WAR AND LACK OF GOVERNANCE IN COLOMBIA

Narcos, Guerrillas, and U.S. Policy

Colombia today is crippled by its most serious political, economic, social, and moral crisis in a century, a condition that seriously threatens the Americas generally and the national interests of the United States specifically. The country is largely ignored today, but before long the news from there is likely to be front page and very bad. In May, substantial terrorism returned to downtown Bogotá. If policy changes are made soon, the pending tragedy can be avoided.

About the size of California and Texas combined, with the fourth largest economy in Latin America, Colombia links Central America and the Panama Canal region to South America and is the source of most of the cocaine and much of the heroin used in the United States. But more important, it is a major player in the drug war generally and in the U.S. and regional efforts to create and sustain a stable, prosperous, and democratic hemisphere. Colombia also has one of the highest rates of homicides and displaced people.[2] Moreover, human rights violations by the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and some members of the national armed forces are commonplace. The Office of the People's Advocate states that massacres in rural areas have reached unprecedented proportions and that kidnappings per inhabitant tripled during the past ten years. This represents fifty times the average crime rate of all other

countries worldwide.[3] Not surprisingly, the number of Colombians seeking asylum abroad, particularly in the United States, is increasing rapidly.[4]

Although many factors have contributed to the current crisis, the primary ones are the failure of the Colombian government to meet the needs of its citizens and a half century of explosive political and social violence.[5] From the colonial period until recently, national leaders and their local appointees ignored or downplayed the needs of the culturally diverse and geographically isolated portions of the country. This kind of treatment prevailed in independent Colombia from the early nineteenth century through the 1980s. Until the early 1990s, the political elite within the Conservative and Liberal Parties silenced diverse political groups through political violence and exclusion, even though the country developed one of the region's most stable democracies within its limitations. Under these circumstances, a kind of lawlessness developed in much of the country, providing the perfect climate in which guerrillas and drug dealers could grow. By the time the Colombian government began introducing significant reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s to help these regions and enhance political inclusion (see below), organized political violence had become an integral part of Colombian life.

The massive drug business, located in the vast lawless areas of the country, is only the latest manifestation of organized crime and violence to descend on Colombians. It also is the only one that attracts the attention of many Americans; hence our relatively recent escalating involvement there. The drug business, stoking ever greater violence combined with public and private sector corruption, is cashing in on the incredibly lucrative business of providing an illegal product to ravenous American and European markets. The war on drugs continues to draw attention and resources away from the primary needs of Colombians.

Indeed, during the past half century, violence has become so commonplace in Colombia that, say political wags, the country's guerrillas

have long since become a major pillar in the establishment they say they want to overthrow. Modern violence is usually traced back to the "Bogotazo" in April 1948, when riots exploded in the Colombian capital after the assassination of popular Liberal politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and spread to the countryside, lasting for a more than a decade. This longer phenomenon, called "La Violencia," probably took about 200,000 lives before it was crushed.

The violence returned in another guise in the early 1960s with the emergence of guerrilla groups that were largely nationalistic and/or tied to the various international centers of communist power, a common phenomenon across Latin America during that period. The most important were the pro-Soviet Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the pro-Cuban National Liberation Army (ELN), the pro-Chinese People's Liberation Army (EPL), the largely nationalistic April 19 Movement (M-19), and various smaller groups. In recent years anti-guerrilla so-called United Self-Defense Forces (AUC), commonly called paramilitaries, have also emerged in increasing force. Most members of the M-19 and EPL laid down their arms in 1989–90; the FARC, ELN, and AUC are still active in the new millennium. In early 2001 the estimated memberships of these groups were FARC, 16,000; ELN, 6,500; and AUC, 9,000.

All the nationalist and Marxist groups that emerged during the cold war had communist or populist agendas, whereas the later paramilitaries claimed to defend property rights in lawless areas. Thus during early growth of these groups one could attribute the spread of organized political violence in Colombia to two primary factors: first, the Colombian political system's incapacity and unwillingness to open itself to all interested parties and to serve the public interest and, second, the foreign support for insurgents. Other studies also argue that guerrilla activity can be associated with age and gender, rural composition, and regional income inequality.[6]

This study discusses the relationship between guerrillas and drug trafficking, including the critical absence of state legitimacy in the war

zones; surveys Plan Colombia worked out in 1999–2000 by President Pastrana and the United States; and reviews the history of negotiating peace in Colombia. It concludes with a critique of Plan Colombia and gives some policy recommendations for the U.S. and Colombian governments.

GUERRILLAS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

After the end of the cold war, insurgent groups in Colombia and other developing countries could no longer depend on their earlier sources of material and strategic support. As a result, they faced tough choices: either find support elsewhere or allow themselves to be absorbed by the formal political systems of their respective countries.[7] Most insurgent groups in Latin America abandoned political violence and in some cases began participating in their national political systems.[8] Such was the case for some insurgent groups in Colombia, most important, the M-19 and most members of the EPL.

But in Colombia another guerrilla-controlled source of income came from outside the country in regions the central government does not control. In fact, since the late 1980s, the three main surviving insurgent groups—the FARC, ELN, and AUC—have increasingly financed their war efforts by taxing and protecting coca and opium poppy-related production, processing, and distribution facilities as well as by kidnapping and extortion.[9] The elaborate strategic alliance between organized political violence and drug-related organized crime adds a higher level of complexity to policy making in and toward Colombia than the Colombian government and its U.S. supporters have been able to contend with.

An analysis of the market structure of drug production and distribution in Colombia sheds light on how to approach this conundrum. During the first few years of the post–cold war era, the three main Colombian drug cartels were forced to decentralize their production and distribution capabilities. This was due to a successful sequence of anti-cartel operations driven by the Colombian National Police and assisted

by U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies.[10] Most of the then-fragmented cartels had to look elsewhere for protection, paying unprecedented amounts of money to the FARC, AUC, and to a lesser extent the ELN, who were anxious to provide these services since they needed cash to finance their weapons purchases and support of draftees. With this new strategic/tactical alliance, guerrilla-derived revenues from taxing coca plantations, kidnappings, and extortions—their main earlier sources of income—have been declining rapidly as the proportion of revenues originating in the direct involvement of FARC and AUC guerrillas in drug production and distribution operations has increased.[11]

Today, an estimated average of 50–65 percent of all FARC fronts' financing originates in drug-related activities. The ELN's and AUC's proportions of their total operational funding reaches 63 and 52 percent, respectively.[12] In many cases, these same groups have acquired ownership positions in the production and distribution of cocaine and opium.[13] In April 2001 for the first time a top FARC leader was formally charged with drug trafficking, and Colombia's army chief confirmed that a raid had turned up evidence of FARC involvement in almost every aspect of the international drug trade.[14] Together, the FARC, ELN, and AUC are estimated to have direct or indirect control of more than 70–75 percent of the distribution and 40–42 percent of the production in the 136,200 hectares of coca grown in Colombia.[15]

This profitable strategic alliance between fragmented drug cartels and guerrilla leaders explains why insurgent groups lack the incentives to seriously engage in peace negotiations with current offers and, thus, provides a major explanation of why more than any other country in the Western Hemisphere Colombia remains threatened by major civil strife.

Lack of State Legitimacy in the War Zones

Past and present violence in Colombia are incomprehensible outside a culture and institutions that stretch back for hundreds of years. Over the centuries, Colombia's diverse geography and patterns of Spanish

and subsequent settlement and rule meant that major portions of the country are even now only marginally settled and governed.[16] The Spanish political and social heritage was only slightly modified during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Colombia's two main political parties acting on behalf of the country's elite. Colombia's institutions generally remained stable in the independence period, as seen clearly in the 1886 constitution, which like earlier documents, in the words of a former reforming president, was "an expression of social immobility." This constitution remained in force until 1991.[17]

The political and fiscal centralization fostered by the constitution of 1886 did not bring anything approaching effective governance to major portions of the country. Instead, many regions distanced themselves even farther from Bogota, a fact that underlies much of the current violence. From the early nineteenth century to today, people in many parts of Colombia have been and are indifferent to, when they are not downright contemptuous of, the activities of the central government. Whether in the government, the family, the school or wherever in civil society, power in Colombian life was vertical. One of the main challenges for today's reformers is to convince people that they should take the public interest into account.[18]

Excessive political centralization thus was one of the root problems that still affects events today. Rather than allowing the local population and municipalities to elect their own leaders, the central government appointed officials who then selected the officials under them. Patronage-driven corruption thrived. Consequently, in much of the country, education, medical services, water supply and sanitation, housing, roads and general communications ranged from grossly inadequate to nonexistent—what one study called "the manifest incapacity of the agencies of national order to satisfy the necessities of basic services in the localities and regions."[19]

Pressures for at least some degree of greater local control have been felt since the nineteenth century but with no lasting impact. The formal dominance of the Conservative and Liberal Parties continued until

recently, and their guidance of policy persists to this day. But from the 1970s in particular, pressures for significant change grew, were stifled, and grew again. The first major breakthroughs came during the Belisario Betancur administration (1982–86) when legislation was passed to allow the popular election of mayors, though the first elections did not occur until Virgilio Barco's presidency (1986–90).[20] Under President César Gaviria (1990–94), a constituent assembly was elected to draft a new constitution. The assembly included the traditional political actors, but also some recently demobilized guerrillas, most important, members of the M-19, as well as minority, Indian, and other groups. The resulting 1991 constitution, and subsequent legislation, brought extensive and sweeping changes during a process called the "opening." Instead of a constitution imposed by one group, as had always been the case in the past, this was a consensus document.[21] The new constitution decentralized power, allowing for the elections of governors and other local officials in addition to mayors and placing control of the basic municipal services in the hands of local governments. This opening challenged the dominant role of the two traditional parties, though in many places the parties rallied to meet the challenge and remained strong. Although some analysts found the experiences of selected *municipios* "encouraging," others noted that often the city mayors and others became more interested in playing party politics than providing services to the people.[22] Real institutional and cultural change came slowly, when at all.

Thus, though the new constitution may have opened doors, it did not create a new world. The challenges today range from, first and foremost, getting people to believe that they can play a meaningful role in a society that for centuries ignored and defied their interests. Beyond that, practical institutions must be formed and staffed with capable, dedicated personnel who will conduct policy on behalf of the people.

The U.S. and Colombian governments agree that seeking a peaceful solution to the civil conflict is the key to Colombia's economic development. But a successful peace process requires establishing a legitimate institutional framework throughout the country. This would mean in-

corporating the coca-growing regions, which have rarely or never had formal and effective working institutions, into the political life of the country. In turn, this requires the development of state-recognized channels through which public preferences could be translated into policies, including laws to win the voluntary compliance of local residents by enacting and enforcing rules with the capacity to address the citizens' social interests and resolve their conflicts. Today all these conditions are missing in the remote conflict and clearance areas, including the isolated coca- and opium poppy–producing regions, as they have been since the inception of Colombia as a nation.

The indispensable condition for achieving the goals of Plan Colombia is, therefore, for the government to gain an institutional presence in areas where the population has seldom benefited from such basic infrastructure as justice, health, and education. But achieving this would require the state's supporting many of the *informal* institutional frameworks already in place. In varying degrees these informal institutions, such as mediation centers and neighborhood councils and communal public works in roads and bridges, have been set up or simply used by the FARC and ELN as ways to gain legitimacy in the regions under their control.[23] The AUC has recently started to utilize similar tactics.

Considering these realities, Colombia's public officials have a lot of catching-up to do. In a recent study, a Colombian scholar noted the process by which settlements occur in many remote areas of Colombia where there are no roads, no schools, no public services, and, above all, no authority. He states: "In the absence of the state in what are immense territories, it is no coincidence that the guerrilla has often taken over by force the role of mediator, usually well accepted by the large percentage of these populations."[24] This is confirmed by recent surveys of the Putumayo region showing that 91 percent of the population perceive municipal authorities to be corrupt and 67 percent view local authorities as incompetent in the provision of public services. Judges are considered "corrupt puppets used by landowners and other powerful to achieve their ends" by 61 percent of the people.[25] These disturbing signs of the

state institutions' lack of legitimacy before the eyes of the local populations in Putumayo, Caqueta, and the northern departments of Bolivar and Norte de Santander make it clear why people tend to interact with all armed groups in order to survive.

The aforementioned survey also finds that 95 percent of the population would never consider dispute resolution mechanisms offered by the official court system, reflecting the real situation within the conflict and cease-fire zones. Specifically, no criminal or civil judges are currently providing court services in these areas, and few citizens would be willing to demand these services if they were available. Moreover, public hospitals have been either destroyed by the guerrillas or closed down by the government while public education and public investment, if they existed at all, are just memories in a distant past. As President Pastrana wrote, "The drug industry has re-emerged in the remote Colombian countryside, an area that, until now, had been largely 'frontier' land with little government or law enforcement presence."[26]

In these conditions, informal institutions provide social escape valves. A recent survey shows that 57 percent of the heads of households interviewed have used or knew someone who had used the informal dispute resolution mechanisms provided by neighborhood councils or directly from the FARC. Moreover, 35 percent of the sampled heads of households attested to participating in communal public works coordinated by the FARC, and 68 percent of the sampled population within the clearance and conflict areas stated that they have used the health services offered by insurgent groups in rural areas. Thus, the armed insurgents have been legitimizing their occupation by institutionalizing their presence. In short, the FARC and to a lesser extent the ELN are well under way to establishing a state within the Colombian territory, not just in military terms but in political terms as well.

The irony is that if the Colombian government ever wants to establish its legitimacy over guerrilla forces in major portions of the country, it must undertake institution building by incorporating the work already conducted by community-based bodies or even, in cases where

they are in command, from the guerrilla groups themselves. The sending of a bit of "emergency aid" after a disaster, which is all the central government has done in most places in the past, is not enough.[27]

Plan Colombia has not made an explicit commitment to use any of its limited nonmilitary resources to strike at the above institutional deficiencies. Thus today the main institutional needs within the conflict and cease-fire zones are

1. Communal (i.e., civil society) participation in the provision of public goods and public services at the local level, using the current neighborhood councils (*parroquias vecinales*), complaint panels, and informal community based–credit unions as the necessary institutional foundation
2. Institutionalization of civil society's oversight and monitoring committees within local governments in the cease-fire and conflict zones (e.g., to monitor budget allocations within local governments)
3. Assistance in the relocation of hundreds of thousands of refugees
4. Implementation of alternative agricultural development plans fitting the needs and long-term potential of regional soils

Without serious central government support for such institution building, local populations cannot be expected to assist the state in breaking the links between farmers, armed insurgents, and drug processing.

PLAN COLOMBIA

When Andrés Pastrana became president in 1998 he and the United States formulated the so-called Plan Colombia to

1. Revive a stagnant peace process between the three dissident military forces and the government
2. Diminish the capacity of the illegal narcotics industry
3. Reactivate a stagnant Colombian economy
4. Strengthen democratic mechanisms at the local and national levels

The cost of Plan Colombia has been estimated at US$7.5 billion, with $1.3 billion already committed by the United States, almost entirely toward diminishing the capacity of the narcotics industry (objective 2 above). Colombia promised to contribute $4 billion (other countries will be solicited to provide the remainder). A substantial international role seems justified by the fact that 90 percent of cocaine consumed in the United States, and 70–80 percent of that consumed in Western Europe, comes from Colombia. It is also estimated that 80 percent of the money laundered by drug traffickers ends up in bank accounts within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development financial jurisdiction,[28] a clear-cut case of an international cross-jurisdictional security problem requiring an international cross-jurisdictional solution. Yet, even in this context, most non-American sources of support have been unresponsive largely because many are worried about becoming involved in a project supported mainly by the United States with its military approach to the war on drugs and, indeed, the entire Colombian crisis. An increasing number of people worldwide are beginning believe that former U.S. secretary of state George Shultz, Nobel Prize–winning economist Milton Friedman, former San Jose (California) police chief Joseph McNamara, and many others were right several years ago when they wrote an open letter to U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan warning that the war on drugs has become more harmful than drug abuse itself. As London's *Economist* magazine editorialized on 10 May 2001, "by any reasonable measure, America's 'war on drugs' is a disaster."

Active U.S. involvement in Colombia has intensified over the past two decades largely because Colombia became the major supplier of illegal drugs consumed in the United States. On balance, the policies of fighting the drug war in Colombia have not been beneficial to Colombia or to the United States. The war—focusing on interdiction and eradication—has not significantly changed the consumption, quality, availability, or price of drugs in the United States. The continuation of this enormously profit-making business has played havoc with life and institutions in Colombia and other parts of Latin America. During the term of President Ernesto Samper (1994–98) the "decertification" program—designed by Congress to punish governments that U.S. leaders concluded did not try hard enough to fight the war on drugs—simply made conditions worse by confirming and feeding the impression that Colombia was a bandit state. National institutions were weakened, criminal elements from abroad sought refuge there, and what had been one of Latin America's most successful economies dived into its worst recession in a century.

When Pastrana took office he asked the United States and the European Union to support his new effort to end forty years of civil strife. In response, former president Clinton and the U.S. Congress agreed to a joint effort to fight drug trafficking and money laundering in the context of Plan Colombia.[29] According to Washington, the U.S. portion of Plan Colombia focuses on helping "to fight the illicit drug trade, to increase the rule of law, to protect human rights, to expand economic development, to institute judicial reform, and to foster peace."[30] Yet, after analyzing the numbers behind the words, a strong tilt toward the drug war emerges.

In Plan Colombia, the United States set aside limited funds for a variety of nonmilitary programs. There is $122 million for technical assistance in such areas as human rights, judicial reform, and "other programs designed to support the peace process and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law in Colombia." An additional $81 million is marked for programs assisting displaced persons, voluntary eradication

of drug crops, local government, and the like; some funds were set aside for related programs in Bolivia and Ecuador, mainly Bolivia.[31]

But by far the largest and most controversial portion of the U.S. aid package in Plan Colombia is the military component, consisting of $390.5 million aimed at taking control of drug-producing regions in southern Colombia. These funds support the training and advanced equipment needed by the second and third Colombian army counter-narcotics battalions, including sixteen UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters ($208 million), thirty UH-1H Huey II helicopters ($60 million), and support for fifteen UH-1N helicopters ($60 million). The assistance package also includes $129.4 million to modernize U.S. and Colombian narcotics interdiction efforts, a major portion of which ($68 million) is earmarked to upgrade the radar systems in four U.S. Customs Service P-3 airborne early-warning interdiction aircraft that detect and monitor suspected targets destined for the United States and Colombia. Finally, the U.S. assistance contains $115.6 million to support the Colombian National Police, including two more Blackhawk and twelve Huey helicopters.

The military aid, then, is in the form of goods and services provided to the Colombian police and to the Colombian armed forces while explicitly denying the use of U.S. armed forces to implement any aspect of Plan Colombia.

The Bush administration seems inclined toward a more positive policy toward drugs but still one that as it is going in mid-May (2001) will be less destructive than earlier U.S. policy without truly facing the realities. Bush has said that "drug legalization would be a social catastrophe" and appointed a drug czar, John Walters, who seems to agree with him on this and other old policies Bush may be ready to eliminate. The hopeful aspects of the new administration are the president's open recognition that "the most effective way to reduce the supply of drugs in America is to reduce the demand for drugs in America." The new administration also seems to understand better than Clinton's that greater efforts must be made to deal with the political, social, economic

and institutional conditions abroad that give rise to drug production. Finally, the new administration has more forcefully recognized the regional nature of the drug problem and recommended that an additional $882 million be spent in neighboring countries during the next few years.[32]

NEGOTIATING PEACE IN COLOMBIA

In 1998 President Pastrana ran for office and won as a peace candidate in a country that is sick of war and violence. But he was not the first to launch a peace campaign, and the earlier experiences have their own accomplishments and lessons for the present and future. All, including Pastrana's, have failures that erode public support for the peaceful approach generally.

President Alfonso López Michelsen tried to negotiate with the guerrillas in the mid-1970s but was thwarted by a suspicious military. The partial successes began with the term of President Betancur a decade later, when a peace commission was formed and truces were signed with the FARC, EPL, and M-19. But the government could not guarantee the safety of guerrillas who laid down their arms, and in the end the truces fell through. In 1985 the FARC founded a political party called the Patriotic Union (UP), which continues in a shriveled form today. Yet tragic political events continued to define the political process. Guerrillas and paramilitaries assassinated judges, prosecutors, presidential candidates, active and prospective mayors, governors, and numerous police officials. At the same time, thousands of the UP's candidates and elected officials were also murdered for political reasons, sending a strong message to guerrillas who consider rejoining the system today.[33]

In 1989–90, at the end of the administration of Virgilio Barco, several guerrilla groups did lay down their arms, including the M-19 and much of the EPL, and participated in the constituent assembly that drew up the 1991 constitution and in subsequent elections. Even though some M-19 candidates also were assassinated,[34] the newly retired guer-

rillas did not turn again to violence (some M-19 activists still travel with armed bodyguards). The FARC and ELN, as well as the paramilitary AUC, remain in the countryside with arms in hand, as suspicious of deals offered by the government as the government and people are of occasional, seemingly positive actions by the guerrillas.

In 1998 Pastrana launched an ambitious peace offensive which has made so little progress, on the surface at least, that it leaves the Colombian people, if anything, more frustrated than before. In 1998 Pastrana, in a bold but ill-advised move, conceded a chunk of land the size of Switzerland to the FARC, which became off-limits to the official armed forces (military and police), and he has promised to make a similar concession to the ELN. These concessions have drawn strong public protests, particularly since the FARC continued its military actions after 1998 and seemed more interested in expanding its takeover of the territory than in negotiating peace. These developments almost unhinged peace talks in late 2000, leading President Pastrana to launch a new truce initiative in February 2001 in which he met with FARC's chieftain Manuel Marulanda in the conceded zone.

An Improved Plan Colombia II

A careful analysis of the original Plan Colombia reveals unrealistic and inadequate responses to the problems facing the country today, though as noted above the Bush administration seems to be making some positive changes. Still the bulk of the guaranteed funding is military and from the United States for the drug war, whereas most of the funding for the essential political and economic programs discussed in this essay are being sought from unreliable sources. Thus the only part of Plan Colombia that has a fair chance of being enacted is limited to the war on drugs. In this scenario, American money is being thrown into a black institutional hole, except that it won't just disappear, it will help spread the problem to other parts of Colombia and even neighboring countries.

Additionally, the essence of the U.S.-backed Colombia national

drug control strategy offers assistance in developing alternative crops while simultaneously eradicating illicit crops and, when possible, factories and cartels. A few of the many problems just within this one portion of Plan Colombia are noted below.

The Eradication Program

Between 1998 and 2000 the growth of Colombia's two principal illegal crops, coca and opium, increased. Coca, the most important crop, was mainly grown in two regions: (1) along the Ecuadorian and Peruvian borders in the departments of Putumayo and Caqueta and (2) farther north and east in Guaviare and neighboring departments. Yet coca plantations are also appearing in the northern departments of Bolivar and Norte de Santander. Almost all the opium poppies are grown on the eastern side of the Central Cordillera Mountains in Cauca, Huila, and Tolima departments, with a lesser amount produced in Norte de Santander and the southern portion of Bolivar and Antioquia departments.

The amounts grown have increased significantly. In 1998, coca and opium poppy crops were estimated to be 101,800 hectares and 6,100 hectares, respectively;[35] in 1999, 122,500 hectares of coca and 7,500 hectares of poppies; in 2000, 136,200 hectares of coca and 9,500 of poppies. The government's failure to address the increasing production grows out of its inability to deal with the guerrillas' (i.e., FARC, ELN, and AUC) procurement and protection of basic infrastructure (roads, trucks, chemicals, etc.) and their control of basic public services that aid in drug production and processing. Coca-growing patterns contribute much to the complexity of this program. Production centers can be located almost anywhere and are extremely mobile. What is more, the latest surveys show that 74 percent of the plots used for coca growing are smaller than 10 hectares.[36] Nonetheless, as of February 2001, Colombian government data claim that the U.S.-backed eradication campaign had destroyed crops growing on 29,000 of the 56,800 hectares in

Putumayo, thus marking a successful launching of Plan Colombia. Moreover, Colombian government and U.S. observers in the region claim that in certain areas up to 50 percent of the coca plantations have been destroyed through spraying herbicides. But the Colombian government's track record in this area has been extremely poor, raising questions as to the actual results of the spraying program.

Independent reports suggest that although many coca fields have been wiped out, the chemicals used in the eradication process have also destroyed banana and yucca plots (thus hampering the production of alternative crops) and contaminated fish ponds, thereby destroying the legal livelihood of much of the population in the region. (The U.S. government denies the spraying has these destructive effects.) What is more, local reports indicate that in the past farmers whose drug crops were destroyed return to sow coca again because it has proven to be the only viable cash crop. Also much of the jungle soil in the coca-producing regions cannot support alternative agriculture.[37]

Thus on the one hand, military activities in late 2000 and early 2001 aimed at destroying coca crops intensified and, within limited areas of southeastern Colombia, have been relatively successful. But these successes have not prevented the relocation of crop growing to other areas or impeded mobile laboratories from processing coca, coca paste, and cocaine in Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, where foreign operators then channel the drugs to neighboring countries and Europe.[38] U.S. government officials have acknowledged this problem and some potentially positive regional programs may result.[39]

Alternative Crop Programs

An agency called the National Alternative Development Plan (Plante) has been put in charge of implementing alternative crop development. Targeting approximately 35,000 small farmers nationwide, each of whom produces less than three hectares of coca or opium poppies, Plante has tried to get farmers to abandon illicit crop production in favor of

marketable nondrug crops. Plante has also attempted to organize strategic alliances with the private sector to provide farmers' organizations with risk capital and technical assistance in production, product processing, and marketing alternative crops. The assistance actually offered to farmers who have lost their livelihood, however, is insignificant relative to their basic needs for capital, seeds, fertilizers, and physical relocation. The government originally promised a onetime transfer of $5 million pesos per family (approximately U.S. $2,220) to spur their eradication incentives, but in February 2001 officials announced that their allocation limit would be $2 million pesos per family (U.S. $888), only about 5 percent of what a family actually needs to develop a new livelihood.[40] This marginal contribution to resettlement, coupled with the local farmers' dissatisfaction with the state's record of human rights abuses and institutional neglect, limits the government's ability to get or regain the loyalty and support of local populations.

We also know that most peasants do not abandon the drug trade easily or quickly. Even after the launching of Plan Colombia in Putumayo in early 2001, army patrols found peasants flowing into the region because growing drugs was seen as better than starving in neighboring provinces. Indeed, most of these farmers found themselves returning to coca production after attempting to grow such alternative crops as wood, rice, and corn with poor results. The reality is that these extremely poor farmers need to support their families and will keep growing coca under the protection and management of armed rebel groups even if they are forced to move to Ecuador or Peru to do so.

The challenge of eliminating drug production and shipment is greatly complicated by another irony: the initial success of the Colombian government in hampering the operations of the three major drug cartels (Cali, Medellín, and Atlántico) decentralized and scattered the production and distribution of cocaine, making the problem of eradication and interdiction even more difficult. As the earlier, large drug cartels became weaker, the alliance between drug producers and armed

insurgents became stronger. The so-called war on drugs has thus become much more complex for two reasons: the smaller drug producers are more flexible and dispersed and thus more difficult to search out and destroy, and the smaller cartels have developed closer working relationships with the guerrilla groups around the country.

The cooperation of the smaller and more flexible cartels with guerrilla groups has introduced important changes in the latter as well and complicated government efforts to negotiate peace in the country. The increasingly decentralized drug producers and cocaine traffickers have also negotiated highly paid protection from second- and third-tier regional FARC, ELN, and AUC "front commanders." Thus tactical units commanded by these guerrilla leaders earn substantial sums of money by protecting the drug production infrastructure and distribution corridors in their regions, including the aforementioned cease-fire zone in Guaviare, along the Ecuadorian and Peruvian borders in the departments of Putumayo and Caqueta, in the departments of Bolivar and Norte de Santander, and in the Central Cordillera Mountains in Cauca, Huila, and Tolima.[41] Thus, although the armed guerrillas control a small portion of the Colombian territory, operations linked to guerrillas working drug production and distribution occur in 50 to 60 percent of the country.

In contrast to what has happened in other Latin American countries, the remaining armed insurgencies in Colombia have found support in their drug-related tax base and drug trafficking and, as a consequence, have become serious destabilizing forces in the region. If policy makers in Bogotá and Washington hope to neutralize this drug/guerrilla strategic alliance, they will have to pay attention to both the social causes of the civil unrest on the one hand and the blocking of financial drug-related flows sustaining the insurgency on the other. Therefore, today it is impossible to separate drugs and guerrillas; thus military operations like those of the United States aimed strictly at coca plantations are doomed to fail.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States and Colombia must devise a more pragmatic, long-term strategy and incorporate other nations and international organizations who will live up to their commitments into it. To do so, the United States, Western Europe, and other major drug markets must recognize that the costs of the drug war have become greater than drug abuse itself. Regional governments must be drawn in as well. Some Bush administration policies suggest increasing efforts in this direction.

Establishing new joint and compatible U.S. federal and state regulatory jurisdictions over narcotics production would be a start. The punitive legal standards and rules applied to the production of these narcotics would have to be similar to the ones applied to other toxic chemical substances. As the *Economist* magazine has long recommended, decriminalization of consumption should be legislated in the user countries, following the same legal standards and rules applied to the consumption of other toxic substances, such as alcohol. (For example, under our proposed framework, stern penalties could still be applied for selling to minors or for endangering others by consumption in public areas.) The expected reduction in drug-related profits as a result of these new regulatory policies would affect everyone on the supply side, including small coca farmers, thus encouraging them to grow something else; drug lords and their goons; money launderers, guerrillas, paramilitaries; and others who feast on the drug industry's rents.

On the demand side, this policy approach would shift large portions of the enormous public expenditures now devoted to incarcerating individual consumers to funding preventive mechanisms such as education, health treatment, and incentive-based labor-rehabilitation training programs for current or potential drug users. These demand-side policies would use incarceration only as a last resort for those committing conventional criminal offenses while consuming drugs.

In Colombia, the bulk of U.S. and Colombian funds and attention

must shift from current military campaigns against coca plantations to dealing effectively with the nonmilitary social and economic issues that underlie Colombia's troubles and that must be resolved if the country is to enjoy peace and prosperity. It must be emphasized that while security is a critical problem, it will not be possible without the fundamental nonmilitary reforms noted above.

The U.S. and Colombian strategy must be to deal with the armed insurgency and the drug-trafficking problems in a coordinated fashion, specifically by linking drug eradication proposals to neutralizing FARC, ELN, and AUC operational and strategic capabilities. It is in these two areas—organized crime and violence—that the FARC and the AUC draw their greatest income flows (on the order of U.S.$105 million per month, sufficient to finance 70–75 percent of all rebel military operations).[42] This drug-related income also finances more than half of the three guerrilla groups' monthly operational expenses. Today a fatal weakness in joint U.S.-Colombian strategy is that U.S. guidelines preclude decoupling the activities of drug traffickers and armed insurgents. Only by severing the links between organized drug-related crime and organized political violence will the right- and left-wing armed insurgencies approach the peace process.

In addition, the United States must assist the Colombian government in gaining an institutional presence throughout the country by bringing the guerrillas back into the political system by facilitating their participation in municipal elections in the regions where they now hold sway and in time on a national level, if they so choose. Although guerrillas and paramilitaries have been guilty of unspeakable violence, so too have cells of rogue elements within the state domain. One need only look at the thousands of demobilized guerrillas who have been assassinated since the mid-1980s to see why government promises may seem empty to guerrillas. The government must do much better than in the past, not least by getting a firm pledge from international allies to help find and punish those who violate the terms of peace agreements. The agreement will also require strengthening the already essential

Program for Reincorporation (Programa de Reinserción), which works with former guerrillas.

The Pastrana government must simultaneously strive to formalize much of the institutional framework already created by community-based groups and even by the guerrillas themselves within the conflict zones. This institutional framework, which is strongest in the FARC zones but found in some degree also in many ELN and AUC areas, includes varying degrees of communications infrastructure and informal alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, including coercive criminal "revolutionary" courts and complaint panels demanded by citizens involved in family and other minor disputes.[43] The participation of guerrillas in the supply of primary public goods and services through informal institutions has given them an added degree of institutional presence in those regions where most of the coca growing and processing takes place. Everyone would win by the government's converting these to formal institutions under official government control.

The process of negotiating with guerrillas has become more complicated because most of the front commanders and young rebel lieutenants (particularly in the FARC and AUC and to a much lesser extent in the ELN) have been able to acquire ownership positions in drug labs while also controlling national and international drug distribution channels. These regional commanders have a high level of tactical autonomy in financing their guerrilla-related and other activities, meaning that the guerrilla supreme strategic commands now have much less control over the tactical aspects of guerrilla warfare. Moreover, over time these autonomous rebel cells have acquired greater mobility in their drug production and processing operations. Thus each front commander has an incentive to delay peace negotiations.

In this context, U.S. and Colombian policy makers must implement an incentive-based policy to draw the command structure of the FARC into the formal political system. Opening the possibility of the insurgents' participation in the formal political process, as explained above, would have to be accompanied by a credible military threat backed by

the United States and the European Union through the United Nations and ideally Latin American countries as well. If no progress is made in peace negotiations, military action would be directed at the holdout party. This approach would give the supreme commanders in each insurgent group an incentive to apply their own pressures to clean their own ranks of uncooperative elements in order to seek political office by winning elections.

Finally, U.S.-backed policy must address the social causes of the Colombian conflict as well as the drug-related sources feeding the insurgency. Colombia may prove to be a lost cause, but it needn't be. An integrated program will require serious, committed, honest, and objective calculated international support on all levels, not just the criticism and procrastination that have been common up to now. It will also require the support of frustrated Colombians. Failure will make inevitable the continuing deterioration of the social fabric and state legitimacy in Colombia and the spread of such decay to much of the rest of the hemisphere.

Notes

1. See La Ley de las FARC, *Semana*, Bogotá, 11 October 1999, pp. 13–16; also see U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts with the Government of Colombia: Hearing before the Western Hemisphere Peace Corps, Narcotics and Terrorism Subcommittee on Foreign Relations, 106th Congress, 24 March 2000.
2. Peter Waldmann and Fernado Reinares, *Sociedades en Guerra Civil: Conflictos Violentos en Europa y América Latina* (Barcelona: Paidos, 1999).
3. Refer to Camilo Echandía, "Grado de Concentración de la Guerrilla Colombiana" (Degree of concentration of the Colombian guerrilla), Working Paper on Public Peace, Universidad de los Andes, 1998.
4. An article in the most widely read Colombian weekly gives precise accounts of these events. See "Exodo," editorial, *Semana*, 28 June 1999.
5. Echandía has found a clear relationship between regional income inequal-