal in 1989.

But the state did little to disband them. Their collaboration with the Colombian military was pushed underground somewhat, but it continues to this day at the local brigade and battalion level. This phenomenon has been documented thoroughly, in 2001 alone in reports released by the U.S. State Department, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and all major non-governmental human rights organizations.<sup>11</sup> Today, the Colombian Commission of Jurists credits the paramilitaries—most of whom have united under an umbrella organization, the United Self Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC)—with about 80% of all political murders in Colombia.<sup>12</sup>

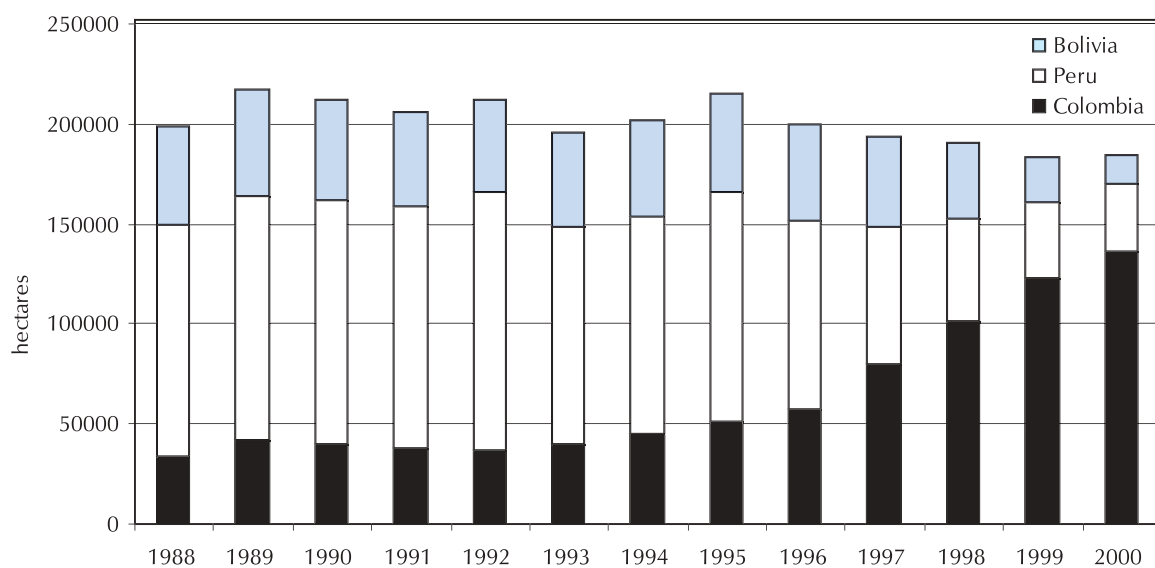
The paramilitaries are the fastest growing of Colombia's armed groups, increasing from about 4,000 in 1998 to at least 10,000 today. They have made significant territorial gains, moving from traditional strongholds like northwestern Colombia and the Middle Magdalena region to town centres in many long-time guerrilla strongholds in southern Colombia and elsewhere. The paramilitaries also fund themselves through the drug trade, and not just because Colombia's drug lords are among their long-time benefactors. Like the guerrillas, the paramilitaries tax coca and heroin poppy in areas where they are strong. The so-called 'political director' of the AUC, the media-savvy Carlos Castaño, has admitted in interviews that his group gets about 70% of its funding from the drug trade.<sup>13</sup>

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## The drug trade

While the drug trade has been an important factor in Colombian political and economic life for two decades now, it has changed significantly since the 1980s and early 1990s, when the Medellín and Cali cartels dominated the trade. As recently as the first half of the 1990s, relatively little coca—the crop that is refined into cocaine—was actually grown in Colombia. While the cartels made Colombia the centre of coca processing and smuggling, the plants themselves were grown in Bolivia and Peru. The large, vertically integrated cartels bought it, refined it and delivered it to first-world markets.

**Graph 1. Andean coca cultivation**



Source: State Department International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports, 1996-2000

This arrangement broke down in the early to mid-1990s, making it more difficult to grow coca in Bolivia and Peru. Internationally funded alternative-development programmes had some impact by giving peasants legal economic opportunities. Law-enforcement efforts in Colombia (as well as some deal-making on extraditions and prison conditions) dismantled the large cartels; the smaller organizations that succeeded them lacked the international reach of their predecessors. Alberto Fujimori, Peru's president at the time, cooperated with the United States on what became known as the 'you fly—you die' policy of shooting or forcing down suspected drug-smuggling aircraft (this policy has been suspended since an April 2001 incident that brought the accidental shoot-down of a planeload of U.S. missionaries near Iquitos, Peru). These factors combined to make it too costly to fly coca base out of Peru and into Colombia for processing.

The drug trade failed to wither away, of course, as demand for cocaine in the United States and other consumer countries remained largely unchanged. During the mid-1990s, coca cultivation moved directly into Colombia, the country where the plant had long been refined into cocaine. Colombia now grows more coca than all other source countries combined.

In the early and mid-1990s, the largest coca growing zone in Colombia was around Guaviare department, on the northern fringe of Colombia's Amazon-basin jungle. Guaviare is typical of the zones in southern Colombia where coca is grown. It was largely uninhabited, at least by non-indigenous people, until the second half of the twentieth century. By the 1970s its forests and savannahs were

home to a few thousand people who were either seeking land in this 'agricultural frontier' or fleeing the violence in the north.

The Colombian government did not follow these settlers to Guaviare. The area remained wild, mired in neglect, without good roads or infrastructure, basic services like education and medicine, justice or law and order. Colombia's guerrillas operated freely.

The region's residents, nearly all of them small landholders, tried their hand at legal crops, such as rubber, corn, yucca and palm oil. High market prices brought occasional 'bonanzas', but these economic bubbles were short-lived and fragile. Without credit, technical assistance, marketing advice or farm-to-market roads, farmers in Guaviare found that their sales could not even cover the cost of inputs and transporting produce to market.

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In the late 1970s or early 1980s, local residents say, enterprising narcotics dealers arrived and showed them how to grow marijuana, then coca and heroin poppy. Instead of a truckload of yucca, a simple procedure involving chemicals like gasoline and cement could turn a field full of coca leaves into a few kilos of profitable coca paste, eliminating the challenge of transporting goods to market. With these illegal crops, the growers suddenly had several buyers to choose from, offering good prices in cash and credit toward future harvests. The zone's residents remained small landholders, but were able to enjoy almost a middle-class lifestyle, with houses in town, electricity, indoor plumbing, perhaps a motorcycle.<sup>14</sup>

### **The 'source zone' strategy (1990s)**

Coca growing took off in Guaviare in the mid-1990s. The United States government responded quickly, devoting more of its drug-interdiction budget to the 'source zone' (as opposed to the 'transit zone', countries like Mexico or Haiti through which drugs are transported). In 1995 Washington launched in earnest an aerial fumigation programme, based in the departmental capital of San José del Guaviare, which continues to this day. Dozens of civilian contractor pilots recruited by a Virginia company called DynCorp fly over the area spraying Round-Up<sup>tm</sup>—a mixture of the herbicide glyphosate and additional compounds, called surfactants, that allow glyphosate to penetrate the plants' leaves and roots.

The area's residents have long claimed that spraying on their food crops has sickened them and their animals, particularly with respiratory and gastrointestinal ailments and skin inflammations. The U.S. and Colombian governments insist that glyphosate is safe, though the health and environmental impact of glyphosate combined with surfactants such as POEA and Cosmo-Flux remains in dispute.<sup>15</sup>

The U.S. contractor spray pilots operate at some risk, because FARC is active in the Guaviare and shoots at them with small-arms fire. (Spray planes were hit by ground fire fifty-six times in 2000, though no casualties resulted.)<sup>16</sup> The contractors' proximity to the conflict has raised concerns in the U.S. Congress, particularly after a February 2001 incident in which a DynCorp search-and-rescue team found itself in a fire fight with FARC guerrillas in Curillo municipality, Caquetá department.<sup>17</sup>

For protection, the fumigation planes fly accompanied by Colombian National Police (CNP) helicopters and aircraft, all bought and maintained by the United States. Due in part to this programme, throughout the 1990s the CNP, particularly its counter-narcotics division (DIRAN), received nearly all U.S. anti-drug assistance. Colombia's armed forces, hampered by corruption and human rights allegations and largely uninterested in the anti-drug mission, got only a few million dollars' worth of aid each year, much of it training.

The United States committed what turned out to be a crucial error with the Guaviare fumigation programme. The spraying was never accompanied by a dollar's worth of alternative development assistance to help the affected peasants make the transition to legal crops. The stated reason for this approach was a refusal to fund aid programmes in areas not completely under Colombian government control. The effect, however, was to make desperate peasants still more desperate by taking away their main economic opportunity.

Of course, coca growing was not necessarily the only viable economic choice available to Guaviare residents. They could always join FARC or paramilitaries, which support their fighters economically, and the U.S. spray programme probably won many recruits for illegal armed groups. Coca growers had another choice as well: to relocate to a safer spot.

Apparently, many of them did exactly that. Peasants moved out of the spray planes' range, deeper into the jungle and deeper into FARC-controlled territory, cutting down thousands of acres of virgin rainforest along the way. While the fumigation programme brought a reduction in coca growing in Guaviare, by the late 1990s the epicentre of coca cultivation moved south and west to the departments of Caquetá and especially Putumayo, closer to the Ecuadorian border.

This zone has been considered FARC territory since at least the early 1980s, due less to guerrilla conquest than to a lack of Colombian state presence. The guerrillas' strength led U.S. officials to determine that, due to security concerns, the contractor-and-police fumigation model could not be duplicated in Putumayo. Instead of questioning its overall approach, the Clinton Administration decided to encourage a much larger counter-narcotics role for the Colombian military.

### ***'Plan Colombia' (1999–2001)***

By 1998 this shift was eased not only by the coca trade's southward migration, but also by the election of a new Colombian president. U.S. officials viewed Andrés Pastrana as someone they could work with and a welcome change from his predecessor, Ernesto Samper, whose apparent acceptance of Cali cartel campaign funds had brought U.S.-Colombian relations to their lowest point in decades.

Pastrana came into office in August 1998 in a moment of optimism. He made peace talks with guerrilla groups his highest priority, and sought to accompany negotiated reforms with what he called

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a 'Marshall Plan' of development for Colombia's countryside. The new president presented the plan's broad outlines to potential international donors in a document called 'Plan Colombia'. The document made no mention of aerial fumigations or military activities, only development efforts.<sup>18</sup>

During a state visit to Washington in October 1998, Pastrana sought to interest U.S. officials in his Marshall Plan. He found few willing to commit hundreds of millions of dollars to programmes that did not appear to promise immediate results in the war on drugs, particularly in a conservative U.S. Congress suspicious of foreign-aid programmes.

Pastrana's visit, along with a December 1998 meeting of the region's defence ministers in Cartagena, made much more progress on another front. At the December meeting, U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen and Colombian Defence Minister Rodrigo Lloreda announced the first major U.S. assistance for the Colombian military in several years. The two ministers agreed to set up a 'counter-narcotics battalion' in Colombia's army—900 men, vetted to ensure clean human rights records—whose responsibility, Lloreda explained, would be to 'support the police of Colombia in counter-narcotics

operations'.<sup>19</sup> The new battalion would be based at Tres Esquinas, on the border between Caquetá and Putumayo departments, which by then had replaced Guaviare as the centre of Colombian coca cultivation.

The new battalion began training in April 1999. By that time, the term Plan Colombia had largely disappeared from Bogotá political discourse, as Pastrana's development plan had faded for lack of international interest.

In fact, by mid-1999 doubts about Colombia's peace process had already begun to spread: FARC had frozen the talks shortly after they began, Defence Minister Lloreda had quit to protest a continuation of the guerrillas' demilitarized zone, and a guerrilla offensive in July alarmed many. When the new defence minister, Luis Fernando Ramírez, and Armed Forces Chief Gen. Fernando Tapias visited Washington in July 1999 requesting \$500 million in military assistance—a heretofore unheard-of sum—U.S. officials were listening. In mid-July, U.S. 'Drug Czar' Barry McCaffrey circulated a memo to his Cabinet colleagues laying out a plan for about \$600 million in new assistance to Colombia's military and police. The largest outlay in McCaffrey's plan would increase the Colombian military's ability to operate in the Putumayo region.<sup>20</sup>

After a period of inter-agency discussion, the Clinton Administration was ready to increase its military assistance commitment. In an August 1999 visit to Bogotá, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering told Pastrana that the United States would 'sharply increase aid if he develops a comprehensive plan to strengthen the military, halt the nation's economic free fall and fight drug trafficking', according to the *Washington Post*.<sup>21</sup>

By late September 1999 a new Plan Colombia, an English document with a significant security and counter-narcotics component, was circulating in Washington. Though vague on specifics, it was understood that the Plan, a Colombian government initiative 'for peace, prosperity, and the strengthening of the state', would cost \$7.5 billion, \$4 billion from Colombian funds and \$3.5 billion from the international community's contributions.<sup>22</sup>

Since it first emerged, critics and supporters of Plan Colombia—which was not available in Spanish until February 2000—have argued over the extent of the U.S. role in its origins. In the Plan's defence, a 2001 monograph from the U.S. Army War College explains: '[C]ontrary to speculation in the media, [the Plan] was authored by a Colombian—Jaime Ruiz, Chief of Staff for Pastrana, who holds a doctorate from Louvain and an engineering degree from the University of Kansas, has an American wife, and speaks flawless English, wrote the plan in a week in English.'<sup>23</sup> Whether or not a single person indeed created a plan to pacify and develop an entire country in a single week, Washington's influence on the Plan's design cannot be discounted.

On 11 January 2000, President Bill Clinton introduced the U.S. contribution to Plan Colombia to the U.S. Congress as an 'emergency supplemental' budget bill. While Colombian officials explained that about 25% of the overall \$7.5 billion plan would go to the country's security forces, with the rest going to economic and social programmes, Clinton's bill was the exact opposite.<sup>24</sup> What became known as the Plan Colombia aid package called for \$1.3 billion in emergency aid for 2000 and 2001, of which \$860 million benefited Colombia (the rest went to neighbouring countries and U.S. counter-drug agencies). Of that \$860 million, 75%—\$642 million—went to Colombia's military and police.<sup>25</sup> Including already-planned aid, the Center for International Policy's most current estimate of U.S. aid to Colombia from 2000 to 2002 is \$1.35 billion in military-police assistance (79%) and \$363.5 million in economic-social assistance (21%).<sup>26</sup>

The centrepiece of this military-aid component was a dramatic expansion of the counter-narcotics battalion strategy begun in December 1998. Since the Plan Colombia aid package became law in July

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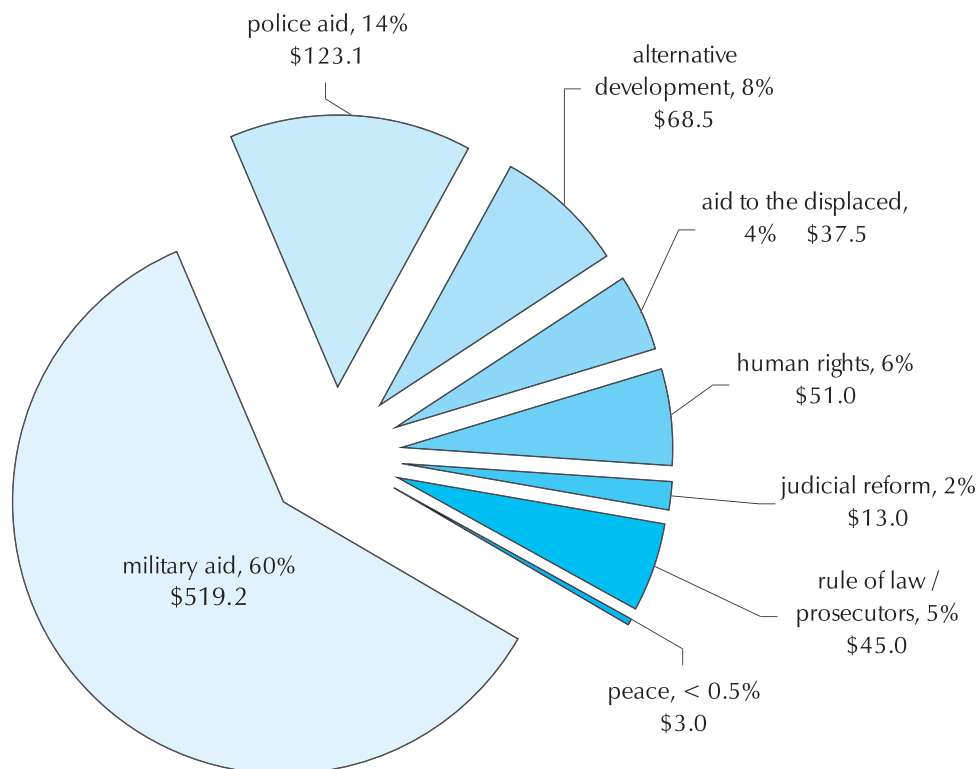
2000, U.S. funds have created two more battalions, forming a 2,300-man counter-narcotics brigade in the Colombian Army, based in the Putumayo coca-growing zone. The units are receiving about seventy-four helicopters, at a combined cost in excess of \$400 million: thirty 1970s-era UH-1 'Huey' utility helicopters delivered in 1999 and 2000, fourteen sophisticated UH-60 'Blackhawk' helicopters delivered in January 2002, and about thirty more upgraded

'Huey II' helicopters, which are to begin delivery in February 2002. (Colombia's police have received two more Blackhawks, and are to get about twelve Huey IIs.)<sup>27</sup>

The units' objective, explains an October 2000 White House report, is to 'establish the security conditions needed' to implement counter-drug programmes such as fumigation and alternative development in Putumayo.<sup>28</sup> To fulfil this objective, what U.S. documents describe as 'the push into southern Colombia' will require U.S.-supported military units to carry out offensive operations against Colombian guerrillas. Critics have pointed out that this mission closely resembles counter-insurgency, a qualitative change that brings the United States closer than ever to Colombia's war.

The aid package has brought a significant build-up of the U.S. presence in and around Colombia. Trainers and intelligence-gatherers (most from U.S. Special Forces units), spray-plane pilots, mechanics, logistics personnel, radar operators and others work with Colombian military and police counterparts at several bases in southern Colombia. Others work at a half-dozen radar sites in remote parts of the country, looking for suspicious drug-smuggling aircraft. Concerned members of Congress placed in the 2000 law a limit of 500 uniformed U.S. personnel and 300 private contractors who could be present in Colombia at any given time. The State Department claims that the U.S. military presence on the ground in Colombia has never exceeded about 400, but pressured Congress to increase the cap of 300 contractors, arguing that the delivery of new helicopters requires a greater presence of mechanics and other support personnel.<sup>29</sup> In the 2002 aid package, discussed below, Congress lowered the military cap to 400, and increased the contractors' maximum to 400.

**Graph 2. 'Plan Colombia' aid package, signed into law in July 2000**  
(in million USD)



**Table 1. Economic and social programmes**

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Economic Support Fund (ESF)	0	0	3	4	0	0
Development Assistance (DA)	0	0.02	0	0	0	0
Child Survival and Disease Programmes (CSD)	0	0	0	0	0	0
P.L. 480 food assistance	0	0	0	0	0	0
International Narcotics Control (INC)	0	0.5	5.75	208	5	146.5
Economic/ Social Total	0	0.52	8.75	212	5	146.5

**Table 2. Military and police aid programmes**

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
International Narcotics Control (INC)	33.45	56.5	200.11	686.43	43	252.5
Foreign Military Financing (FMF)	30	0	0.44	0.4	0	0
International Military Education and Training (IMET)	0	0.89	0.92	0.9	1.04	1.18
Emergency drawdowns of counter-narcotics assistance	14.2	41.1	58	0	0	0
'Section 1004' (Defense Department counter-narcotics aid)	10.32	11.78	35.89	85.9	60.9	79.8
'Section 1033' (Defense Department riverine counter-narcotics aid)	0	2.17	13.45	24.63	19.04	4.3
ONDCP discretionary funds	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
Excess Defense Articles (EDA)	0.09					
Military / Police Total	88.56	112.44	308.81	798.26	123.98	337.78

All figures in millions of USD. Estimates, derived by averaging two previous years, are in italics. Various programmes are explained in detail at <http://www.ciponline.org/facts/co.htm> and <http://www.ciponline.org/facts/home.htm#1>

### Concerns about the strategy

Though it enjoyed the support of the Democratic Clinton Administration and Republican leaders in Congress, the Plan Colombia aid package was nonetheless controversial. Among the concerns that made it one of the most contentious U.S. foreign-policy issues in 2000 and 2001 were the possibility of escalated military involvement, doubts about fumigation's impact and effectiveness as an anti-drug strategy, human rights consequences, damage to Colombia's peace talks, and lack of international support.

Many observers question whether, even after their helicopters are all delivered, the 2,300 members of the new U.S.-funded counter-narcotics units will indeed be able to create 'security conditions' in Putumayo, a zone roughly the size of Belgium. The new brigade's theatre of operations is one of FARC's oldest, most fiercely defended strongholds, where the guerrillas know the terrain and are in regular contact with many of the local *campesinos*. Colombia's military lost several large-scale battles in the vicinity during the late 1990s, such as Las Delicias (1996), Patascoy (1997) and El Billar (1998), and fought FARC to a bloody draw at Coreguaje in June 2001. Many sources, including former U.S. Southern Command Chief Gen. Charles Wilhelm, have acknowledged a very real possibility that FARC have surface-to-air missiles capable of taking down even well armoured helicopters.<sup>30</sup>

If the 'push into southern Colombia' fails militarily, many expect an escalation of U.S. assistance and involvement. While the often-used Vietnam analogy is inappropriate—it is difficult to imagine U.S. ground troops in Colombian jungles—a costly and difficult military commitment is certainly a plausible outcome of the current strategy.

Critics of the plan also question the effectiveness of fumigations as an anti-drug strategy. Since large-scale fumigations began in Guaviare department in 1995, the total amount of coca grown in Colombia has more than doubled. The U.S. anti-drug strategy has so far shown itself effective only in moving cultivations around geographically: from Bolivia and Peru to Guaviare, then to Putumayo.

Fumigations under the new plan began in Putumayo in late December 2000, and U.S. officials claim that 84,000 hectares of Colombian coca—a record number—was sprayed with glyphosate in 2001.<sup>31</sup> While even the policy's advocates do not predict a decrease in Colombia's total coca cultivation in 2001, complaints of health and environmental damage, as well as wrongful spraying of legal crops, have proliferated.<sup>32</sup>

As alternative development programmes have been slow to get started in fumigated zones, many of the region's residents have packed up and left; some have gone across the border into Ecuador, but many others appear to have gone elsewhere in Colombia's vast Amazon-basin jungles, where they have cut down new forest and planted new coca. Shortly after the first wave of fumigation in Putumayo, press coverage described new coca growing in Nariño department to the west, in a zone residents have taken to calling 'Little Putumayo'.<sup>33</sup> Spraying in Putumayo may prove effective only in displacing coca elsewhere in Colombia—or even over borders into neighbouring countries.

Human rights groups continue to be concerned about the possibility that U.S. assistance may contribute to abuses of the civilian population. Due to the Colombian military's well-documented ties to the paramilitaries, as well as the impunity enjoyed by officers credibly alleged to have been involved in abuses, the U.S. government was unable to certify that its aid recipients met a series of human rights

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credible allegations of close ties to the AUC. In an October 2001 report, Human Rights Watch alleged that the Putumayo-based 24<sup>th</sup> Brigade even took payoffs from paramilitary leaders in exchange for its collaboration.<sup>34</sup>

The military-paramilitary relationship appears to be disturbingly close in Putumayo, the destination of most U.S. military aid. While the new counter-narcotics brigade so far faces no allegations of paramilitary collaboration, existing units in this area—especially the 24<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Colombian Army—face

More concerns arise from the impact the new U.S. military assistance had on the defunct talks with the FARC. The announcement of the Plan Colombia aid package certainly soured talks with FARC at a moment when the two sides were working to undo decades of mistrust. The announcement of a major aid package strengthened hard-line opponents of negotiation on both sides of the negotiating table: FARC leaders who opposed the talks and distrusted government motives from the start, and government and military leaders who viewed the aid as a sign that further concessions in the talks would not be necessary.

More warning signs are evident in the European allies' and Latin American neighbours' reluctance to offer the Plan Colombia strategy an open endorsement or additional assistance. To date, Europe has offered only about \$300 million in non-military aid to Colombia, and most of that is intended as 'support for Colombia's peace process' and specifically not considered a contribution to Plan Colombia.<sup>35</sup> The United States accounts for nearly all of the total international contribution to Plan Colombia, which was originally expected to total \$3.5 billion. The lack of support is best explained by disappointment at being excluded from the plan's design, discomfort with the large U.S. military component, and lack of interest in what has never been a priority aid destination for most European donor countries.

### *The 'Andean Regional Initiative' (2001–2002)*

By April 2001, few of the Plan Colombia aid package's helicopters had been delivered, and the Bush Administration had yet to nominate many of its key Latin America policy-makers. His administration's aid request to Congress for 2002 therefore did not include any new hardware or battalions, and was largely seen as a continuation of the strategy put in place by the Clinton Administration.<sup>36</sup>

The main difference in the 2002 request was an increased focus on Colombia's neighbours. The Bush Administration sought to sell its aid request as part of a regional approach, preferring the term 'Andean Regional Initiative' to Plan Colombia. While 70% of Colombia's portion of this request (combining the foreign aid and defence-budget outlays) benefited military and police operations, most of the aid for neighbouring countries was more evenly balanced between military and social priorities. Nonetheless, the administration's aid request still called for steep increases in military and police aid to Peru (82% over 2000–2001 levels), Bolivia (20%) and Ecuador (63%).<sup>37</sup>

Like aid levels, the U.S. presence in the countries bordering Colombia is also increasing. In 1999 and 2000 the Clinton Administration brokered agreements for the use of air bases at Manta, Ecuador and Aruba and Curaçao in the Netherlands Antilles. (A third site in Comalapa, El Salvador, began operations in 2001.) Both 'Forward Operating Locations', less than 200 miles from Colombian territory, host daily surveillance and signals-intelligence flights that monitor drug production and smuggling from the air in the northern Andes and southern Caribbean.<sup>38</sup> Many observers, particularly in Ecuador, worry about future pressure to change the sites' purpose if the U.S. mission in Colombia should shift to counter-insurgency.

In Peru, the United States maintains a near-constant training presence in the Amazon port of Iquitos, where a U.S.-built Joint Riverine Training Center assists Peruvian Navy and Police efforts to control river traffic.<sup>39</sup> Iquitos, along with other Peruvian sites like Andoas and Pucallpa, also hosts radar sites and runways for the two countries' aerial interdiction programme. This programme has been on hold since the accidental shooting down of a planeload of U.S. missionaries in April 2001.

The Andean Regional Initiative faced a U.S. Congress that was more sceptical than it had been a year earlier during the Plan Colombia debate. The final version of the 2002 bill cut about one-seventh from the Bush Administration request, and conditioned the delivery of aid on human rights standards (with language a bit weaker than the year before, but with no waiver) and the impact of fumigations. Attempts to cut military assistance from the package came close to passage in the House of Representatives, gaining the support of most of the Democratic Party, and an attempt to undo military aid cutbacks failed in the Senate.

### *A new administration mulls counter-insurgency*

Despite the anti-guerrilla aspects of U.S.-funded operations like the 'push into southern Colombia', Washington has so far operated on the assumption that counter-insurgency—involvement in the 'quagmire' of Colombia's messy war—is a mission to be avoided. While being 'tough on drugs' plays well before a domestic audience, most politicians have avoided endorsing a nakedly counter-insurgent approach, which would raise too many uncomfortable questions about escalation, 'slippery slopes', exit strategies and the danger of a 'new Vietnam'. (While some congressional Republicans for years have urged Washington to get into the counter-insurgency business, they were relegated to a hard-line fringe during the Clinton years.) Officials from both the Clinton and the Bush Administrations alike

have sought to assure Congress and the public that they have no intention of crossing an invisible line between the anti-drug and anti-guerrilla missions. According to the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, Anne Patterson, 'The political stomach for going into the counter-insurgency business is zero. It is not going to happen'.<sup>40</sup>

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The line between the missions has blurred, though, as Colombia's peace process has stumbled and fresh allegations have emerged of FARC ties to the drug trade. 'The United States ... should stop pretending that it is only supporting a campaign against the drug traffic in Colombia', the *Washington Post* editorialized on 3 January 2001. 'If it is to continue training and equipping the Colombian army, the new administration cannot avoid involvement in the larger Colombian conflict'.<sup>41</sup>

Colombia's armed groups are increasingly being viewed as threats to U.S. national security. Washington is not likely to continue tolerating high levels of instability in a nearby country that is Latin America's fourth-largest economy and fifth-largest U.S. trading partner. Colombia is also the United States' seventh-largest source of imported oil, and probably has more untapped and unexplored oil reserves than any country in the hemisphere.<sup>42</sup> Other natural resources of great international value, all of whose exploitation is hindered by instability, include coal, natural gas, gold and precious gems, timber, and two coasts close enough to entice possible builders of alternatives to the very crowded Panama Canal.

As the Bush Administration established itself over the course of 2001, key voices began to question the anti-drug emphasis. The new defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, was known to be sceptical about involving the military in counter-narcotics. An influential June 2001 study by the Rand Corporation think-tank and funded by the Air Force was severely critical of U.S. anti-drug policy in Colombia, calling instead for a greater commitment to counter-insurgency. 'The U.S. program of military assistance to El Salvador during the Reagan Administration could be a relevant model', the study suggested.<sup>43</sup>

By mid-2001, as more Bush nominees arrived in key policy-making posts, officials acknowledged that they were in the midst of a 'formal review' of the Colombia policy it had inherited from the Clinton Administration. Assistant Secretary of Defence Peter Rodman stated in August that officials were making 'agonizing decisions' about whether the United States' interest in Colombia is 'just narcotics, or is there some wider stake we may have in the survival of a friendly democratic government'.<sup>44</sup> Secretary of State Colin Powell's scheduled 11 September visit to Bogotá was viewed as a key step in this review process.

### **The 'war on terrorism'**

Secretary Powell's visit, of course, was postponed indefinitely. The 11 September attacks and subsequent war in Afghanistan knocked Colombia from the nation's front pages for months. The policy review was frozen and the U.S. strategy was put on 'autopilot'.

As the Afghanistan effort winds down, however, the debate over U.S. counter-insurgency support to Colombia is gathering momentum, fuelled by the February 2002 breakdown in talks with the FARC. The new international context, of course, is also fuelling consideration of a possible shift. Viewed through the lens of anti-terrorism, Colombia—with its three groups on the State Department's list of foreign terror organizations—sticks out prominently on a map of the world.

U.S. officials' rhetoric has grown more bellicose in the wake of the terror attacks. Both U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson and Senator Bob Graham (chairman of the Intelligence Committee) have publicly compared FARC to the bin Laden terrorist organization.<sup>45</sup> Secretary of State Colin Powell told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in October 2001 that bin Laden's al Qaeda exemplifies a

terrorist group against which an international alliance could be sustained, adding that FARC and Ireland's Real IRA 'probably meet a similar standard'.<sup>46</sup> The State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism, Francis Taylor, told reporters on 15 October 2001 that FARC, ELN and AUC 'will receive the same treatment as any other terrorist group, in terms of our interest in pursuing them and putting an end to their terrorist activities', adding that the United States will employ 'all the resources' available to do so, including, 'where appropriate, as we have done in Afghanistan, the use of military force'.<sup>47</sup> Key Congressional leaders responded positively to President Pastrana's November request to use existing counter-narcotics aid to fight armed groups; House Drug Policy Subcommittee Chairman Mark Souder of Indiana told reporters, 'It is not just narcotics. It has developed into terrorism and we need to fight terrorism in our hemisphere'.<sup>48</sup>

The Bush Administration's response was foreseen in its 2003 aid request to Congress, made public on 4 February 2002. Combining aid through foreign assistance and estimated defence-budget outlays, Colombia would get over \$520 million in military and police aid and \$164 million in social and economic aid in 2003. For the first time since the Cold War, the administration seeks a significant amount of non-drug military assistance for Colombia. The Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programme—used in recent years mostly to provide grant military aid to the Middle East—would provide \$98 million to help Colombia's army protect the Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline, which runs from Arauca department to Sucre department in northeastern Colombia. Much oil in this pipeline belongs to Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum. Colombian guerrillas attacked the pipeline 166 times in 2001.

A 'supplemental' budget request introduced 21 March 2002 would go still further. In addition to an extra \$6 million to begin the pipeline-protection programme immediately, the bill contains language that would fundamentally change the U.S. mission in Colombia, officially crossing the line between counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency as a matter of law. The request would allow all past, present and future military and police aid given through anti-drug programmes to be used 'to support a unified campaign against narcotics trafficking, terrorist activities, and other threats to [Colombia's] national security.'

The U.S. government is clearly at a strategic turning point, and the new proposal would multiply the number of potential targets against which U.S.-provided military equipment and U.S.-supported units can be employed. Washington is likely to witness a thorough debate in 2002 about greater involvement in Colombia's conflict.

This debate must include an honest assessment of the size of the effort that would be needed. While the Rand Corporation and others hold up U.S. support for El Salvador in the 1980s as a possible model, they often neglect to recall that it took twelve years and nearly two billion dollars of military aid to achieve only a stalemate in El Salvador, after fighting killed 70,000 people and exiled over a million. Colombia has fifty-three times the area and eight times the population of El Salvador. The cost of a 'successful' counter-insurgency campaign in Colombia could be nightmarishly high, whether measured in dollars or lives.

Human rights are a second reason to pause before plunging into counter-insurgency. There are few guarantees that military aid—whether weapons, intelligence or lethal skills—would not get misused against innocent civilians. It is possible to imagine, for example, that intelligence provided to Colombia's military about guerrilla movements in a village could find its way to paramilitaries who then massacre the villagers. Other than weak legislative protections, little exists to prevent an expanded U.S. military aid programme from contributing, directly or indirectly, to such abuses.

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It is also unclear that a predominantly military approach can bring the security, governability and reform needed for a stable democracy to flourish in Colombia. Since the country is simply too large for the armed forces ever to maintain a permanent presence in all of its territory, military aid must be seen as a small piece of a much bigger puzzle. Not until Colombians are made to feel like stakeholders in a system managed by an accountable, responsive state will insurgency and criminality stop looking like attractive options.

### *First steps towards human security*

Concrete proposals for building Colombian human security would be the subject of a much longer paper. However a few general principles deserve brief mention. While there is a role for Colombia's military, the international community must focus more strongly on professionalizing and strengthening Colombia's civilian state institutions. This could be made possible by increasing international support for peace negotiators, judges and prosecutors, human rights and anti-corruption activists, honest legislators, reformist police and military officers, muckraking journalists and others who want to build

***While there is a role for Colombia's military, the international community must focus more strongly on professionalizing and strengthening Colombia's civilian state institutions.***

a real, functioning democracy. Alternative development, infrastructure programmes and other state investment can create the conditions for a functioning legal economy in neglected rural areas. Drug-consuming countries must spend more money at home on efforts to reduce demand, which most studies indicate is most effectively achieved by offering treatment to addicts.<sup>49</sup>

Decisions made in the next year or two will determine whether Colombia's peace process can stop the fighting, whether real reforms can take root, and whether the human rights nightmare documented by the Colombian Commission of Jurists can come to an end. Colombia needs the international community's help to emerge from its long, complicated human security crisis. But the international community must be prepared to use, with great patience, a sophisticated and complex set of tools. The sledgehammer of counter-insurgency only promises to do more damage.

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