

FIGHTING THE HOBBSIAN TRINITY  
IN COLOMBIA:  
A NEW STRATEGY FOR PEACE

Joseph R. Nuñez

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## FOREWORD

Developing an effective U.S. national security strategy for Latin America hinges upon how well Colombia fares in its fight against the major sources of violence: guerrillas, paramilitaries, and narcotraffickers. Currently, Washington supports a counterdrug policy, while Bogotá argues for a counterinsurgency strategy. Considering the Free Trade Area of the Americas initiative, proposed for implementation in 2005, regional security issues no doubt will increase in importance. In particular, Colombia's troubles are spilling over borders and affecting countries such as Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Venezuela. Moreover, Colombia's leading role in the drug trade touches all countries in the Americas and beyond.

In this monograph, one of a special series on Colombia, Colonel Joseph R. Nuñez first analyzes the intervention conundrum of Colombia. He then summarizes the reasons for the violent and anarchic situation that frustrates those wishing to make peace and expand democracy. After introducing what he calls the "Hobbesian trinity," he then discusses alternatives to intervention and notes the complexity of the human rights challenge. He suggests a new strategy for improving human security, government accountability, democratic reform, and peace prospects. His counterinsurgency approach is controversial, yet promising. He then argues that the current approach is heading the wrong way, moving away from peace and fomenting greater instability. Colonel Nuñez concludes that there is a window of opportunity for the United States to support Colombia in a new way in its war against this anarchic trinity. But this will involve overcoming political factions responsible for the current policy that he argues is ineffective.

This is a timely study. A new administration is challenged to form a new policy for Colombia, now the third

largest recipient of foreign aid. Thus, this report provides an excellent opportunity for policymakers to review where we are and where we need to go. The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish this monograph as a contribution to the national security debate on Colombia within the United States and abroad.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute

## FOREWORD

This ambitious monograph by Colonel Joseph Nuñez is a cogent response to the question of “What are the strategic and operational imperatives for the U.S. military in the implementation of Plan Colombia?” In it he develops the necessary background to make the argument that it is time for the United States to get rid of its Vietnam ghosts, and for Colombia to generate a viable political-military strategy to attain security, stability, democratic governance, and a sustainable peace. Together, both countries can make a major contribution to the well-being of the entire Western Hemisphere.

Lacking representation, opportunity, and a true civil society, a Hobbesian monster has emerged to address the thin veneer of Colombian democracy, a paucity of economic progress, and the virtual nonexistence of personal and collective security throughout the country. The Hobbesian trinity, of course, includes the insurgents, the paramilitaries, and the illegal drug traffickers. These forces represent the worst passions of humanity—violence, greed, corruption, anarchy, and intimidation—and are not confined within the borders of Colombia. The spillover effects of these forces into neighboring countries is creating a regional threat to stability, democracy, and peace.

Colonel Nuñez argues that the United States can help the Colombians defeat this unholy trinity, but the only way to implement the enabling political, economic, and social components of Plan Colombia is to establish control of the national territory and the people in it. Moreover, the only way to defeat the forces of corruption, disintegration, degradation, and violence is to establish security throughout the national territory, progressively. A new Colombia must be created one municipality at a time. That, in turn, will require a voluntary constabulary force trained, equipped, and controlled by the government—something

very different from past self-defense initiatives—that can rebuild a sense of personal security under the rule of law.

All this is ambitious, indeed. It will be difficult, time consuming, and require strong resolve. But it can and must be done. It can be done by rethinking the threat and response. It must be done as a result of deliberate, cooperative, long-term, holistic, and strategic-level ends, ways, and means planning to achieve a mutually beneficial political end-state. The mission of the U.S. military, and the Army in particular, is to assist Colombia in professionalizing and modernizing its officer corps and general staff to the point where they can train, equip, and utilize their own regular and constabulary forces to directly contribute to the achievement of the stable, democratic, and peaceful end-state. Impressively, this can be done without increasing U.S. presence or influence.

The Dante B. Fascell North-South Center of the University of Miami is pleased to join with the Strategic Studies Institute in offering this monograph to help inform the national security debate on what is to do be done in Colombia. It is of critical importance to this country, Colombia, and to the hemisphere.

Ambler H. Moss, Jr.  
Director  
The Dante B. Fascell North-South  
Center  
University of Miami

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

JOSEPH R. NUÑEZ, a colonel in the U.S. Army, is Professor (select) in the Department of National Security and Strategy of the U.S. Army War College. A cum laude graduate of St. Lawrence University, he holds the M.A. in Government from the University of Virginia, and is currently completing a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Virginia. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army War College. With over 23 years of service, Colonel Nuñez has commanded at the company and battalion level, taught Political Science in the Department of Social Sciences at the U.S. Military Academy (West Point), and deployed to Haiti in 1994 with the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) for Operation Uphold Democracy. His research interests are focussed on the Americas and reflected in his dissertation research. Most recently, *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* published his article, "A New U.S. Strategy for Mexico." His presentations on Colombia have included the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command and the Latin American Center, St. Antony's College, Oxford University.



Map of Colombia

# FIGHTING THE HOBBSIAN TRINITY IN COLOMBIA: A NEW STRATEGY FOR PEACE

In an attempt to hold off the final disaster, the General [Simon Bolivar] was returning to Santa Fe de Bogotá with a column of troops, hoping to gather others along the way, in order to begin once again the struggle for national integrity. He said then that this was his decisive moment . . . "The entire Church, the entire army, the immense majority of the nation, were on my side," he would write later, remembering those days. But despite all these advantages, he said, it had been proved over and over again that when he abandoned the south to march north, and vice versa, the country he left behind was lost, devastated by new civil wars. It was his destiny.<sup>1</sup>

The dominance of the mafias in Colombia has led to the coining of a new term, "colombianization," defining a social situation generated by narcotics traffickers. A colombianization is characterized by the disintegration of political, economic, and social structures and a permanent state of violent crimes such as political assassinations, executions, and human rights violations.<sup>2</sup>

The violent ones [guerrillas] don't understand or don't want to understand that their actions only help to perpetuate and increase poverty and unemployment. While the vast majority of Colombians work for the country's economic recovery, and to create jobs that make a worthy life possible, the acts of the violent ones sow only misery. . . .<sup>3</sup>

## Introduction.

Colombia is unable to protect the rights of its citizens, thus raising serious questions of political legitimacy. A Hobbesian trinity of narcotraffickers, guerrillas, and paramilitaries has amassed one of the worst records of human rights abuses ever witnessed in this hemisphere.<sup>4</sup> Violence is a daily part of Colombian life. No possible humanitarian (peacemaking) intervention could succeed in

creating a peaceful and secure environment. Geography is a huge advantage to those who espouse violence and an awesome disadvantage to those who wish to make peace. Moreover, the unconventional military threat is too strong for even a well-trained and equipped international military force, and the Organization of American States (OAS) is not willing to support intervention.<sup>5</sup> Nor is the government of Colombia willing to permit outsiders to fight against those who are challenging its sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> This country's political and cultural milieu accepts and encourages the use of violence to solve political and economic conflict.

The United States is deeply committed to assist Colombia, particularly in the fight against drugs, but has at best the foundation of a strategy to improve stability and security. Yet, there is no comprehensive approach to subduing the guerrillas, narcotraffickers, and paramilitaries. Colombia is very anxious about the U.S. aid package (\$1.3 billion) contained in Plan Colombia. At the same time, Colombia's government appears to be parroting our counterdrug mantra, and faces criticism from Colombia's citizens for not being able to prevent guerrilla and paramilitary offensives that are now more frequent and bloody. This indirect approach to fighting insurgency is largely a result of human rights concerns in the U.S. Congress and a simplistic application of the Vietnam metaphor to ambiguous conflict in developing nations. Legislators are eager to support President Andres Pastrana, but are concerned about providing support to the armed forces to fight all three scourges, particularly since past human rights performance has been less than stellar. The United States does not want to be funding a dirty war, nor do officials want U.S. military forces conducting an intervention to help fight the rebels.<sup>7</sup> Finally, though Americans will support the fight against the scourge of drugs, there is no wellspring of support to fight insurgency because it brings back unwarranted fears about Vietnam and selective learning from Central America in the 1980s.

The chaos has not remained within Colombia and deeply affects the United States. Moreover, we share a good measure of responsibility for the violence—our people have created a huge demand for the drugs. Large international financial interests benefit from the drug trade and protect it.<sup>8</sup>

This monograph proposes a strategy to end the widespread terror gripping Colombia, where civil society is a term no longer understood as something its people might hope to enjoy now or anytime soon. A key assumption is that the Colombian security challenge is complex, much larger than just a fight against narcotraffickers, guerrillas, and paramilitaries. Civil society is weaker because of gross distortions created by serious challenges (shortcomings) to regime legitimacy: elite circulation, representation, justice, economic development, income distribution, geographic separation, and political fragmentation. Without an allegiant and consensual national identity, the Colombian government may be able to establish short-term security. Creating a lasting peace that preserves the safety of its citizens is a long-term goal that is still most elusive.

Those seeking to win this war within democratic values will need a comprehensive approach that incorporates political (executive, legislative, judicial, administrative, and military), economic (investment, infrastructure, trade, manufacturing, and agriculture), and social (education, health, religion, and community) programs for reform and renewal. It will require major international support to advance investment, build democratic institutions, develop infrastructure, and combat multinational criminals in the worldwide drug trade. Before any of these can be effectively implemented, “dirty war” must end. The solution is to force the guerrillas (then the paramilitaries) to negotiate a peace. They have not yet sincerely negotiated—there is too much for them to lose and very little to gain. Clausewitz’s sage advice is pertinent: “war is . . . an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”<sup>9</sup> Unless you can destroy the enemy’s will to resist, he will continue to wage war against your

military.<sup>10</sup> This requires more than counterdrug operations, but counterinsurgency elicits negative responses throughout the hemisphere.

This is a very complex war. There are two major guerrilla organizations, as well as paramilitary forces. Further complicating this equation, both guerrillas and paramilitaries receive funding from various narcotrafficking “mafias” and, in turn, provide protection and contract murder services for the international purveyors of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana. But this is surely war, even if it is internal and unconventional. It may sound incongruous (not to mention seeming counter-intuitive) but it will require effective military operations—with international support—to make peace, yet that is precisely the situation as it is. This assessment is not popular in Washington. Some hope that the enemy will negotiate in good faith. Others believe that since the situation has no bearing on the balance of power, outside powers such as the United States should stay out of this conflict or, at most, continue a counterdrug approach. Both camps are mistaken. The enemy must be compelled to accept peace and stop the killing and destruction.

Once a peace accord is realized, an international peacekeeping force might be introduced, assuming that all Colombian parties agree to accept multinational military assistance. An international peacekeeping force could assist in ensuring that the peace holds, the resolve of the states of the Western Hemisphere is demonstrated, human rights are protected, and pressure is placed on narcotraffickers and paramilitaries to either leave or obey the rule of law. Moreover, this international force is an impartial and legitimate actor which promotes better relations among the various factions. Their mission is to act as impartial observers, not to intervene forcefully, which would be seen as an affront to Colombian sovereignty. Let us now turn to Colombia’s situation, the actors and their impact, and the strategic remedy.

## Colombia's Contentious Clime.

Colombia has surpassed Chile, Argentina, and Peru for the record as the bloodiest land of this century in South America. *La Violencia*, initiated by the 1948 assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, produced over 200,000 deaths (many innocent bystanders) over 15 years. Colombian elites worked out a power sharing agreement to rekindle a sense of civic culture and conflict management. It worked only to postpone conflict for a while. Liberals and Conservatives established the National Front—an agreement to alternate the presidency between parties and share administrative positions in government. “Peasant republics” emerged during the conflict as “quasi-independent zones for self-defense and self-administration in agrarian matters.”<sup>11</sup> While Conservatives and Liberals were compromising, a disillusioned and largely rural minority of the country was ignoring them and turning to Marxism. The Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) emerged from these peasant republics, as did the Army of National Liberation (ELN), and they found support from Havana to Moscow. Peasants in rural areas were frustrated with their lack of representation within the two most powerful political parties, which largely represented the interests of wealthy urban businessmen and rural landowners.

Over the years, Colombia enjoyed democratic elections, the only exception being the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-57). Colombian politics revolves around the two major parties, which perpetuate family legacies of political power, much to the disdain of many working class and poor citizens. According to David Jordan, “In Colombia the regime is based on elite dominance reinforced by a thinly disguised alliance with the immensely wealthy and powerful drug cartels.”<sup>12</sup> From the outside looking in, Colombia’s situation or condition as a state is paradoxical. It is one of the oldest democracies in the Western Hemisphere. It has been free from military dictatorships and is not

subject to the high level of ethnic cleavages that challenge Andean states such as Peru and Bolivia. Yet it is also the country with the longest running civil war.

How democratic is Colombia? The country is procedurally democratic since it has a record of elections under pluralism—parties compete for elected positions. But there is not much more than that to be found. Political parties do not represent all groups within society. Sufficient checks and balances between the various branches of government do not exist. There is no professional bureaucracy to handle resources in an effective and efficient manner. The government is not accountable to the people. Colombia is a procedural democracy, as Jordan explains.

The procedural definition of democracy does not therefore exclude the corrupt democratic regime. As long as a country is able to hold elections it is still considered a democratic regime, whether the government is corrupt or not. Advocates of the procedural definition do not necessarily believe that corruption can be avoided in an electoral system, nor do they address the issue that the electoral system can be used to maintain corrupt elites. Yet when corruption assists elites to manipulate the electoral system, then accountability, the very purpose of the electoral system, is nullified. In order to eliminate false claims of democracy, the understanding of the democratic regime needs to be extended beyond the procedural definition. It should take into account the potential symbiotic relationship between ruling elites, organized crime,<sup>13</sup> and the globalized financial system.

Communist insurgent groups did not fare well until the latter half of the 1970s, when they began their association with an emerging agribusiness giant, the narcotraffickers. It was a marriage made in hell, given its effect on democracy and human rights. The guerrillas furnished security for the narcotraffickers, enabling cocaine barons to grow, harvest, process, and transport illicit products to their main market, the United States. In return, narcotraffickers provide the guerrillas with funds that enable them to provision their “soldiers” and purchase high quality automatic weapons.

This arrangement created narcoterrorism, “the use of drug trafficking to advance the objectives of certain governments and terrorist organizations.”<sup>14</sup> Guerrillas and drug traffickers take advantage of the corruption of the government and its superficial sovereignty and democracy, based on deals between wealthy elites, not the interests of a majority of the people.

This shotgun marriage between guerrillas and narcotraffickers turned into a strange polygamy when paramilitary groups entered into a security relationship with narcotraffickers to fund their campaigns against the guerrillas. Paramilitaries have their roots in “self-defense groups, usually peasants, who battle alone against guerrillas, drug traffickers, and common criminals; not surprisingly, these vigilantes commit their share of atrocities as well.”<sup>15</sup> Originally funded by large landowners, the paramilitaries found even better funding with the narcotraffickers, which enabled them to buy sophisticated small arms, pay their “soldiers” higher wages than the army, and wage more intense warfare against the guerrillas. The real losers throughout this escalation of violence have been the peasants, caught between warring factions and subjected to gross human rights abuses. To this scenario add the armed forces and, to a lesser extent, national police, who until recent years committed their share of extrajudicial violence, further exacerbating public fears.<sup>16</sup> Yet both the military and police are also victims in this conflict.<sup>17</sup> Adding insult to injury, the police and military have been unable to protect citizens, as government authorities have been displaced from many precincts and patrolling areas by ambushing guerrillas.

The human costs of this civil war are enormous—over 35,000 people killed in the last decade. Besides police, military, other government officials, paramilitaries, guerrillas, and narcotraffickers, innocent civilians are murdered because they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Colombians live in a state of constant fear and no one is safe from violence. Wealthy businessmen are kidnapped

for ransom. Poor villagers are forced to support guerrillas or paramilitaries, lest they be made to flee their villages as refugees of war. Prominent citizens who participate in the peace process are assassinated.<sup>18</sup> University professors, judges, and journalists are targets.

The FARC has an army of at least 15,000 soldiers, many battle hardened and proficient in the art of guerrilla warfare; most of the key leaders have 20 to 30 years' experience in such operations. Though outnumbered by the Colombian Army, guerrillas are well trained, equipped, and often achieve greater combat effect with fewer forces. For years much of the military lumbered through halfhearted static defense operations that were neither effective in developing soldiers who could fight nor of much threat to the guerrillas. FARC columns have more automatic weapons than do many infantry battalions.<sup>19</sup> Drug money—best estimates put it at close to \$500 million per year—has become a guerrilla force multiplier on a strategic level. Without drug money, their largest source of income, the FARC cannot effectively challenge the military and police. Of course this assumes that the guerrillas can be separated from their drug money, an assumption that I do hold. Yet, even if we could deny them access to drug money, that is not the way to get them to make peace. The FARC could easily increase their kidnapping and extortion actions to fill their war chests.

The second largest insurgency group, the ELN, has an estimated strength of 5,000 fighters. Most of their funding comes from kidnappings for ransom, bank robberies, and contract security for narcotraffickers. They are as brutal as the FARC. A favorite tactic is blowing up oil pipelines. In October 1998 they demolished a pipeline, causing devastation in the local community of Machuca. Some 50 people were killed and 60 were injured. According to Amnesty International, "The apparent total disregard for civilian life with which this was carried out breaches the fundamental principles of the laws of armed conflict, which prohibit direct or indiscriminate attacks on civilians."<sup>20</sup> It is

noteworthy that when the FARC tried to unite guerrilla movements in 1978, it was criticized by the ELN for “splitting the masses of other revolutionary movements by intimidation through the sacrifice of hundreds of peasants.”<sup>21</sup> While that may have been true, the ELN’s bloody campaigns of terror caused severe harm to peasants, just on a smaller scale than their FARC competitors.

Paramilitary organizations serve to a large degree as proxy forces of the government, or so it appears. Since paramilitaries are not accountable to the government or responsive to the criticisms of human rights groups, their performance in the field is perceived to be doing the dirty work. Carlos Castaño leads an alliance of paramilitary groups called the United Self-Defense Units of Colombia (AUC). Castaño’s vision for the AUC is to elevate it from a regional to a national actor in the fight against guerrillas, and some believe that he has already succeeded. To rise to the national level, the paramilitaries have insinuated themselves in narcotrafficker security work and drug trade “taxation,” often displacing guerrillas that performed these lucrative missions. But the methods of the paramilitaries are very questionable. Instead of just fighting the guerrillas directly, they also target the civilian population. According to Mark Chernick, “Towns are ‘cleansed’ of anyone suspected of supporting the guerillas—or any leftist party, union, social movement or progressive church organization—to demonstrate to the population at large what awaits them if they become involved in such activities.”<sup>22</sup>

The years 1996 to 2000 have established a new trend. The military used to be the primary aggressor against the FARC, but no longer is that true. The paramilitaries are now the leading purveyors of human rights abuses. Their armed attacks now double what the military and FARC achieve combined.<sup>23</sup> Escalation of paramilitary warfare, combined with indiscriminate targeting of civilians, has established a new and terrible record. Human rights organizations report that paramilitary forces are now

responsible for an estimated 75 to 80 percent of all human rights abuses,<sup>24</sup> although much of the violence perpetuated by guerrilla organizations is not classified as human rights abuse. Most of Colombia's internal refugees are a by-product of paramilitary actions to displace the FARC, ELN, and their sympathizers from rural villages and towns. The military connection to the paramilitaries has been reinforced through the participation of former soldiers and officers, and even some retired military officers in paramilitary groups. Human rights organizations assert that there is a tacit understanding that the paramilitaries fight the northern campaign—the hottest combat area—and the army fights the southern campaign—the less volatile combat area.<sup>25</sup> But there is no conclusive proof of this.

The government has had a mixed record since Conservative Party candidate Andres Pastrana was elected president in August 1998. After distancing itself from the previous presidency of Ernesto Samper that was tainted by strong drug corruption influence, the United States was eager to support President Pastrana because he was clean, energetic, and was committed to making peace with the guerrillas. That optimism faded significantly when Pastrana decided to cede a portion of south central Colombia to the FARC as an autonomous or demilitarized zone—land equal to the size of Switzerland. Pastrana's rationale was that if he acted in good faith with the rebels, the FARC would agree to make peace.

Pastrana's plan has not worked so far; rather it enhanced the FARC's legitimacy as the *de facto* ruler of its own state.<sup>26</sup> The FARC used the area known as the *Despeje* (demilitarized zone) to launch a major offensive against the Colombian Army in November 1999, to which President Pastrana criticized, "It showed the guerrillas were not interested in pursuing a peace agreement."<sup>27</sup> The army was able to repel the guerrilla offensive, and according to General Fernando Tapias (commander of the armed forces), killed more than a hundred guerrillas—all of this occurring

while FARC and government officials continued to hold peace talks within the *Despeje*.<sup>28</sup>

Against this surreal peace process, the state has shown some improvements in police and military effectiveness, yet there is no corresponding increase in the security of Colombian citizens. Though the police have made some headway in reducing the penetration of narcotraffickers, they are still regarded as a corrupt institution. This explains why the military has been given the major law enforcement support missions, such as the forming of an anti-narcotics battalion in 1999 that was funded by the United States. Every soldier in the unit had to be investigated—for possible human rights violations and corruption—and cleared before joining this special unit.<sup>29</sup> The military fared better than the police in this process. Additionally, the military is better suited for the mission of combating the guerrillas' 'military' violence that safeguards drug trafficking operations. The United States and Colombia agree that this unit's mission is to support the police in fighting narcotraffickers. If guerrillas happen to be providing security, they are considered to be legitimate targets.<sup>30</sup> The counterdrug battalion works in concert with police units. Several additional counterdrug battalions were trained and initiated operations in 2000. The military will have an elite brigade by mid-2001, the sum of several battalions.

The Colombian Army has significantly improved its human rights record over the last few years. Between 1998 and 1999, the military reduced the number of human rights violation charges from 310 to 103; for the first time ever the number of soldiers and officers convicted of human rights abuses is a double digit figure—22 as of November 1999.<sup>31</sup> The army's decrease in human rights abuses, however, cannot be considered without also considering its correlation to the significant rise in human rights abuses by the paramilitaries. As long as there is a plausible relationship between the military (and the national police) and their "proxy force," the Colombian people cannot fully

trust the institutions that are charged with providing security. On the other hand, if human rights violations are combined with International Humanitarian Law violations,<sup>32</sup> another image emerges. According to the Colombian Council of Jurists, the “reduction in the number of human rights and International Law violations attributed to Public Forces has fallen from 15.68 percent in 1995, to 3.72 percent in 1998, and to 2 percent in 1999.”<sup>33</sup>

The Colombian judicial system is in shambles. Its collapse began over a decade ago when judges and prosecutors were given various choices by the narcotraffickers: take a bribe, resign from office, flee the country, or be murdered. Some brave ones, like Carlos Mauro Hoyos, Colombia’s attorney general in 1988, stood up to the drug dealers and were gunned down.<sup>34</sup> Not having a strong judiciary to begin with, some criminals have long taken pride in skirting the law. Avoiding taxes or smuggling contraband goods was bad enough, but now they face a system that is overwhelmed and fearful to act. The justice system is characterized by “criminal impunity from prosecution, government inefficiency, high levels of crime, rampant corruption, and lack of security and protection for judicial officials, many of whom have been assassinated.”<sup>35</sup> To fill the vacuum of the weakened rule of law, other groups have taken up their own forms of justice, such as that administered by paramilitary forces that often operate where there are no judges, lawyers, and police.<sup>36</sup> The FARC itself provides revolutionary justice for the residents of the *Despeje* and countless other areas.

Until recently Colombia was able to maintain a vibrant economy that was the envy of many of its South American neighbors, despite the violence. Rich in natural resources such as oil, bolstered by agricultural products like coffee, and supplemented by the underground economy of drugs, it maintained a good quality of life for the upper half of society, largely concentrated in Bogotá and a few other cities. Yet, it was living on borrowed time, as drug money distorted consumption patterns in the economy and eroded civil society. The enormous violence perpetrated by the

Hobbesian trinity has finally reduced international foreign investment, and now the country is in the midst of the worst recession of the past century.<sup>37</sup> International corporations are reluctant to set up or increase operations in Colombia, uncertain as to whether they can conduct business safely and profitably. This maelstrom has gone far beyond the Hobbesian trinity; there is a huge increase in street crime that has further shaken investor confidence and paralyzed legitimate domestic business such as the construction industry.<sup>38</sup> It has also added to the “brain flight” of some of the country’s best and brightest, most of them young adults who no longer see a bright future in their homeland, but rather the shadow of death all around.<sup>39</sup>

### Strategy Dilemmas.

Some policy analysts have considered the possibility that the United States, in concert with other members of the OAS, might need to directly intervene with military force in Colombia. The rationale is that the country cannot defeat the guerrillas, narcotraffickers, and paramilitaries on its own, even with additional military and police support. Rather than let it devolve into interminable violence or complete civil war, something should be done to save Colombia from its anarchic juggernaut acceleration. There are not many advocates of this option, which has no chance of success, would make matters worse in Colombia, and reap great criticism from our hemispheric neighbors. As already noted, international peacekeepers welcomed by Colombia after a peace accord is reached could be positive, but military intervention to create peace is pure folly.

Why is intervention an awful strategy? Stanley Hoffmann described the challenges facing many weak states today: “Many are racked or wrecked by tribal, religious or ethnic conflicts; many never managed to erect stable and effective state structures and have become the theatre of battling gangs competing for power; some have autocrats. . . ready to use the worst forms of repression to

stay in power.”<sup>40</sup> Hoffmann’s analysis resonates true for Colombia when he writes about the weakness of governmental institutions and groups fighting for political control. But Colombia certainly is not a failed state, like Somalia or Liberia; or a murderous state, like Haiti or Iraq under military regimes, or a troubled state, on the scale of Sudan, Sri Lanka, or Rwanda.<sup>41</sup> Yes, there are far too many political murders occurring in Colombia for the community of nations (democratic ones to be sure) to ignore or accept. Colombia may exhibit many of the political, economic, and social characteristics of failure, however it has not yet failed. It is headed toward the cliff, but has not yet fallen—it is still trying to dig in its heels to stop and is screaming for help. Though facing many troubles, it is still under a democratically elected government that is trying earnestly to make peace, respect human rights, and provide security for its people. It does not meet the definition of a troubled state, although one might argue that its weak and fragile government is not out of danger to become one.

Colombia is a failing state that is desperately trying to turn itself around. It is failing because it has been “breaking down as a result of [its] inability to establish legitimacy with any degree of certainty.”<sup>42</sup> The administration of President Pastrana acknowledges this.

There is no question that Colombia suffers from the problems of a state yet to consolidate its power: a lack of confidence in the capacity of the armed forces, the police, and the judicial system to guarantee order and security; a credibility crisis at different levels and in different agencies of government; and corrupt practices in the public and private sectors. All this has been fed and aggravated by the enormous destabilizing effects of drug trafficking, which, with vast economic resources, has constantly generated indiscriminate violence while undermining our values. . . .<sup>43</sup>

Humanitarian intervention in Colombia by a multinational force is a scenario to be avoided at all costs. Neither the United Nations (U.N.) nor the OAS has legitimate authority to intervene.<sup>44</sup> The administration of President

Pastrana still has sovereignty. It is a legitimate government with international standing. Hoffmann explains the important linkage between intervention and sovereignty.

The case against intervention has a hard core: it is the defence of the norm of sovereignty, corner stone of the inter-state order since the seventeenth century. Sovereignty is seen by its champions, not as a licence for excesses or atrocities at home or abroad, but as a protection of a society's individuals and groups from external control—benevolent perhaps, but alien and imposed. The sovereign state is deemed to be the protector of security and property of its subjects, as in Hobbes' *Leviathan*; or the guardian of their rights, as in Locke and Mill; or the expression of their collective will, as in Rousseau. Even if, in practice, the state is one which violates some of these rights, assaults the security and property of some of its subjects, and lacks a "general will" because of a clash of antagonistic group wills that tear society apart, foreign intrusion is still seen as a greater evil.<sup>45</sup>

Intervention is wrong for a second reason. The Colombian people are dead set against outside powers asserting military authority within their land, although a poll revealed a majority of the business class favors U.S. military intervention. The will of the people is to make peace. Citizens turned out by the millions to support the government, and express their disgust with the enormous loss of lives and their desire for a Colombian solution.<sup>46</sup>

The third reason is that the OAS and U.N. would repudiate any parties to this action. While both organizations have expressed increasing criticism over Colombia's inability to safeguard human rights, neither is ready to sanction the introduction of foreign troops on Colombian soil. They are using diplomatic means to encourage the country to make its Plan Colombia a reality, especially since President Pastrana has aggressively argued against intervention and for greater international cooperation in the peace process.<sup>47</sup>

The final reason to be wary of intervention is that the FARC and ELN might actually benefit from a multinational

invasion. As stated earlier, an enormous force is required to pacify Colombia, more than countries are willing to commit. An undersized force of conventional ability is no match for guerrilla units operating in challenging terrain led by *comandantes* who have been executing successful ambushes for decades. Once this multinational force suffered significant casualties—just a few U.S. casualties given today’s force protection conscious military—it would cease to be effective. The rebels might even do better with recruiting under the banner of nationalism. Of course, this does not begin to take into account what roles would be played by the narcotraffickers and paramilitaries. A multinational force could not safeguard human rights in this most challenging environment.

Even if one subscribes to a communitarian version of liberalism that values human rights over sovereignty, Colombian intervention still does not make sense.<sup>48</sup> While it is never a good idea to place too much value on a leader, President Pastrana has demonstrated that his administration is committed to protecting human rights, improving justice, and extending opportunity to all Colombians. It is clear he understands “the moral standing of society rests on its ability to respect and protect the rights of its members and on their consent, explicit or implicit, to its rules and institutions.”<sup>49</sup> Pastrana exemplifies many of the leadership virtues extolled by Laurence Whitehead, but came up short in being able “to divert attention from intractable obstacles.”<sup>50</sup> To resolve this, he must exert more control over the guerrillas and advance the peace process. Nonetheless, as long as the Colombian government continues to improve its record, what better solution can outside powers offer?

If intervention is not a viable strategy, the United States might try to muddle through with its support of a war against drugs. The narcotraffickers are a major reason why the guerrillas and paramilitaries are so powerful. Drug money constitutes a major portion of their war chests. The question that needs to be answered is whether a

counterdrug strategy can be effective in stopping the growing, harvesting, processing, and transporting of drugs. U.S. Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, General (retired) Barry McCaffrey points to the answer.

Drug czar Barry McCaffrey yesterday blamed the Clinton administration and Congress for failing to provide an aid package of more than \$1 billion for expanded assistance to the Colombian police and military to fight the exportation of cocaine and heroin. "Colombia is out of control, it is a flipping nightmare. If we believe our own rhetoric, I think a pervasive argument can be made that the interests of the American people would be served by this assistance package. We need to have a coherent, longtime democratic response in the region. This is a political decision, but we are after the drugs," he said, adding that the package was not intended to interfere in Colombia's civil war.<sup>51</sup>

Merely fighting drugs will not build democracy in Colombia, even if those who are protecting drug traffickers are fair game. A long-term democratic response can only be implemented if the country is secure and stable. Security comes before democracy. Fighting drugs and those who protect the narcotraffickers is not going to establish peace. Guerrillas and paramilitaries will fight on because the government is unable to defend its citizens in the towns and villages of the mountains and jungles. The military and police cannot assert pervasive and ubiquitous authority throughout the country. Our government suffers from policy gridlock that is due to competing visions of Colombia, which further exacerbates the situation.

Fighting drugs does not solve the alarming human rights conundrum. It will not keep the paramilitaries and guerrillas from continuing a dirty war. Even if a great deal of pressure can be placed on the narcotraffickers, they will react as they have in the past—move operations elsewhere in Colombia or to Peru and Bolivia and ride out the storm. They might even target other border countries. This will only create instability elsewhere, much like pressing on a balloon in one place and having it pop out somewhere else.

Colombia is beginning to take a stronger stand in support of human rights, including bringing paramilitary gunmen to justice.<sup>52</sup> In spite of change in government policy, the human rights record is still unsatisfactory. For many years, abuses were largely confined to the armed forces and the guerrillas. To be sure, many of the assassinations were “contract hits” paid for by the narcotraffickers and fulfilled by *sicarios*, professional “hit men.” The war is dirtier because paramilitaries are clearly out of control and increasing their operations. The state cannot distance itself from the paramilitaries—evidence demonstrates the enduring tie.<sup>53</sup>

It is no secret that the guerrillas have been more favored among human rights groups than the paramilitaries. If there is a bias among human rights groups, both at the national and international levels, it is to the left and not the right. This explains the instances of paramilitaries claiming that they killed a guerrilla, while others claim that the individual was a member of a human rights group and not a guerrilla.<sup>54</sup> Government officials often complain that the human rights groups are eager to point out abuses by the military, police, and paramilitaries, but are very slow to criticize the guerrillas.<sup>55</sup> Such are the gray areas of dirty war.

The most innocent victims of conflict are children. The guerrillas are the worst offenders when it comes to recruiting children as combatants. The paramilitaries also have children in their ranks, but to a lesser degree. The paramilitaries use children as their “eyes and ears”—they provide some of the best intelligence on guerrillas since they are often not suspected of collaborating due to their puerility. On the other hand, the FARC has no compunction about using children as combatants. Some of the children are as young as 9 years of age.<sup>56</sup>

## A New Strategy for Colombia.

Until President Pastrana was elected, Colombia exemplified what David Jordan calls an anocratic state—"the procedural features of democracy while retaining the features of an autocracy, where the ruling elite face no accountability."<sup>57</sup> Pastrana is not beholden to drug interests, nor does he advocate an elitist status quo approach. His goal is to make peace and improve opportunity for all Colombians.<sup>58</sup> Yet Colombia has a long way to go to become a truly democratic state. The United States can assist, but it will require a completely new strategy that is unconventional, comprehensive, supportive of democracy, and makes use of a huge and untapped resource, the people.

The better solution is to adopt an integrated approach to restore security that maintains accountability of the government to the people for their security.<sup>59</sup> This requires applying old ideas to a new situation—Colombia's complex circumstances. To defeat this Hobbesian trinity, the will of the people must be mobilized, represented, and utilized to create a democratic peace in their war-torn land. A new Colombia must be created, one town at a time. The only way to defeat the forces of disintegration and anarchy is to establish security progressively—one town, then another, and so on. This new constellation of interlocking population centers has the potential to achieve safety through defense, respect for human rights, political sovereignty, establishment of the rule of law, unencumbered commerce, and a new tie to the national government. Though a difficult mission to achieve, the will of the Colombian people can make a strategic difference.

In short, the internal defense of Colombia must be placed in the hands of the people, much like the militia system that supported the creation of the United States through their numbers and unconventional tactics. The government in Bogotá is already considering the establishment of a voluntary constabulary force, something very different than

past self-defense initiatives that failed.<sup>60</sup> An essential component that increases the likelihood of success is the integration of national support to the towns. To make security a reality, the judiciary, police, and military must establish an enduring relationship with every community. Presently, guerrillas control (have more influence in than the government) approximately 40 percent of the Colombian landmass. Beyond the *Despeje* (which is less than 10 percent of the country), rebels control many villages and towns, displacing judges, police, and military. Only the paramilitaries have achieved any lasting success in reclaiming populated areas, but their unlawful methods and links to narcotraffickers are unacceptable.

The national police and armed forces cannot defeat the guerrillas, at least presently. At best they have been able to repel major attacks by the FARC. They may slow the narcotraffickers—no one seriously believes they can be defeated, even with support from the United States. Neither the national police nor the armed forces are committed to vanquishing the paramilitaries. While these private armies have been able to accomplish what the police and military have been largely unable to do, they represent a strong threat to the sovereignty of the state and the human rights of citizens. These unaccountable forces must be compelled to turn the fight over to the national police, armed forces, and the new militia.

There is a recent Andean case for the successful employment of a militia or civilian defense force. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Peru experienced both failure and success with a peasant militia system known as *rondas campesinas*. These self-defense organizations were only marginally successful before the government trained, equipped, and supported the village-based system of defense against *Sendero Luminoso* and *Tupac Amaru* guerrilla forces. In the few cases where the government taught people basic defense skills and provided them with defensive weapons and army advisors (who were connected to military reaction forces), peasants succeeded in providing

effective security for their communities.<sup>61</sup> David Scott Palmer, in assessing the *rondas campesinas*, noted that they fulfilled political as well as defensive military roles by strengthening the organization of local communities. He also noted that part of their success was because they “proved to match more closely peasants’ perceptions of their immediate needs than anything Sendero [*Luminoso*] was prepared to offer.”<sup>62</sup>

Militias are an excellent demonstration of the will of the people. Not serving as a standing military force, they are civilians first, then citizen soldiers. They are accountable first to their community. Human rights have a better chance of being protected because civic leaders provide immediate control of the militias. The next level of command is the national military authority. Self-defense forces exclude paramilitary soldiers and leaders, unless they have been screened for human rights abuses and cleared. Everyone in the community who volunteers to serve is not only pledging to defend their community against guerrillas, narcotraffickers, and paramilitaries, they are also pledging to follow the laws of land warfare and protect the rights of the citizens of their village, town, or city. The militia or constabulary force is the glue that holds the community together. It integrates military, police, courts, local government, social services, education, commerce, churches, and civic organizations. Citizen soldiers also have the potential to reunite Colombia as a country, through improved ties to the national government and the establishment of an allegiant civic culture.

The constabulary force’s most urgent mission is to rid the community of fear. Only when this is accomplished can there be any hope of positive change. An effective strategy must therefore incorporate strong measures to rebuild a sense of security under the rule of law. Before political, economic, and social changes can construct a more broadly democratic Colombia, citizens must be assured that “they are protected in [their] lives, liberties, and property and all that pertains to them.”<sup>63</sup> It is difficult for many people to

understand this since they have not experienced fear on the level that Judith Shklar describes based on personal knowledge from another time and place.

Given the inevitability of that inequality of military, police, and persuasive power, which is called government, there is evidently always much to be afraid of. And one may, thus, be less inclined to celebrate the blessings of liberty than to consider the dangers of tyranny and war that threatens it. For this liberalism the basic units of political life are not discursive and reflecting persons, nor patriotic soldier-citizens, nor energetic litigants, but the weak and the powerful. . . . A minimal level of fear is implied in any system of law, and the liberalism of fear does not dream of an end of public, coercive government. The fear it does want to prevent is that which is created by arbitrary, unexpected, unnecessary, and unlicensed acts of force and by habitual and pervasive acts of cruelty and torture performed<sup>64</sup> by military, paramilitary, and police agents in any regime.

When you add guerillas and narcotraffickers to Shklar's realm of fear, the level of personal terror multiplies exponentially. Violence comes from every direction. There is no way of knowing when or who might be killed. Death may come for those whose village happens to be near an oil pipeline that explodes into a firestorm because the ELN considered it a lucrative target to weaken the state. People are eliminated by the paramilitaries for conducting trade with guerilla supporters. Those trying to uphold the law are also targeted by narcotraffickers. The randomness of violence has a most chilling effect on people's daily lives. Francisco de Roux understands this Colombian phenomenon very well.

But reality is different. These people...are afraid. There is uncertainty for the future. There is war, and it reflects in Barrancabermeja of burned buses and black smoke coming out of oil-pipes in flames. On the side roads, leading to the foot trails, burned corpses are found and there persists the uncertain feeling of the possible "lost bullet". . . Families from neighborhood communes locking up themselves at 6 p.m. in a narrow room remember other times in the street when the

conversation among neighbors stretched far into the night breeze, full of stories, songs and rhythms. Now the popular spots of the river port are almost empty.<sup>65</sup>

Henry Shue also addresses the importance of combating fear by placing security on his short list of basic rights. For Colombians Shue's logic is compelling. He clearly understands that, particularly in the developing world, not much can be realized unless security is first guaranteed for all citizens.

No one can enjoy any right that is supposedly protected by society if someone can credibly threaten him or her with murder, rape, beatings, etc., when he or she tries to enjoy the alleged right. Such threats to physical security are among the most serious and—in much of the world—the most widespread hindrances to the enjoyment of any right. If any right is to be exercised except at great risk, physical security must be protected. In the absence of physical security people are unable to use any other rights that society may be said to be protecting without being liable to encounter many of the worst dangers they would encounter if society were not protecting rights.<sup>66</sup>

To fight fear and promote security, Colombia must develop ties that bind its society together. Supporting a strong and accountable constabulary force or militia is an important part of creating unity and strengthening regime legitimacy. What will it take to make citizen soldiers competent guardians of their communities? First, a cadre of military officers and soldiers must be dedicated to training a town's militia volunteers. The cadre must spend at least one month teaching volunteers the basics: maintaining and firing a shotgun (defensive weapon), defensive fighting positions (tactical emplacement), tactical movement under fire, cover and concealment, unit drill (cohesion and coordination), communications (internal and external), first aid techniques, physical training, chain of command, and military ethics (human rights). The senior civic leader who demonstrates military ability is then placed in charge of the unit, along with several subordinate leaders who assist the commander. Community militias are provided a retired

military officer (on a voluntary basis) as an advisor. The advisor supports the militia commander with tactical advice, yet is not in the chain of command. Civilian volunteers who pass militia training are issued shotguns, ammunition, cleaning kit, and uniform. They swear an oath to defend each other, their community, and the Republic of Colombia.

Once established, the government supports each community's militia, directly and indirectly. Within each municipality, the national police coordinate daily with militia leaders to exchange information, update defensive requirements, plan training, and make themselves available to citizens who wish to speak with them about security concerns. These meetings may include other representatives (church officials, human rights workers, judges, etc.). The militia leader has an office in the police station that is outfitted with a military radio to contact military units and other militia units in the area. Each community militia can call on the military to provide a reaction force of soldiers to assist them in repelling an attack against their town or village. If nearby, these soldiers can be quickly transported by military vehicles to the troubled community and reinforce militia efforts. If far away, this force can air assault by helicopter to the hot spot. Depending on the level of threat, a reaction force could range in size from a platoon (40 soldiers) to a brigade (1,500 or more soldiers). An interlocking web of security is effective and efficient; it is the best method of fighting fear and encouraging respect for civil authority.<sup>67</sup>

Militias require other support from the national government. They should be paid for training periods and when activated to defend their communities. The army needs to set up mobile teams that periodically review militia performance, addressing such matters as tactical competence, unit morale, equipment readiness, and compliance with the laws of land warfare (protection of human rights). The army also must set up a legal commission to investigate, prosecute, and punish

militiamen who violate military law. This cannot be emphasized enough. Militias must be accountable, not only within a command structure, but also to a code of justice that punishes citizen soldiers for violating the rights of community members. Militia members must clearly understand they are to discharge their duties within the rule of law, unlike the brutal paramilitaries, who break the law by taking “justice” into their own hands, and violate human rights in the name of security.

Once communities are more secure, the strategy changes. The national government is obligated to fulfill other basic needs of the people. Though Colombia’s average income is in the upper half of South American countries, the distribution of income in Colombia has become more skewed in the 1990s—the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer.<sup>68</sup> This wide gap between rich and poor does much to support the growth in the guerilla support base, not to mention narcotraffickers and paramilitaries. Unless economic opportunity can be created, and the government can take action to reach out to the disadvantaged, Colombia will remain mired in anarchy.

Government efforts to create an improved environment for the expansion of economic activity can take many forms. The military can take on civic action projects that have proven beneficial to stability and growth elsewhere in South America.<sup>69</sup> Improving roads, building bridges, supporting medical clinics, transporting food, improving water sources, assisting schools, and developing youth programs are some of the things that the military can do to help rural communities grow. The national government must also improve the effectiveness of its civil servants who are tasked with bureaucratic responsibilities for support of infrastructure. Corruption is pervasive, causing rural communities to go without projects that were promised, funded, paid for, but never executed.<sup>70</sup> In a secure environment, international development aid can flow through the national government to remote communities, providing small business loans, job training, and

agricultural assistance. Colombia can rekindle ties to its people by extending economic assistance to the millions of citizens who are currently impoverished.

In order for Colombia to begin reclamation of its land and people, outside support is required, particularly since it is in the midst of an economic recession. Already the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, it will take much more to save Colombia from the demons that haunt it and protect the rights of its citizens. Current U.S. policy toward Colombia is incomplete at best.<sup>71</sup> We are far too eager to fight drugs, too afraid of counterinsurgency operations, and clearly placing the Pastrana administration in the unenviable position of having to support a strategy that the Colombian people do not find convincing. The wrong memories of operations in Central America and Vietnam have created a knee-jerk reaction against fighting insurgency. Further exacerbating this situation is a strong propensity for human rights organizations, members of Congress, and media elites to protest any type of counterinsurgency support because of the human rights abuses that have been committed around the world by police, military, and paramilitary forces.<sup>72</sup>

It is imperative that the United States support this new militia strategy. It mobilizes the will of the people, places them in control of their security, helps them to reclaim their communities, improves civil society, and guards against human rights abuses. The militia has the potential to displace the guerrillas and encourage them to make peace and end this civil war. In order to make this militia a reality and a success, Washington must assist with funding of this proposal. It is in our national interest to promote democracy, preserve domestic tranquility, create a secure environment for commerce, and protect human rights.

The United States has pledged full support of the Colombian peace process. Yet this process has accomplished very little so far. The guerrillas are making a mockery of the negotiations. They were happy to take the *Despeje*, but are

loath to concede anything that might diminish their power. They will make peace when they are forced to accept terms of peace. Their situation is too powerful, lucrative, and secure. Already their public support is waning.<sup>73</sup> Their strategy of violence has convinced the vast majority of the people that it is time for peace. Current strategies are beginning to make it less profitable to be a guerrilla, particularly when elite forces are now targeting narcotraffickers and their security. The missing strategic link is how to make them more insecure, so they might want to have a peaceful settlement. No current action is accomplishing that, so it is time to consider a new strategy.

U.S. national interests in these issues go beyond the borders of Colombia and have major consequences for our national security. These problems have great regional impact. Colombia's civil war displaced over a million people, some of whom have migrated to neighboring countries. Guerrillas and narcotraffickers have penetrated the border countries of Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama.<sup>74</sup> The effects of the drug trade are also felt in Mexico, Canada, and the United States. Whether it is support of the drug trade or consumption, the corruption and human loss is very significant. Furthermore, Colombia is of huge economic importance to the United States and the rest of the hemisphere, far beyond natural resources. If Mexico is the gateway to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA—proposed for 2005), then Colombia is the linchpin.<sup>75</sup> If Colombia is not stabilized, there will be no hemispheric economic community. It will be an all or nothing proposition when it comes to South America, so Colombia weighs heavily upon our ability to extend free trade throughout the Americas. We must safeguard our own hemispheric interests by supporting democracy. Furthermore, it is high time the United States developed a new political-military strategy for the Americas, one that changes structure, orientation, attitudes, and techniques. In so doing we will have a greater ability to promote democracy, protect human rights, react quickly for

humanitarian assistance, extend free trade, and build enduring relationships that create better understanding and cooperation.<sup>76</sup>

### Heading the Wrong Way.

The events of 2000 do not bode well for the future of Colombia. Bogotá is about to concede another *despeje* to the ELN. Larry Rohter paints a troubling picture in *The New York Times*.

They say necessity is the mother of invention, but desperation can also be its source. In Colombia, a government frustrated by its inability to end three decades of warfare with two major guerrilla insurgencies is now seeking peace by granting both movements one of the things they crave most: uncontested territory of their own. . . . This has left two zones a kind of never-never land where it is not clear who is in charge or how the zones fit into the rest of the country. "You are seeing, in a sense, the hollowing-out of government in critical regions of Latin America and its replacement by individuals who are, in fact, introducing a narco-government, a small narco-empire," Peter Romero, the State Department's senior official for Latin American affairs, warned last week.<sup>77</sup>

This concession strategy to advance peace negotiations has not fared well. The FARC is now stronger politically. It is a de facto government in the process of levying a "peace tax" on citizens and enterprises within its zone. Not to be outdone, the ELN used terrorist acts (sabotage and kidnapping) to force President Pastrana to concede another zone.<sup>78</sup> Colombia moves further away from peace by appeasing guerrillas. Only demonstrations of government force and resolve can deter guerrillas from further violence and make peace something they desire.<sup>79</sup> Enrique Santos Calderón, co-director of the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*, reflected the growing frustration of the people; "President Pastrana is a hostage of the peace process with the FARC."<sup>80</sup> There is no movement in the peace process; the guerrillas concede nothing. Their argument is that they will not negotiate until the government halts what they assert is

a government alliance with the paramilitary forces. Moreover, the FARC opposes including any dialogue with paramilitary organizations. This resistance by the FARC was criticized by Fabian Marulanda, the bishop of Florencia, who said, "This is like the behavior of a small child who gets in a huff and who won't talk anymore."<sup>81</sup>

The results of battlefield operations have been mixed. From November 1999 until May 2000 the military had increasing success in combat against rebel forces.<sup>82</sup> Improved U.S. support played a part in the military gains in their fight against the rebels, but equally important was the transition within the military's senior leadership—from bureaucrats to combat veterans with mobile brigade experience. By October 2000 the situation changed significantly. The military offensive to recover the Putumayo region in the south was met with strong guerrilla resistance, no doubt due to fact that this area is a major drug producing area and source of rebel funding. Paramilitary forces are also fighting to protect their financial interests—protection money from the narcotraffickers—and provide a measure of security that neither the military nor police have been able achieve.

Both military and guerrillas have suffered increased casualties.<sup>83</sup> The military was particularly disheartened when, in addition to losing 56 soldiers during a FARC campaign, they lost one of their prized Black Hawk helicopters. Yet the senior military commander in the area called the battle a victory for Colombian forces.<sup>84</sup> To be sure, morale is on the upswing among the soldiers. But the FARC is arguably winning the larger war in three major ways. First, they are causing further instability among the civilians in the region and frustrating military and police efforts.<sup>85</sup> This instability is rooted in the military's inability to maintain control of reclaimed territory, largely due to major units being assigned more terrain to control than they can effectively occupy.<sup>86</sup> Second, they have successfully managed to get the paramilitaries more spotlighted for atrocities than themselves. Third, the rebels are engaging

in more border and cross-border operations, not to mention causing peasants to flee across borders.<sup>87</sup> The result is that states in the region are skeptical about the military portion of Plan Colombia and U.S. involvement.<sup>88</sup> It is also having an effect on a key supporter of Plan Colombia, Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-NY), who is withdrawing his support over concerns about the increase in violence and potential for increased human rights violations given a larger role for the military.<sup>89</sup> Gilman favors the police. At stake are helicopters needed to increase mobility and surprise.<sup>90</sup>

U.S. budgetary support for Colombia faced serious resistance in Congress in the first half of 2000. Critics assert that increased funding of the military will result in more abuses of human rights as operations expand beyond fighting drugs. According to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), “What we are seeing is a dramatic ratcheting up of a counterinsurgency policy in the name of counterdrug policy.”<sup>91</sup> If Leahy is correct, it is due to strategic “hand-tying” by a Congress haunted by counterinsurgency ghosts.<sup>92</sup> The only hope for a more balanced approach is a new administration that can persuade the public and Congress to adopt a new strategy to help achieve peace in Colombia. The Inter-American Dialogue—sounding almost Clausewitzian—recently recommended that the United States should continue “helping to turn Colombia’s army into a better-trained and more professional force,” noting that this will “level the playing field in Colombia, change the calculations of the guerrillas, and make them more inclined to negotiate seriously.”<sup>93</sup>

What needs to be changed in order to achieve peace? To begin with, the military and police must not be pitted against one another in a contest to get their “snouts in the fiscal trough.” Rep. Gilman may want to shift U.S. support from the military to the police because they are less tainted by human rights abuses.<sup>94</sup> Of course, this overlooks two major points. First, the police are more corrupt than the military.<sup>95</sup> Second, they are far less capable than military when it comes to fighting against narcotraffickers protected

by guerrilla armies. Where guerrilla forces are involved, military units must be the appropriate response. Working together, the military and police can restore security, particularly if they join with this new militia that is controlled by the government.

More importantly, the government must develop a winning, not a losing attitude. As Michael Radu painfully points out, the counterinsurgency difference between Peru and Colombia is that the former took an aggressive stance against guerrillas and the latter has been weak-willed and too accommodating.<sup>96</sup> Peru succeeded, and Colombia is no closer to peace or victory. One important difference is that the Colombian guerrillas are better trained, equipped, and led than those in Peru; thus Colombia must do more to achieve security, which is why Colombia has sought and secured support from outside. Radu notes that “the people armed” in the form of *rondas campesinas* made a difference in providing security in remote areas.<sup>97</sup> Colombia’s previous attempts at self-defense have been disasters, such as the *CONVIVIR*, due to a lack of government control and support. The upshot of this has been the widespread public and government fear of establishing another militia program.<sup>98</sup> A common retort to the recommendation of a new militia force is that “Colombia has enough violence already with the paramilitaries and guerrillas; giving weapons to civilians will just make matters worse.”<sup>99</sup> This resistance in the face of disaster is frustrating, to say the least.

The dynamics of conflict in Colombia are perplexing. The guerrillas do not have widespread support, yet they are being permitted to expand their power. They talk about making peace, but have made no concessions.<sup>100</sup> The state has failed to maintain the most basic human right of citizens—personal security. Escalation of military operations has served to displace citizens and create tensions in neighboring states. The narcotraffickers, supposedly the key target of Plan Colombia, are not losing profits, having mastered the “balloon game,” and shifting of

shipping routes. The reviled paramilitaries, decried as human rights abusers and funded by drug money, have been the most effective in fighting the guerrillas. The civilians complain about the lack of security, but long condoned a conscription policy that exempted the middle and upper classes from serving the cause of freedom and democracy. Government institutions are weak, and a good part of that is due to the depth and breadth of corruption among legislators in Congress.<sup>101</sup> Unless all Colombians stand up against anarchic violence, their future is grim indeed.

## Conclusion.

The Colombian people have suffered enough. For over half a century they have had to contend with the inequities of politics, economics, and society, under a thin veneer of democracy. They have been subjected to one of the bloodiest civil wars ever seen in this hemisphere. Lacking representation, opportunity, and true civil society, a Hobbesian monster emerged to address the paradoxical nature of this politically, economically, socially, and geographically diverse country. These forces represent the worst passions of humanity—violence, greed, corruption, anarchy, and intimidation. It will take the will of the people, political commitment, financial resources, and much patience to win the peace that the people so richly deserve.

There is a window of opportunity for the United States to strongly align with the optimistic and energetic administration of Andres Pastrana; a Colombian leader who is deeply committed to peace, democracy, human rights, and economic opportunity. Washington must not stay mired in old and unsuccessful strategies. It is time to support a new strategy that solves complex Colombian problems and addresses assistance concerns raised by various political factions in Washington. The nonmilitary aspects of Plan Colombia, though real and significant, cannot be realized until people can stop living in constant

fear of dying violently. Washington must not succumb to choosing the police over the military, or shy away from integrating citizens into the security architecture, as long as they are trained, equipped, and controlled by the government.

The mission for the U.S. military, and the Army in particular, is to assist Colombia in training, equipping, and advising their forces to reestablish human security, an essential condition for democratization and development. This should be done without increasing our presence or influence—it is Colombia's task to achieve a safe and secure environment for its citizens. A major focus must be developing a militia that is integrated with the police and the army, while also being accountable to government authority. The key is to maintain legitimacy and avoid human rights abuses. Though unpopular, this counterinsurgency mission has a better chance of improving human security than the current counterdrug strategy, a lesson that was learned in Peru. Fighting drugs is a regional or hemispheric mission that requires greater coordination and cooperation, not to mention demand reduction, to avoid the “balloon effect.”

Human rights are best protected when citizens have a role in maintaining their security. Justice, development, responsive government, opportunity, all markers of civil society, cannot be achieved without security. As already noted, neither humanitarians nor jingoists have advocated a strategy that will work to bring peace. Peace does not come without action, and the guerrillas have made a mockery of government attempts to reach out with olive branch in hand. Efforts to make peace will continue to fail as long as Colombia's priorities are out of alignment with the needs of the people, not to mention those of the region, and are beholden to outside interests and strategies distorting the situation. Yes, it is time for Colombians to fight for human security, national peace, and a deeper democracy.

## ENDNOTES

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85. Author received an electronic note from an international journalist in Colombia on November 3, 2000. This journalist reports from hot spots such as the Putumayo region.

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88. Anthony Faiola, "Colombia's Creeping War; Neighbors Now Fear Spillover of Violence," *The Washington Post*, October 1, 2000, p. A1.

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