

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**United States Army Special Forces Support to
“Plan Colombia”**

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The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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ABSTRACT

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Today the US is expanding its military role in Colombia to include Counter-Insurgency. What will be the role of the US Army Special Forces and how can they apply their unique capabilities to meet Colombian and US Strategic Objectives.

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UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES SUPPORT TO
“PLAN COLOMBIA”



FIGURE 1: MAP OF COLOMBIA

Since 1964 Colombia has been engaged in an internal war with leftist insurgents. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) have continued to attack democratic institutions and civil society to achieve their goals. In response to this threat and the failure of the Colombian Government to protect the population, land owners formed their own security forces called autodefensas. These local defense groups formed the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), a right wing para-military group, which has been responsible for numerous murders and human rights abuses in their fight with the FARC and ELN. All three of these groups are now fueled by narcotics trafficking, extortion and kidnapping, and are a direct threat to Colombian democratic institutions and their ability to meet the people's economic and social needs.

United States policy has been to solely support Colombia in the fight against the narcotics trafficking. All the money, training and equipment were not allowed to be utilized to fight Colombia's internal war with the FARC and ELN. Since September 11, 2001, US policy has now shifted to include counter-terrorism. It is now recognized that the FARC, ELN and the AUC must be defeated in order to secure the peace and enhance Colombian Government programs to ensure the rule of law, human rights, and economic progress.

This paper will analyze United States policy towards Colombia, "Plan Colombia," and focus on the US military assistance required to best support Colombia's effort to gain control of their country and meet US objectives of stopping illegal narcotics production and shipment as well as eliminate lawless areas that can breed terrorist organizations that threaten the world.

WHY COLOMBIA?

Colombia is located in northern South America bordered by Panama (Central American links with South America), Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Venezuela. Colombia has four times the land area of California and a population of 43 million people. It is the only country in South America with both Pacific and Caribbean coasts. The country is divided into a coastal plateau in the west, a series of Andean ridges cut by large, navigable rivers and their valleys in the center, a plain in the east, and a hilly tropical plateau descending to Amazonian jungle in the south and southeast. A country rich in agriculture and minerals,

Colombia ranks as one of the great exporters of high quality coffee and emeralds in addition to metal ores. Oil has been discovered in several locations in the last forty years and is becoming more important for the Colombian economy.¹

Colombia's geographic location causes it to be the lynch pin of the Andean region. Instability in Colombia can have a disastrous effect on the whole Andean region. Already the

effects of the Colombian insurgency and illicit narcotics traffic have adversely affected Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Venezuela.

Colombia is responsible for some 75% of the world's cocaine production and 90% of the cocaine entering the United States is produced or passes through this country. It is now becoming a significant source of heroin as well. In 2000 alone, the United States experienced 50,000 drug related deaths and suffered \$160 billion in economic losses due to the illicit drug trade.²

Terrorism in Colombia both supports and receives resources from the narcotics industry, kidnapping and extortion, threatening United States citizens and economic interests. The FARC and ELN have kidnapped 51 United States citizens since 1992 and killed 10. Terrorist attacks have also claimed the lives of 3000 Colombians in 2001. Another 2,856 were kidnapped, with the FARC, ELN, and AUC being responsible for 2000 of these. Mainly targeting political or government representatives, it has also included 289 children.³

Beyond drug trafficking, terrorism, illegal arms smuggling, and other criminal activities, there are broad and important US national interests in Colombia that include stability in the Andean Region, trade, immigration, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and protection of the environment.⁴

- Colombia's gross domestic product is more than \$90 billion a year.⁵
- Trade between Colombia and the United States was over \$11 billion in 2001, with direct US investment of more than \$4 billion.⁶
- Colombia has important reserves of petroleum, natural gas, and coal.⁷
- Approximately 50,000 United States Citizens live in Colombia.⁸
- Colombia's eco-system and environment are increasingly threatened by cultivation of illicit drugs, whether it's by slash and burn techniques, cutting of tropical forest reserves, or the toxic chemicals poured by narcotics processing into streams and rivers.⁹

UNITED STATES POLICY AND PLAN COLOMBIA

“Plan Colombia”

“At the threshold of the 21st Century, Colombia is faced with the challenge of promoting and consolidating a society in which the essential obligations of the Colombian State are guaranteed, as stated in [the] Constitution...the fight against drug trafficking constitutes the core strategy...Colombia has already demonstrated its commitment and determination in the search for a definite solution to the drug trafficking phenomenon, as well as to the armed conflict, human rights violations and the destruction of the environment to which drug production is associated.” – Plan Colombia

Since 1999 the United States has been working with Colombia to dramatically reduce coca production in accordance with “Plan Colombia”. The United States provided military hardware, tactical training and intelligence support to the Colombian military for the purpose of conducting counter narcotics operations. The United States must recognize that in order to reduce the coca industry it first must assist Colombia in dealing with its insurgency problem. In order for Colombia to succeed in the counter drug war it has to eliminate the threat of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), The National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).

United States policy up to now has been limited to counter narcotics support to the Government of Colombia in its war against these insurgents and paramilitaries. These groups do not represent forces for social progress. On the contrary, they are after territorial control in order to remain in power and make money through the drug trade. Their tactics have been assassinations, kidnappings, bombings, and multiple human rights abuses throughout the country. The Colombian population and democratically elected government officials have been their primary targets.¹⁰

Colombia is a key to the United States interests in Latin America. With a population of 43 million people, it is the second oldest democracy in the hemisphere and it is an important trading partner as well. The United States sells more to Latin America and the Caribbean than to the European Union. Latin America and the Caribbean comprise our fastest-growing export market. The United States needs strong partners in the hemisphere to suppress illegal migration, drug trafficking, and terrorism. Only prosperous and stable democratic governments can provide the cooperation we need and this is why Colombia's stability is so critical.¹¹

“Plan Colombia” was a six-year \$7.5 million plan which called for substantial Colombian investment, judicial, political and economic reforms, modernization of the Colombian Armed

Forces, and renewed efforts to combat narco-trafficking. The Colombian Government has spent \$2.6 billion for Plan Colombia related infrastructure projects as well as projects regarding human rights, humanitarian assistance, local governance, and the environment. Colombia has also spent \$426 million on social services and institutional development. Primarily, the Colombia contribution to Plan Colombia is being used for counter drug efforts and social and economic development projects. Colombia has also continued to modernize its' armed forces, stabilize its economy in accordance with International Monetary Fund (IMF) guidelines, and has undertaken an aerial eradication program resulting in the destruction of unprecedented amounts of coca.¹²

The United States has supported "Plan Colombia" by providing \$1.7 billion to combat narcotics trafficking, strengthen democratic institutions and human rights, foster socio-economic development, and mitigate the impact of the violence on Colombian civilians. United States assistance up to this point has been used solely to support counter narcotics activities, which has included but was not limited to the following:

- Provided helicopters to the Colombian National Police and Military.
- Extradited 23 Colombian nationals to the United States.
- Trained, equipped, and deployed the Colombian Army's Counter Narcotics Brigade.
- Eradicated 84,000 hectares of coca cultivation in 2001 through aerial spraying.
- Worked with NGOs and international agencies to provide assistance to 330,000 Colombians displaced by violence since mid-2001.
- Implemented programs to help the government of Colombia reform its administration of justice and strengthen local government.
- Assisted the Prosecutor General's Office set up human rights units throughout the country to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of human rights abuses.¹³

The United States has been instrumental in assisting the Colombians during the first two years of the implementation of "Plan Colombia." Now it is time to expand the United States support to include counter terrorism. The United States must recognize the terrorist and narcotics problems --together--threaten Colombia's security, prosperity and democracy. Without that the Colombians will not be able to effectively combat the narcotics threat and be a key player in Latin American affairs in the future.¹⁴

Colombia is now into the second year of "Plan Colombia" with a new President who is intent on defeating the insurgency, eliminating narco-trafficking, and defending their democracy for a secure and prosperous future. President Alvaro Uribe is seeking military and monetary

assistance from the United States in order to assist Colombia in combating the FARC, ELN, and AUC. Although Colombia's military and National Police emerged as much more capable and professional forces, they lack the resources, manpower, and mobility to re-establish a safe and secure environment throughout the country. With Colombia's narco-terrorists increasingly supporting themselves through drug trafficking, it is increasingly more difficult for the security forces to establish a secure environment that allows protection of US national security interests, democratic institutions to fully function, and for political, economic, and social reforms to take hold.¹⁵

Fundamental security and stability are necessary for the government of Colombia to remain a viable, legitimate government and for other supporting programs to succeed. Military support alone can not win this fight. Alternative development programs, information operations, and civic action are all critical to changing the mindset of the Colombian rural population. Raising coca has been a way of life for many Colombian farmers and until the Colombian Government is able to provide security, infrastructure (i.e. roads, electricity, potable water, etc....), and economic alternatives to the rural villages they will continue to support the narco-trafficking in order to make living. However, Colombia must continue its aggressive spraying and eradication campaign if it wants to persuade communities to participate in alternative development programs.¹⁶

Human rights concerns must also continue to be a critical part of the United States Colombian policy. The Colombian military has made a concerted effort to correct its bad human rights record. In 2002 they captured 590 paramilitaries and killed 92 in combat.¹⁷ Eight military personnel, to include two colonels and a lieutenant colonel, were charged in civilian courts with collaborating with paramilitaries and committing gross human rights violations last year as well. The best way to ensure that Colombia continues to make progress on human rights is through continued US engagement.¹⁸

President Bush, whose administration has continued to ask Congress for an expanded role in Colombia, has specifically included Colombia in the new National Security Strategy.

"In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups. We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian people." – National Security Strategy of the United States, September 2002.

President Bush makes it a point to tie narco-trafficking to terrorists and states that the US will assist Colombia in extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian People.¹⁹ This will allow all United States agencies, specifically DOD, DOS, DOJ, and USAID, to synchronize their efforts in order to assist Colombia in its fight against terrorism's assault on its democracy, prosperity, and security. With these resources Colombia must continue to develop and implement a national political-military strategy, boost the resources devoted to security, implement economic reforms, improve human rights protection, and sustain vigorous and effective counter-narcotics programs.²⁰

Colombian President Uribe understands the necessity of having a social, economic and military strategy to win this war. Colombia does not want or need US conventional combat troops on the ground, but it does need training, arms, equipment, and intelligence to implement a successful military strategy.²¹

Colombia plans to establish comprehensive policies to eliminate the cultivation and manufacturing of and trafficking in illicit drugs and to strengthen the presence of the state and to ensure the primacy of the rule of law and respect for human rights throughout Colombia. In addition, President Uribe plans to adopt major reforms with respect to the budget and personnel of the Colombian military forces and furnish significant additional financial and other resources to implement those policies and reforms.²²

Already President Uribe has introduced an extensive, longer term tax and pension reform package, which has been submitted to the Colombian Congress, and is moving to cut bureaucratic overhead by seeking congressional and public approval in a referendum to reduce government operating costs. His 2003 budget also calls for increased government defense expenditures, which would increase military and police spending from 3.5% this year to a goal of 5.8% of GDP in 2003.²³

The Government of Colombia, under President Uribe's guidance, is completing a national security strategy which includes those elements described above as well as others needed to undertake a comprehensive campaign to counter the actions of armed groups engaged in illegal activities such as terrorism and drug production and trafficking that have plagued Colombia for years. The strategy includes commitments to human rights, dedicate more resources to the Colombian Armed Forces, and reform the conscription laws to make military service universal and fairer. These initiatives will build on the restructuring of the Armed Forces begun during the Pastrana administration (1998-2002).²⁴

Even with these changes the Colombia will still need substantial assistance from the United States. Currently the United States is in the process of adjusting its policy towards Colombia to include counter terrorism in addition to what it is providing for counter narcotics in “Plan Colombia.” This support will be critical in assisting the Government of Colombia in defending its democracy and the rule of law from the narco-traffickers and terrorists, improve respect for human rights and promote economic and social development.

UNITED STATES POLICY OBJECTIVES

In order to assist Colombia in its endeavor to remain a prosperous democracy, the United States has revised its policy objectives from the original objectives under “Plan Colombia.” The United States Policy Objectives are:

- Continue assistance to combat illicit drugs and terrorism, defend human rights, promote economic, social and alternative development initiatives, reform and strengthen the administration of justice, and assist the internally displaced persons.²⁵
- Enhance counterterrorism capability by providing advice, assistance, training and equipment, and intelligence support to the Colombian Armed Forces and the Colombian National Police through ongoing programs as well as implementing the new authorities and the pipeline protection program.²⁶
- Promote economic growth and development through support for market-based policies and implementation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the Andean Trade Preferences Act as well as the Andean Trade Program and Drug Eradication Act.²⁷
- Substantially reduce the production and trafficking of cocaine and heroin from Colombia by strengthening counter-narcotics programs that assist with eradication of illegal coca and opium poppy. Continue to advise, train, and assist counter drug organizations and units; dismantle drug trafficking organizations; disrupt the transportation of illegal drugs, precursor chemicals, trafficker supplies, and cash; address major cultivation regions; and respond rapidly to shifts in cultivation regions.²⁸
- Increase institutional development, professionalization, and enlargement of Colombian security forces to permit the exercise of governmental authority throughout the national territory while ensuring respect for human rights.²⁹

The United States will stay committed to assisting Colombia in its fight against narcotics trafficking and terrorism through these policy objectives. United States policy responds to

Colombia's social, economic, governmental, narcotics and terrorism challenges in a balanced and comprehensive manner.

The United States has undertaken a wide variety of programs to assist Colombia. These provide training, equipment, infrastructure development, funding, and expertise to the Government of Colombia and Colombian civil society in areas that include alternative development, interdiction, eradication, law enforcement, institutional strengthening, judicial reform, human rights, humanitarian assistance for displaced persons, local governance, anti-corruption, conflict management and peace promotion, the rehabilitation of child soldiers, and preservation of the environment.³⁰

In implementing these programs the United States Congress and the Administration have increasingly come to understand that the terrorist and narcotics problems in Colombia are intertwined and must be dealt with together. The training, equipment, intelligence support and other United States programs described above will now be available to support Colombia's unified campaign against narcotics trafficking and designated terrorist organizations. The new authorities will provide additional flexibility in assisting the Colombian government address narcotics trafficking and terrorism more efficiently and more effectively.³¹

In doing so, the United States will continue its human rights vetting of all Colombian military units receiving United States assistance and will not exceed present statutory limits of 400 United States military personnel and 400 United States civilian contractors providing support to "Plan Colombia".³²

As the United States continues to synchronize its assistance to Colombia, the Department of Defense and United States Special Operation Forces will continue to be a key contributor to the ultimate success in United States policy objectives and "Plan Colombia".

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SUPPORT TO PLAN COLOMBIA

As United States policy expands to include counterterrorism so will the support by the Department of Defense. Currently the United States Southern Command is training and equipping a Counter Narcotics (CN) Brigade, riverine units, fielding Black Hawk helicopters, training pilots and crews, infrastructure upgrades, and providing counter drug intelligence support. They also continue to be responsible for military training and support missions as well as providing continual support to the Department of State's military related programs. Operations up to this point have focused in southern Colombia, particularly in the Putumayo and Caquetá Departments, where approximately half of Colombia's coca cultivation takes place.³³

The CN Brigade is the best-trained and equipped unit in the Colombian Army. It has by far had the most success in securing the Putumayo and Caquetá regions forcing the FARC to establish their cocaine labs further away from the cultivating areas. No longer does the FARC own the military initiative in Putumayo and Caquetá Departments, but it is no longer strategically effective for them to attack Colombian bases and forces in the field. This increased security in the coca-growing areas means a better environment for interdiction efforts by the first CN Brigade and the Colombian National Police.³⁴

As the Blackhawk and Huey II helicopters are fielded DOD training programs continue to train Colombian Army pilots, crew chiefs, and maintenance personnel in airmobile operations. Night vision training and advanced or readiness level progression training will enhance the capability and survivability of these helicopters in infiltration and exfiltration of Colombian ground forces during counter terrorist or counter narcotics operations. In addition, training and logistics programs are on track to provide greatly enhanced air mobility capability to the Colombian Army.³⁵

In most of Colombia the rivers are the highways, especially in southern Colombia. Training of the Colombian riverine units becomes critical in order to control the vast amount of waterways throughout the country. The main objective of expanding the capability of the Colombian Marines is to interdict the precursor chemicals used in cocaine production that have traditionally been moved along Colombia's rivers. It is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of these precursors reach the coca-growing areas by the rivers. The Colombian Marines have had some success in this endeavor, while demonstrating the capability to transport the first CN Brigade to riverside labs and also protecting the river convoys carrying building materials to Tres Esquinas. These riverine units have established the first continuous presence of the Colombian government in areas previously abandoned to control of narco-terrorist organizations.³⁶

The steady improvement in the professionalism and respect for human rights and the rule of law by the Colombian military and the increased effectiveness in counter narcotics operations can be directly attributed to the training being provided by United States Southern Command assets. The increase in professionalism starts with the continued professional military education, and the confidence gained by technical proficiency, through training and resources available for operations.

As United States policy in Colombia expands into counter terrorism so will the United States Southern Command's role. US Special Operation Forces have carried the bulk of the load in the counter narcotics effort up to this point and as the US role expands into foreign internal defense the US Army Special Forces will continue to be a key player in bringing stability

to Colombia and enhancing the Colombian military's ability to combat the FARC, ELN, and AUC.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES IN LATIN AMERICA

United States Army Special Forces primary contribution to foreign internal defense missions is to organize, train, advise, and assist host nation military and paramilitary forces. The goal is to enable these forces to maintain the host nations internal stability to counter subversion and violence in their country and to address the causes of instability. Internal stability forms the shield behind which a nation-building campaign can succeed. Successful foreign internal defense missions can lead to operational or strategic successes for United States foreign policy.³⁷

Special Forces foreign internal defense operations include training host nation military individuals and units in basic small unit tactics and maritime skills, provide advise and assistance to military leaders, and provide training on tactics, techniques, and procedures required to protect the host nation from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency, and develop indigenous individual, leader, and organizational skills. In addition, Special Forces can supervise tactical operations conducted by host nation military units to neutralize and destroy insurgent threats, isolate insurgents from the civil population, and protect the civil population. Selected host nation forces may be trained to conduct counter terrorist missions as a subset of foreign internal defense operations.³⁸

The United States Army Special Forces have been involved in Latin America since 1963. They have conducted a myriad of missions throughout this time frame to include unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counter terrorist operations and humanitarian assistance to name but a few. The 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and later the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) have been the backbone of US military operations in Latin America for the last forty years.

Foreign Internal Defense has been a primary mission for Special Forces in Latin America. In 1967, Major Pappy Shelton led a team from the 8th Special Forces Group to Santa Cruz, Bolivia to train a newly formed 600 man ranger battalion. MAJ Shelton developed a 19 week program of instruction which called for six weeks of basic infantry training, three weeks of advanced infantry training, three weeks of basic unit training, five weeks of advanced unit training and a two week long field training exercise. This program taught the basic skills. Once those skills were mastered, more advanced skills were introduced. The field training exercise

was an opportunity to put all the skills into use in an environment similar to that in which the rangers would be operating.³⁹

This FID operation displayed the capabilities a Special Forces Operational Team Alpha (SFODA). The SFODA made a difference in the war with insurgents. Although the team did not conduct combat operations, it trained and equipped a battalion to such a level of readiness that it was able to go right into combat against the toughest of opponents, the elusive guerrilla.⁴⁰

MAJ Shelton and his SFODA performed in a very professional manner. In six months they transformed an ineffective army into a first-class fighting force that was able to capture the spirit of the guerrilla movement not only Bolivia but the spirit of guerrilla movements throughout Latin America- the guerrilla leader Che Guevara.⁴¹

Another example of US Army Special Forces conducting foreign internal defense missions in Latin America was their involvement in El Salvador from 1981 to 1991 during El Salvador's civil war. The US military's job was to improve the El Salvadoran Armed Forces' (ESAF) performance in the field against the Farabundo Marti para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) guerrillas and to make it an essential part of the solution rather than a continuing part of the problem regarding human rights.⁴²

US Army Special Forces began training the Atlacatl Immediate Reaction Battalion (Batallón del Infantería Reacción Inmediata -BIRI) in 1981. In 1982 Special Forces trained the Ramon Belloso BIRI and the Atonal BIRI. These BIRI Battalions started aggressive counter-guerrilla operations against the FMLN immediately upon graduation.⁴³

Still a small unit capability was needed to support these battalions, which were easily avoided by the guerrillas. 3^d Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group was given the mission to train the new Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (PRAL) Company. Operating in small teams, the PRAL accounted for hundreds of guerrilla casualties and were instrumental in disrupting guerrilla combat operation, logistical nets and base camps. Before the war's end each Brigade would field a similar unit. The PRAL proved that Salvadoran troops, with the proper training and leadership, could operate effectively in small groups and they set a standard for valor and lethality for the rest of the ESAF.⁴⁴

Fifty Five US Special Forces advisors deployed to El Salvador to serve as trainers and advisors called operational planning assistance and training teams (OPATT). OPATTs were two man teams assigned to El Salvadoran infantry brigades around the country. The senior adviser (usually an SF Officer) would train and advise the BDE Commander and the BDE Staff while the SF NCO would train the units rifle platoons. For nearly a decade the SF advisors trained, lived, fought, and in some cases died alongside their Salvadoran army counterparts.

Serving without high-tech weapons and with limited resources, the SF advisers relied on the most useful weapon in the counterinsurgency inventory: an intricate knowledge of insurgency itself. Their knowledge was coupled with the powerful rapport that they had established with the members of the Salvadoran military. Although limited in number, the SF advisers were instrumental in turning the tide of the war and reducing the human rights abuses by the Salvadoran military.⁴⁵

The US Army Special Forces involvement in El Salvador played a major role in bringing the FMLN to the peace talks and ultimately to the close of the conflict in 1991. Lessons learned in El Salvador by Special Forces units and soldiers can directly apply to the situation the United States finds itself in today in Colombia.

US ARMY SPECIAL FORCES IN COLOMBIA

Special Forces has been involved in Colombia now for the last 14 years conducting joint combined exercise for training (JCET), staff assistance visits, mobile training teams (MTT), counter narcotics training, and counter terrorist training.

In 1989 President Bush authorized Special Forces to deploy to Colombia to train military and police units in advanced urban operations in the hunt for Pablo Escobar. For the next four years Special Forces personnel assisted Colombian units and US national assets by continuing to provide training and regional expertise. The training, advice and assistance paid off on Dec 2, 1993 when Pablo Escobar was killed by the Special Forces trained Colombian police unit Search Bloc, in Medellín Colombia.⁴⁶

In 1993 Special Forces detachments formed the Operational Planning Group (OPG) to support US counter narcotics operations in Colombia. This was tied to the Andean Ridge effort to synchronize efforts across the Andean Ridge countries to stop the flow of illicit drugs to the United States. Special Forces personnel assisted in tracking unidentified aircraft by and passing the information to the Colombian military. Special Forces also worked to ensure US run radar sites in Leticia, San José de Guaviare, and Marandura Colombia were secure by assisting USAF personnel and Colombian counterparts in base defense.⁴⁷

The OPG expanded its role by assisting Colombian Police and the US Drug Enforcement Agency in putting target packets together on suspected drug laboratories. The expertise these SF NCOs and Warrant Officers brought to the table assisted the Colombians in taking actionable intelligence and putting it into an operational concept. This has been very effective and continues today.⁴⁸

The OPG was directly involved in advising and assisting the Colombian military in base defense operations and physical security requirements at Tres Esquinas airbase in the Caquetá Department. This started in 1999 and continues today as the Tres Esquinas base continues to grow and support counter narcotics operations in Southern Colombia.⁴⁹

In April 1999, the 7th SFG(A) deployed to Tolemaica, Colombia to start training the 1st Colombian Counter-Narcotics Battalion (BACNA). It was a 950-man battalion with a number of separate platoons to support CN operations. This took nine months to complete and the 1st BACNA became operational in December 1999 at Tres Esquinas. It was then decided to train two more CN battalions and a brigade headquarters. The 2nd BACNA was streamlined and reduced to 700-man battalion. Their training was completed in December 2000 along with the brigade headquarters. The 3^d BACNA was trained and became operational in the summer of 2001.⁵⁰

The CN Brigade is now the best trained and equipped unit in the Colombian Army. It has made impressive results during drug interdiction operations by destroying coca-processing labs, providing security to eradication operations, and seizing chemical precursors and coca leaf in southern Colombia. Since operations began in December 2000, over 890 drug labs have been destroyed and 119 people detained for judicial processing. The CN brigade has also provided the ground security for the spraying of 59,000 hectares of coca in the Putumayo and Caquetá regions. The government of Colombia's success in its spraying effort in Putumayo last year would not have been possible without the CN brigade's aggressive ground support to spray aircraft. In addition, there has not been one human rights charge against this unit since its inception in December 2000.⁵¹

7th SFG(A) detachments are actively involved in training the Colombian National Police (CNP) in counter narcotics and airmobile operations in Espinal, Colombia. They have worked with the Jungle Police and the Colombian Anti-Narcotics Police (Dirección Antinarcóticos -- DIRAN) to form airmobile companies in an effort to conduct quick raids on unsuspecting drug labs. This has been highly effective but could be even more so if the police and military started to conduct joint operations.⁵²

Currently 7th SFG(A) is continuing to work with the CN brigade by conducting sustainment training and assisting the Colombians in their efforts to reconfigure this unit to make it lighter and more agile.

SF detachments continue to work with the DIRAN and the newly formed CNP Carabineros. Training will consist of small unit tactics, airmobile operations, human rights

training, and humanitarian assistance in dealing with the population. The Carabineros will be the regional security that will stay in place after the military departs.⁵³

A Special Forces Company has just deployed to Arauca department, along to the Venezuelan border, to train the 18th Colombian Brigade in security operations. The 18th Brigade's primary mission is to provide security to the Cano Limon oil pipeline and border control. This is the first Special Forces mission that will directly target the terrorists rather than narcotics.⁵⁴

In an attempt to better organize to fight the FARC, ELN, and AUC, the Colombian Army is forming a small SF Commando unit, which will work in small reconnaissance teams to find terrorist camps and then call in a strike company to destroy the enemy. This is being modeled after the PRAL in El Salvador and MACV SOG from the US Vietnam experience. The 7th SFG will be involved in helping to establish the school for these soldiers and then to train the units in small unit tactics, night operations, reconnaissance, and airmobile operations. This is a big step for the Colombian military, which has been used to working at battalion level and higher in dealing with the guerrillas.⁵⁵

There is also discussion about a second counter narcotics brigade being formed in Apiay, Colombia. This has not been decided at this point and may come later. The 7th SFG(A) will have approximately a battalion's worth of officers and NCOs in Colombia at any one time on ninety day rotations to continue to assist Colombia in its fight to regain control of the country. Once this has been effectively accomplished the counter narcotics and alternate programs can then proceed without interference from the terrorist organizations, which now cause such a security risk throughout Colombia.⁵⁶

THE WAY AHEAD

The United States is taking the right steps now to include counter terrorism in its Colombian policy. It will be critical for the United States to continue to synchronize all the elements of national power; diplomacy, economics, information, and military in order to thwart the terrorist organizations in Colombia. Until security is assured in Colombia and the population can be protected from the FARC, ELN, and AUC all other US programs will fail.

President Uribe has made great strides in his first six months in office. He has taken the bull by the horns and is acting like a real commander and chief, something not normal in Colombia. He has imposed a war tax and declared war on the FARC, ELN, and AUC. He has directed that the military reorganize to better fight a counter-insurgency war. He has beefed up the CNP to include a new unit the Carabineros, who will assume the security role in a

department once the military has pacified the area. He has worked to better his human intelligence community by recruiting informants within the population and is looking at possibly organizing a local security element within the communities, much like the Sinchis in Peru. The United States must continue to support him in his endeavors in order to keep the heat on the FARC, ELN, and AUC.

Militarily the United States must continue to utilize the 7th SFG(A) to continue to work with Colombian units throughout the country. This could even expand to OPATTs with Colombian brigades much like the United States did in El Salvador. This will gain credibility for United States trainers and also assist in gathering needed information on what equipment is needed and training is necessary to enhance these units' capabilities.

Training should continue to consist of the following:⁵⁷

- Training and doctrine for night, joint, and small unit operations
- Improvement in collection, evaluation, and dissemination of usable intelligence.
- Development of quick reaction capabilities
- Enhancement of medical evacuation capability
- Improvement in logistics, supply, repair and spare parts inventory capabilities
- Improved transport and lift capability both day and night

The footprint of US forces must remain small. This mission can be accomplished within the 400-man cap now imposed by the US Congress. The United States must not give the perception that it is directly engaged in unilateral military operations against the FARC, ELN, and AUC. This is an internal struggle in Colombia and it must remain a Colombian fight. That is why Special Forces are the best unit to utilize to get the job done as trainers and advisors only.

Equipment supplied to the Colombian must remain simple and not high-tech. Other than helicopters, the US should stick to providing the Colombian units boots, rations, radios, ammunition, and lots of training-not expensive hard-to-maintain hardware. Mobility is critical and will continue to be an issue. The Colombian military will need helicopters and river craft in order to get to places quickly to respond to the insurgents.

The United States and Colombia need to continue to include the surrounding Andean Ridge countries; Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama, in a regional security plan as well to ensure the FARC, ELN, or AUC are contained in Colombia and can't seek refuge in

neighboring countries. The borders continue to be porous and will remain so until all the Andean Ridge Countries come to some sort of security agreement to flush out these insurgents.

CONCLUSION

This fight is winnable for Colombia and will help stabilize the country and the region. The United States must stay the course and continue to support President Uribe's efforts in eliminating the FARC, ELN, and AUC as terrorist organizations. This is necessary if alternative programs are to be effective in assisting the Colombian population, stopping the flow of illegal narcotics, improving human rights, and cleaning up the environment.

The United States is now committed to helping Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian people as stated by President Bush in his National Security Strategy. The United States must stay on board and support President Uribe behind the scenes, and with the help of all the Andean Ridge countries restore stability throughout the region.

WORD COUNT = 6,190

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