

**STRATEGY
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**PLAN COLOMBIA, CONSEQUENCES FOR VENEZUELAN
NATIONAL SECURITY**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Plan Colombia, Consequences for Venezuelan National Security

by

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ABSTRACT

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Consequences of the implementation of Plan Colombia for Venezuela. If Plan Colombia accomplishes the strategic goal (50% reduction in cocaine production), and narcotics trafficking groups move into Venezuela, the government will have to commit its Armed Forces but, under unequal military and technological conditions when compared to Colombia. Plan Colombia will also promote massive migration towards Venezuela as well as the displacement of subversive/paramilitary groups looking for safe havens. The security and defense of the Colombian border does not depend on the Venezuelan Armed Force exclusively. It also depends on the coordination of the various sectors involved in the nation's development. It is imperative to offer greater security and well-being assurance to the people of the border area in order to increase their presence in such an important region. Consequently, Security and Development are an indissoluble pair at the time of protecting the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of our nation.

Plan Colombia poses complex challenges to Venezuela and these must be carefully considered.

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PLAN COLOMBIA, CONSEQUENCES FOR VENEZUELAN NATIONAL SECURITY

GUERRILLA, PARAMILITARY, AND DRUG TRAFFICKING IN COLOMBIA

THE COLOMBIAN GUERRILLAS

The domestic conflict in Colombia has its origins in a period of extensive political instability known as "the violence". Its onset has a specific date: April 9th, 1948, at 13:05, upon the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitan, the leader of the Liberal Party. It later became more intense with the victory of the Conservative Party's candidate in 1949 in an election boycotted by the Liberal Party. In the following years, both parties mobilized armed partisans in the provinces, starting an undeclared civil war that so far has resulted in a death toll of more than 200,000.

THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC)

The FARC is the largest insurgent group today. Its leader, Manuel Marulanda Velez, better known as "Tirofijo" (sure-shot), began his guerrilla experience in 1949 when he joined the Liberal guerrillas in the Department of Tolima. In 1964, Marulanda cooperated in the establishment of an "Independent Communist Republic" in Marquetalia, in Southern Tolima. In 1964, the Colombian army attacked and destroyed the guerrilla unit in Marquetalia. But Marulanda escaped and in 1966 he founded a group called the "Communist Self Defense Forces". This group was later reorganized into the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), with Marulanda as its highest leader. Between the mid-60's and the mid-80's the FARC grew at a slow pace, conducting limited attacks and ambushes of military units, with the purpose of obtaining weapons and equipment and expanding its area of influence. In 1984, the then President of Colombia, Belisario Betancur, declared a cease-fire. The FARC took advantage of this to enlarge, and also to consolidate its "protection and war tax collection" operations in areas rich in resources (cattle in the East plains of the country, agriculture in Uraba and Santander, oil in the valleys of the Magdalena, and gold in Antioquia). Three new Fronts were established in the Departments of Caquetá and Meta, where there are large coca crops today, and two more Fronts were activated in the valley of the Magdalena river. From that moment, the FARC began its contact with the drug dealing business, since the illegal drug processing centers were located in the areas that were being controlled by the guerrillas.

In his lecture of September 27, 2000, at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., the Mayor of Calamar, Department of Guaviare, stated: "up until 1981 the insurgents prohibited the

growing of coca and marijuana, which they considered counter-revolutionary. At the same time, the drug dealers protected by the Paramilitary forces began their penetration of the region and growing coca became the predominant economic activity. The FARC, fearing the loss of their social basis -constituted by farmers- in the region, started to promote and protect growers and producers in the area. The policy of collecting taxes on the drug dealing business was expounded in the "Conclusions of the Seventh Conference of the FARC".¹

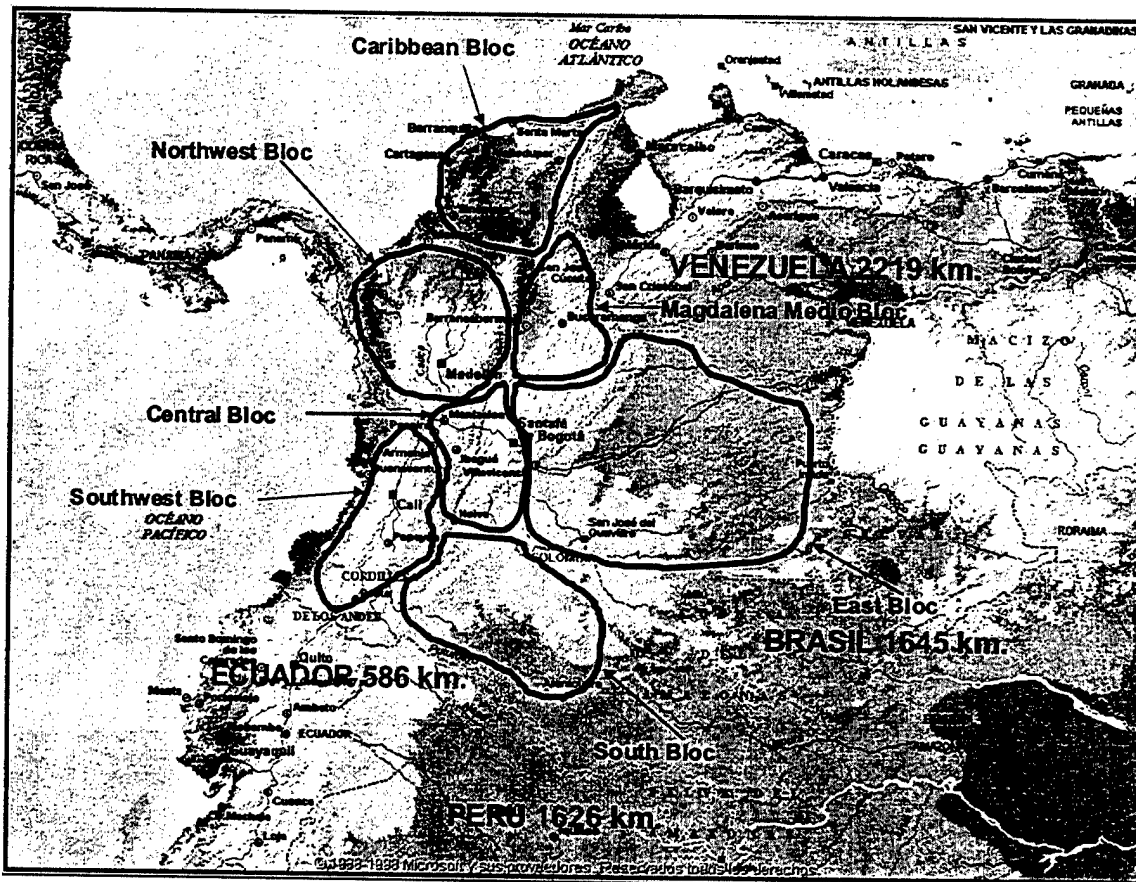


FIGURE 1 - FARC'S BLOCS²

Halfway through the 90's, the coca farming and cocaine processing centers proliferated in the FARC Fronts in the Eastern Andes, and no doubt this, in addition to the income obtained by extortion and kidnapping, contributed to the FARC's spectacular growth. At its inception in 1966, the FARC consisted of 350 guerrillas. By 1986, it had approximately 3600 men and 32 fronts; in 1995, approximately 7000 men and 60 fronts, and currently it has between 15,000 to 20,000 guerrillas distributed in seven "Territorial Blocks" with more than 70 fronts throughout Colombia (See Figure 1). In spite of the growing and expanding ability of the FARC, this guerrilla organization has two critical weaknesses. First, it is closely linked to outlaws and drug dealers and, second, it lacks support and credibility with a substantial majority of the Colombian

population, a factor that deserves better use by the Colombian government to achieve the end of the conflict.

THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN)

The ELN was founded in 1964 by supporters of the Cuban Revolution. It was mainly formed by students and graduates from the Santander University. In the times when there was tension between Havana and Moscow over the Latin America strategy, the ELN was favored by Cuba. In addition to the Castro-Communist component, the ELN attracted radical Catholics who intermingled the teachings of Social Justice with Marxist doctrine. Its most notorious character was father Camilo Torres, who joined the ELN in 1965 and died four months later during an encounter with the Colombian Army. Initially, this insurgent group operated in Northern Santander, Antioquia and Bolivar Departments. Internal organization problems with its main leader, Fabio Vásquez Castaño, led to his trial and subsequent execution for treason. In the late 60's, most members of the insurgent group were either killed or captured in clashes with the Colombian Army. However, the ELN rose up again in the '80s under the leadership of another Catholic priest, father Manuel Pérez, alias "el cura". Under this new leader the internal problems of the organization were solved and new sources of financing were found, mainly from extortion against the oil companies operating in the Northeast of Colombia. The ELN increased its numbers from 800 guerrillas in 1996 to 3000-5000, organized in five fronts, by the year 2000. Almost one half of its forces are deployed in the Northeast of the country, in the region of the middle Magdalena valley and as far east as the Venezuelan border. This deployment corresponds to the location of the Colombian oil industry. Currently, this guerrilla group is facing internal problems that originated with the death of father Manuel Vélez in 1998 in Havana where he was receiving treatment for malaria. Other problems of this group are the territorial control disputes with the FARC and the Paramilitaries.

OTHER GUERRILLA ORGANIZATIONS IN COLOMBIA

The FARC and the ELN are the main Colombian guerrilla organizations, but other smaller groups operate independently. The Popular Liberation Army was founded in the 60's with a Maoist orientation. In 1990 most of its members reached an agreement with the Colombian government to cease hostilities. However, a dissident fraction is still operating. In 1994, this group suffered an important blow when the Colombian Army captured its leader, Francisco Caraballo, together with 14 important leaders. At the present time, the EPL has hundreds of guerrillas who operate mainly in the Department of Chocó, close to the Panamanian border.

Other small groups, known as "the dissidents", include the People's Revolutionary Army and the Guevarist Revolutionary Army .

THE PARAMILITARIES

As the presence and power of guerrilla organizations grew, a series of self-defense organizations, the paramilitaries, arose outside of the law. They were formed to cooperate in the struggle against the insurgents.

Local self-defense groups have developed throughout Colombian history, such as during the period of "the violence" when many villages were armed to fight banditry or political armed gangs. Recently, the self-defense groups emerged as a response to guerrilla activity, in those areas where the government was incapable of providing security to the population. In 1964, a civil defense law permitted the creation of "civil defense groups" to support government forces in their strife against the insurgency. In addition, private security groups were created, financed by landowners and businessmen. In 1987, as a result of their relation to criminal activities, these self-defense groups were declared unlawful. But they did not surrender their weapons and have continued to grow outside of Government control.

Another form of self-defense, the "convivir" (living together) groups were organized. In these groups, people collaborated in fighting the insurgents without becoming organized into militia units. Their main task was to provide intelligence to Government security forces and they were not authorized to carry any weapons of war except for of self-defense. By 1990, these organizations had been dismantled by the Colombian government.

To provide coherence to these outlawed organizations, the United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC) were formed, constituted of several regional units and including the Peasant Self-Defense of Córdoba and Urabá (*Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*), the Casanare Self-Defense, the Santander and Southern Cesar Self-Defense, and the Putumayo Southern Block Self-Defense,³ with approximately 8000 paramilitaries.

The first of such organizations, the Peasant Self-Defense of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU), was established by the brothers Fidel and Carlos Castaño in Urabá to avenge the kidnapping and subsequent murder of their father by the FARC in 1981. Carlos Castaño became leader of the AUC after his brother Fidel died in a skirmish with the FARC in 1996. In that same year, Carlos Castaño organized the AUC as a means to expand the paramilitaries in Colombia. With better financing and equipment, the AUC evolved into units capable of conducting highly effective offensive operations.

The AUC's tactics are similar to those of the guerrillas. They seek control over as much territory as possible and then, in order to exercise political influence there, they intimidate public officials. They also try to control the drug farming and production regions from which the guerrillas get their main source of income. For this reason, Guaviare, Putumayo and Caquetá have become areas of armed clashes with the guerrillas.

The illegal self-defense groups are believed to be the ones mainly responsible for the massacres in Colombia. Thus, in 1997, 30 people died in massacres by self-defense forces; the next year, that figure was multiplied by 3.7, reaching 111 individuals, and in 1999, it almost quadrupled reaching 408. In the year 2000, between January and October, 671 civilians were killed as a result of the war. Of this total, 164 were murdered by the guerrillas and 507 by the illegal self-defense groups. This means that during 1999 and 2000, the illegal self-defense groups have been accountable for more than 70% of massacre victims in Colombia.⁴

DRUG DEALING AS A SOURCE OF FINANCING

The Colombian conflict is the classic example of how, on their own, guerrilla organizations are capable of obtaining sufficient financial resources to sustain the domestic conflict (See Figure 2). The guerrilla's main sources of financing are drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping. For instance, the FARC has a system of collection for "protection" services offered to drug dealing elements. By the year 2000, the collection (in U.S. dollars) were the following: basic paste production, US\$30/kg; cocaine hydrochloride, US\$100/kg; laboratory protection, US\$10,000/week; crop protection, US\$ 100/Ha./month; opium crops, US\$8,000/Ha.; security of clandestine landing strips, US\$5,000; shipment of cocaine, US\$20/kg; transport of chemical precursors, 20% of aggregate value; international flights for shipping controlled substances, US\$10,000/each; domestic flights, US\$5,000/each.⁵ The FARC is present, extracting these financial resources, in close to 80% of the coca planted areas and 90% of the poppy field areas in Colombia. Approximately 32 rural fronts have bonds with the drug dealers.⁶

In contrast to the FARC, the ELN's participation in the drug trafficking business is much more reduced. According to the Colombian Ministry of Defense, 7 out of the 41 fronts established in the coca areas obtain their resources by mechanisms similar to those used by the FARC in their areas of influence.

According to the AUC's chief Carlos Castaño, 70% of the paramilitaries financing comes directly or indirectly from drug dealing. In southern Bolivar and at the Catatumbo, Meta, Guaviare, Caquetá, and Putumayo valleys, the self-defense members

demand a share both from coca growing peasants as well as from the drug dealers who visit those regions in search of coca paste for processing.⁷

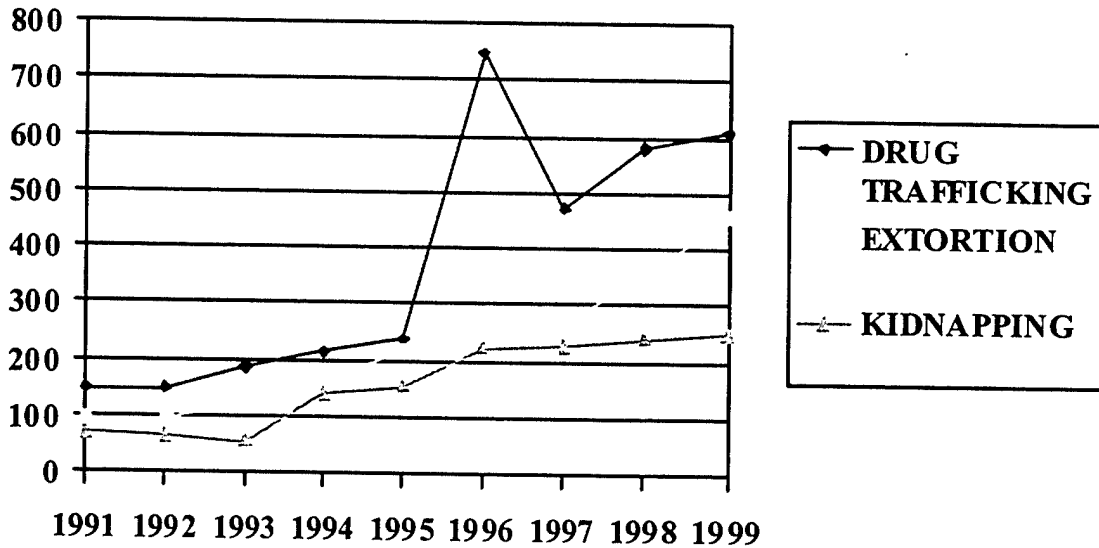


FIGURE 2 - FARC'S FINANCE SOURCES (IN MILLION OF DOLLARS)⁸

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING

Each year, narcotics trafficking costs the American people approximately 52,000 deaths and about US\$110 billion dollars in expenses, as a result of medical costs, accidents, and loss of productivity. Most illegal drugs entering the United States come from Colombia: almost 90% of the cocaine consumed in the U.S. and 2/3 of the heroin consumed in the East Coast.⁹ Colombia is at present the world's largest cocaine producer.

The report on global drug trafficking status submitted by the U.S. Department of State in March, 2000, reveals that the world's cocaine production is concentrated in three coca growing countries of the Andean region: Bolivia, Colombia and Perú. A bush, botanically known as *Erythroxylon Cocae* grows in these countries. From the leaves of this bush is extracted the cocaine hydrochloride by a process of maceration and mixing with solvents, such as potassium permanganate, paraffin, benzine, ether and sulfuric acid, among others. Besides cocaine, Colombia is the largest producer and distributor of heroin in the Western Hemisphere. Base heroin is obtained by acetylation of the morphine-base with acetic anhydride; after several filtrations and dehydration by evaporation, where acetic anhydride, ammonia, hydrochloric acid, soda ash, chloroform, sulfuric acid, acetone and ether, among other chemicals are used, heroin is obtained. One of the strategies of the U.S. government to attack the illegal traffic of controlled substances is to diminish the production of narcotics at their places of origin and therefore

restrict their supply and cause the street price to increase, in an effort to reduce domestic demand. In the late 80's the United States, in cooperation with producing countries in South America, eradicated crops, destroyed laboratories, captured drug dealers and confiscated enormous loads of illegal drugs. However, these results did not increase the price of narcotics in America's streets. For example, in 1998 cocaine prices remained low and stable between US\$ 10,000 and US\$ 36,000 per kilogram at the domestic level. In most metropolitan areas the price per kilo fluctuated between US\$ 17,000 and US\$ 26,000.¹⁰ The failure of this strategy is not due to lack of resources to fight drug trafficking, but to the structure of the market for controlled substances. Production costs are low, the actions to avoid illegal drug entry are not totally effective, and the potential profits are so high that the market forces attract a considerable number of growers, producers and dealers.

During the 80's and mid-90's the strategy to fight drug dealing in Colombia focused on destroying the large cartels that imported most of the paste, or coca base, from Bolivia and Perú. Under pressure from the U.S. government, the Colombian government ordered the capture and deportation of big drug trafficking bosses. Midway in the 90's, the main leaders of the Medellin and Cali cartels were killed or captured. But the end of the large cartels did not diminish the traffic of narcotics to the United States. Simply put, the structure of the drug dealers changed and it created a space in the market for a significant number of small cartels and intermediate producers whose plan was to export small quantities, earn a lot, and make little noise. The cost for Colombia was extremely high. During the conflict, Cartel bosses assassinated many Government representatives, judges, and officers of the National Police, and they terrorized the Colombian population by exploding car bombs.

Meanwhile, a campaign of crop eradication and aerial interdiction of illegal drug trafficking had excellent results in Bolivia and Perú. In Bolivia, the results were encouraging. The 45,500 hectares of coca planted in 1992 were reduced to just 14,600 hectares in the year 2000. This reduction was due to the implementation of an aggressive program of eradicating by hand, and replacing the coca crops with alternative crops. Ironically, the positive results from the crop eradication policy created an economic deficit which led the country into a social and financial crisis. At present, the Government has to struggle with significant peasant demonstrations which are a consequence of the dissatisfaction that the crop substitution programs have caused, and this compromises the sustainability of those programs. It is then likely that the planted areas will not be further reduced but rather increased. In Perú, the strategy was based on shooting down the planes that entered or left the coca regions. The result is that the coca crops that in 1992 occupied more than 129,000 hectares in the country, were reduced to less

than 40,000 hectares in 2000. This activity was discontinued in April 2001 after the mistaken shoot down of a U.S. missionary aircraft, causing the death of a woman and her child.

These factors contributed to the spectacular increase in the amount of hectares of coca grown in Colombia. From about 37,000 hectares planted in 1992, the country increased production to 122,500 hectares grown by 2000. Domestic reasons also promoted this increase. The first of these reasons was the deterioration in the agricultural and cattle sector in Colombia during the past decade. The Gross National Product (GNP) from agriculture significantly fell with respect to the total GNP at that time, and a considerable number of peasants lost their corn and bean crops in addition to the title to their lands. The second reason, and the most important one, was the existence of guerrilla and paramilitary organizations. They protected the coca growers and organized and helped them face the antinarcotics repression, all for the purposes of making the huge profits from the illegal traffic of drugs. At the same time that coca crops were being dramatically reduced in Bolivia and Perú, all was set for increasing such crops in Colombia, where there was unemployed peasant labor willing to colonize jungle regions with limited government control, and where there were also armed groups ready to provide such peasants with safety and to ally with them in an excellent business (See Figures 3 and 4). In this scenario, the multiplication of the narcotics crops was the logical development of the events.

In Colombia, a completely new phenomenon has developed: the link between the political armed movements and the drug cartels. The trend started when it was evident to the insurgent forces -especially to the FARC- that engaging in drug dealing would provide the necessary funds to intensify the local fight against the State. This mixture of drug dealing and insurgency has created a new kind of threat against security: It is not merely an insurgency with an old-fashioned ideology that fell with the Berlin wall, nor it is a simple criminal cartel. This is a new threat that incorporates the elements and the strength of both. To complicate even more the Colombian domestic situation, there came up, initially in response to the activities of the guerrillas, the United Self-Defenses of Colombia or Paramilitaries. The paramilitaries represent a different challenge. In spite of having been initially created to "protect the population against the insurgents", the paramilitary groups allied with criminal elements related to drug dealing. At that point the Government faced the dilemma of treating these groups either as political actors and legitimate participants in peace talks, or as criminals that should be eliminated. For obvious reasons, the Government elected the second course of action.

The actions of the drug dealers, the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries have made more complex the principal issues that the Colombian Nation has to deal with: loss of governmental authority, financial deterioration and social disintegration. In the middle of this complicated

domestic scenario, Plan Colombia was implemented; in this plan, the support of the United States was formulated on a false distinction between fighting against violent agents and/or suppressing drug trafficking. This was due to the impossibility of obtaining U.S. Congressional approval for military aid to fight Colombian insurgents. Simply stated, the United States acknowledges the links between the guerrilla and other illegal armed groups with the drug dealers, but it insists that military assistance can only be used for antinarcotics purposes and not against the guerrillas as such. It is evident that such a distinction cannot be sustained in reality, as it is ever more clear that the war against drugs cannot be won in Colombia unless the Government recovers control over its territory.

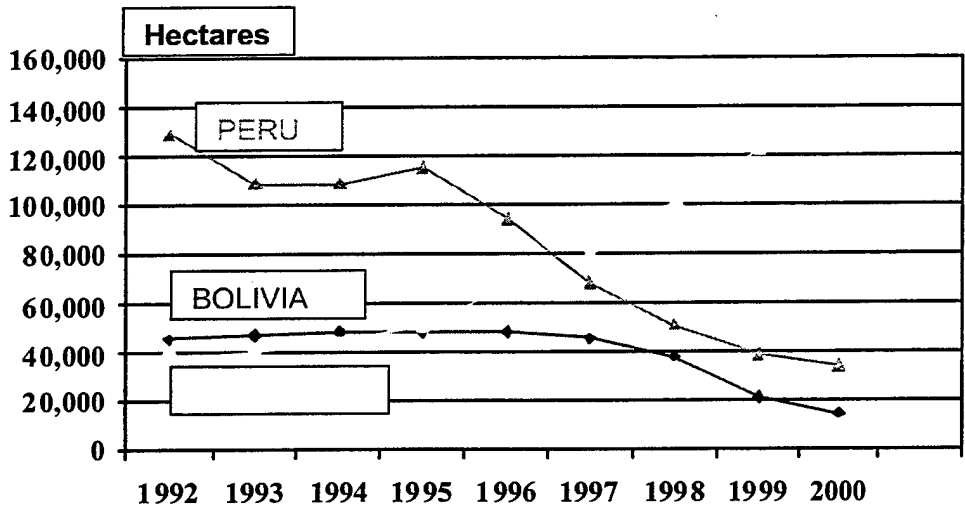


FIGURE 3 - COCA CULTIVATION IN THE ANDEAN REGION, 1991 – 2000¹¹

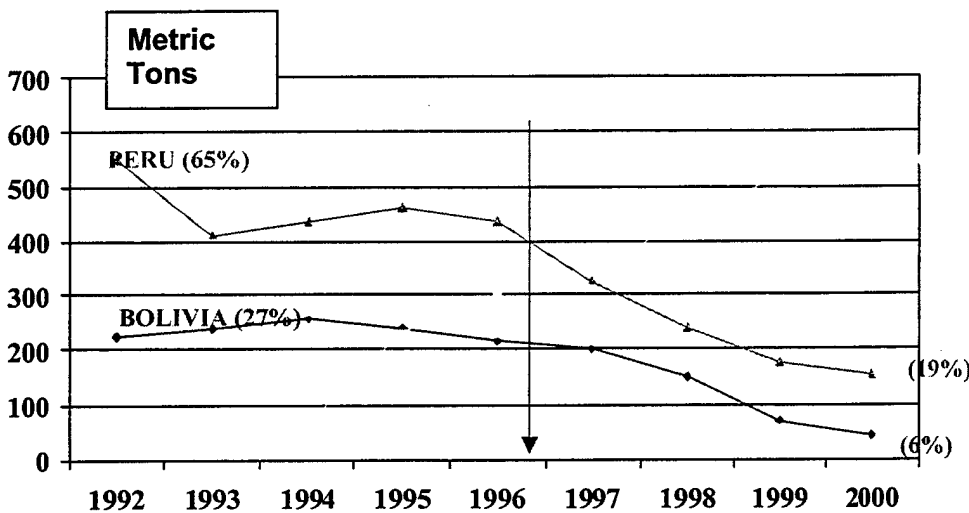


FIGURE 4 - COCAINE PRODUCTION IN THE ANDEAN REGION, 1991 – 2000¹²

The situation gains complexity with the presence of the Russian Mafia in the drug dealing business in Colombia. For some time now, these crime syndicates have been supplying

Russian armament in exchange for cocaine and heroin to be sold on the streets of Europe and Russia. One of the routes for this exchange crosses almost one half of the globe, from Russia to Jordan and Israel, being completed by parachute-dropping the load or by landing on clandestine runways in the Colombian jungle. On September 7, 2000, Colombian authorities discovered a Russian submarine being built in a warehouse in Bogotá. According to the confiscated manuals, printed in the Russian and Spanish languages, this submarine was capable of carrying about 200 tons of cocaine for long distances.¹³

Meanwhile, the fight against the illegal traffic of controlled substances continues at regional level, but in an individualized manner. In other words, each country has its own way of conducting the operations. A report published by the Department of State shows the following results:¹⁴

COUNTRY/ RESULTS (YEAR 2000)	BOLIVIA	COLOMBIA	ECUADOR	PERU	VENEZUELA
COCA					
GROWN HECTARES	14,600	136,200		34,100	
DESTROYED HECTARES	7,653	47,000		6,200	
COCAINE (HCI) SEIZED	0.72	69 MT	1.72 TM	2.70 TM	15.03 TM
OPIUM					
GROWN HECTARES		-			
DESTROYED HECTARES		9,254			
HEROINE/MORPHINE SEIZED		0.572 MT	0.109		0.13 TM
TOTAL ARRESTS	2.017	8,600	3.025		2.616

TABLE 1

ACTIVITIES OF COLOMBIAN INSURGENCY AT THE COLOMBIAN-VENEZUELAN BORDER

During the last few years, the events in the Republic of Colombia have been characterized by high indices of widespread violence reaching all sectors of domestic life. This transcends to the international context, where neighboring countries have been affected by the incidence, in their respective territories, of the actions of the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the trafficking of narcotics, and regular and organized crime (See Figures 5, 6 and 7). On the Colombian side, along the 2,219 kilometers of Colombian-Venezuelan border, there is the area of influence of the FARC's secretariat and Eastern block, the middle Magdalena block, and the Caribbean block, with 8 bands (cuadrillas) and approximately 1000 men (this figure can vary considerably, depending on the situation); the ELN, seriously restricted in this territory, exercises control with 9 structures or armed gangs of about 1000 men; the AUC with the Northern block and about 400 men, and the EPL with a smaller presence, operating in the departments of North Santander and Santander. These groups have the following capabilities:

FARC:

- Increase their terrorist actions in the eastern area of the country.
- Sabotage against public infrastructure and oil pipe lines.
- Increase political violence.
- Expand crops and laboratories.

ELN:

- Sabotage against electric power infrastructure.
- Increase political violence.
- Increase attacks to oil pipe lines.

EPL:

- Increase their funds by kidnapping and drug dealing.

AUC:

- Dispute territorial control in the Catatumbo area and southern Bolivar.

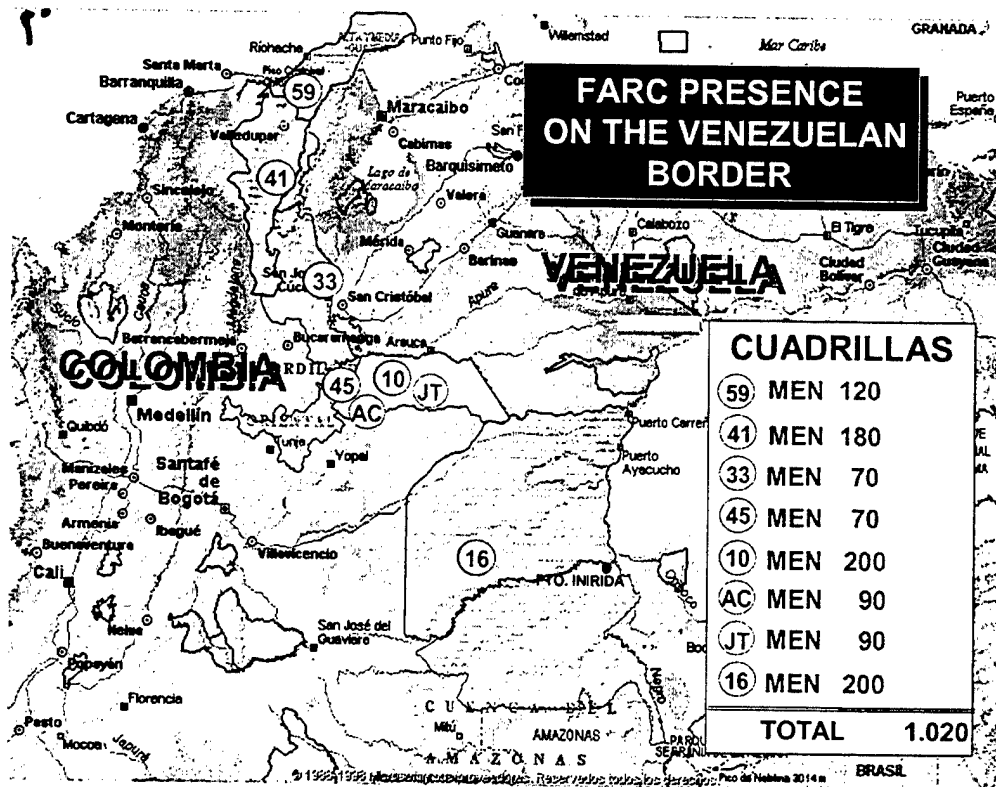


FIGURE 5 - FARC PRESENCE ON THE COLOMBIAN - VENEZUELAN BORDER¹⁵

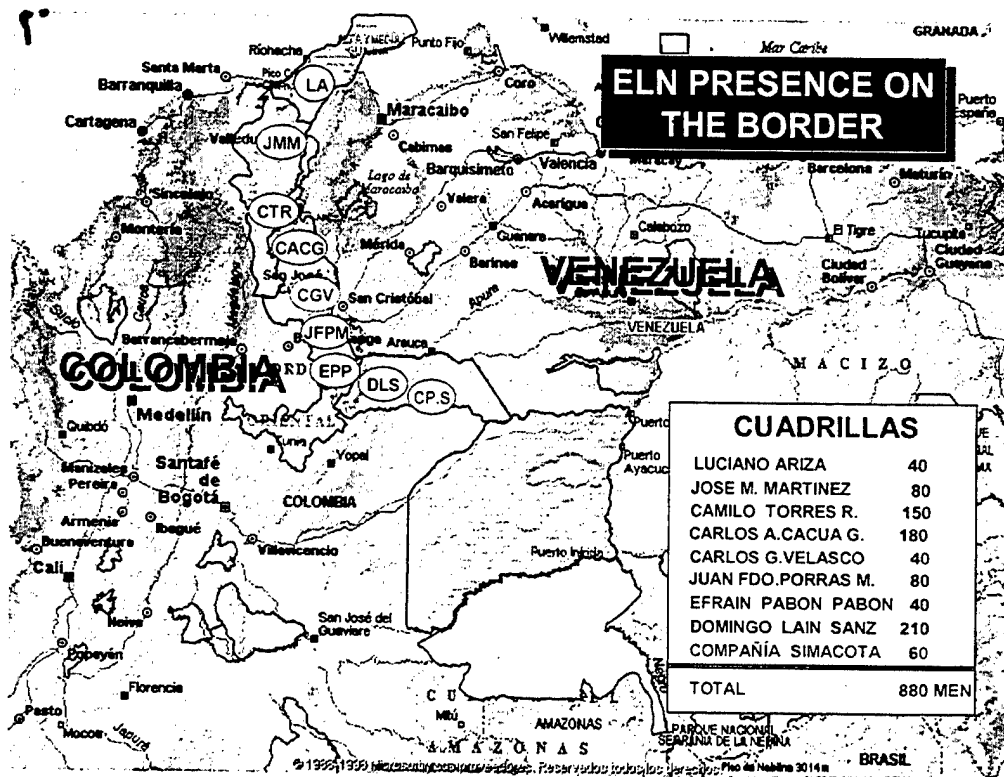


FIGURE 6 - ELN PRESENCE ON THE COLOMBIAN - VENEZUELAN BORDER¹⁶

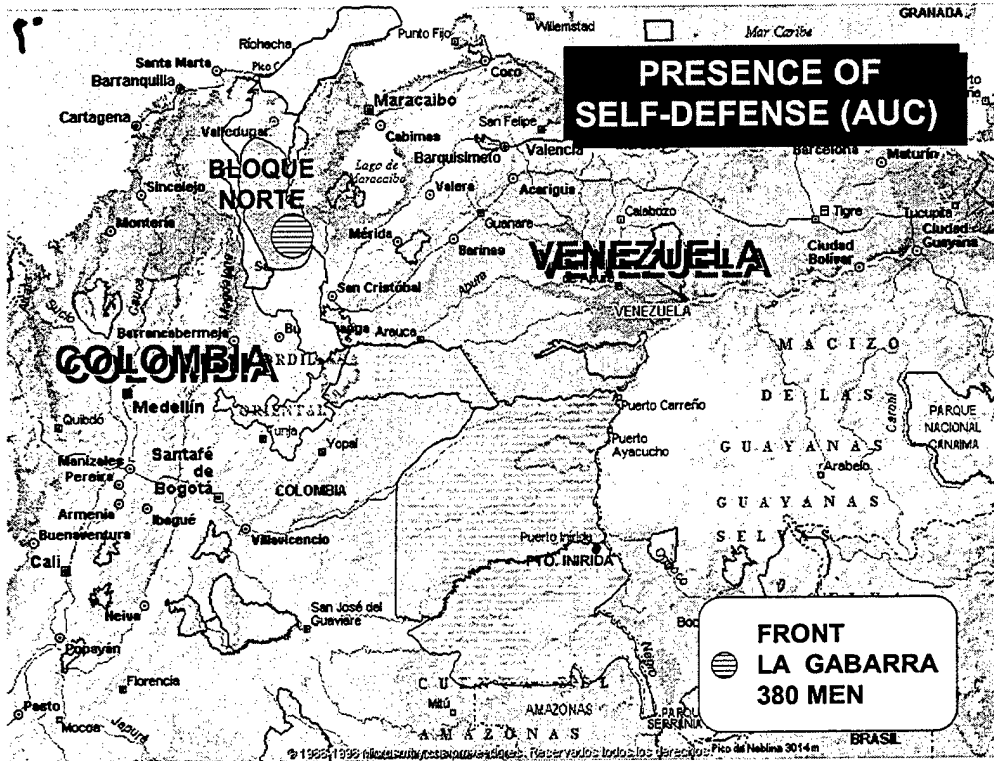


FIGURE 7 - AUC PRESENCE ON THE COLOMBIAN – VENEZUELAN BORDER¹⁷

PLAN COLOMBIA

ORIGIN AND STRATEGIC STRUCTURE OF PLAN COLOMBIA

In August 1998, President Andrés Pastrana assumed the Presidency of the Republic of Colombia. He did it with renewed domestic and international support, thus ending the period of somewhat troubled diplomatic relations that existed between Washington and the administration of President Ernesto Samper due to the latter's monetary support from the drug dealers for his presidential campaign. In October that year, during a state visit to Washington, President Pastrana explained his "peace first" strategy designed to terminate the internal conflict in Colombia. By negotiating with the principal insurgent group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, to end the domestic war, the Colombian Government would regain control of its territory, which would facilitate the eradication of coca crops and the programs for cocaine interdiction in the areas controlled by the FARC.

After significant concessions by President Pastrana, among which was the creation of a "haven" for the FARC over an area of approximately 42,000 Km² in southern Colombia (where the largest coca farms are located), and after a not so encouraging initiation of the peace talks, guerrilla actions increased. In July 1999, an important intensification of the FARC's offensive

operations rang the alarm in the region. The guerrilla offensive made it necessary to modify the strategy that President Pastrana had applied so far. In November 1999, the U.S. Congress approved a package of supplementary assistance for US\$165 million in addition to the US\$ 124 million previously approved. With this, Colombia ranked third after Israel and Egypt among the countries receiving U.S. assistance.

In view of the situation, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Thomas Pickering, advocated for the preparation of a long term Colombian national plan to increase government efficiency in fighting drug traffic. This is how Plan Colombia originated: a plan prepared in Colombia with the assistance of the United States and designed to "strengthen democracy through peace, security, and economic development".¹⁸

The Strategic Structure of the Plan refers to three elements which the Colombian government deems structural to the internal conflict: first, as a central element, to seek a political and negotiated solution to the armed conflict; second, a new approach in the anti-narcotics fight, that takes into account its adverse effects on the Colombian society and democracy, that must be fought under the international principle of shared responsibility -thus, the table of donors- and third, a set of investments designed to invigorate the action of Colombian communities, especially in the rural and conflict areas, assisting such communities in the strengthening of their financial capacity and democratic institutionality.

Basically, the Plan comprises ten strategies to reach peace, prosperity, and a stronger Colombian state. They are:¹⁹

- An economic strategy that generates employment, reinforces the State's tax collection capacity, and offers a viable economic force to oppose drug trafficking.
- A fiscal and financial strategy.
- A peace strategy.
- A strategy for the national defense and for the restructuring and updating of the Armed Forces and the Police.
- A judicial and human rights strategy.
- An antinarcotics strategy.
- A strategy of alternative development that will promote agricultural programs and other profitable economic activities for the peasants and their families.
- A strategy of social participation, aimed at the creation of collective consciousness.
- A human development strategy.
- An international orientation strategy that will confirm the principles of joint responsibility, integrated action, and balanced treatment of the drug problem.

The five-year Plan Colombia will have a total cost of US\$7.5 billion: US\$4 billion will be contributed by Colombia while the remaining US\$3.5 billion will be contributed by the international community, including US\$ 1.3 billion from the United States. This division reflects the "shared responsibility" between Colombia and the international community to solve the drug consumption and production problem. Nevertheless, the European nations have not yet provided all of the help anticipated by Colombia, due to certain divergence regarding the "military component" of the American aid and the situation of human rights in the country. The two-year term American contribution was distributed as follows:²⁰

- Military aid for interdiction:	US\$519.2 million
- Assistance to National Police	US\$ 3.1 million
- Alternative development	US\$ 68.5 million
- Aid for displaced population	US\$ 37.5 million
- Human rights	US\$ 51 million
- Judicial reform	US\$ 13 million
- Strengthening of the State	US\$ 45 million
- Peace	US\$ 3 million

Total: US\$860.3 million

The rest of the money was invested in interdiction operations conducted by the United States (amounting to US\$162.3 million) and in aid for the countries of the region, so as to reduce any possible repercussions in the neighboring countries and improve the interdiction system at the regional level:²¹

- Modernization of "Forward Operating Locations" in Aruba, Curacao and Ecuador: US\$116.5 million.
- Aid to Perú, comprising support for alternative crop development: US\$32 million.
- Aid to Bolivia, comprising support for alternative crop development: US\$110 million.
- Aid to Ecuador, comprising support for alternative crop development: US\$20 million.
- Aid to Brazil, US\$3.5 million.
- Aid to Venezuela, US\$3.5 million.
- Aid to Panama, US\$ 4 million.
- Aid to Trinidad and Tobago, US\$2.1 million.
- Aid to El Salvador, US\$3 million.
- Aid to Costa Rica, US\$1.9 million.

This package of regional aid is helpful but not sufficient. No provision is made in the Plan to avoid illegal crops from being transferred across the border towards Ecuador, Perú, Venezuela and Brazil. The concern expressed by the neighboring countries must be recognized, in the sense that the probable intensification of the armed struggle will provoke a massive migration of civil population and even the displacement of illegal crops and insurgent groups, together with the likelihood of damage to the environment. The Plan leaves open certain crucial flanks, such as those of Venezuela and Ecuador. Venezuelan and Ecuador must implement on time the necessary actions to reduce the impact, which will probably force them to commit their Armed Forces to perform counter-narcotics operations under conditions of military and technology support unequal to those of Colombia.

A transparent management of the Plan's resources by the Colombian Government and, particularly, of the resources allocated to social and reform programs, will have an effect on the system's stability and consolidation, since they are vital to motorize the peace process. In addition, the Government must meet in full all of the proposed goals, to avoid a reversion in public opinion with a greater weakening of the Colombian State.

MILITARY ASPECT OF PLAN COLOMBIA

The military aspect is not the principal component of the Plan. However, it is the most noticeable due to the wide press coverage it has received. Its Operational Concept is to "Prepare plans and conduct special joint and coordinated operations against the trafficking of narcotics in the next six years, emphasizing in the first two years the Putumayo and southern area of the country, so as to reduce the production, distribution, and marketing of illegal drugs and the traffic of precursors, raw materials, chemicals and weapons."²² During the first stage of the plan, the Military Forces, together with the National Police units under their operational control, will conduct location and intelligence, land, river and air interdiction, eradication, recording and security and area control operations, in addition to actions in support of the community. The goal is to reduce by 50% the price of the coca leaf in the area of operations. In the second stage, from the beginning of the third year, the Colombian Military Forces will concentrate their operations at the Meta, Guaviare, Vaupes, Arauca, Southern Bolivar and Northern Santander areas, with the principal objective of lowering by 50% the price of the coca leaf and coca base in the area of operations. In the last stage of the Plan, the Military Forces will conduct operations against drug dealing throughout the national territory, in order to gain the capability to sustain the operational effort and to reduce by 50% the production, distribution and commercialization of illegal drugs inside the Colombian territory.

The most outstanding aspect of said U.S. military aid includes a US\$ 318 million contribution to purchase helicopters. The three new Counter-Narcotics Battalions of the Colombian Army will receive sixteen (16) Blackhawk UH-60 helicopters costing about US\$ 208 million. (Additionally, two Blackhawk UH-60's will be supplied to the National Police at a cost of US\$ 26 million). These two new units will also receive thirty (30) "Super Huey" helicopters and the National Police will get twelve (12), at a cost of US\$ 120 million.²³ Here is where a significant change is noticed in the contribution of the United States to the fight against narcotics in Colombia. Compared to previous years, when the National Police received most of the aid, with the implementation of the Plan the Military Forces and, especially, the Colombian Army, have become the principal recipients of military aid.

The military component of the Plan will initially lead to a radicalization of the conflict since armed clashes will increase. During an interview with the Brazilian press, the Commander of the Colombian Military Forces, General Fernando Tapias, described the American aid as a "point of no return", recognizing that "there will be an intensification in the war before peace can be achieved".²⁴ On its part, the FARC's spokesman for international matters, Marcos Calarcá, stated that "with Plan Colombia the war will escalate to proportions never seen; the war will be generalized, because the plan is not only an aggression against the FARC but against the Colombian people".²⁵

Plan Colombia implies a high risk, therefore, the future of the country is at stake. Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that the Colombian Military Forces have changed. At an interview offered for the *Semana* magazine, General Fernando Tapias said, "the Colombian Army has never been better prepared than it is now. Just think that only four years ago the then Commander of the Army asked me for 40 paratroopers to counter a guerrilla attack. We could not do it. There was no plane, no parachutists, no parachutes. This week, we mobilized to Guaviare, in the operation of August 7, 3000 men in less than 24 hours." General Jorge Enrique Mora, Commanding General of the Colombian Army, said at the same interview "It is a very improved Army. Not only in numbers but in quality. From 60,000 men capable of operating we now have reached 110,000. And we have replaced high-school boys with professional soldiers".²⁶ All seems to indicate that due to the links between drug trafficking and insurgency, the Colombian Military Forces will need more resources to achieve the goals of the Plan. This would dangerously increase the levels of violence, which will probably compromise stability in the region.

At the regional level, the biggest problem of Plan Colombia is the way it was presented to the neighboring countries: as an accomplished fact, without previous consultation with the

interested governments. It is understood that Colombia, as a sovereign country, is at liberty to plan and implement such action as it deems necessary to solve its sensitive domestic situation. However, in view of the possibility that such actions may affect other States, they must be consulted with, in order to adopt in a timely manner any measures necessary to reduce their probable consequences. Maybe this kind of situation is precisely what the new "Andean Initiative" intends to avoid. This initiative has already been presented to the interested nations and it is aimed at procuring a consensus to design an effective strategy for fighting the traffic of narcotics.

PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF PLAN COLOMBIA IN VENEZUELA

Venezuela and Colombia do not share just a common 2,219 Km borderline. They are sister countries joined by similar historical, ethnical, cultural and economic identities, with common interests. According to calculations of the Venezuelan-Colombian Chamber of Commerce (Cavecol), the trade exchange in 2001 will reach approximately 2.7 billion dollars, generating about 250,000 direct jobs in both territories, and approximately 750,000 indirect jobs.²⁷ The migration to Venezuela of illegal Colombian workers is the result of the higher remuneration and the subsidies of the Venezuelan State, and corruption has been generated along the intermediate links that bring these workers to their places of work in Venezuela. The Colombian guerrilla aspires to fill the void of security among the illegal aliens and exercises the violence of kidnapping and extortion against Venezuelan owners. Along the Venezuelan-Colombian border a complex smuggling of persons, goods, illegal drugs, and weapons is present, which runs parallel to the legal flows and exchanges and which generates friction and violence in the everyday relations of the populations in contact. As far as the traffic of narcotics is concerned, the Venezuelan territory is utilized by the drug dealers in order to ship to the United States and Europe the illegal drugs produced in Colombia.

In view of the environment of insecurity at the Colombian-Venezuelan border, and due to Colombian irregular groups' incursion in the states of Amazonas, Apure, Táchira and Zulia, President Rafael Caldera activated the Theater of Operations No. 1 on March 15, 1995 and the Theater of Operations No. 2 on April 11, 1997, to "carry out and conduct military and other operations in order to guarantee territorial integrity, sovereignty and national independence, combat and eradicate banditry, terrorism, drug dealing and smuggling, being also prepared to accomplish missions of conventional warfare in the areas of their responsibility". These Theaters of Operations include more than 100 Border Security Bases along their areas of

responsibility and employ a great number of units and resources of the Venezuelan Armed Forces (See Figure 8).²⁸

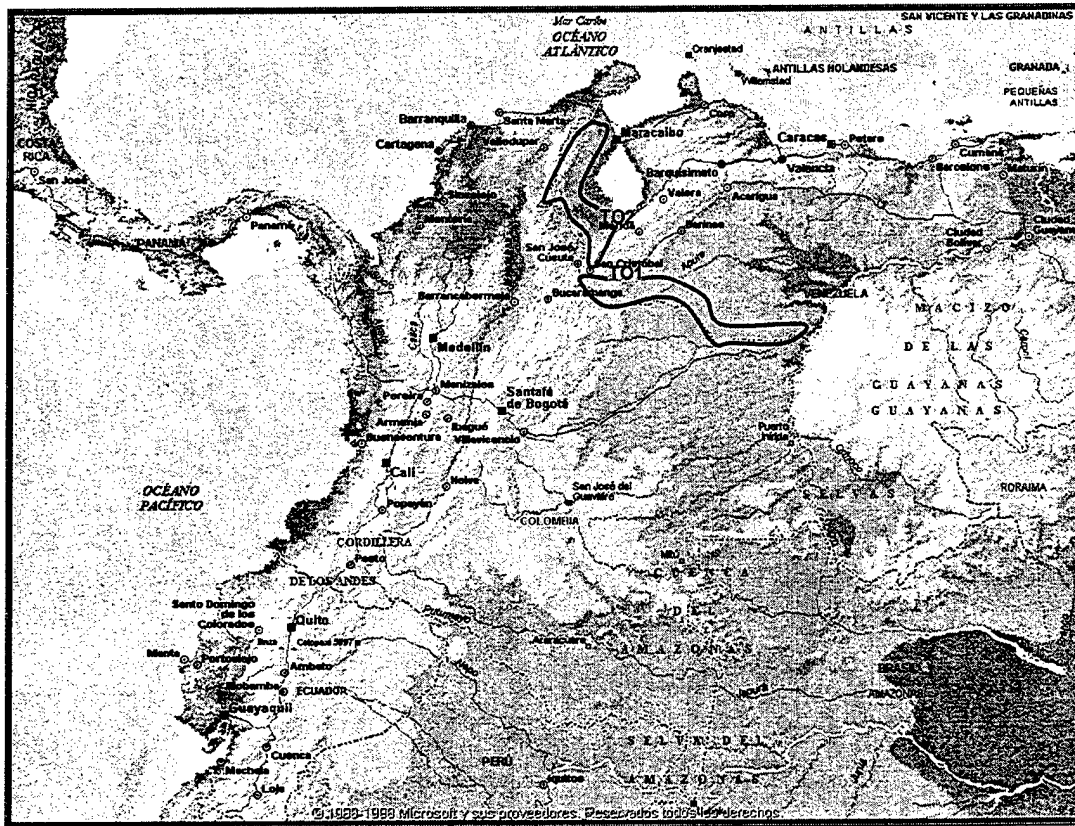


FIGURE 8 - THEATERS OF OPERATIONS 1 AND 2.²⁹

It is very early for the Venezuelan State to feel the effects of the implementation of Plan Colombia. This Plan is at its first stage in the southern part of the country. However, during the implementation of its second stage in the Departments of Meta, Guaviare, Vaupés, Arauca, Southern Bolivar and Northern Santander, and at its third phase that covers the entire Colombian territory, the consequences of the plan will be felt and, consequently, the Venezuelan State might be affected in the following areas:

SOCIAL AREA

Venezuela has a long experience in illegal alien migration from Colombia. At the present time, more than three million Colombian citizens have settled in Venezuela. While it is true that a large percentage of this migration has contributed to national development, it is not less true that in view of the current economic situation of the country, the Venezuelan State is not prepared to receive another large number of Colombian citizens.

The people domestically displaced in Colombia face one of the most serious situations in the world. There are more than one million displaced individuals in that country.³⁰ The main cause of these displacements is the political violence, associated with the domestic armed conflict characterized by human rights violations. However, displacements inside Colombia are not only due to the armed conflict; they are also the result of a deliberate strategy. The illegal armed groups try to solve their differences by attacking civilians suspected of sympathizing with the other side, and they do so with such extreme cruelty that, those threatened in their physical integrity, are left no other option but fleeing. In addition, fumigation in illegally planted areas also promotes the forced displacement of peasants.

Such was the case of a group of 600 Colombian peasants from the La Pista town in Colombia. They ran away from their country and sought refuge at La Vaquera, State of Zulia, in Venezuelan territory, on June 8, 1999. One week before, another 2,200 Colombian citizens took refuge in that same State, fleeing from violence in the neighboring country. Both groups were repatriated, willingly, to Puerto Santander, Republic of Colombia.

The Colombian Counsel's Office for Human Rights and Displacement has created an information system supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to calculate the number of displaced persons in Colombia, on a yearly basis. The figures below reflect the results of these estimates:³¹

Year	Newly Displaced	Percentage Increase
1985 to 1994	586,261	-
1995	89,510	15%
1996	181,000	26%
1997	257,000	30%
1998	308,000	28%

TABLE 2

According to these figures, at least 1 out of 40 Colombians is an internally displaced individual, and, in general, Colombia has one of the largest populations of domestically displaced people in the world.

It is for this reason, and based on the mid-year events of 1999 in the State of Zulia, that the Venezuelan State must be prepared for possibly receiving a large volume of Colombian Refugees, considering a likely increase in internal violence as a result of the implementation of the second and third stages of Plan Colombia.

OIL AREA

With the probable radicalization of the internal conflict in Colombia by increased armed clashes, the guerrilla groups in that country -especially the ELN- might increase their sabotage of oil pipes inside the Colombian territory, and at the same time might attack Venezuelan oil facilities near the borderline, which they would do with a double intention: to induce the Venezuelan Government to pressure the Colombian Government for a decrease in its military activities in the border area, and to affect the crude and by-products supply from Venezuela to the United States.

In Colombia, the most affected region would be Río Limón - Caño Novenas, with dire consequences for the production of crude oil in that country. In the case of the Catatumbo region, any oil spills due to guerilla attacks would have serious repercussions on the ecology of the Venezuelan water system. On October 22, 2001, more than 18 thousand barrels of crude affected the Tarra and Catatumbo rivers when the Río Limón - Caño Convenas oil pipeline located in the Arauca Municipality was blown up. Almost one month later, a new explosion was caused, so that in total almost 50,000 barrels of crude have been spilt on the Venezuelan water system this year.

In Venezuela, the probable intensification of guerrilla attacks against oil facilities could affect strategically important structures, such as those located in the state of Zulia and the way out of Lake Maracaibo (See Figure 9). There might also be affected, although with less traumatic consequences due to their modest oil production, the Venezuelan oil activities in the Apure-Barinas axis. The production capacity of this area is of 1 million 700 thousand barrels per day of crude and condensate, and two billion cubic feet of gas. It is expected to be 1 million 925 thousand barrels per day by the year 2009. The petrochemical complex of El Tablazo, with a production capacity of 3 million 400 thousand metric tons of oil by-products per year, and the Bajo Grande Refinery, with a refining capacity of 16,000 barrels per day, are located on the way out of Lake Maracaibo. To the North, in the State of Falcón, is located the Paraguaná Refinery Center, one of the world's largest, with a refining capacity of 940 thousand barrels of crude per day.³²

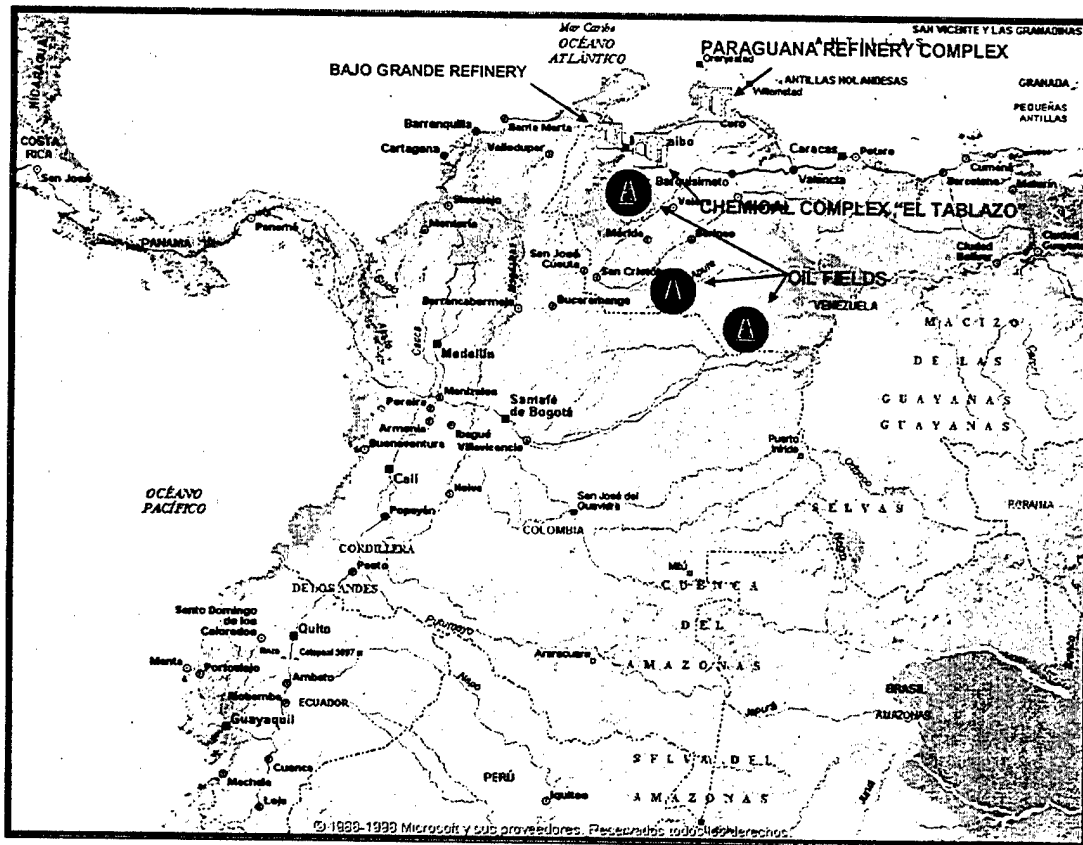


FIGURE 9 - VENEZUELAN OIL ACTIVITIES IN THE BORDER

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The impact that the trafficking of narcotics may have on the environment cannot just be measured in terms of the hectares or square kilometers affected. The very process of converting coca leaves into cocaine causes considerable environmental damage due to the irresponsible waste disposal of the toxic chemicals utilized in the processing. A study conducted by the DEA in 1993 on the production of cocaine in the region of Chapare, Bolivia, demonstrated that the production of one kilogram of coca base requires 3 liters of sulfuric acid concentrate, 10 kilograms of lime, 60 to 80 liters of kerosene, 200 grams of potassium permanganate, and one liter of ammonia concentrate.³³

Besides, the disposal of the chemicals utilized in processing the crop and in producing narcotics has devastating effects on tropical ecosystems. To get rid of the poisonous waste, the processors generally and indiscriminately spill it into the closest water flow, where the damage is significantly increased. Chemicals are likewise disposed of on the ground, where they can filter to the ground water. Excessively utilized substances can also be carried away by rain towards the local watershed. These chemicals harm animals and plants, whether directly or

indirectly, through the food chain. Coca growers also use significant amounts of toxic pesticides to help clear new lands and control weeds and pests.

So far, the eradication of illegal crops by air in Colombia is made employing glyphosate only, one of the most used herbicides worldwide. Currently, glyphosate is used in more than 100 countries, including the United States, where approximately 17 to 22 million kilograms are applied each year. Glyphosate is one of the less harmful herbicides available in the world market, since it only acts on plants laying on the soil when it is sprayed, and through contact with their leaves. Upon contact with the soil the glyphosate stops acting as a herbicide and is rapidly decomposed by the action of microorganisms. However, in order that the fumigation plan can have positive results, it is necessary to implement on time the Alternative Development programs contemplated in Plan Colombia, and to increase the presence of the Colombian State in rural areas. Without these policies, the efforts to combat drug dealing will be in vain.

Otherwise, the impact on the environment would be very serious, as coca growers will move their illegal crops to non-intervened areas, such as the Amazon jungle and the Venezuelan borders, which will force Colombian authorities to expand the fumigations, engaging in a vicious circle of significantly detrimental consequences for the environment.

The growing and processing of illegal crops has already caused substantial environmental damage to the Andean region, one of the most valuable ecosystems in the planet. As long as drug dealing prospers, the rich biological diversity of the area will continue to be in danger.

ORGANIZED CRIME

Another source of accelerated changes in Colombian-Venezuelan border relations, is the use of the boundary area as a pass for shipping drugs to the United States and Europe. This traffic induces corruption and violence and creates an additional resistance against Colombian immigrants in Venezuela. This situation has been propitious for the growth of local mobs and the creation of criminal networks related to drug trafficking, which surreptitiously avail of the degradation of the Colombian conflict in order to grow under its shadow.

The presence of new criminal groups in Venezuelan territory has been detected. These groups are made up of dissidents from Colombian subversive groups and elements from Venezuelan regular crime, who use the same *modus operandi* as the Colombian subversive organizations. It is not known for certain where the subversive action starts and where the action of regular criminals does so, though the truth is that this "bi-national delinquency" affects in equal measure the inhabitants of the border areas.

Now then, with the implementation of the second and third stages of Plan Colombia, it is very likely that the guerrilla and drug trafficking organizations will be displaced towards the Venezuelan border, with the intention to use the Venezuelan territory for coca crops and cocaine-processing laboratories. They could use those bi-national crime organizations as "points of support", in order to expand and consolidate their illegal operations in Venezuelan territory.

THE MILITARY ASPECT

With the implementation of Plan Colombia in the border area, and in view of the possibility of increased armed clashes with the Colombian insurgents, a greater information exchange and coordination between the Venezuelan Armed Forces and the Colombian Armed Forces is necessary. For this purpose, a Colombian - Venezuelan Border Bi-national Committee (COMBIFROM) has been created, entrusted to "inspect and supervise the compliance with the agreements signed between Colombia and Venezuela, and to propose any necessary amendments to the rules and procedures that govern the coordination levels established for its operation." The Effective Operations Manual (*Manual Operativo Vigente (POV)*) was prepared to this end, in order to develop and execute in a coordinated manner the operations between the Colombian Public Forces and the Venezuelan Armed Forces at the border areas, in an effort to minimize subversive action, narcotics trafficking, illegal immigration, and common organized crime, by implementing an effective communication and the exchange of information and intelligence between the Border Units of both countries.³⁴

In the last few years, the Colombian Military Forces have significantly increased their combat power to fight the Colombian insurgency. It becomes necessary to have greater transparency and an extended measure of mutual trust between both Armed Forces, to prevent from happening what the Secretary General of the United Nations, in his Account of the Organization's work in year 2001, has stated: "The combination between the fight against drug trafficking and the counter-subversion actions involve the risk of an arms race in the region and the extension of the clashes, displacement, and drug farming beyond the Colombian borders".³⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Political analysts believe that rather than a plan designed to fight the traffic of illegal substances, Plan Colombia is a project to fight Colombian insurgency. This view owes to the fact that there seems to be a "negative stalemate", such that none of the armed actors would be capable of overwhelmingly defeating the other. The U.S. strategy regarding the Colombian subversive groups can be derived from the statements made by a high ranking public official,

who said: "Though I share the opinion that the solution to the domestic problems of Colombia lies in negotiating, I am fully convinced that a victory in the terrain of war would set a precedent. This is a precondition to arrive at a significant and productive negotiation".³⁶ It seems then, that the real objective is focused on minimizing the FARC's finances, in order to reduce their armament purchasing capability, while the Colombian Military Forces are strengthened to counteract the military stalemate existing in that country.

It is clear that this situation involves a very high strategic risk for regional stability: if the close link between the insurgency and drug trafficking persists, Colombia's problems could spread and cross its borders towards Venezuelan oil fields and towards Panama, both of these being points of vital strategic interest for the United States.

The leaders in the region must call for a "shared resolution" to deal with the problems in the area. South American States must design their cooperation initiatives to face their own threats. They must define a sub-regional security agenda in which they might consider problems such as drug dealing, terrorism, international crime organizations, human rights, environmental protection, democratic stability, and domestic conflicts, among other things.

In this context, these countries have a duty to propose the regional mechanisms required in order to facilitate the kind of cooperation that does not merely intend the satisfaction of occasional interests but that lays down such rules as will propitiate, under equality of conditions, a permanent, ongoing cooperation in common cause. All this would form part of a new concept of security for the region.

The security and defense of the Colombian border does not depend on the Venezuelan Armed Forces exclusively. It also depends on the coordination of the various sectors involved in the nation's development. It is imperative to offer greater security and well-being assurances to the people of the border area in order to increase their presence in such an important region. Consequently, security and development are an indissoluble pair at the time of protecting the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of our nation.

In this respect, Venezuela needs to apply such policies in order to:

- Reinforce the security and defense efforts in the region. We have 2,219 Km border with Colombia in a complex geographical environment. Due to the length of the border the Armed Forces need to activate a new Theater of Operations in the State of Amazonas. The Venezuelan Armed Force must reinforce the Theaters of Operations with transport helicopters and with one Special Operation Battalion per component, besides the special counter-insurgency units already in place. For this kind of conflict these are the most appropriate assets.

- Strengthen strategic intelligence and enhance its coordination and efficiency. To achieve this, the Unified Command of the Armed Forces must centralize all the intelligence organizations –civil and military – to develop a more efficient and productive organization. Venezuela must increase the intelligence budget and personnel, to improve intelligence collection assets. Toward that end, the government must launch a plan for the surveillance of the Colombian – Venezuelan border, with a system of radars and sensors, in close combination with human intelligence to provide the eyes for the government to maintain and reinforce sovereignty in this vast and complex area. Intelligence has its cost, and that cost must be paid. However, intelligence should not be conducted by the public powers and the National Armed Forces only. For greater efficiency it requires the indirect involvement of the population.
- Reinforce the National Guard units in charge of security for the oil infrastructure. Venezuela's oil industry is highly complex and is designed with multiple technology and security safeguards to prevent disruptions. However, the oil industry is not immune to strikes from guerrilla groups. Intelligence organizations must assign as a first priority, the collection of information regarding potential terrorist attacks against these strategic installations, in order to attack and eliminate insurgents before they sabotage oil facilities.
- Prepare the Theater of Operations for possibly receiving a large volume of Colombian Refugees. To do that, each Theater must develop a plan to temporarily accommodate them, until the proper national authorities in conjunction with the United Nations organizations takes charge.
- Reinforce the judicial system to create a special legal framework for the region. To achieve this, the Venezuelan Congress must approve a special law against kidnapping and extortion, with severe penalties against these kinds of activities.
- Reinforce the police presence in the border area, for the protection of farmers and citizens in general.
- Promote health, education and roads in the region, to win the hearts and minds of the population in the area.
- Implement more and much better social, educational and cultural programs in the border region.
- Encourage the presence of radio communications media at the border, steadily expanding coverage in the area. It is imperative to locate along the border numerous

radio stations and also to have the television signal reach the entire region. This is a fundamental aspect for the development of the area.

Plan Colombia poses complex challenges to Venezuela and these must be carefully considered. The sole strategy that could minimize risk and secure actual control of this situation is one of critical cooperation with Washington and Bogotá, a strategy that, without subordinating to each other, may afford us the possibility of influencing the course of the events in accordance with our own interests.

WORD COUNT = 8,891

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