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UNITED STATES STRATEGY IN COLOMBIA

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

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US STRATEGY IN COLOMBIA - NEW OPPORTUNITIES

“In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state... We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory...”

George Bush, 2002¹

INTRODUCTION

With these words in the recently announced National Security Strategy, the president signaled new opportunities to break the deadlock in stabilizing Colombia.

Despite decades of US support to the Government of Colombia, the troika of guerrilla insurgency, civil disorder by paramilitaries and illegal drug activities has brought Colombia close to becoming a failed State. US support to Colombia has been restricted to countering the cultivation and production of drugs, whilst eschewing involvement in the military insurgencies. Recent events have raised new opportunities to advance US interests in Colombia.

The first change was the election of a more aggressive and progressive president in Colombia, Alvaro Uribe. Uribe has displayed a willingness to reassert government control over all areas of the country. More importantly, the Colombian Government has satisfied congressional requirements regarding the prosecution of human rights abusers. The greatest opportunities, however, are provided in the new National Security Strategy, supported by a domestic willingness to act positively and directly to secure US interests – finally burying the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ that has hampered US military involvement in developing states. These three factors provide confidence that instability in Colombia can now be brought to an end with US assistance.

¹ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America” Presented by President George W Bush. 17 Sep. 2002 :page 10

The purpose of this paper is to propose a revised US security strategy for Colombia taking advantage of the new opportunities. The paper then proposes a military strategy to support the recommended overarching US strategy for Colombia. Initially, this paper analyzes the Colombian environment including opposition strengths and weaknesses. The paper then proposes a security strategy taking into account diplomatic, economic, military and informational opportunities identified in the current environment whilst minimizing risks. The final step in the methodology is the development of an appropriate military strategy. To maintain the focus on future strategy, the paper assumes that the reader has a working knowledge of Colombian history and US involvement.

COLOMBIA TODAY

The Colombian Government faces a significant number of violent opponents. For the purposes of developing broad strategy responses, the groups are divided into three categories – guerrilla organizations, paramilitary groups and drug syndicates.

Opposition to the Colombian Government

Colombia's major insurgency group is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which has been active since 1948. Initially a peasant-led Marxist guerilla organization, FARC has become associated with the narcotics industry and cynical political power. FARC's stated objective is to overthrow the Colombian Government. The guerilla organization has proven capable of large-scale offensive operations with some 15,000 – 20,000 fighters. Nevertheless, FARC lacks popular support (five percent of the population) and is highly dependent on illegal and unpopular drug activities to finance recruitment and operations.

The National Liberation Army (ELN), founded by students and academics in 1964, is the second major guerilla group in the country. Initially, the ELN is seeking equal representation

with FARC in peace negotiations with the government. However, the final objective of the ELN is the establishment of an autonomous state within Colombia. The ELN has some 3,000 –5,000 fighters largely confined to the northeastern region facing Venezuela. Like FARC, ELN has little public support. Military operations are small-scale and restricted to criminal activities such as attacks on infrastructure and extortion of oil companies within its area of concern.

The paramilitary organizations began as self-defense groups to oppose the guerrillas in areas where government authority had broken down. However, under the umbrella of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the paramilitaries have evolved into a major political player with the objective of achieving legitimacy and equal representation with FARC in the peace negotiations. The AUC strategy is to violently oppose the guerrilla groups, but in doing so, they inflict severe damage to the Colombian population. The AUC has even less popular support than FARC and is also reliant on narcotics activities for financial support.

From a Colombian or regional perspective, the drug traffickers are not a direct threat to stability. Because of the economic benefits accruing to the peasants, the narcotics industry has a higher level of popular support than the other protagonists. The strength of the narcotics industry is the essential financial support provided to the other non-state actors. As a consequence of successful interdiction in the early 1990s, the large drug cartels have been replaced by many smaller and dispersed operators. The major weakness of the drug-traffickers is their dependence on successful FARC and ELN control of crop growing areas – the de-militarized zones.

Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia, announced in 1999, is the Colombian Government's national strategy to address the 50-year crisis. Whilst the plan contains ten economic, social, political and military elements, the most significant objectives are:

- a negotiated peace with the guerrilla organizations;
- restoration of Government authority, law and order in all areas of Colombia;
- eradication of the drug growing industry using quick reaction military units; and
- increased domestic support for the Government through improved agricultural development, social programs and personal safety and security.

The Colombian central strategy is to target the drug producers and traffickers, thereby starving the insurgents of funds for operations. Whilst the objectives are admirable, the current strategies have not produced the desired outcomes.

Regional Concerns

Colombia is bordered by Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil - all of whom have suffered from Colombia's inability to control the activities of the insurgents, paramilitaries and the drug traffickers. Panama has lost control of its border regions where FARC units import arms and drug traffickers export narcotics. Venezuela is concerned at the extent of illegal migration from Colombia and the destabilizing links between insurgents and criminals in both countries. Ecuador, already suffering from internal instability, is also struggling with large numbers of refugees and loss of government control to FARC in border regions. Brazil has similar concerns but is in a stronger position to respond to the threats. All five countries would welcome the containment of the Colombian factions but fear that increased military operations under Plan Colombia would drive more refugees and drug traffickers across their borders.

US STRATEGY IN COLOMBIA

The brief environmental analysis of Colombia today indicates that the opposition has neither domestic nor regional support. Uribe's government has shown renewed determination to

improve governance and security² with public support growing, albeit from a low level, with each new action. It is possible to end instability in Colombia and the flow-on effects in Central America.

United States Interests and Objectives

The United States has three major interests in Colombia. Firstly, Colombia is a major trading partner with more than 400 of the “Fortune 500” companies conducting business. Secondly, Colombia is the main source of heroin and cocaine shipped to the United States. Finally, further destabilization of democratic Colombia would produce a ‘failed state’ as a possible terrorist base close to the United States. Regionally, the United States is concerned with the effects of Colombian instability on the neighboring states. US regional interests include the security of the Panama Canal, the large oil reserves in Venezuela and preventing expansion of drug production to Ecuador and Brazil.

The objectives in Plan Colombia reflected both Colombian and US strategy through the 1990s. Whether either country believed that the central objective of negotiating a peace agreement based on autonomous governing regions would bring stability is a moot point. Previous Colombian Governments preferred to avoid action, and US domestic considerations ensured that the only acceptable strategy was one that addressed drug production and trafficking. Times have changed. The opening quote clearly sets out the US administration’s objectives in Colombia as:

- defeat both the guerrilla and the paramilitary forces;
- restore state control to all regions of Colombia; and
- restore law and order to all parts of Colombia.

² Wilson, Scott. “State of Emergency, New Tax are set by Colombia’s Leader – Campaign Against Guerrillas to Intensify” [Washington Post](#) 13 Aug. 2002: A08

The following paragraphs develop these objectives into a US strategy for Colombia based on wide-ranging initiatives to attack the opposition strengths and exploit the weaknesses through diplomatic, economic, informational and military means.

Diplomatic Initiatives

The first diplomatic goal is to ensure that Bogotá's policy priorities align with US objectives. The requirement is fundamental and should be a condition of future US support. Fortunately, Uribe has already shown a predisposition towards expanding activities beyond drug interdiction. There have been several high profile operations against the paramilitaries, and as this paper is being written, the Army is involved in a major operation to regain control of the regional city of Medellin. The second initiative is to convince the Uribe government to place Colombia on a national war basis with all activities directed towards the agreed objectives. This initiative would involve engaging the Colombian population in the struggle and increasing the resources allocated to prosecuting the war beyond the current 3.6 percent of GDP. Whilst the possibility of complete success in this initiative is more problematical, the minimum requirement, and a condition of increased US support, should be a substantial increase in resources allocated to defense and security. A war focus would serve both as a signal to the Colombian population and opponents that the government is serious and would serve as a positive example to the American public.

Since the armed struggle threatens to destabilize the countries beyond Colombia's borders, those states must become part of the solution. There are matters that are in dispute between Colombia and each of its neighbors that reduce the prospect of successful bilateral security arrangements. However, the common nature of the threat to Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil provides an opportunity for US diplomacy to broker a regional security

arrangement among those five countries, possibly with Colombia and United States as observers. The goal of the security arrangement would be limited to sealing the borders with Colombia and removing the safe havens that already exist for FARC elements in Panama and Ecuador. There would be a high likelihood of the proposal being accepted by Ecuador and Panama subject to additional military aid. Brazil and Peru would also likely join a limited focus coalition that advances their interests. Because of Venezuela's alleged sympathy and complicity with FARC, a separate diplomatic strategy beyond the scope of this paper would be needed. However, a security arrangement without formal Venezuelan involvement would be satisfactory.

Economic Initiatives

There are two major features of Colombian geopolitics that have extended the struggle with the enemy. Firstly, whilst the population does not support the ideals and objectives of the protagonists, many Colombians do support the growth and production of drugs out of the simple necessity for jobs and survival. Secondly, both the insurgents and the narcotics' producers are able to operate in up to 50 percent of the country because of the almost total lack of infrastructure. The two issues are linked – the lack of infrastructure militates against introducing successful legal industries. The obvious solution is to fund alternative industries and provide the transport links that support commercial and security operations.

Regrettably, extant security problems and the likelihood of escalating military action to end the insurgency are incompatible with civil construction and encouraging new commercial activities. Further, the extensive funding required to bring about these changes would come at the expense of funds needed to achieve the three primary security objectives. Whilst economic initiatives are not practical at the restoration of sovereignty and security stage, they would be

essential in the follow-on phase of providing permanent stability when the requirement to fund security operations had reduced for both Colombia and the United States.

Informational Initiatives

Whilst the Colombian people and the anti-government forces are two separate targets for informational initiatives, one strategy would suffice. The major initiative in Colombia would be to support Uribe's efforts in sending the signal that the nation is at war to achieve sovereignty and security over all national territory in the short-term. The messages must be clear – the protracted conflict will be brought to an end and government control over all areas of Colombia is not negotiable. Combined with the economic recovery proposals promised for the end of the conflict, both messages would likely be well received by the Colombian people. A strong campaign and apparent increased support for Uribe would encourage the anti-government groups to negotiate more faithfully and modify claims at the peace talks. This low cost strategy is designed to turn the extant lack of support for the insurgents and paramilitaries into positive support for the government. The strategy would have a high probability of success.

Political Initiatives

Both the US public and Congress have been consistently reluctant to provide support to Colombia beyond the drug interdiction efforts that were considered a direct national interest. The strategy outlined can only progress if Americans believe that the situation has changed. Congress now understands the links between terrorism and failing states – Afghanistan was once only a US concern for its narcotics production and shipment to the United States. Colombia has also changed. With the progressive move to an all-volunteer force, the Colombian military has become more professional, with a willingness to engage in direct combat, reduce unofficial ties with the paramilitaries and accept human rights responsibilities. These progressive changes,

supported by the proposed increased financial and governance commitments by the Colombian government, should be used to convince Congress that the instability in Colombia can be brought to an end.

Military Initiatives

The first two objectives in the US National Security Strategy – defeat both the guerrilla and paramilitary forces and recapture territory under enemy control are military tasks. Three questions arise – can the enemy be defeated at an acceptable cost; can the Colombian military achieve the objectives alone; and if not, what level of US assistance would be required?

The first question has been largely addressed in the previous discussion. The enemy forces do not have popular support domestically or internationally, they have been unable to achieve success in fifty years against past less effective Colombian governments and military forces and, if the neighbors' borders were secured, there would be no possibility of reinforcement of their combat forces. The combined enemy force of some 35,000 can be defeated in combat.

The diverse range of enemies and their strengths and disposition, precludes the Colombian military from conducting intensive offensive operations whilst defending the cities and infrastructure. The geography of Colombia also requires extensive air support to conduct military offensive action – a capability that Colombia does not have in sufficient quantity to strike a series of crippling blows on the enemy. Military support, particularly aviation assets, and training would need to be provided. Additionally, any new equipment and increased training personnel could not be employed by the Colombian military for a lengthy period. Early decisive action to convince both the Colombians and Congress that the conflict could be ended and that further effort would be worthwhile is an essential element of the complete strategy. Timely and

decisive action could only be achieved with a level of direct US military support to Colombian operations. The extent of that support and risk analysis will be addressed in the remainder of the paper.

THE MILITARY STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The discussion on ‘Colombia Today’ provided an overview of the Colombian environment to determine a broad strategy response to that country’s crisis. This section addresses the military environment in more detail to support the development of a specific military strategy.

Opposition Forces

Whilst the long-term goal of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is the establishment of a Marxist state in Colombia, the current strategic objectives are assessed to be:

- maintain control of the de-militarized region, *zona de despeje*, that FARC uses for coca production to finance operations and recruiting;
- control the strategic transport corridors that permit rapid response across the country;
- isolate the capital, Bogotá, and other vulnerable interior cities; and
- initiate a large-scale offensive and general uprising when the planned strength of 30,000 fighters is achieved.

Reflecting 36 years of experience, FARC forces are well organized into geographical regions across the country and functional groups such as logistics and intelligence. FARC conducts large-scale military operations with modern weapons, including shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles. The weapons are mainly transported overland from Panama on the same route as the outgoing drugs that pay for the arms. FARC’s weakness is the lack of public support and the

consequent resort to terrorizing community leaders and associating with criminals in the drug industry.

The National Liberation Army (ELN) restricts operations to a small region in the northeast of Colombia. The ELN generally avoids government targets and confrontation with the Colombian Army. It adopts a strategy of attacking economic targets associated with the oil industry. With active FARC infiltration and threatened government attacks, ELN's short-term objective is to maintain control over its own de-militarized zone.

The various paramilitary organizations originated as either privately funded armies to protect infrastructure and industries or as vigilante groups seeking to protect the population in areas where law and order had broken down. Their targets have primarily been the FARC and other guerrilla groups. Under the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the paramilitaries have waged a brutal campaign. AUC's weakness has been its association with criminal drug activities, brutal actions against civilian 'suspects' and serious human rights abuses. Whilst the AUC does not attack government forces, international condemnation of AUC brutality has brought government retaliation, recently demonstrated by the ambush of 45, and deaths of 24 paramilitary soldiers by the Colombian Army in August 2002.³ The further effect of this weakness has been the internal fracturing of the AUC as various paramilitary components oppose the AUC methods and expanded goal of seeking a place in government in its own right.⁴

The joint Colombian – US effort committed to breaking the major drug organizations during the 1980s and 1990s was successful in reducing the military-like power of the Cali and Medellin cartels. However, the Colombian drug business is now in the hands of an estimated 140 small operators solely concerned with growing, manufacturing and trafficking narcotics. As

³ Wilson. Scott. "24 Dead, but Alliance Endures" Washington Post, 18 Sep 2002: A16

⁴ Wilson. Scott. "Cocaine Trade Causes Rifts in Colombian War" Washington Post, 16 Sep 2002: A1

such, their contribution to the conflict is their ability to finance the combatants rather than being considered as a military threat.

Colombian Forces

The transformation of the Colombia military from a defensive force to an offensive force followed military defeats in 1998. A strike force of 4000 soldiers trained as a rapid deployment force spearheads the Colombian Army. However, more than half of Colombia's 144,000 military personnel are necessarily employed in defending fixed installations and critical infrastructure points, border protection or undergoing training. The point defensive requirement is a major limitation on Colombian military operations. The critical capability deficiency is in air mobility and strike assets. Even when helicopters have been provided as foreign aid, their use has been restricted to anti-drug operations rather than supporting counter-insurgency tasks. Colombian morale has improved considerably with recent successes, however the lack of back-up fire support, medical evacuation equipment and secure home bases still results in a reluctance to take the fight to the enemy in the jungle.

US Military Constraints

Considering the size of the opposing forces, the United States has the military resources to accomplish the objectives unilaterally – the constraints are political. The political desire in both Colombia and the United States will be for Colombian forces to accomplish as much of the offensive action as possible, with the US military supplying capabilities that cannot be provided by Colombia.

THE GRAND STRATEGY FOR COLOMBIA

Political Objectives

The Colombian situation is somewhat unusual in that the publicly stated political objectives are actually those sought by all parties. Those objectives are firstly, the restoration of state authority over all Colombian territory and secondly, the restoration of law and order through the defeat (militarily or politically) of the illegal armed forces. The only implied objective is the elimination of Colombia as the major base for production of narcotics entering the United States – and this objective has the support of all parties. This unambiguous direction bodes well for a satisfactory result.

Military Objectives

In simple terms, the first political objective can be translated into the military objective to restore military control, and subsequently civil authority, over the two de-militarized regions under the control of FARC and ELN.

The restoration of law and order throughout Colombia translates into a military objective of directly defeating the armed protagonists. Because the insurgents, paramilitaries and drug traffickers have different strengths, weaknesses and goals, the strategy for defeating each group will vary.

The Grand Strategy for the Colombian Campaign

This paper is primarily concerned with the US military strategy for Colombia. Prior to considering the extent of US involvement, it is essential to consider the grand strategy for the Colombian campaign. The grand strategy must be the agreed position of both Colombia and the United States.

In addressing the first objective, two questions arise. Should the two regions be recaptured simultaneously, and if not, which should be taken first? In considering offensive war, the Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz wrote "...a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies must be directed."⁵ The center of strength of all the forces aligned against the Colombian government is the competent and experienced force of FARC fighters-- they should be the first target. A decisive attack on FARC's center of gravity would weaken the most dangerous enemy, serve as a warning to the much weaker ELN and encourage the Colombian people and army to make greater efforts. Whilst the drug crops are very important for financing FARC operations, it is the safe haven region itself that represents the center of gravity of the FARC. The 42,000 square kilometer de-militarized zone provides FARC with new recruits, safe training and logistics facilities, and respite areas in addition to the financial resources provided by drug operations and 'taxation' of the peasants. The importance to FARC of total control over the region explains the relative ineffectiveness of the current Colombian – US strategy of crop eradication whilst conceding territory control to FARC. This first phase of the strategy, the capture of the *zona de despeje*, would be a major air land engagement.

The return of the FARC territory to Colombian control would have several beneficial flow-on effects to the other objectives. Firstly, loss of the recruiting, training, logistic and finance base would severely limit the effectiveness of FARC forces throughout Colombia. Secondly, the now isolated FARC forces in the north would likely place further pressure on the ELN with incursions into their demilitarized zone whilst the inferior ELN forces contemplate defending the zone against government forces. Finally, the illegal drug activities would have been severely curtailed by the loss of the FARC protected lands.

⁵ Von Clausewitz. Carl. "On War." Ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton. 1984. 595

The second phase of the strategy is the restoration of sovereignty over the ELN occupied territory in northeast Colombia. The past reluctance of ELN to engage with government forces and the salutary lesson from the phase one operation, in which the much stronger FARC would have been defeated, provide an opportunity to pursue a political solution. Conversion of the ELN from a military foe to a political opponent should be feasible. However, should the ELN fail to agree to an early cessation of guerrilla operations, a second air-land engagement smaller than phase one would be conducted.

The third phase of the campaign, the final defeat of the illegal forces, would be dependent on the extent of success in the first two phases and the level of diplomatic success with neighboring states in sealing the borders against the movement of insurgents and drug producers to new safe havens. Political overtures by the Colombian government and military search and destroy activities would proceed in parallel. Although cut-off from stable financial, logistics and recruiting sources, the dispersed FARC organization would still be unlikely to agree to Government terms, although the effort would be worth pursuing. With similar support base losses as FARC, ELN would nevertheless be likely to agree to terms at the conclusion of phase two. The elimination of the primary reason for the existence of the paramilitaries, the destruction of FARC and ELN forces would provide an opportunity for the Colombian Government to 'normalize' the status of AUC groups by providing them with legal opportunities to maintain the newly achieved security in those areas where government control is weakest. The lack of a persuasive ideology within the AUC and the elimination of the primary enemy provide a level of confidence that this conciliatory approach would be successful with a majority of the AUC organizations. Much of the drug industry would have been destroyed with the

elimination of the protectors and transporters. The final task to eliminate drug producers would be a policing activity.

With the strategy outlined, not only would the primary political and military objectives be met, but, the end state would likely be a stable government with a confident military and a supportive population. It would be naïve to believe that all insurgency and drug activities would be eliminated, however, the state would be in a position to counter new threats alone and successfully.

THE US MILITARY STRATEGY IN COLOMBIA

A quick reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the Colombian Army shows that some level of US military support would be required at least for phase one. This section addresses the extent of US military involvement in the Colombian campaign – the US military strategy in Colombia.

US Military Strategy for Phase 1

Whilst many of the 20,000 FARC fighters are distributed throughout other regions in Colombia, the re-occupation of the *zona de despeje* would be a major air land engagement. The combat operation must be succeeded by a permanent security presence in the region. The three rapid reaction brigades of the Colombian Army would be insufficient to overcome a FARC force that was already well established defensively within the region. US ground forces, particularly special forces, would be required for the operation. US assistance would also be required to overcome capability deficiencies in the Colombian military. Intelligence and surveillance assets would be required prior to the combat operation. The combat engagement would require significant air-mobile assets and ground attack aircraft, neither of which could be provided by Colombia in sufficient quantities. Finally, the reticence of the Colombian military to engage

effectively in direct combat would be alleviated by US forces providing secure base areas, rapid response back-up firepower and an efficient aero-medical evacuation capability.

US Military Strategy for Phase 2

Following success in the major combat engagement of the campaign, the strategy principle for further operations would be to have Colombian forces involved to the maximum extent. US forces would be used to replace Colombian forces employed on infrastructure and force protection tasks. Colombian personnel would be deployed to maintain security in the recently occupied *zona de despeje*, freeing the Colombian rapid deployment force for operations against the ELN. The restoration of ELN territory to Colombian control should be achievable by the Colombian Army. US intelligence and surveillance assets, aero-medical support and rapid response reserve forces would be required as in phase one.

US Military Strategy for Phase 3

The extent of US military support required for the final defeat of the illegal forces and restoration of law and order throughout Colombia would be dependent on the levels of:

- diplomatic success in containing those forces within Colombia,
- political success in convincing elements of the guerrilla groups to disarm and the paramilitary forces to act as agents of the Colombian government in maintaining security in the newly liberated areas, and
- progress made in equipping and training more of the Colombian military for offensive operations.

The optimistic position would be that US military forces provide decreasing levels of intelligence and surveillance support and a combat training organization. At worst, the requirement would be for the same level of forces as in phase 2.

Phase 3 contains the exit strategy for US military forces in Colombia. The steady decrease in enemy strengths and influence and the increase in Colombian military capabilities would permit the withdrawal of combat forces during phase 3. Whilst Colombian forces would still be engaged in combat operations, US aid would transition from military support to economic support to provide the infrastructure and industries needed for the long-term replacement of the drug industry.

A Risk Assessment of the US Strategy in Colombia

The two major risks to the US strategy would be a significant military defeat requiring US military escalation, and the re-establishment of FARC, ELN and drug sanctuaries in the border states causing a protracted campaign in Colombia with inconclusive results.

Unfortunately, the initial decision to commit US forces would include acceptance of the possibility of force escalation since the proximity and importance of Colombia to US territory would preclude the option of withdrawing and accepting complete defeat of the Colombian government should these risks eventuate.

The risk of military defeat is considered to be low since the United States could bring vastly superior forces to bear if necessary. More importantly, this possibility would have been addressed prior to US commitment by ensuring that the Colombian government and society acknowledge that this is a national war of survival. This condition requires the national commitment of all necessary resources. The risk of failing to achieve the first national objective, the restoration of Colombian sovereignty over all territory is low.

The risk of escalation through a protracted campaign to defeat the remaining enemy forces has been significantly reduced by making direct US military support conditional on achieving complementary diplomatic and political goals that limit strategy surprises, such as the

expansion of the area of operations to border states. The risk of failing to achieve the second national objective, the complete defeat of the enemy forces, is low. However, significant dependence on the actions of other nations is always problematical. The possibility of a protracted campaign for Colombia is a medium risk.

CONCLUSION

The US security objectives for Colombia are clearly stated in the 2002 National Security Strategy as the defeat of both the guerrilla and paramilitary forces, the return of state control to autonomous regions of Colombia and the re-establishment of law and order to all parts of Colombia. The nature of these objectives and the lack of past success with political solutions, indicate that military action will be the dominant strategy. These national objectives are achievable through the use of Colombian and US forces.

The US national strategy for Colombia addresses the diplomatic and political conditions that must be met prior to the commitment of US military forces and the economic issues that must be addressed to achieve an enduring stability in Colombia. The proposed diplomatic strategy is to secure the following pre-conditions: Colombia must agree to treat the crisis as a national war with full commitment of resources and the nations bordering Colombia must accept responsibility for securing their borders, albeit with US assistance. The proposed political strategy is to secure congressional and US public support for a new Colombian strategy based on broad security considerations rather than anti-drug operations. Following successful achievement of the primary objectives, the economic strategy would be to replace military aid with infrastructure aid to provide a viable alternate to the illegal drug production industry.

Subject to reasonable confidence that Colombia and a majority of the neighboring states would meet the specified conditions, the United States should commit military forces to a three-phase strategy comprising:

- a major combined Colombian – US military air-land offensive to re-establish control of the FARC-controlled de-militarized region using significant US ground and air forces;
- a primarily Colombian air-land offensive against the ELN controlled de-militarized zone using US air-mobile assets for direct support and US ground forces in reserve and force protection roles; and
- a primarily Colombian search and destroy operation against remaining dispersed illegal forces with US personnel providing training and intelligence and surveillance support.

Direct US military combat involvement would end with the conclusion of the second phase.

The military strategy outlined is based on the information available from external sources and the expected progress on diplomatic and political initiatives. As detailed US intelligence and surveillance information becomes available, and the outcomes of the early initiatives become known, the strategy should be reviewed and adjusted.

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