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**ALL TERRORISTS ARE NOT EQUAL – THE DRUG WAR IN  
COLOMBIA AFTER SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

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Immediately after the attacks of September 11th, the US Ambassador to Colombia, the Colombian military and other Washington officials began to couch the three major insurgency groups in Colombia as "terrorists." Since these three organizations are among the twenty-eight groups listed in the US State Department's "Profile of Global Terrorism," such a designation could drastically change the type of military assistance offered by the US in support of Plan Colombia. Currently, the US military plays only a "supporting" role in Colombia. This approach is "accepted" by other nations who have an interest in the drug wars and who also play a key role in ensuring Plan Colombia's success. If the US declares that it now considers the insurgent groups to be "terrorists" - and conducts military operations directly against them - the US may win the terrorist battle but will lose the drug war.



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Our war... will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated....

—George W. Bush, Sept 20, 2001

Six months after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks on the United States, President George Bush is considering taking his new “war on terrorism” to the jungles and mountains of Colombia. There, evidence shows, exists a dangerous and growing relationship between the illegal international drug trade and left-winged guerillas and right-winged paramilitaries. This drug trade, which promotes violence and international crime, is now termed a “threat” to US national security.

Today, since nations are reluctant to fund terrorist groups for fear of military or financial retaliation, drug trafficking is becoming the terrorists’ major source of funds. This scenario is taking place in Colombia and it is fueling what appears to be a never-ending war. Circumstances has forced a marriage of convenience- the guerillas and paramilitaries “protect” the drug traffickers and their illegal crops and the drug traffickers pay huge sums for their service. Newly rich, the rebels are able to recruit new members and purchase sophisticated weaponry.

The US military is currently allowed only to support counter-drug operations in Colombia. President Bush eagerly promotes a new initiative, which would permit limited counter-insurgency operations. These proposed new rules of engagement can be linked to the war on terrorism – which by association is now linked to drug trafficking.

The problems facing Colombia are indeed complex. However, they existed before the 1990s when illegal drugs became so prevalent. But when one understands the geography, history, and politics of the country, it becomes clear that an increased involvement of the US military, under the guise of fighting a war on terrorism, is not the answer. *Plan Colombia*, a strategy created in Colombia, is a solid foundation for building long-term constructive progress within the country. Adding more bullets and American soldiers to the mix will not end America’s war on drugs or solve Colombia’s internal problems, but may increase them.

## **DRUG WAR IN GENERAL**

At least fifty-four federal agencies and seventy-four congressional subcommittees are involved in battling illegal drugs.<sup>1</sup> Since 1981, the United States has spent between \$25 - \$30 billion on efforts to control illegal drug traffic.<sup>2</sup> In 1995, eighty-five percent of Americans

believed that stopping the flow of illegal drugs into their country should be our most important foreign policy goal.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, despite these efforts, the price of cocaine and heroin has decreased by a third, while its purity has risen twenty percent. In addition, the "illegal drug industry" is growing so fast; that the United Nations now predicts it generates \$400 billion a year in revenue – comprising eight percent of all global trade.<sup>4</sup> There are fifty million regular users of heroin, cocaine and synthetic drugs worldwide.<sup>5</sup> In the US, there are five million drug users needing "immediate treatment."<sup>6</sup> In the 1980s alone, 3.6 million Americans became addicted to cocaine.<sup>7</sup>

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) states that in 1999, 14.8 million Americans twelve years of age and older had used an illegal drug within the past month. This number compares to peak drug use levels in 1979 when twenty-five million Americans age twelve and over were "current" users. Even though the number of users in this category declined significantly between 1979 and 1992, the number of teenage users has gradually increased. Of the estimated 3.6 million people who met "diagnostic criteria for dependence on illegal drugs" in 1999, 800,000 of them were between the ages of twelve and seventeen.<sup>8</sup>

There have been many debates over how to best approach the problem of illegal drugs within the US. Ideas vary from stronger law enforcement to the legalization of drugs. Views of the success of the US's fight against illegal drugs has also varied.

Retired General Barry McCaffrey, former Director of ONDCP, has an optimistic view regarding America's fight against drugs – but acknowledges that the battle will take time. He suggests that what is needed is a Pan-American consensus that understands that "the drug problem is indeed hemispheric in its geographical extent, long-term in its duration, and broad-spectrum in its consequences."<sup>9</sup>

The Cato Institute, a libertarian, public policy research foundation, disagrees with America's counter-drug policies. It calls the international drug war "both undesirable and unwinnable."<sup>10</sup> Cato suggests that the US has "federalized the social problem of drug abuse" by its antidrug laws and has "intruded into the complex social settings of dozens of countries around the globe by pressuring foreign governments to adopt laws and policies to its liking."<sup>11</sup>

The success of the battle against illegal drugs is hotly debated. Every set of numbers used to defend one point is said to be out of context. However, the important point is that in

2001, a record seventy-four percent of Americans surveyed thought that the war on drugs was failing.<sup>12</sup>

## **POLITICS AND REVOLUTION IN COLOMBIA**

As in most countries, history and geography have played a major role in Colombian society. Colombia occupies the northwestern end of South America, and is the only country in the region with both Pacific and Atlantic coastlines. The country comprises an area of 1,138,910 sq. km with a population of 40,349,388.<sup>13</sup> Three branches of the Andes Mountains run north and south in the center of the country. This region, which includes the capital of Bogota, has "dominated the country's development, accounting for less than half of the national domain but encompassing 98 percent of the population."<sup>14</sup>

Spaniards landed in the region in 1510 and established the first permanent European settlement on the American mainland. Simón Bolívar won independence from Spain, then he united Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador in 1824. Eventually, Venezuela and Ecuador were "lost" to separatists, while the US "created" Panama to dig the Panama Canal. While Bolívar established the Conservative Party, his vice president, Francisco de Paula Santander, founded the Liberal Party.

The government has "never been able to rule wide areas of the country" because "if you don't like the [government] in Colombia, you have some of the earth's best terrain to avoid it."<sup>15</sup> Colombia has endured more than 20 civil wars since 1830. These conflicts, like those of today, were primarily waged between the Liberal and Conservative factions trying to seize control. The Conservatives promote a centralized federal government and a major role for the Catholic Church, while the Liberals seek a reformist and anticlerical form of government. Neither side has ever been very democratic and both have practiced a "democracy for the few."<sup>16</sup>

On April 9, 1948, Jorge Gaitan, a Liberal leader with a strong following, was assassinated. Thus began "*La Violencia*" (The Violence) - a civil war resulting in an estimated 200,000 deaths by 1960.<sup>17</sup> Besides Gaitan's assassination, the causes of *La Violencia* included party hatred, "repression" by the Conservative government and "popular aspirations for economic and social betterment."<sup>18</sup> It was a time when "Liberals and Conservatives ... drenched Bogota in blood, creating thirsts for revenge that have lasted to this day."<sup>19</sup>

In 1958 a "contrived stability" was restored under a political settlement known as the "*Frente Nacional*" (National Front), where Conservatives and Liberals shared political power

and alternated the presidency.<sup>20</sup> However, a “hardcore” rural guerilla group of former Liberal factions never accepted a peace offering of amnesty and became holdouts in “county-sized redoubts that defied the Colombian Army for years.”<sup>21</sup> Crime increased in the countryside. At one point in the 1960s, 120 of these groups were active - forcing farmers to carry weapons while working in their fields.<sup>22</sup> In reality, this violence continues to this day.

A communist-led offshoot of these armed groups eventually grew into the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) or FARC.<sup>23</sup> The FARC was formed by Manuel Marulanda and today, 40 years later, is a Marxist-Leninist movement with 18,000-armed guerrillas.<sup>24</sup> The FARC remains Latin American’s “oldest and most powerful insurgency.”<sup>25</sup>

During the early 1960s, the economic blockage against Cuba began and Fidel Castro “initiated a series of revolutionary movements in Latin America.” In 1965, a “radical Spanish priest,” inspired by a Marxist philosophy and supported by Cuba, formed the Army of National Liberation (*Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional*) or ELN in Colombia.<sup>26</sup> With 5,000 soldiers today, the ELN fights to nationalize Colombian’s oil industry.<sup>27</sup> The ELN routinely sabotages the country’s oil pipelines and kidnaps oil executives in the belief that multinational corporations steal natural resources and do little for Colombia’s economic and social development.<sup>28</sup>

Eventually, powerful right-winged paramilitary groups formed to “challenge” the guerrillas. Some of these groups have “close ties” to drug traffickers and the military, while others were formed to simply to protect wealthy landowners.<sup>29</sup> The United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*) or AUC, formed in the late 1990s, is the largest such organization. Carlos Gastano, whose “rancher father” was kidnapped and executed by the FARC, leads the AUC.<sup>30</sup>

While the paramilitary groups may have had some limited success against the FARC, in comparison to the army or national police, “they [also] represent a strong threat to the sovereignty of the state and the human rights of citizens.”<sup>31</sup> Groups like the AUC have increased “the levels of terror in the countryside and violence in the nation as a whole.”<sup>32</sup> However, while the paramilitaries are illegal under the Colombian Constitution, they are gaining approval from Colombia’s frightened middle class.

The Colombian Army and the national police have been no match against the guerillas and paramilitaries - who currently control up to 40% of the country.<sup>33</sup> While the army and police lack sufficient funding, money from the drug trade has allowed the FARC to purchase

sophisticated weapons, satellite telephones, and laptop computers. A high tech submarine, designed by Russian and US engineers to transport cocaine, was recently discovered.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, the rough terrain makes it difficult to find rebel encampments. Until recently, the best the Colombian Army could do was to simply "repel major attacks by the FARC."<sup>35</sup> However, training, supplies of spare parts and intelligence from the US are closing the gap.<sup>36</sup>

Andres Pastrana, a former television anchor and son of a former Colombian president, was elected president in 1998, "amid hopes that he could achieve a peace deal" with the rebels.<sup>37</sup> He ceded an "isolated jungle zone" to the FARC with a promise not to invade as an incentive for peace negotiations. This area, called the "Distention Zone," was roughly the size of Switzerland.

The peace talks were not successful, even though for three years the president "overlooked numerous guerrilla abuses of the demilitarized zone to keep the dialogue going."<sup>38</sup> It became obvious that the FARC was using it's safe zone to "recruit, reequip, train, and stage for operations against the government forces" and to grow coca.<sup>39</sup> Many Colombians concluded that the FARC did not want peace and President Pastrana began losing popular support.<sup>40</sup>

Reports show that popular support of the FARC has dropped to 4% of the population.<sup>41</sup> Elections in which FARC nominees participated, as well as public opinion polls, also show that most Colombia's do not support revolution. Therefore, with "politics ... effectively closed to them," the FARC and the ELN have turned to crime.<sup>42</sup> There are even signs that diplomats from Latin America and Europe are becoming convinced that FARC's commitment to peace is not sincere. One Latin America Ambassador stated, "Things have passed from hope to disillusion. There was a romantic perception, especially in Europe, about the FARC. But now they have gone from being Robin Hoods to, if not a criminal group, a group that is insensitive to human pain."<sup>43</sup>

Yet, President Pastrana held fast to his idea of negotiations and even gave "periodic renewals of the rebel zone." At one point, there was even discussion that the ELN, should be offered a "variant of a demilitarized zone" in Colombia.<sup>44</sup> Facing criticism, the president stated, "I did it at the cost of my popularity, using up my political capital and my place in the history of Colombia. But I kept going forward because it was my commitment to ... the nation."<sup>45</sup> The government hoped that a deal reached in January 2002, would pave the way for cease-fire talks and that Mr. Pastrana would have been able to pass negotiations on to his successor who will take over in August 2002.<sup>46</sup> By law, the president is limited to one term.

All hopes for peace were dashed on February 20, 2002, when four armed FARC soldiers hijacked a domestic airliner and kidnapped a senior senator.<sup>47</sup> President Pastrana immediately ordered the Colombian military to attack and retake "the zone." The US and the European Commission have both supported this military action.<sup>48</sup> President Pastrana stated, "The mask is off and the guerrillas have shown their true face, the face of violence without reason, before the world."<sup>49</sup> Tension further increased when Ingrid Betancourt, a presidential candidate, was also kidnapped on February 24, 2002.<sup>50</sup>

A majority of Colombians support President Pastrana's tough actions. Recent polls indicate that "Colombian society has shifted sharply to the right ... with most people ... having lost faith in the peace process and the rebels."<sup>51</sup> One shopkeeper stated that, "This peace process didn't make sense – it doesn't matter if there is a war. We are already at war."<sup>52</sup> Polls also show that most Colombians will vote for Alvaro Velez, a strong critic of the FARC and drug traffickers, in the upcoming presidential election.<sup>53</sup>

## **DRUG PRODUCTION IN COLOMBIA**

For centuries, the indigenous peoples of the Andean region chewed coca leaves to reduce the pain of hunger, cold and high altitudes. The coca plant also played a "symbolic role" in the culture, having "medicinal, magical and religious qualities."<sup>54</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, coca was refined into cocaine being used first as an anesthetic, then as a stimulant.<sup>55</sup>

From the 1970s until the 1990s, the majority of coca plants were harvested in Peru and Bolivia. Colombia was simply a "transition country," where coca paste was brought to processing labs, made into powder, then shipped to the US markets.<sup>56</sup> Eventually, the US took action to stop the flow of cocaine.

In Bolivia, an "aggressive" eradication program devised by the US reduced the land area under coca cultivation by fifty percent between 1997 and 1999. In Chapare, the country's "main coca-growing region," some 2,000 troops and police were used in the campaign.<sup>57</sup> There was also a crackdown on imports of chemicals used to process coca leaves, which led to a drop in the purity of Bolivian cocaine. The government also created new laws and training programs for judges and prosecutors to aid in the fight against the traffickers. Bolivia hopes to eradicate all illicit coca production by mid-2002.

While Peru was the world's main producer of coca in the early 1990s, its crop production yield has shrunk by two thirds over five years. Output plummeted after the government allowed

its troops to “shoot down aircraft heading for refining plants in Colombia.”<sup>58</sup> In addition, the decline of the Shining Path Maoist guerrillas in the country made it easier for troops to destroy coca fields.

While coca production in Bolivia and Peru decreased, it rose in Colombia.<sup>59</sup> This scenario demonstrates just “how fleeting victories can be in a drug war where national boundaries mean nothing to traffickers who can shift their crop across remote and poorly policed regions.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, expansion of the coca crop in Colombia “cancelled out” important reductions in the region. By 1997, “the Colombian producers took over the main market share,” and had become the world’s largest exporter of both cocaine and heroin to the US.<sup>61</sup>

In the early stages, Colombian marijuana traffickers began exporting small quantities of cocaine to the US hidden in suitcases. Astounding profits attracted the attention of local “businessmen,” who were able to process cocaine for \$1500/kilo in jungle labs then sell it in the US for as much as \$66,000/kilo.<sup>62</sup> Eventually, two organizations became the major players in the Colombian drug trade – the Medellin and Cali Cartels.

When the drugs were grown elsewhere, only “criminals” operated the processing labs in Colombia. However, with the source of imported coca reduced, the Cali Cartel began hiring peasants to grow and harvest coca in Colombia. Where previously the antidrug fight “consisted largely of jailing or extraditing a relatively few lab entrepreneurs,” the operation “now came to involve an entire economic class.”<sup>63</sup> Soon the Medellin Cartel was cultivating coca plants as well.<sup>64</sup>

The timing of the drug traffickers was perfect since the poor farmers had been “rendered vulnerable to exploitation by centuries of governmental neglect.”<sup>65</sup> The government had never provided the country’s peasants with “good nutrition, good education or a decent quality of life,” and there were no “attractive farm or employment alternatives.”<sup>66</sup> With this eager and knowledgeable workforce, Colombian traffickers became “far less dependent on Peruvian or Bolivian [for] cocaine base sources of supply.”<sup>67</sup>

By 2000, Colombia was producing 520 metric tons of cocaine annually – two-thirds of the world’s consumption.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, eighty percent of the cocaine found in the United States was grown in Colombia. Representative Benjamin A. Gilman, Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, stated, “What happens in Colombia on the narcotics front affects every school, hospital, courtroom, neighborhood and police station across America.”<sup>69</sup>

## **DRUGS AND POLITICS – COLOMBIAN STYLE**

Once the drug traffickers began to grow and cultivate coca in Colombia, they needed protection from the police.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, they made “temporary alliances” with guerrilla or paramilitary groups. These groups, in turn, charge a “surtax for protection.”<sup>71</sup>

Today the FARC “protects” more than half of the cocaine produced in Colombia, and receives \$300 million in surtaxes from drug traffickers and its own drug operations – providing a “better tax base than Bogota.”<sup>72</sup> People who have become displaced by the conflict, especially in the rural areas, seek jobs with the drug traffickers and guerrilla groups since recruits “earn twice as much as army conscripts.”<sup>73</sup>

Eventually, some guerrilla and paramilitary groups became “little more than bands of well-armed thugs extorting a fee for their services to drug traffickers.” In the 1990s, this “marriage of convenience” grew as both the production of coca increased and the US-sponsored crop eradication program began. It has been reported that the FARC offers a \$2,500 reward to any guerrilla who kills an American pilot.<sup>74</sup> In October 2000, the FARC shot down a Black Hawk helicopter for the first time – killing 22 Colombian soldiers.<sup>75</sup>

While the FARC still earns money from extortion and kidnapping, they receive a “large amount of funds” from the drug trade that allows them to purchase weapons and sophisticated equipment. The Colombian government estimates that the “illegal self-defense” groups earn between \$500 million to \$1 billion, while the FARC “controls close to a billion dollars a year in income.”<sup>76</sup> With such large financial gains, their struggle becomes a “for-profit war,” and “gives the guerrillas few incentives for peace talks.”<sup>77</sup>

This money also makes the FARC almost self-sufficient. They have been able to purchase automatic weapons and “satellite phones that give them a communicative edge over the armed forces ... They are wily at wiretapping and cloning cellular phones, enabling them to anticipate the government’s moves. They even use computers at roadblocks to check the bank accounts ... allowing them to pick out the richest for kidnapping.”<sup>78</sup>

The FARC denies that its cause is “supported” by the drug trade. On its web site, it makes the following comments:

The narcotics traffic is a phenomenon of globalize capitalism and of the Yankee above all. It is not the FARC's problem. We reject it. But since the US government uses the narcotics traffic's existence as the pretext for its criminal action against the Colombian people, we call upon it to legalize narcotics consumption. Thus the high

profits produced by the illegality of this trade would be suppressed at the roots, consumption controlled, those dependant on narcotics treated clinically and this cancer would be eliminated definitively. For great illnesses, great remedies."<sup>79</sup>

There are, however, indications that the guerrilla groups are becoming more involved the drug trade themselves.<sup>80</sup> When the Medellin and Cali cartels were eliminated in the mid-1990s, the guerilla groups stepped in.

Since the cartels had previously hired the guerillas to protect their coca field and shipments, the guerillas "were already familiar with the business."<sup>81</sup> Now there are "thousands of newly rich businessmen and guerrillas who supply more drugs than ever."<sup>82</sup> In March 2002, the US indicted three members of the FARC for "conspiring to smuggle planeloads of cocaine from Colombia to the United States."<sup>83</sup> Some observers state that this "competition" between the guerilla and drug traffickers has led some traffickers to create their own "private armies."<sup>84</sup> Such arrangements have led to increase fighting between all the combatants, with drugs becoming "the gasoline fueling the war in Colombia."<sup>85</sup>

### **PLAN COLOMBIA**

Colombia has a "powerful combination" of problems, which include the "lack of authority, legitimacy, and governance."<sup>86</sup> A senior US diplomat formally assigned to Colombia estimates that "two-thirds to three-fourths of the members of the Colombian Congress are corrupt."<sup>87</sup> As expected, "[a]s the Colombian State erodes, crime and politics merge."<sup>88</sup> One author has written, "At a certain point, Colombia ceased to have a state. Maybe it never really had one."<sup>89</sup> In 2001, US Department of State called Colombia, "one of the most dangerous countries in the world."<sup>90</sup>

According to Human Rights Watch, the "average number of victims of political violence and deaths in combat" rose from twelve to fourteen per day in 2000.<sup>91</sup> The organization also determined that "little progress beyond rhetoric" had been made in the peace process and that abuses were committed by all involved. It was found that individuals who spoke in support of protection of civilians "were eliminated ruthlessly by all sides."<sup>92</sup>

In 1998, the Colombian Army experienced "severe defeats." Military bases were overrun, armories were looted and the morale of the soldiers was low. At the time, a "reasonable estimate" would have been that the entire country would have been overrun in five

years if the situation did not improve.<sup>93</sup> The guerrilla movement even had the confidence to change tactics – moving from ambush, hit-and-run-type operations to the “use of 300 to 500-man guerrilla units in seizures of small towns and stand-up confrontations with regular units.”<sup>94</sup>

The military suffered from “poor organization and spotty training” – issues that raised concern in the US that the Colombian government might fall.<sup>95</sup> In addition, in 2000, Colombia designated only 7.5% of its budget to the military – which was below the amount designated in 1990, when the “crisis” was not so dangerous.<sup>96</sup> In comparison, the FARC earns almost \$1 billion in drug income annually, giving them “all the money they require” to continue their struggle.<sup>97</sup> It was seen that Colombia had lost its sovereignty and control over its territory to rebel groups.<sup>98</sup>

To combat the troubles facing his country, President Pastrana developed *Plan Colombia*. While it is promoted as a plan “developed, approved, and [to be] implemented by the Colombian Government,” the US State Department was “extensively consulted.”<sup>99</sup> The plan is a \$7.5 billion idea – with Colombia asking for \$3.5 billion from the international community to supplement its own expenditure of \$4 billion.

*Plan Colombia* purports to strengthen the government, while addressing the effects of unemployment and pursuing peace - it is not a “military strategy.” One writer described the plan as follows:

The central premise is that drug money feeds the coffers of the guerrillas, whose attacks give rise to the self-defense organizations otherwise known as paramilitaries. If the money going to the narcos is taken away, the guerrillas cannot mount the attacks, they become less threatening, and the paramilitaries have less reason for being. The prospects for bringing the guerrillas and the paramilitaries to the table for serious peace negotiations are enhanced because they have less justification and less ability to wage war against the state and each other.<sup>100</sup>

*Plan Colombia* is presented as an idea to give the “Colombian State a chance to reestablish itself before it is totally taken over by crime.”<sup>101</sup>

On January 11, 2000, President Bill Clinton announced an “urgently needed two-year funding package” of \$1.6 billion to support *Plan Colombia*.<sup>102</sup> He stated that the US has a “compelling national interest in reducing the flow of cocaine and heroin to our shores, and in promoting peace, democracy, and economic growth in Colombia and the region.”<sup>103</sup> One observer stated:

If the FARC wins, we will have the world's first narco-state. A mere 2 1/2-hour plane ride from Miami, there will be a safe haven for every international terrorist and drug trafficker in the world. It is a definite threat to our national security.<sup>104</sup>

Colombia has become the third largest recipient of US aid – though far behind Israel and Egypt – with funds growing from \$65 million in 1996 to nearly \$300 million in 1999.<sup>105</sup> While the US will supply a variety of financial aid, sixty-one percent of it will be for the Colombian military.<sup>106</sup> US support will:

1. Help train special counter-narcotics battalions, purchase 30 Blackhawk and 33 Huey helicopters, and provide other support.
2. Increase Colombian capability to aggressively interdict cocaine and cocaine traffickers and upgrade radar, aircraft and airfields.
3. Provide \$96 million to purchase equipment that will enable the Colombian National Police to increase crop eradication.
4. Provide \$145 million over the next two years to provide economic alternatives for Colombian farmers who now grow coca and poppy plants.
5. Provide \$93 million for new programs that will help the judicial system and crack down on money laundering.<sup>107</sup>

While *Plan Colombia* is promoted as an “international” plan, objections have been raised in Europe where some view it as having too much of a “military focus, which promotes the “escalation of the armed conflict.”<sup>108</sup> It is also felt that the plan was developed “exclusively” with the US and was not even translated into Spanish for four months.<sup>109</sup>

Some private organizations in the US have voiced their concerns about the military's role as well. Amnesty International predicts that the plan will “escalate the armed conflict and the human rights crisis.”<sup>110</sup> The National Council of Churches stated that the money used to support *Plan Colombia* should instead be allocated “for development assistance ..., support for a negotiated peace process, and for drug treatment and prevention programs” in the US.<sup>111</sup> The Cato Institute has expressed worries that military aid will be used in the fight against insurgents and not simply for counter-narcotics. They claim that “military hardware can and will be used for both purposes.”<sup>112</sup>

During an "initial assessment" of Plan Colombia by the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control on February 28, 2001, testimony was given by Donny Marshall, Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Rand Beers, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, US Department of State; General Peter Pace, Commander in Chief, US Southern Command; and Robert Newberry, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, US Department of Defense. These speakers supported *Plan Colombia*, but cautioned that time was needed to allow for the full benefits to be seen. Mr. Beers stated:

I am proud that the United States is supporting the government of Colombia in its commitment to making an all out effort to resolve that country's problems. With our assistance package, the United States has pledged much needed support. While operations begin and teams in both countries adjust to operational modalities, the process is now solidly underway. I am confident of the success of these projects and of *Plan Colombia*....<sup>113</sup>

There are signs that some members of Congress are becoming frustrated by the lack of success with *Plan Colombia* or with its emphasis on military action. The Bush Administration has promoted a new "Andean Initiative". This program, the successor to *Plan Colombia*, is a "two-pronged program that is supposed to fund drug eradication programs while funding humanitarian programs designed to encourage farmers to grow crops other than coca."<sup>114</sup> In October 2001, the Senate voted to fund the Andean Initiative with \$567 million - a reduction of \$164 million in President Bush's request.<sup>115</sup>

## **THE US WAR ON TERRORISM**

After the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, the US responded with speed and overwhelming military might against the Al Qaeda organization. However, based on the "words" and "actions" of the Bush Administration, there appears to be a desire to take the "war on terrorism" to other parts of the world. On September 20, 2001, President Bush stated, "As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror; this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world."<sup>116</sup>

Terrorism used to be funded mainly by nation states, particularly the Soviet Union. But as the Soviet Union dissolved in the 1980s, rebel and terrorist groups turned to organized

criminal activities for funding. Today, there are only a few “state sponsors” of terrorism – namely North Korea, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Raphael Perl, a senior analyst for the Congressional Research Service, states it bluntly – “State sponsors are increasingly hard to find. What world leader in his right mind will risk global sanctions by openly sponsoring Al Qaeda or funding it?”<sup>117</sup>

The links between terrorism and drug trafficking are real and growing. Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers not only protected suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden, but also were deeply involved in the world heroin market.<sup>118</sup> Steven Casteel, the DEA’s Assistant Administrator for Intelligence, stated that four days before the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, DEA agents seized 53 kilos of Afghan heroin distributed by Colombians in New York.<sup>119</sup> He explained that Al Qaeda expanded the acronym ABC (atomic, biological and chemical) to ABCD – adding drugs. “Drugs are a weapon of mass destruction that can be used against western societies and help bring them down,” Casteel said.<sup>120</sup>

During testimony on October 3, 2001, before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, Asa Hutchinson, DEA Administrator, made the following comments linking drug trafficking to terrorism:

Clearly, international criminal organizations smuggling drugs into the United States pose a threat to national security. International drug trafficking that threatens to undermine governments friendly to the United States, or countries that have strategic interest to the United States, is also a matter of national security concern....

I appear before you today to testify on the connection between international drug trafficking and terrorism. As the tragic events in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. so horrifyingly demonstrate, terrorist violence is indeed a threat to the very national security of the United States....<sup>121</sup>

Since October 1997, the US Department of State has published a list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). Other countries such as the United Kingdom, as well as the United Nations and the Group of Seven (G7) leading nations, also publish such lists. There are three statutory “criteria” that an organization must meet before it is placed on the list: (1) it must be foreign; (2) it must engage in “terrorist activity,” and (3) it must threaten the security of US nationals or the national security of the US. (The law defines “national security” as the “national defense, foreign relations or economic interests” of the US).<sup>122</sup>

The legal effects of designation are meant to strike a severe blow to a FTO. According

to the statute: (1) it is unlawful for "a person in the US or subject to the jurisdiction of the US" to provide financial or material support to a FTO; (2) members of the FTO, if they are aliens, can be denied visas for travel into the US; and (3) financial institutions in the US must block a FTO's funds and report such action to the US Department of the Treasury.<sup>123</sup>

Post-September 11<sup>th</sup>, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell published an updated list of FTOs. In a written statement, Secretary Powell stated, "As we embark on a long-term struggle against terrorism, I hope this list will draw the attention of foreign governments across the world to these groups and will encourage those governments to take action."<sup>124</sup> Of the twenty-eight FTOs listed, three are operating in Colombia – the FARC, the ELN and the AUC.

The designation of these Colombian organizations as FTOs has fueled debate. *The Narco News Bulletin* has described the US's definition of a "terrorist" as "confusing and arbitrary," and states that the FTO list "fails to distinguish between groups that cross international borders to do violence and those that do not."<sup>125</sup> *Narco News* writes that the list "mixes national liberation or independence movements" with other organizations that wish to destroy foreign governments. It argues that there are cases where certain FTOs are "no different from the American colonists of 1776 who fought for independence from the British Crown ...."<sup>126</sup>

The European press has stated that a democracy fighting terrorism faces a serious "dilemma" - how to concede that some of the grievances that lead ordinary people to support terror organizations are indeed legitimate, without at the same time condoning or giving in to, the violent means deployed.<sup>127</sup> It has also been argued that the US has a "shifting fidelity" since states previously listed as backing terrorists groups (including Iran, Syria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Lebanon) are new allies in "today's version of the 'war on terrorism.'"<sup>128</sup>

The US State Department has defended the list by stating that, even though the three Colombian FTOs, are "local," these organizations have "global reach." Richard Boucher, the Department of State spokesman, was asked if the list distinguished between "local groups that may ... commit terrorist acts within their own country, but really don't threaten the United States?" He replied, "[S]ome of these organizations that you might think were local in fact have various ties. The example of people suspected of being with the IRA showing up with the FARC in Colombia is one that we have cited before as an example that there are many activities between these groups, and you need to put terrorism out of business. And that's the goal."<sup>129</sup>

## A WAR ON TERRORISM VERSES A WAR ON DRUGS

President Pastrana has been “under pressure from the army and the public to take a harder line” against the guerrilla groups.<sup>130</sup> Frustrated by the lack of interest by the FARC in peace talks, and losing in public opinion polls, he is trying a new technique – classifying the guerrilla and paramilitary groups in his country as “terrorists.” During a five-day visit to the US in November 2001, President Pastrana insisted that the “drug trafficking conflict in his country amounts to ‘narco-terrorism’ and demands a international response.”<sup>131</sup>

The Colombian military, “never happy that the FARC [were] given a huge area of territory as a safe haven for peace talks,” is also beginning to make the “terrorist connection.”<sup>132</sup> They have compared their struggle against the FARC to that of the US campaign against Osama bin Laden.<sup>133</sup> General Jorge Mora, Colombian Army Commander, has stated that the “FARC have killed many times the number of people that bin Laden has killed and they have also carried out many more attacks.”<sup>134</sup> Such language is sure to bring attention to Colombia.

Despite the fact that Colombia is home to three FTOs, the US has long supported Pastrana’s peace efforts. However, an increasing number of US officials and members of Congress are beginning to support a tougher stand. *Jane’s Defence Weekly* predicts:

[T]he new international environment that is still emerging after 11 September is also destined to have an impact in Colombia’s remote jungles and inaccessible mountainous zones. It is becoming increasingly evident that Washington will not endlessly tolerate rebel attacks on Colombia’s civilian population and sabotage of the country’s key energy and economic infrastructure.<sup>135</sup>

By law, the three, US-trained Colombian counter-narcotics battalions can only be deployed in counter-drug operations and not on counter-insurgency missions. Furthermore, the number of US soldiers and contractors allowed in country is strictly limited – currently 400 each.<sup>136</sup> The “distinction” between counter-insurgency and counter-drugs has always been seen as “artificial, owing to the situation on the ground with armed groups having a strong presence in the drug-producing zones.”<sup>137</sup>

Links between the terms “terrorist” and “drugs” are beginning to show up in US government speeches and press releases. Both the Pentagon and the Bush Administration “are trying to tie the war between the Colombian government and the FARC to the global war against terrorism.”<sup>138</sup> During the October 2001, debate over funding for *Plan Colombia* in the

Senate Appropriations Committee, Senator Bob Graham called Colombia "the global testing ground for our commitment against terrorism."<sup>139</sup> This suggests that the US may be willing to "broaden the scope" of military aid – or at least remove certain restrictions.

On October 25, 2001, Anne Patterson, the US Ambassador to Colombia stated that *Plan Colombia* was an effective "anti-terrorist policy."<sup>140</sup> In addition, she said that the best way to "weaken and defeat" Colombia's terrorist groups, was to deprive them of income from the drug trade – a major tenet of the new US anti-terrorist policy.<sup>141</sup> Ms. Patterson has also compared the FARC to "Osama bin Laden and his network, Al Qaeda," and has mentioned that the US wants to "extradite certain guerrilla and paramilitary leaders."<sup>142</sup>

On October 10, 2001, Secretary of State Powell stated that the "events of September 11 brought home to us in tragic fashion the global reach of terrorists in today's world. The lesson is clear: To defeat terrorists, we must identify them, we must find them, and we must seize them wherever they are in the world doing their evil deeds or plotting new evil deeds."<sup>143</sup> In March 2002, Secretary Powell told a House subcommittee that, "It's terrorism that threatens stability in Colombia .... And if it threatens stability in Colombia, it threatens stability in our part of the world."<sup>144</sup>

On December 15, 2001, President Bush called on Americans to join in the anti-terrorism effort by giving up illegal drugs. He stated, "It's so important for Americans to know that the traffic in drugs finances the work of terror, sustaining terrorists, that terrorists use drug profits to fund their cells to commit acts of murder. If you quit drugs, you join the fight against terror in America."<sup>145</sup>

Even the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, created in 1998 by the ONCDP, has launched an ad campaign entitled, "Truth. The antidrug," designed to educate youth (nine to eighteen years old) of the "connection" between drugs and terrorists. Its slick, teen-oriented website states:

Drugs form an important part of the financial infrastructure of terror networks.... Drug income is the primary source of revenue for many of the more powerful international terrorist groups. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) receives about \$300 million from drug sales annually. The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) relies on the illegal drug trade for 40-70 percent of its income.... And the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which provided safe haven to Osama Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network, used revenues from opium and heroin to stay in power....

As state sponsors for their activities become scarce, terrorists are

increasingly dependent on drug financing. The combined force of their alliance poses an enhanced threat to regional stability, American national security and the future of our country's youth.<sup>146</sup>

US Attorney General John Ashcroft, during remarks to the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism on January 28, 2002, spoke of the "terrorism" that has haunted the West Hemisphere. He stated:

Although the Western Hemisphere has been victimized by terrorism for decades, the events of September 11 have focused attention on the growing threat from terrorists who operate on a global basis. Groups with links to international terrorists operate here in our hemisphere, laundering their finances, trafficking in narcotics and smuggling illegal arms and munitions. The possibility that these groups could violate our borders for the purpose of terrorism is very real.<sup>147</sup>

There may be good reasons why the US is now turning to the "terrorist card." There have been many cases of violence against US citizens within Colombia, where 120 US citizens have been kidnapped since 1981. Fourteen of the victims were murdered, one died from malnutrition in captivity, and several still remain missing.<sup>148</sup> In September 2001, a tape recording of Jorge Briceño, the military commander of FARC, spoke of attacking US interests in both Colombia and in the United States. Mr. Briceño stated, "To combat [US interests] wherever they may be, until we get our own territory, to make them feel the pain which they have inflicted on other peoples."<sup>149</sup>

In addition, there is evidence that the FARC has become involved with other terror groups overseas. In August 2001, three Irish citizens were arrested in Colombia and accused of training FARC soldiers. Two of the men are believed to be high-ranking members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the third is believed to be Sinn Féin's representative to Cuba.<sup>150</sup>

Arlene Tickner, Director of the International Studies Center at the University of the Andes in Bogotá, predicts that having the FARC viewed as terrorists could initiate a change in US policy towards a more "military-oriented, counterinsurgency position against 'terror groups'.... I would sense that seeing FARC as a terrorist group [might] be easier to sell to the US public and US Congress in terms of reorienting the United States' role"<sup>151</sup>

## FIGHTING TERRORISM OR SOCIAL CONDITIONS

In February 2002, President Bush requested funds to finance a second, US trained anti-narcotics brigade – to supplement the brigade already operating. In addition, he requested permission from Congress to allow the two brigades to protect “oft-targeted oil pipelines” and power-generating plants - which are critical to Colombia’s economy.<sup>152</sup> The units would be financed with the \$731 million requested by the president in his 2003 budget. There is also indication that he may ask Congress to “remove all restrictions on US military aid to Colombia.”<sup>153</sup> It appears, therefore, that the president’s strategy of focusing on the new threat of terrorist, wherever they are, may be at play in Colombia.

Some argue that the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks have provided the opportunity for hard-liners in Washington and Colombia to shift US policy from counter-narcotics to counter-terrorism. By equipping two brigades to “protect” vital Colombian interests such as oil pipelines and power plants while dropping all restrictions on US military support, that opportunity may become a reality.

There are strong arguments on all sides of the debate as to what should be done in Colombia. There appears to be agreement however, that the government is fighting a five-sided war – against the FARC, the ELN, the paramilitaries (ANC), a poor economy and illegal drugs. But focusing simply of the drug problem, or on the “new” terrorism threat, is not the answer.

The problems in Colombia are complex and interrelated. The guerrillas have been fighting the “government” for more than 40 years - long before the scourge of illegal drugs became a US national security threat. The actions of the US are being watched closely by Colombia’s hemispheric neighbors, who are always “mistrustful of how the US uses its military force.”<sup>154</sup> To assist Colombia in its struggle, the US needs to take a multi-faceted approach, not simply increase its military presence. The day after President Bush’s “State of the Union Address,” in January 2002, the editors of *The New York Times* wrote:

The apparent success of the Afghan campaign should not encourage Mr. Bush to overreach. As much of the world recognized, the attacks of Sept. 11 left the United States no choice but to defend itself, as it has done by dismantling the Taliban in Afghanistan and going after Osama bin Laden and his followers. There may well be circumstances that call for military action elsewhere in the months ahead, perhaps even pre-emptive strikes. Sept. 11 however, does not give Mr. Bush an unlimited hunting license. As a number of his predecessors learned to their and their nation’s dismay, turning too quickly or too frequently to the use of force can cost a president support at home and

damage American interests and alliances abroad.<sup>155</sup>

*Plan Colombia* was a starting point – it was the first real attempt by a Colombian President to earnestly try to heal his country's wounds. It should not be considered a "military strategy," but a "grand strategy for the remaking of the nation into a secure democratic society freed from violence and corruption."<sup>156</sup> General McCaffrey has stated that "*Plan Colombia* is not perfect – but the strategy does represent the deliberate will of the elected Colombian government in a good-faith effort to engage this intractable drug problem."<sup>157</sup> It should be considered a "living, breathing document" which needs periodic review, changes and modifications.

By increasing the US military component of *Plan Colombia*, under the guise of "fighting terrorism," President Bush would be dismissing several key factors. These include: (1) US public opinion; (2) concern of European and Latin American countries; (3) the need to continue monitoring Colombia's Army; (4) losing the focus on human rights and social reform; and (5) the US's need to confront its own drug problem.

#### US PUBLIC OPINION

An important consideration should be US public opinion. In 1999, polls showed that "a majority of the people would support greatly increased funding for efforts to cut off drugs at the source."<sup>158</sup> Thereafter, President Clinton announced a \$1.3 billion aid package for Colombia.<sup>159</sup>

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, President Bush promised the nation that there would be no more "safe harbors" in which terrorists could hide.<sup>160</sup> A *USA Today* editorial on September 13, 2001, asked:

Just how far does his rejection of a safe harbor reach? Will it apply to all terrorists? To all known to have committed acts of terror against the United States? To all those who might? In any country? By any means? Would we simultaneously attack Iraq, Iran, Syria and all other suspected sponsors of terrorism?<sup>161</sup>

The editorial concluded that, "The public, for all of its enthusiasm for war, has yet to even awaken to those questions. For any plan to succeed, both they and the soldiers who will fight will need answers. Congress will need to endorse them, as it did in the Gulf War."<sup>162</sup>

A sample of three recent US public opinion polls shows that public support of a military campaign against terrorism is decreasing over time. In one poll, eighty-four percent of the

public supported US military action against "any nation found to be aiding or hiding terrorists" in October 2001. By January 2002, that that number dropped to eighty percent .<sup>163</sup>

While Americans are currently strongly in favor of defeating terrorism and the holding countries that "harbor" terrorists accountable, the question is how long can that support hold? By every indication, we will soon find out. But despite the long lines of blood donors, the 88,000 American flags sold at Wal-Mart on September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the strong support for war in public opinion polls, it's not clear that the public is ready for war.<sup>164</sup> Nor will it truly be until the goals of future conflict are fully defined. Polls have reversed quickly when an unprepared public begins to recognize unseen costs in lives.<sup>165</sup> A downturn of US public support could threaten to erase the delicate gains that have already been made in Colombia.

#### CONCERN OF EUROPEAN AND LATIN AMERICA COUNTRIES

Increased US involvement in counter-insurgency operations would not be welcomed news in Europe and Latin America. While *Plan Colombia* is based on international support, not all parties involved support it. For example, the European Parliament opposes the plan, because it is "perceived ... as inspired by the United States with 'militaristic' and counterinsurgency purposes, and as having the dangerous potential for spillover to other Andean neighbors."<sup>166</sup>

The US-sponsored war on drugs has never been popular in Latin American. Many countries there believe that the US policy on drugs is "a violation of Latin American sovereignty," because the US attempts to solve its internal drug problems by "interfering in the internal affairs of other countries."<sup>167</sup> The countries also see the problem as one of demand, not one of supply. An editorial in a Colombian newspaper stated that "the principle problem of *Plan Colombia* is that it was conceived as a strategy to solve problems for the United States and not Colombia."<sup>168</sup>

Countries bordering Colombia, namely Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama, have all expressed concern about a possible "spill over" of the drug trade into their countries. Drug traffickers are foremost "businessmen" and consider moving their crops simply as a cost of doing business. Since "smuggling" and production costs account for only thirteen percent of the street value of cocaine in the United States, the "drug traffickers thus have every incentive to continue bringing their product to market," no matter where it is grown.<sup>169</sup>

So far, only Brazil and Venezuela have expressed concern publicly. Brazil's Foreign

Minister, Luiz Lampreia, stated, "We are concerned about *Plan Colombia's* possible effects on Brazil, in terms of military and in terms of drug trafficking. We have no intention of participating in any common international action."<sup>170</sup>

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has become a "staunch critic" of *Plan Colombia*, expressing worry about narco-traffickers and leftist guerrillas crossing his border.<sup>171</sup> However, he has also allowed FARC troops and supplies from the outside to cross his borders.<sup>172</sup> When President Chavez compared the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack in the US to the current war in Afghanistan, relations between the US and Venezuela hit a low point.

By increasing the presence of US military troops, or by refocusing the military training offered to the Colombian military to include counterinsurgency missions, the delicate balance between the US and its neighbors in the south will be further disrupted. In addition, our European allies will perceive this involvement as a new way to "Americanize" the dire situation that already exists.

#### THE NEED TO CONTINUE MONITORING COLOMBIA'S ARMY

President Bush's new "anti-terrorist" strategy has been described as a "limited effort to train troops to defend an Occidental Petroleum oil pipeline repeatedly blown up by rebels."<sup>173</sup> However, funding would allow the training of a new brigade of Colombian soldiers and provide the unit with 10 "Super Huey" helicopters.<sup>174</sup> While guarding the pipeline is the "first step," plans are also being made to expand the military mission to include protecting other potential "terrorist targets, including electrical pylons, bridges, and roads."<sup>175</sup>

The US needs to remain outside the combat role while still providing the "means" and the "know how" to Colombia to battle its internal wars. Increasing the role of US troops involved in counter-drug operations could increase the risk of direct military action against the FARC, ELN or the paramilitaries – as these groups are becoming increasingly involved in the drug trade. Since evidence shows that the paramilitaries are "aligned" with the Colombian Army, there is also the real danger of upsetting the "cooperation" that is commonplace between the US and Colombian militaries.

A democracy can only survive if it's citizens feel safe and secure. However, in Colombia, the army is not respected and, until recently, was not even combat effective. One reason for the lack of public support is "the ruling class's historic distrust of the military."<sup>176</sup> Traditionally, the army's ranks have been filled with the poor farmers and rural peasants, while

those with a high school diploma were “exempt” from combat operations.<sup>177</sup> Meanwhile, “the middle and upper classes in the cities remain insulated and aloof.”<sup>178</sup>

One argument against increased US military involvement is that it would be good for Colombia to “fight its own fights.” As one observer states, “The US aversion to counter-insurgency support may actually be in Colombia’s best national interest because Colombians will have to make their own sacrifices.”<sup>179</sup> Daniel Garcia-Pena, a peace activist and a Colombian Congressional candidate has stated that, “There are many [in Colombian] who want foreign troops to come do the fighting.... But I don’t think the world is willing to send it’s sons to die in Colombia while the elite here is unwilling to send it’s owns sons into battle.”<sup>180</sup>

US officers have not only helped make the Colombian Army more “professional,” but they have developed a plan to increase the number of uniformed soldiers in the Colombian Army from 12,000 to 452,000.<sup>181</sup> Evidence also shows that the one US-trained brigade is finally becoming combat effective.

Operations now reflect a more professional army – one that has “added tens of thousands of combat soldiers, reorganized its officer corps, instituted a merit-based promotion system and improved coordination with other armed branches.”<sup>182</sup> The Colombian Defense Minister, Gustavo Bell, states that “carrying out operations are now possible. Strategic areas have been retaken that until a just a few years ago were considered bastions or mobility corridors for guerrillas.”<sup>183</sup>

US “oversight” of the Colombian military should continue, if only because of the negative reports that still arise regarding the Colombian Army’s human rights record. A December 1999, report by Human Rights Watch states, “Cooperation between army units and paramilitaries remained commonplace.”<sup>184</sup> This is good reason for the US to continue its goal of making the Colombian military more professional as well as more “democratic” in its conscription of soldiers. Consideration might be given to condition any further military aid on an improvement in the Colombian army’s human rights record.

In addition, by infusing increased US military assistance, President Bush runs the risk of sustaining the guerrillas will to keep fighting, while at the same time giving the “hard liners” in the Colombia government more reason to end all negotiations. This would raise concerns, like those expressed by the Senate Appropriations Committee, that the drug war in Colombia is “drawing the US into a prolonged civil war that may pose grave risks for American personnel....”<sup>185</sup> The risk of entering a “quagmire” (to use a term that sends shudders through

American voters) grows.

## LOSING THE FOCUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL REFORM

In prior conflicts, such as Vietnam and El Salvador, the US faced the difficult task of “creating” government institutions before assisting in “reforming” them. In Colombia, the institutions already exist – it is not “a matter of wholesale construction.”<sup>186</sup> It is thought that the “mechanisms of governance and economy” are in place and will function well if allowed to do so. Corruption is not seen as too large an obstacle.<sup>187</sup>

While the US has promised financial aid in the area of human rights and social reform, progress has been slow as compared to the military assistance. Evidence shows, for example, that even though the coca fumigation project has “gone forward rapidly,” other “social” programs lack initiative. The US Senate Appropriations Committee reported on September 4, 2001, that:

[P]aramilitary violence has increased sharply, hundreds of thousands of people are displaced in their own country, and little has been provided in the way of alternative sources of income for Colombian farmers whose coca crops, and in some instances their licit crops have been destroyed.<sup>188</sup>

The committee stated that few of the funds appropriated in 2001 to strengthen the justice system, in particular the Colombian Attorney General’s Human Rights Unit, have been spent.<sup>189</sup>

Approximately seventy-nine percent of US financial aid to Colombia in 2001 was for military and police programs. Therefore, only twenty-one percent of the aid was earmarked for “economic, social and justice programs.”<sup>190</sup> A larger part of the President Bush’s new financial aid package should be used as part of a “long-term effort to eliminate the reasons why Colombians choose to cultivate drugs in the first place.”<sup>191</sup> These reasons include an historic, state neglect of rural areas, a weak judicial system unable to enforce laws and punish human rights abuses, and a lack of economic opportunity.

While the US has been proficient in providing military support, and is now planning to increase such aid, assistance for Colombian human rights and social issues has been slow. More involvement with such programs is essential for success in Colombia. As Ingrid Betancourt, a presidential candidate who is currently being held hostage by the FARC, has written, “There is no quick fix, but I am convinced that reclaiming our democracy is the very first step toward peace, and the sole condition for a true alliance against drugs and against terrorism between people of all nations.”<sup>192</sup>

## THE US NEEDS TO CONFRONT ITS DRUG PROBLEM

Peter Jennings of *World News Tonight* has stated that, "There's a fairly longstanding notion in the non-minority communities that if those evil Peruvians, Colombians, Mexicans and those dreadful cartels didn't exist, that we'd have less of a dreadful problem in the United States."<sup>193</sup> This is the view of many Americans. It is, however, a simple case of supply and demand.

The US must realize that the fight against drugs needs to be equal. As shown in Peru and Bolivia, "victory over drugs in one country does not curb domestic US drug consumption."<sup>194</sup> In fact, evidence shows that increased "pressure" in Colombia has resulted in increased coca production in Peru.<sup>195</sup> This shows that "eradication in one place simply pushes coca growing to another, given the continuing demand for cocaine, principally in the United States."<sup>196</sup> However, as expected, this change in venue also leads to a change in which "rebel" group gains the drug profits.

Therein lies the problem – a "ballooning" effect that is impossible to control.<sup>197</sup> Unless the US stems its demand for illegal drugs, there will also be a source – and always be problems. Even the FARC has criticized the US for its domestic fight against drugs. On its web site, it states that "US anti-drug policy has not changed at all since the 1973 Nixon Administration. Since then the logic has been to destroy the evil 'at its root.' And the root, for the US, has always been outside its own borders."<sup>198</sup> That is why, the FARC claims, that sixty-seven percent of the "anti-drug budget" is invested to operations outside the US, while being "content" to discourage drug use with "weak publicity campaigns, or 'racially' criminalizing drug possession and consumption."<sup>199</sup>

The US must come to terms with its insatiable consumption of illegal drugs. It is discouraging for citizens in Colombia to be terrorized by drug traffickers, knowing that if the US demand died down, so too would the violence in their lives. President Bush has promised to increase domestic drug treatment spending by \$1.6 billion over five years.<sup>200</sup> Such money will be well spent. The US "market" should be considered another front in the new war on terrorism.

## CONCLUSION

The long, sad war in Colombia continues. While the US-backed *Plan Colombia* is a good starting point to help the country, the plan is now being endangered by increased

military involvement by the US. The new US "war on terrorism" threatens the delicate and slow progress that has been made in Colombia and the US must resist the temptation to use it as an excuse to become too deeply involved.

By increasing the US military component under the guise of "fighting terrorist," the US would be dismissing several critical factors. These include US public opinion, the concerns of European and Latin American countries, the need to continue monitoring the Colombian Army, losing the focus on human rights and social reform, and the need for the US to honestly confront its domestic drug problem.

While production of illegal drugs in the country is a "current" sign of the Colombian Government's inability to govern the nation, it is not the root cause of the nation's problems. More progress can be made only if we pursue political and social reforms, and not rely too heavily on the military. *Plan Colombia* was conceived as a "social program" with military support – and it should not become reversed.

WORD COUNT = 9,856



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, 587.
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- <sup>10</sup> Vasquez, 581.
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