

WINNING THE WAR ON TERROR, LOSING THE WAR ON DRUGS? U.S. POLICIES IN COLOMBIA DURING GEORGE W. BUSH'S PRESIDENCY

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Abstract

The article describes the basic elements of U.S. policy in Colombia during George W. Bush's presidency. It points out several issues for which the U.S. government has been continuously criticized, but focuses on two main aspects of the policy: the two-pronged war against illegal armed groups and the aerial eradication of illicit crops. I argue that although broader U.S. objectives such as strengthening of Colombian democracy have been fulfilled, the aerial eradication has not only proven ineffective in the long run, but is inherently flawed and continues to cause massive ecological destruction.

Keywords: United States, Colombia, war on drugs, war on terror, illegal armed groups, aerial eradication

Introduction

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, greatly affected United States foreign policy towards Latin America in general and Colombia in particular. On the one hand, the U.S. interference in Colombia's domestic affairs, substantial already during Clinton's presidency,¹ intensified during Bush's tenure because the global war on terrorism became a new reason to exercise even more control over the Andean region. In addition to illegal drugs, terrorism became a reason to increase U.S. military presence there. On the other hand, however, the Bush administration's commitment to the global war on terror and its involvement in wars in

¹ See, for example, the interventionist policies of the U.S. in Colombia during the Ernesto Samper's presidency (1994–1998), in Russell Crandall, "Explicit Narcotization: U.S. Policy toward Colombia during the Samper Administration," *Latin American Politics and Society* 43, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 95–120, <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed February 21, 2013).

Afghanistan and Iraq diverted a great deal of U.S. resources as well as attention away from the war on drugs. Thus in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the U.S. sought to extend its control over Colombia, while at the same time desired to reduce its financial obligations there.

Apart from continuing counternarcotics efforts in Colombia, ending the country's protracted internal conflict became a priority for George Walker Bush's administration (2001–2009) as part of the global war on terror.² To this end, in 2001 the two major Colombian leftist illegal armed groups – the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army), and the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, or National Liberation Army) – were re-certified as foreign terrorist organizations and the same category was newly given to the right-wing group AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, or United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia).³ Additionally, an interesting shift occurred in the U.S. State Department's terminology. While during the Cold War era left-wing illegal armed groups were referred to only as *communist insurgents* or *communist guerrillas*, during Clinton's tenure these designations were replaced by a term *narco-guerrillas*. Finally, in the wake of the terrorist attacks in 2001 they were again renamed *narco-terrorists*. This term accurately reflected the groups' reliance on drug money as their principal source of revenue,⁴ as well as the change in their tactics: they had increasingly engaged in sabotage, extortions, attacks on civilians in public places, and kidnappings. At the same time, their struggle became less ideological. This shift was accompanied by a major change in U.S. policy: during Bush's presidency the U.S. Congress allowed the Colombian government for the first time to use U.S. military equipment in counterinsurgency operations, whereas previously this had been designated solely for counterdrug efforts. The war on drugs thus merged with the war against "terrorist" insurgents.

² Isaac Isacson, "Extending the War on Terrorism to Colombia: A Bad Idea Whose Time Has Come," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 6, 2002, http://www.fpif.org/articles/extending_the_war_on_terrorism_to_colombia_a_bad_idea_whose_time_has_come (accessed September 28, 2010).

³ FARC and ELN were designated as foreign terrorist organizations for the first time in 1997. See Connie Veillette, *Plan Colombia: A Progress Report* (Congressional Research Service, June 22, 2005), 3, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32774.pdf> (accessed November 9, 2007).

⁴ The FARC began to raise funds from coca production in 1993. Although the most recent estimates of the Colombian government state that FARC earns annually about 2.4 to 2.5 billion U.S. dollars from the drug trade, these numbers differ greatly from the estimates provided by the Colombian Attorney General's Office of 1.1 billion U.S. dollars and also from 2003 estimates of United Nations Development Program of 204 million U.S. dollars. See Elyssa Pachico, "70% of FARC Assets Held Outside Colombia," *InSight Crime*, September 18, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/70-of-farc-assets-held-outside-colombia> (accessed February 14, 2013).

Both the U.S. and the Colombian government agreed that a defeat of the narco-terrorists was an indispensable prerequisite to stabilizing the country, stimulating economic growth, improving human rights situation, and eventually to solving the drug issue. These goals were also endorsed by Alvaro Uribe Vélez (Colombian president from 2002–2010), who already during his presidential campaign declared the re-establishment of security and state presence in the entire country as his foremost objective. Hence both governments converged in putting emphasis on counterinsurgency operations, but also on policies aiming at strengthening the rule of law and democracy, and support for existing Colombian institutions. The core of the counterdrug policies remained aerial chemical eradication, which gained momentum at the beginning of the new century.

The main aim of this article is to describe the basic framework of U.S. assistance to the Colombian government, to enumerate main elements of it, and point out several issues for which the U.S. government has been continuously criticized, such as overemphasizing the military aspect of its policies or the ineffectiveness of forced eradication. Since the overall U.S. strategy in Colombia is too complex to be covered in detail, this article focuses on two main aspects of it: firstly, it contrasts massive offensives against leftist insurgents with controversial demobilization of the right-wing paramilitaries; and secondly, it examines closely the aerial eradication of illicit crops.

While the priority of this article is for the reader to comprehend complex U.S. policies in Colombia, my main argument is that although broader U.S. security objectives and support for Colombian democracy have been fulfilled, the aerial eradication of illicit crops has not only proven ineffective in the long run, but is inherently flawed and continues to cause massive ecological destruction and for these reasons should be radically changed.

Although counterterrorist policies have ensured an improvement in day-to-day security in the urban areas for the majority of Colombians (about 75% of the Colombian population is urban) and the position of illegal arms groups was weakened, these successes came at a high price. Since Clinton's presidency, reports of human rights abuses committed by the Colombian security forces multiplied.⁵ In the last decade, however, the U.S. government has been ignoring or denying such allegations and kept providing practically unconditional financial and military assistance to army units suspected of attacks on civilians. Consequently, this

⁵ Amnesty International, Colombia: Stop the Massacres. Stop the military Aid, Press Release, AI Index: 23/110/2001 (Public), News Service No. 181 (October 2001), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/110/2001/en/244d296c-fb1e-11dd-ac08-b50adaf01716/amr231102001en.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2010).

attitude has tarnished the image of the United States as a promoter of human rights.

Regrettably, due to the limited scope of this paper, I cannot elaborate on the issues related to human rights abuses. The impunity of military forces involved in extrajudicial killings of civilians and the lot of internally displaced persons or indigenous communities are topics which merit more attention and consideration than just one paragraph and therefore I have chosen to omit these issues from the more detailed analysis that follows. Nonetheless, they deserve further research attention that will together with this paper produce a more comprehensive picture of the complexities of U.S. counternarcotics policies in Colombia and their related controversies.

An Overview of U.S. Policies in Colombia

Although U.S. military assistance dates back to the early 1950s and the first counterdrug programs in Colombia originated already in the beginning of 1970s,⁶ it took until September 1999 for the Colombian government to present a comprehensive policy plan. Plan Colombia (precisely Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and Strengthening of the State) consisted of five interrelated elements: support for a peace process, the strengthening of the national economy, a counterdrug strategy, justice system reform and protection of human rights, and greater democratization and social development. The Plan was envisaged as a global strategy to attack the socio-economic roots of the drug industry and the conflict, but regional security concerns were more important than the drug trade itself. The Colombian government, however, did not receive funding from the EU, because the latter objected to the excessive militarization, and so the final circle of donors and the scope of the Plan had to be limited. The bulk of U.S. assistance was thus allotted mainly to the Colombian army for the procurement of military hardware, law enforcement and interdiction efforts, as well as crop eradication.⁷ The original Plan was followed in

⁶ More about U.S. military programs in Colombia see Barbora Capinska, "United States Counterdrug Policies and Colombia" (Master thesis, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, 2008), 7–17; For early counternarcotics assistance see *Ibid.*, 28–38.

⁷ Although meager in comparison to military assistance, development programs received much more funding than they had in previous years. While from 1996 to 2000 USAID provided Colombia with only 18.6 million U.S. dollars, 228 million U.S. dollars were allotted for social, economic, development, judicial, and law enforcement components of Plan Colombia. In U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Plan Colombia, Fact Sheet, July 19, 2000; U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Social, Economic, and Development Support of Plan Colombia, Fact Sheet, February 20, 2001.

2005 by a new ambitious project called Plan Colombia II; in January 2007, a new six-year follow-up on Plan Colombia Consolidation Phase was announced by the government of Colombia.⁸

In the spring of 2001, President Bush presented a new framework for regular provision of assistance for Plan Colombia called the Andean Regional Initiative (ARI, since 2004 called Andean Counterdrug Initiative, ACI, since 2008 called Andean Counterdrug Program, ACP).⁹ The ARI took a very broad regional approach to tackle drug-related problems, support democratic institutions and foster economic development not only in Colombia, but also in its six neighbors Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela where the drug problem (and partly the internal conflict) had spilled over the years.¹⁰ This time, however, 45% of the total funding, or 399 out of 882.29 million U.S. dollars, was earmarked for Colombia, with only half of the total (442.5 million dollars) being assigned for law enforcement and security, which was a progress in comparison to the assistance provided by the Clinton administration to support Plan Colombia. But although the ARI claimed to be novel in its regional approach, it very much resembled George H. W. Bush's Andean Initiative, announced back in 1989. Overall, neither the policy nor the strategy changed much. The program still lacked a more specific implementation plan, and alternative development projects remained underfinanced.

The total grant aid provided during the presidency of G. W. Bush was 5,375 million U.S. dollars, of which about 80 percent was military and police aid (see Table 1).¹¹

⁸ In fact, all of these plans relate to the same policy, they only change the designation.

⁹ Sources for programs related to counternarcotics operations in Colombia are numerous and the funding is very complex and not entirely transparent. These foreign assistance accounts are Andean Counterdrug Program (ACP), Development Assistance (DA), Economic Support Fund (ESF), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), and Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR). Additionally, Department of Defense receives annually extra funds and uses also Section 1207 Assistance program. For detailed information see U.S. Government Accountability Office, Counternarcotics Assistance. U.S. Agencies Have Allotted Billions in Andean Countries, but DOD Should Improve Its Reporting of Results, GAO-12-824, July 2012, 41, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/592241.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2013).

¹⁰ The target Andean countries are currently only Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

¹¹ It is difficult to comprehend the complexities of federal "drug war" budget due to various sources of funding and a very large number of agencies involved in the "drug war." It is stressed by the fact that different reports provide different data due to different methodology which are partially due to the discrepancies between requested budgets and obtained. Since GAO and CRS reports seem to be the most reliable, the author inclines to use primarily these sources, as is convenient. For detailed information about the numerous agencies and departments involved see Liana Sun Wylar, *International*

Table 1: Total counternarcotics aid to Colombia, FY 2001–2008 (in millions USD)

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
276.2	560.4	808.1	797.5	769.1	741.1	722.6	700	5,375

Adapted from: June S. Beittel, *Colombia: Background, U.S. Relations, and Congressional Interest* (Congressional Research Service, November 28, 2012), 38, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32250.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2013).

For most of the decade, since the adoption of Plan Colombia, the so-called 80-to-20 percent formula (about 80% of the funding for military purposes, and about 20% for economic and social issues) prevailed. However, between 2004 and 2006 the U.S. South Command and the Colombian Ministry of Defense began developing a new civil-military strategy, which seemed to address some of the previous weaknesses, such as too much emphasis on militarization and forced eradication, or insufficient development programs.¹² This process became apparent already in the 2008 and 2009 U.S. counternarcotics budgets, in which assistance for security forces and eradication programs was reduced, while resources for non-military programs were increased. Whereas previous ratio was 76% to 24% for military and non-military aid respectively, the new allocation was 55 to 45.¹³ At the same time, the Colombian government proposed a scheme called Integrated Action, which focused on stabilizing the areas previously under the control of the guerrillas and consolidating the central government's presence there.¹⁴ However, the military element was still prevalent in this strategy, even though it included agricultural, transportation, educational, environmental, and other policies. This strategy began to be implemented in the spring of 2009 and thus coincided with the end of George W. Bush's presidency.¹⁵

Although grant aid to Colombian security forces always represented the bulk of the total aid, the distribution of this assistance between the Colombian National Police (CNP) and the Colombian Army (COLAR) changed a few times in the past

Drug Control Policy: Background and U.S. Responses (Congressional Research Service, October 16, 2012), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34543.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2013).

¹² Adam Isacson and Abigail Poe, *After Plan Colombia. Evaluating "Integrated Action", the next phase of U.S. assistance* (International Policy Report – Center for International Policy, December 2009), 5, http://justf.org/files/pubs/091203_col.pdf (accessed September 15, 2010).

¹³ Washington Office on Latin America, Congress to Take Up New Drug Policy Commission: Time to Re-Examine Decades-Old Drug Control Policies, October 2009, http://wola.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=viewp&id=1004&Itemid=8 (accessed August 19, 2010).

¹⁴ Isacson and Poe, *After Plan Colombia*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6–8.

with the shifts in the policies' emphasis. During the 1980s most of the U.S. aid was channeled to the Colombian police, but in the 1990s that body became so corrupt that with the approval of Plan Colombia, most of the aid was earmarked for the Colombian army. However, U.S. decision-makers soon realized that the COLAR was needed primarily to combat the guerrillas and thus assigned counternarcotics tasks again to the CNP and its special Directorate of Antinarcotics (DIRAN, established back in 1987).

Apart from the counternarcotics tasks, the DIRAN supports a special judicial branch established in 2006, responsible for gathering evidence for asset forfeiture,¹⁶ and also has an aviation unit (ARAVI) which comprises of 18 fixed-wing and 58 rotary-wing aircraft.¹⁷ The CNP's main interdiction force, though, are the so-called *Junglas* (DIRAN's Jungle Commandos), three 500-man elite airmobile units specializing in the destruction of clandestine laboratories and the capture of High-Value Targets (leaders of guerrillas, narcotraffickers, etc.).¹⁸ They were trained by U.S. Army Special Forces and are "among the finest Special Forces units in Colombia, if not Latin America."¹⁹ The funding for the CNP is primarily used for the maintenance of its aviation fleet, purchases of herbicide, but also for spare parts or ammunition.²⁰ The CNP received about 2.5 times less in funding than the Colombian army during the Bush presidency.²¹

Following the increase in violence accompanying the legislative and presidential elections in Colombia in early 2002, during which even Bogotá came under heavy mortar fire, in July 2002 the U.S. Congress authorized the use of counternarcotics assistance to include fighting the insurgents, expanding the operations previously labeled only "counterdrug." Thus in late 2002 the COLAR's Counternarcotics Brigade, created back in September 1999, was re-organized and officially

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2009, 201, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/120054.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2010).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2010, 202, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/137411.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2010).

¹⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Plan Colombia. Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance, GAO-09-71, October 6, 2008, 44, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0971.pdf> (accessed September 21, 2010).

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Fiscal Year 2009 Budget. Program and Budget Guide, 65–66, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/121735.pdf> (accessed September 4, 2010).

²¹ For comparison of funding for COLAR and CNP see U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Plan Colombia*, October 6, 2008, 28.

given authority to operate in the entire Colombian territory and to participate in counterterrorist operations. Above all, the Brigade provides ground security for the aircraft in the spray zones, but it also conducts operations to destroy clandestine laboratories, and seize cocaine or precursor chemicals. In early May 2003, one of the Brigade's battalions was already operating in the Nariño department, where most of the coca was cultivated. All three existing battalions received new training in order to transform into a rapid action force and were provided with additional helicopters (UH-1N and UH-60 Blackhawks) to increase their mobility; they were also restructured into three combat units and one support unit.²²

For both the CNP's and the COLAR's aviation units (consisting of aircraft both for transportation and eradication purposes) private contractors were indispensable, although the U.S. insisted on the nationalization of the counternarcotics programs since the adoption of Plan Colombia. In order to pressure the Colombian government to gradually take over responsibility for all programs supported and managed by the U.S. agencies and thus reduce Colombia's dependence on U.S. assistance, funding for aviation programs was decreased. The main problem has been the dearth of Colombian pilots and mechanics, so these positions had to be filled by private contractors. Although it was envisaged that all programs would be nationalized by 2012, the number of contractors in Colombia was still high at the end of George W. Bush's presidency.²³

The use of private contractors intensified after the adoption of Plan Colombia, because in July 2000 the U.S. Congress limited the number of U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilian contractors to 500 and 300, respectively.²⁴ In October 2004, these were increased to 800 military personnel and 600 civilian contractors,²⁵ but it was still necessary to employ private contractors. By 2000, there were around 160 to 180 U.S. private contractors; in 2002, three private companies had contracts with the State Department and seventeen with the Department of

²² U.S. General Accounting Office, Drug Control: Financial and Management Challenges Continue to Complicate Efforts to Reduce Illicit Drug Activities in Colombia, GAO-03-820T, June 3, 2003, 6, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03820t.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2008); U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2003 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2004, IV-21, <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2003/vol1/html/index.htm> (accessed November 15, 2007).

²³ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Plan Colombia, 16, 62, and 64.

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Civilian Contractors and U.S. Military Personnel Supporting Plan Colombia, May 15, 2001, <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2001/3509.htm> (accessed November 15, 2007).

²⁵ The Library of Congress, *A Country Study: Colombia*, February 2007, 28, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Colombia.pdf> (accessed October 28, 2008).

Defense.²⁶ The most important among them were DynCorp Aerospace Technologies (operational in Colombia already since the early 1990s), which had been providing pilots and mechanics for the spraying aircraft; Lockheed-Martin, Northrop Grumman and Eagle Aviation Services and Technology (EAST); and *AirScan* (operating in Colombia since 1997), whose airplanes guarded the Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline and searched for guerrillas in the jungle areas.²⁷ Although exact data are not available, while in 2002 private contractors got about 150 million (about 37%) out of the total 400 million dollars of U.S. military assistance,²⁸ in 2006 the State Department reported that almost half, or more than 300 million U.S. dollars of its overall spending in Colombia, went to private companies.²⁹

The State Department claims that U.S. contractors take part in search-and-rescue missions or in spray operations never as gunners, but only as pilots or medics.³⁰ It is, however, doubtful that these U.S. citizens would not take part directly in risky operations and occasional clashes with guerrillas or other armed groups. Indeed, their uncertain military status is alarming because it makes them unaccountable to the U.S. public or the Colombian government.³¹ On the other hand, since they often participate in clandestine operations, when they are captured by the guerrillas it is easier for the U.S. government to deny all responsibility.³²

A high priority for both governments was establishing police presence in the entire country, because in the past various self-defense groups and guerrillas

²⁶ Washington Office on Latin America, "Protecting the Pipeline: The U.S. Military Mission Expands," *Colombia Monitor* 2, no. 1 (May 2003): 12, http://www.wola.org/media/Colombia%20monitor_may03_oil.pdf (accessed October 22, 2007).

²⁷ Juan O. Tamayo, "Colombia: Private Firms Take on U.S. Military Role in Drug War," *Miami Herald*, May 22, 2001, <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=11094> (accessed September 4, 2010). AirScan was brought to Colombia by the Occidental Petroleum to provide air surveillance of the company's complex and a part of the pipeline. However, this contractor was directly involved in the bombing of Santo Domingo in which eleven adults and seven children died and 25 other civilians were injured by an unfortunate mistake. However, the Occidental Petroleum as well as the AirScan denied all responsibility. See Douglas W. Cassel, Jr., "A Corporate Cover-up?," *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, January 9, 2003, http://www.law.northwestern.edu/depts/communicate/newspages/article_full.cfm?eventid=547 (accessed September 5, 2010); and Christian T. Miller, "A Colombian Village Caught in a Cross-Fire," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 2002, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines02/0317-01.htm> (accessed September 5, 2010).

²⁸ Toby Muse, "U.S. contractors get half of aid to Colombia," *Associated Press*, June 15, 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-06-15-colombia_N.htm (accessed September 3, 2010).

²⁹ Center for International Policy, U.S. Contractors in Colombia, November 2001, <http://ciponline.org/colombia/contractors.htm> (accessed September 7, 2008).

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, Civilian Contractors, May 15, 2001.

³¹ Washington Office on Latin America, Protecting the Pipeline, 12.

³² Juan Forero, "Colombia: Private U.S. Operatives on Risky Missions," *New York Times*, February 14, 2004, <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=7830> (accessed September 4, 2010).

provided security in rural areas. In February 2004 for the first time in Colombia's history all municipalities had an official police presence.³³ This could be achieved by a successful *Carabineros* program – these 120 to 150-man Mobile Rural Police Squadrons maintain police presence in remote areas and provide security for manual eradicators.³⁴ Manual eradication, necessary in areas where chemical spraying is prohibited (such as border areas or national parks), became an obligatory task for municipal police units in 2006.³⁵

During the Bush's presidency interdiction efforts in Colombia were enhanced by the re-introduction of the Aerial Bridge Denial (ABD) program in August 2003. Originally it was initiated in the 1990s in Colombia and Peru and was relatively successful in the latter until in April 2001 a civilian aircraft was shot down and two U.S. citizens killed (a missionary and her little daughter).³⁶ However, new safeguards and control measures were implemented and the program resumed the detection of illegal aircraft involved in smuggling. The U.S. supported financially the ABD fleet consisting of five Cessna Citation 560 aircraft and two C-26 aircraft, but also provided training for Colombian crews.³⁷ Thanks to this program, in 2003, four airplanes were destroyed and three seized;³⁸ in 2004 it was thirteen and three respectively,³⁹ and in 2005 two aircraft were destroyed and five captured.⁴⁰ It has also been quite successful in deterring the drug traffickers from using certain air routes: the number of illegal flights over Colombia decreased by

³³ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Drug Control: U.S. Nonmilitary Assistance to Colombia Is Beginning to Show Intended Results, but Programs Are Not Readily Sustainable, GAO-04-726, July 2, 2004, 20, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04726.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2008). As many as 169 municipalities had no police presence prior to 2002. U.S. Government Accountability Office, Plan Colombia, 45.

³⁴ By 2010, 20 out of 71 squadrons were assigned to this task. See U.S. Department of State, 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: 202.

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Fiscal Year 2008 Budget. Program and Budget Guide, 59, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/93449.pdf> (accessed September 4, 2010).

³⁶ This incident triggered a heated debate because pilots from U.S. private contractor Aviation Development Corp. accidentally helped track down the missionary's plane. See Tamayo, "Colombia: Private Firms."

³⁷ U.S. Department of State, Fiscal Year 2008 Budget, 62.

³⁸ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2003 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2004, 97, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/29957.pdf> (accessed November 15, 2007).

³⁹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2005 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2005, 131, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/42867.pdf> (accessed November 15, 2007).

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2006 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2006, 107, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/62379.pdf> (accessed November 15, 2007).

more than 70 percent, from 637 in 2003 to 171 in 2007.⁴¹ Consequently, though, the use of Colombia's complex river system, long Pacific and Atlantic coasts and numerous ports increased and about 40 percent of the cocaine leaves Colombia this way instead by the air.⁴² The ABD program was fully nationalized by the end of December 2009.⁴³

Apart from military support for Colombian security forces, an important element of U.S. policies in Colombia was the support for the rule of law and reform of civilian judiciary, especially its transition towards an oral accusatory system similar to the U.S. one. This area likewise saw some significant progress: on January 1, 2008, the Colombian government finally completed its judicial reform (started in 2005) which shortened the trial time from years to months and thus increased the system's efficiency: the number of cases solved increased from three to over 60 percent.⁴⁴ The project also provided training to thousands of prosecutors, judges, public defenders, private lawyers, and police investigators.⁴⁵ The USAID-supported Justice Houses program was also successful: altogether more than 40 houses were built in order to provide access to legal services, handle about three million cases, and train judges.⁴⁶ The U.S. government also emphasized the improvement of the rule of law in general and initiated a Culture of Lawfulness program that promotes respect and appreciation for the rule of law among the youth of Colombia.⁴⁷ President Uribe has been cooperating with the U.S. in the matter of extradition: between 2002 and 2010, 975 individuals were extradited, among them notorious Cali cartel leaders Miguel and Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela.⁴⁸

Although the ARI was originally designed as a regional initiative, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela benefited to a small extent, because only the Colombian government, a traditional U.S. ally, accepted such a close cooperation due to the urgent and serious situation prevailing in the country. In consequence, many minor successes are often thwarted by the lack of such a concentrated effort in the neighboring countries – a phenomenon referred to as the spill-over effect. What is more, due to the lack of international funding, Plan Colombia and its ambitious

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, Fiscal Year 2009 Budget, 63.

⁴² U.S. Department of State, 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 204.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, 2008 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 207.

⁴⁶ Veillette, *Plan Colombia*, 12.

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, Fiscal Year 2008 Budget, 64.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Vol. I (March 2010): 206, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/137411.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2010).

comprehensive projects to tackle all aspects of Colombian internal conflict and drug production were curtailed as well and the emphasis was shifted to military solutions. While this approach is understandable given the fact that the war in Colombia represents a serious regional security problem, it must be remembered that the choice of the elements of Plan Colombia for implementation is a political one. Certainly, socio-economic development projects are difficult to realize amidst protracted violent conflict, but they are essential for the transition to legal economy, the re-integration of demobilized fighters, and the consolidation of the state's presence in the entire country beyond police offices, army roadblocks and checkpoints. What is more, the continuous U.S. support for the Colombian army – which since the presidency of Uribe and G. W. Bush has not only been fighting the insurgents, but also raiding laboratories, eradicating illicit crops and carrying out other counterdrug operations – is dangerous and antidemocratic, because the army is to a great extent politically and financially independent, making it less accountable to the civilian government.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, due to the fact that the Colombian conflict is a part of global war on terror this policy has remained almost unchanged under G. W. Bush's successor, Barack Obama (president since 2009, re-elected in 2012).

“The War on Terror” – a War with a Double Standard

The primary goal of president Uribe was to defeat the leftist armed groups and re-establish security in all parts of the country, especially in the “reconquered” territories, where for many years the insurgents supplanted the state. The main reason for this was the worsening security situation, which resembled that of the late 1980s: the murder rate hit an astonishing 34,000 per year, the highest in the world. The annual rate of 3,000 to 3,600 kidnappings in Colombia accounted for 60% of the total number of kidnappings in the world.⁵⁰

Reversing the efforts of previous Colombian presidents, including his immediate predecessor, of working to achieve a negotiated peace settlement with the guerrillas, Alvaro Uribe denied their legitimacy and refused to negotiate – unless the insurgents promised to give up terrorist practices and complied with a ceasefire.

⁴⁹ For the involvement of the army see George Withers, Lucila Santos and Adam Isacson, *Preach What You Practice: The Separation of Military and Police Roles in the Americas* (Washington Office on Latin America, November 2010), <http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Regional%20Security/2010/preachwhatyoupractice.pdf> (accessed March 5, 2013).

⁵⁰ Speech by Alvaro Uribe upon His Inauguration as President of Colombia, August 7, 2002, <http://library.cqpress.com/cqpac/hsdc02-151-7252-395043> (accessed April 6, 2006).

His solution was a massive military offensive, backed by the U.S. with military equipment, training and intelligence. The first operations were launched in June 2003 in the department of Cundinamarca (of which Bogotá is the capital) with the *Mission Libertad 1*. In December 2003 it was followed by *Operation Año Nuevo* in the department of Caquetá, later extended to the southern departments of Guaviare, Meta, and Putumayo, but also Antioquia in the north.⁵¹ At the beginning of 2004, Colombian president presented a new plan for an ambitious offensive in southern Colombia against the still powerful FARC rebels. Under the aegis of *Plan Patriota* around 18,000 Colombian soldiers assisted by U.S. military advisors were deployed in the southern part of the country, a traditional stronghold of the guerrillas. As a part of President Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense policy, the foremost objective of this offensive was to weaken the FARC militarily and economically.

The *Plan Patriota* was considered a great success: the government purportedly reduced the number of FARC fighters to 12,000, took control of 11 villages which FARC had controlled, destroyed 400 guerrilla camps and captured large amounts of weaponry, ammunition, and explosives. However, critics argued that this campaign had a detrimental effect on the local population, which was forcibly displaced during the operations and therefore made even more prone to support the guerrillas.⁵² Moreover, this military operation, as many similar efforts in the past, lacked a necessary non-military plan that would "bring the rest of the government" into this conquered territory.⁵³

President Uribe's tough and resolute stance towards the guerrillas contrasted with his approach towards Colombia's right-wing paramilitary "self-defense" groups. According to the Santa Fé de Ralito agreement signed July 15, 2003, the AUC agreed to complete total demobilization by December 31, 2005. Although these right-wing "*paras*" were involved in drug trafficking, extortions, kidnappings, and massacres at least as much as the leftist insurgents, they were offered amnesty (thanks to the Justice and Peace Law in effect between July 2005 and October 2007), shorter prison terms, and not in a single case were members of the AUC prosecuted for human rights abuses.⁵⁴ Reportedly as many as 31,000 demobilized,

⁵¹ Catalina Martínez Tovar and Michael Lettieri, *Plan Patriota: What 700 Million Dollars in U.S. Cash Will and Will Not Buy You in Colombia*, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, April 20, 2006, <http://www.coha.org/2006/04/20/plan-patriota-what-700-million-in-us-cash-will-and-will-not-buy-you-in-colombia/> (accessed November 9, 2007).

⁵² Veillette, *Plan Colombia*, 10.

⁵³ Isacson and Poe, *After Plan Colombia*, 5.

⁵⁴ Amnesty International, "Colombia: Justice and Peace Law will guarantee impunity for human rights abusers," Press Release, AI Index: AMR 23/012/2005 (Public), News Service No. 106, April

although this figure seems disproportionately high compared with previous estimates of the total number of combatants.⁵⁵ Interestingly, although the U.S. had designated the paramilitary groups as narco-terrorists and had acknowledged the fact that they had perpetrated some outrageous crimes, the U.S. Congress did not object to the appropriation of special funds to support their dubious demobilization process.⁵⁶

The impunity of the *paras* – who according to some reports are responsible for the majority of atrocities committed in Colombia – was met by much criticism, especially in the light of the revelation about the nexus between the members of high governmental echelons and army officers with the paramilitaries. As a result of this so-called “para-political” scandal which broke out in November 2006, many Colombian congressmen, governors and military officials have been investigated, jailed and even sentenced to prison for collaborating with paramilitaries.⁵⁷ The possible collaboration of Uribe’s government and the paramilitaries was not proven, but the scandal significantly affected President Uribe’s position.⁵⁸

Finally, one additional important counterterrorist measure cannot be omitted: in Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003, the U.S. Congress allocated special funding of 6 and 93 million U.S. dollars respectively for training and equipping a special brigade within the Colombian army to protect the first 110 miles of the Caño Limón-Coveñas 477-mile pipeline in Arauca department in northern Colombia. The U.S. Department of Defense financed a mission of the U.S. Army’s 7th Special Forces Group which trained about 7,000 Colombian soldiers. The Department of Defense also furnished ten helicopters, but their late arrival in 2005 seriously delayed the mission.⁵⁹

2005, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR230122005?open&of=ENG-COL> (accessed November 14, 2007).

⁵⁵ June S. Beittel, *Colombia: Background, U.S. Relations, and Congressional Interest* (Congressional Research Service, November 28, 2012), 5, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32250.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2013).

⁵⁶ For the demobilization see Human Rights Watch Report The ‘Sixth Division’: Military-Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia, HRW Index No. 2653, September 2001, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/colombia/6theng.pdf> (accessed November 19, 2007); and Human Rights Watch Report Smoke and Mirrors: Colombia’s Demobilization of Paramilitary Groups, Vol. 17, No. 3 (B), August 2005, <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/colombia0805/colombia0805.pdf> (accessed November 19, 2007).

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State, 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 202–203.

⁵⁸ Beittel, *Colombia: Background*, 5.

⁵⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Security Assistance: Efforts to Secure Colombia’s Caño Limón-Coveñas Oil Pipeline Have Reduced Attacks, but Challenges Remain, GAO-05-971, September 6, 2005, 2, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05971.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2008).

The Arauca department has one peculiarity: it is much better linked with Venezuela than with Colombia, which gives the ELN guerrillas traditionally strong in the region a strategic advantage. Before the arrival of FARC and self-defense groups to the region in 2001, the ELN insurgents had operated quite freely, making profit not only by extortions, but also through drug trafficking. The Caño Limón oilfields in Arauca were discovered in 1983 and are Colombia's second largest oil reserve.⁶⁰ The pipeline carries about 123,000 barrels (or about 20% of Colombia's oil) daily from the northeast Colombian department of Arauca through six other departments to the port of Coveñas at the Caribbean coast, and it is vital to the regional as well as the national economy.⁶¹ During 2001, 170 attacks shut it down for 200 days and thus reduced production by an average of 70,000 barrels a day, resulting in a loss of 500 million dollars in revenues and royalties that year.⁶² What is more, between 1990 and 2003 about 2.9 billion barrels of oil were spilled due to bombings, causing serious environmental damage.⁶³

Thanks to the special U.S. funds, the number of attacks was reduced dramatically (from 170 in 2001 to a mere 13 in 2005),⁶⁴ and there was only one attack in 2007.⁶⁵ However, following the enhancement of security on the first portion of the pipeline, the attacks began to occur outside the protected range in the department of Norte de Santander. The attackers also changed their tactics: instead of bombing the pipeline they sabotaged the electrical grid system supplying the oilfield's wells.⁶⁶

Despite these successes, however, critics point out that their consequence was the extreme militarization of the region. Since October 2002, the inhabitants of Arauca have suffered from unprecedented violence attributed not only to guerrillas and to paramilitaries, but also to the troops of the Colombian Army's 18th Brigade which has been operating there with complete impunity. Overall, the murder

⁶⁰ Eduardo Mackenzie, *Les FARC ou l'échec d'un communisme de combat. Colombie 1925–2005* (Paris: Editions Publibook, 2005), 510.

⁶¹ "Drogues et antidrogue en Colombie," *Les Cahiers de la sécurité* 59, 4th trimestre 2005, Paris INHES (Institute National des Hautes Etudes de Sécurité): 174. See also Mackenzie, *Les FARC*, 510.

⁶² U.S. Government Accountability Office, Security Assistance, September 6, 2005, 1 and 7.

⁶³ Washington Office on Latin America, Protecting the Pipeline, 9. The pipeline is approximately three meters underground so previously the insurgents used to put bombs in holes. The oil spills were causing great environmental damage. For example, in November 2001, 7,000 barrels spread over 50-mile area and got into the Arauca River. See U.S. Government Accountability Office, Security Assistance, September 6, 2005, 7.

⁶⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Security Assistance, September 6, 2005, 15.

⁶⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Plan Colombia, October 6, 2008, 35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

rate in Arauca has reached 160 victims per 100,000 in 2003, several times more than the national average.⁶⁷

Overall, Alvaro Uribe's tough security measures (including long-term curfews and restrictions on news media, some on the verge of being unconstitutional),⁶⁸ known as the Democratic Security Policy, his decision to enlarge the security forces (almost doubling their size and tripling the defense budget),⁶⁹ and the offensives against leftist insurgents helped improve the situation and assure everyday security for the majority of Colombians. It is noteworthy that between 2002 and 2009 murder rates declined by 40% and the number of kidnappings fell by 76%.⁷⁰ However, security improved at a significant cost: in the first two years of Uribe's tenure, arbitrary arrests increased and were estimated to be at least 6,000 in that period.⁷¹ An alarming increase in extrajudicial executions was also observed: between 2002 and 2007 at least 955 were perpetrated mostly by the COLAR, and these were only the documented cases.⁷² Finally, only in 2009, more than 286,000 people were newly displaced; the majority of the IDPs are Afro-Colombians and indigenous people from remote rural areas who suffered the most from the excessive militarization, yet received almost no assistance, nor reparations, and had no access to basic services.⁷³ But although the U.S. assistance was conditioned on the human rights record of the recipient unit – the so-called Leahy Amendment adopted already in 1997 prohibits U.S. funding for units whose members were implicated in human rights violations – the U.S. government did not stop the flow of aid to the COLAR; Congress only withheld a portion of it for a short period.

⁶⁷ Washington Office on Latin America, *Protecting the Pipeline*, 4; See a detailed report on the situation in Arauca: Amnesty International, Colombia: Laboratory of war – repression and violence in Arauca, AI Index AMR 23/004/2004, April 2004, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/004/2004/en/23614880-d63d-11dd-ab95-a13b602c0642/amr230042004en.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2010).

⁶⁸ Washington Office on Latin America, *Colombian Government's Controversial Security Measures*, September 2002, http://www.wola.org/news/colombian_government_s_controversial_security_measures (accessed April 13, 2011).

⁶⁹ Isacson and Poe, *After Plan Colombia*, 4.

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Fiscal Year 2009 Budget*, 62.

⁷¹ "Drogues et antidrogue en Colombie," 183.

⁷² Washington Office on Latin America, *U.S. groups, alarmed by increase in extrajudicial executions in Colombia, urge stricter enforcement of U.S. human rights conditions*, October 2007, 1, <http://www.wola.org/media/Extrajudicial%20Executions%20in%20Colombia%20Oct%202007%20Release.pdf> (accessed November 9, 2007).

⁷³ Amnesty International, *Colombia – 2010 Annual Report*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/colombia/report-2010> (accessed March 5, 2013). For the internally displaced persons see Human Rights Watch, *Colombia: Displaced and Discarded. The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons in Bogotá and Cartagena*, Vol. 17, No. 4(B) (October 2005), <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/colombia1005web.pdf> (accessed March 5, 2013).

Aerial Eradication and Alternative Development Projects – An Unbalanced Strategy

Besides border interdiction, crop eradication is the most important element of the U.S. counterdrug strategy and has been since the 1970s, when defoliation of cannabis was tested for the first time in Mexico. Although chemical aerial eradication was introduced in Colombia in July 1984 against cannabis, due to a lack of environmentally safe herbicides it was approved only in 1992 against opium poppy and in 1994 against coca. Colombia is the only Andean country which has authorized aerial chemical eradication, and this decision should mainly be attributed to the fact that the government lacks effective control over a large portion of its territory. The large-scale manual eradication programs that were successful in Bolivia in 1998 are inapplicable in Colombia. The second reason why the U.S. generally prefers defoliation to the other elements of the counterdrug policies is that it is much easier to detect and destroy the illicit crops before they are processed into a narcotic than to intercept it once it is already on its way to the U.S. Finally, aerial eradication provides an immediate (albeit short-lived) result and hence is the best indicator for cost-benefit analysis: the U.S. agencies evaluate the effectiveness of the aerial eradication – and even of the whole counterdrug program – by the area of illicit crop sprayed.

In order to understand why aerial eradication has received so much criticism we must explore every aspect of it. Firstly, how is aerial eradication carried out? In each eradication mission two aircraft (one to spray, the other to observe) participate, but they are often accompanied by a few heavily armed helicopters. Therefore, eradicating one hectare of coca costs approximately 8,000 dollars.⁷⁴ In addition, the Counternarcotics Brigade provides security support on the ground. The fields which are scheduled for fumigation are designated by the government of Colombia in advance, but pilots are permitted to release the spraying mixture only if they confirm visually that the crop is really coca. In order to enhance the effectiveness, the missions are canceled if the weather conditions are unfavorable – they should not be executed “if wind speed at the airport is greater than 10 m.p.h., if relative humidity is below 75 percent, or if temperature is over 32° Celsius to avoid drift that might come from a temperature inversion.”⁷⁵ Other strict regulations

⁷⁴ “Drogues et antidrogue en Colombie,” 31.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Report on Issues Related to the Aerial Eradication of Illicit Coca in Colombia: Chemicals Used for the Aerial Eradication of Illicit Coca in Colombia and Conditions of Application, September 2002, <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rpt/aeicc/13234.htm> (accessed November 19, 2007).

also state that spraying wet coca should be avoided: “the goal is to have no rain on the targeted fields from two hours before to four hours after the spraying.”⁷⁶ Unfortunately, in practice these regulations are often violated: pilots refuse to spray certain zones⁷⁷ or they release the herbicide at too high altitudes (the approved altitude is less than 100 feet, or 30.48 meters, which is very low) without having ensured that illicit crops were indeed targeted because they fear possible presence of armed groups, which is mainly the case in southern and south-eastern Colombia.⁷⁸ What is more, the pilots fly over too fast (at average speeds of 140 mph to 205 mph, or about 225 to 330 kph)⁷⁹ to spray the chosen pieces of land and thus often the neighboring forests or fields of licit crops are affected.

The number of sprayed hectares is established by a simple formula of “flow-through” calculation: the amount of herbicide necessary to eradicate one hectare of illicit crop under normal conditions is compared with the total amount used during the daily spraying activity for each type of spray aircraft.⁸⁰ Subsequently it translates into multiplying the number of net hectares sprayed by a given “kill rate.”⁸¹ The sprayed fields are often verified on the ground, but the insurgent threat makes such a procedure too risky. It is then almost impossible to ensure that the areas claimed to have been fumigated were, in fact, sprayed. These inconsistencies in methodology make it impossible to truly establish the area that has been sprayed – which is, as it has been pointed out, the most important indicator of cost-effectiveness of the whole strategy.

More controversies arise, of course, around the use of the herbicide, its very composition, and its purported adverse effects on humans and the environment. According to the U.S. State Department information, the spraying mixture consists of 55% of water, 44% of commercially available glyphosate formulation, and 1% of surfactants, COSMO FLUX-411F and COSMO-IN-D.⁸² Surfactants help dissolve

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ U.S. General Accounting Office, Drug Control: U.S.-Supported Efforts in Colombia and Bolivia, NSIAD-89-24, (November 1, 1988): 35, <http://archive.gao.gov/d17t6/137207.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2008).

⁷⁸ “Drogues et antidrogue en Colombie,” 18.

⁷⁹ Betsy Marsh, Going to Extremes. The U.S.-Funded Aerial Eradication Program in Colombia, Latin America Working Group Education Fund, March 2004, 5, <http://www.lawg.org/docs/Going2ExtremesFinal.pdf> (accessed October 21, 2007).

⁸⁰ U.S. General Accounting Office, Drug Control, November 1988, 34.

⁸¹ U.S. General Accounting Office, Drug Control: U.S. International Narcotics Control Activities, NSIAD-88-114, March 1, 1988, 10, <http://archive.gao.gov/d34t11/135305.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2008).

⁸² Curiously, in 2000 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report two adjuvants were mentioned, but since the 2001 report the State Department mentions only one, the COSMO FLUX-411f. It may

it in water, but also help it to “stick” to and penetrate the sprayed plants.⁸³ Although the brand name of the glyphosate was not disclosed by the U.S. government, it has been confirmed by its Colombian counterparts to be Roundup Ultra, manufactured by the U.S. agrochemical company Monsanto.⁸⁴ Glyphosate, a non-selective herbicide (it kills any plant it comes into contact with), was approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for general use in 1974, and was re-certified in September 1993 and is being used in more than a hundred countries including the U.S. Although the State Department admits that it is slightly toxic to wild birds and fish – because it takes between one to eight weeks to dissolve in water and soil, it purportedly does not build up in organic tissue.⁸⁵ The EPA concluded that if used properly, it has adverse impact neither on the environment nor on humans.⁸⁶

However, this herbicide is being applied in an inaccurate and damaging way. Already in 1988 GAO drew attention to the excessive use of herbicides in marijuana spraying – at that time 3.4 liters were needed to fumigate one hectare of marijuana, but sometimes 27 liters were used on 24 hectares (an average of 1.1 liter per hectare), and then two days later 200 liters were sprayed over a mere 16 hectares equating to 12.5 liters per hectare. It was even reported that once 24 hectares were sprayed by 285 liters of the herbicide (11.9 liters per hectare).⁸⁷ However, the herbicide’s manufacturer Monsanto recommends the application of only 2.5 liters per hectare with the concentration of 2.5 grams per liter equating to a mere 6.25 grams per hectare. The State Department, on the other hand, refers in its reports to a mixture of 147 grams per liter, and the Colombian National Police admits to using 23.65 liters per hectare with a concentration of 158 grams per liter. This corresponds to a stunning 3.7 kg per hectare, which is about 500 times the

signify that it is not known what the mixture exactly consists of, as some independent organizations signal.

⁸³ “Drogues et antidrogue en Colombie,” 29.

⁸⁴ According to the manufacturer’s description the composition of Roundup Ultra is 41% of glyphosate, 14.5% surfactant, and 44.5% water. The exact identity of the surfactant is unknown. See Jim Oldham and Rachel Massey, *Health and Environmental Effects of Herbicide Spray Campaigns in Colombia*, Institute for Science and Interdisciplinary Studies, March 18, 2002, 2, http://www.laslianas.org/Colombia/SprayingReview_Oldham-Massey.pdf (accessed April 6, 2011).

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *Aerial Eradication of Illicit Crops: Frequently Asked Questions*, March 24, 2003, <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/fs/18987.htm> (accessed November 19, 2007).

⁸⁶ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *2000 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2001, <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2000/> (accessed November 15, 2007).

⁸⁷ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Drug Control*, November 1988, 35.

recommended amount.⁸⁸ In March 2002 the Colombian government authorized the reduction of the spraying mixture's strength, but this restriction was lifted already in August of that same year in order to improve the effectiveness of aerial spraying. The application of 2.5 liters per hectare for opium poppy and 10.4 liters per hectare for coca was approved.⁸⁹ At this excessive concentration the environmental impact can be disastrous. Let us remember that in Colombia illicit crops have already been sprayed for more than twenty years. The quantities of herbicide which have been poured into the Colombian ecosystem are therefore difficult to estimate.⁹⁰

Interestingly, officially the EPA says "glyphosate-based products [...] could cause vomiting, swelling of the lungs, pneumonia, mental confusion and tissue damage" and in the U.S. it is advised to use Roundup with caution.⁹¹ The manufacturer also warns that persons or livestock should not come into contact with it directly nor through drift for it may cause skin, eye, or gastrointestinal irritation.⁹² Because the spraying occurs without any prior warning, it is almost impossible to meet these conditions. Since 2001, when complaints began to be recorded, until the end of 2008 the government of Colombia received 8,750 complaints about damage to the licit crops caused by aerial eradication and it has investigated a great majority of them. However, only 117 have been found valid so far, and no case of adverse effects on humans was verified.⁹³ While local and international non-governmental organizations, as well as some Colombian institutions such as the Human Rights Ombudsman or the Comptroller-General's offices, produce piles of reports documenting cases of herbicides' adverse effect on human health, livestock and legal crops,⁹⁴ the U.S. and Colombian governments have dismissed such complaints as implausible and their very source – coca growing farmers – as unreliable and easily manipulated by narcotraffickers or armed groups.⁹⁵

Interestingly, the U.S. government prefers to emphasize that coca cultivation, production and trafficking have resulted in the destruction of – at an absolute

⁸⁸ "Drogues et antidrogue en Colombie," 47.

⁸⁹ U.S. General Accounting Office, "Drug Control: Coca Cultivation and Eradication Estimates in Colombia," GAO-03-319R, January 2003, 12, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03319r.pdf> (accessed October 5, 2008).

⁹⁰ Oldham and Massey, Health and Environmental Effects, 9–10.

⁹¹ Scott Wilson, "Aerial Attack Killing More Than Coca," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2001, page A01, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/drugs/aerial.htm> (accessed September 15, 2010).

⁹² Oldham and Massey, Health and Environmental Effects, 6–7.

⁹³ U.S. Department of State, 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 204.

⁹⁴ Oldham and Massey, Health and Environmental Effects, 11.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

minimum – 2.4 million hectares of the fragile tropical forest in the Andean region over the last 20 years.⁹⁶ That is, of course, true: coca growing peasants establish new plots each time deeper and deeper into the jungle.⁹⁷ What is more, large quantities of chemical precursors are used in the processing of cocaine and heroin in the jungle laboratories. However, the U.S. State Department makes the further claim that “spraying a single-crop field in a way that does not harm the soil in fact encourages the natural reintroduction of native species and increases diversity,” because it allows plants to rejuvenate rapidly.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, the studies conducted on this are inconsistent. Some emphasize the fact that glyphosate is a broad-spectrum herbicide that kills a wide range of plants and affects all living organisms and, used inappropriately, its potential environmental damage may be disastrous and irreversible.⁹⁹ Others maintain that the risks to health and environment are negligible when compared to risks associated with the cultivation of illicit crops and drug refining.¹⁰⁰ However, a recurrent argument found in both samples of such studies is that it is the surfactants that determine the toxicity of the formulation and that very often they are more toxic than the glyphosate itself.¹⁰¹ The biggest problem remains the surfactants added to the final mixture, because the exact formulation is not known and thus their effects are difficult to evaluate.

Apart from the incorrect use of the herbicide, there is one more problematic aspect of aerial eradication. As it is at the core of the counterdrug efforts, the eradicated area is used as the sign of progress in the whole war on drugs. However, just like drug seizures and apprehensions are a questionable evaluation tool in border interdiction or law enforcement, the number of hectares eradicated of illicit crops is even more unreliable. The area under cultivation and other indicators – such as the potential coca leaf production per hectare, per yield or per year; or the amount of coca leaves needed to produce one kilogram of cocaine hydrochloride according to which the amount of cocaine produced annually is estimated – are all *mere* estimates. As the State Department itself admits, “[the

⁹⁶ U.S. Congress. Senate, Andean Regional Initiative, testimony of Rand Beers, July 11, 2001, http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/jun_aug/4054.htm (accessed November 19, 2007).

⁹⁷ Oldham and Massey, Health and Environmental Effects, 11.

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, Aerial Eradication of Illicit Crops, March 24, 2003.

⁹⁹ Oldham and Massey, Health and Environmental Effects.

¹⁰⁰ Keith R. Solomon et al., Environmental and Human Health Assessment of the Aerial Spray Program for Coca and Poppy Control in Colombia, A report prepared for the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) section of the Organization of American States (OAS) (Washington, DC, USA, March 31, 2005), 90, <http://www.cicad.oas.org/en/glifosatefinalreport.pdf> (accessed April 7, 2011).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 93; Oldham and Massey, Health and Environmental Effects, 7.

figures] represent the midpoint of a band of statistical probability that gets wider as additional variables are introduced and as we move from cultivation to harvest to final refined drug.”¹⁰² The White House’s Office on National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) decided in 2007 to finally present the data not as point estimates, but as intervals.¹⁰³ Hence, for example, the 2006 interval estimate was “subject to a 90 percent confidence interval of between 125,800 and 179,500 hectares [and this] means that it is not possible to infer year-to-year trend information.”¹⁰⁴ The gap between these numbers is too big to deduce any trends in either cultivation or cocaine production.

Nonetheless, the State Department likes to present year-to-year fluctuations as evidence of great success, even though they are often due to changes in methodology or realization. For example, the initial short-lived “success” of the aerial eradication in 2001 and 2002 can partially be attributed to an increase in the number of spraying helicopters from 10 in July 2001 to 17 in January 2003 and their ability to carry twice as much of the spraying mixture.¹⁰⁵ The success of the 2001 and 2002 eradication was also due to the fact that the cultivation was concentrated in the Putumayo region and thus it was much easier to conduct the spraying there.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, the increase in coca cultivation between 2005 and 2007 was attributed to the expansion of the area surveyed.¹⁰⁷ Besides, the data are the accumulated sprayed area figures, which take into account also fields sprayed several times in the same calendar year.

As can be seen in Table 2, the data provided by the State Department and the United Nation’s Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in some cases differ substantially, which is especially important for the evaluation of trends in coca cultivation.

¹⁰² U.S. Department of State, 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 20. For methodology see *Ibid.*, 20–22.

¹⁰³ See John M. Walsh, Reality Check, Washington Office on Latin America, June 2007, <http://www.wola.org/media/Reality%20Check%20June%202007.pdf> (accessed October 22, 2007).

¹⁰⁴ White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), 2006 Coca Estimates for Colombia, June 4, 2007, <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press07/060407.html> (accessed October 31, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ U.S. General Accounting Office, Drug Control: Financial and Management Challenges Continue to Complicate Efforts to Reduce Illicit Drug Activities in Colombia, GAO-03-820T, June 3, 2003, 12, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03820t.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ “Drogues et antidrogue en Colombie,” 51.

¹⁰⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Plan Colombia, 5.

Table 2: Comparison of estimates on coca cultivated and area eradicated by U.S. State Department and UNODC, 2001–2009

	Area cultivated in hectares		Area eradicated in hectares (chemically and manually)		Year-to-year change in cultivation	
	STATE	UNODC	STATE	UNODC	STATE	UNODC
2001	169,800	145,000	89,200	94,150		
2002	144,500	102,000	127,900	130,360	-15%	-30%
2003	114,000	86,000	133,000	132,810	-21%	-16%
2004	114,000	80,000	147,490	136,550	0%	-7%
2005	144,000	86,000	170,085	138,770*	+26%	+8%
2006	157,000	78,000	213,710	215,100	+9%	-9%
2007	167,000	99,000	219,530	219,940	+6%	+27%
2008	119,000	81,000	229,230	229,600	-29%	-18%
2009		68,000	165,270	165,320		-16%

*Chemically eradicated only.

Compiled by the author from U.S. Department of State International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports from 1996 to 2010 and UNODC Coca Cultivation Surveys 2001–2010.

The State Department does boast with one more success: a decline in opium poppy cultivation. During the 1990s, the cultivation of this crop and the production of heroin were continuously on the rise so that by the end of the decade Colombia became a principal supplier of heroin to the U.S. market – Colombian heroin replaced that from Southeast Asia, especially on the U.S. East Coast.¹⁰⁸ Increasing eradication since 2001, with the adoption of Plan Colombia, resulted in a tremendous decrease in poppy cultivation to such an extent that in 2006 it was declared that no more plantation-sized plots of opium poppy existed in the country.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly though, while the potential production of it was estimated at only 1.9 metric tons,¹¹⁰ in 2010 it was reported that “60 percent of the heroin seized in the United States originates in Colombia,”¹¹¹ and these shipments

¹⁰⁸ U.S. General Accounting Office, Drug Control: Narcotics Threat From Colombia Continues to Grow, NSIAD-99-136, June 22, 1999, 5, <http://www.gao.gov/archive/1999/ns99136.pdf> (accessed October 5, 2008).

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Department of State, Fiscal Year 2008 Budget, 59.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 212. This estimate is as of 2007; newer data are not available.

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of State, 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 201.

were confiscated primarily east of the Mississippi River.¹¹² This apparent success is a perfect example of how false methodology may lead to an assumption that the problem has been solved. Firstly, clearly the opium poppy crops are hidden in licit crops or its plots are too small to be detected. Secondly, due to false cultivation data, it is impossible to estimate the potential production.

Indeed, as in the case of opium poppy, one of the major side effects of the intensive spraying of coca in the southern departments of Putumayo¹¹³ and Caquetá (under the operation Push into Southern Colombia during Clinton's presidency) was the diffusion of its cultivation.¹¹⁴ While in 1999 it was present only in twelve departments, in 2008, 24 out of 32 were affected.¹¹⁵ In 2008, almost half of the total coca cultivation took place in just three departments: Guaviare, Nariño and Cauca (the latter two are on the southern Pacific coast).¹¹⁶ Indeed, after the successful eradication in the neighboring departments of Putumayo and Caquetá, Nariño has been the biggest coca producer in the country since 2003: 37% of all cocaine laboratories detected and destroyed in 2009 were in Nariño.¹¹⁷ The diffusion of cultivation also caused a shrinking of coca fields: the average field size further decreased from 2.05 in 2001 to 0.66 hectares in 2009,¹¹⁸ with coca bush often ingeniously hidden in the shade or intercropped with licit crops. Colombian farmers have also introduced new coca varieties called Tingo Maria, White Bolivian, and Black Bolivian which have bigger leaves, give more yields, contain more alkaloid, and are becoming resistant to glyphosate.¹¹⁹

Intensified eradication also resulted in an increase in illicit cultivation in Colombia's national parks where herbicide treatment is forbidden. There are fifty-five National Natural Parks in Colombia covering about ten million hectares, which represents the fifth greatest system of protected area in the world.¹²⁰ Unfor-

¹¹² U.S. Department of State, Fiscal Year 2009 Budget, 16.

¹¹³ In 2000, cultivation in Putumayo represented 40% of the total area under coca cultivation in Colombia. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey 2009, June 22, 2010, 27, <http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/Colombia-Coca-Survey-2010-ENGLISH-web.pdf> (accessed September 22, 2010).

¹¹⁴ See maps presenting gradual dispersion between 1999 and 2002 in United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey, June 2004, 84–87, http://www.unodc.org/pdf/colombia/colombia_coca_survey_2003.pdf (accessed November 9, 2007).

¹¹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey 2009, 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14. In 2006–2007, these were Nariño, Putumayo and Meta.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 and 40.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹⁹ CNN, "New possible threat in drug war," September 1, 2004, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/drugs/threat.htm> (accessed September 4, 2010).

¹²⁰ Washington Office on Latin America, Chemical Reactions. Fumigation: Spreading Coca and Threatening Colombia's Ecological and Cultural Diversity, February 2008, 2, <http://wola.org>

unately, in 2009 at least 18 of them (up from 14 in 2008) were affected with the illicit cultivation, accounting for about 6% of the total area under illicit cultivation in Colombia. Thus, illicit cultivation in national parks has increased by 17%.¹²¹ What is alarming is that in 2006 the government of Colombia authorized for the first time the aerial spraying of 2,090 hectares in the National Natural Park Sierra La Macarena.¹²² Furthermore, the coca cultivation has also increased along the borders with Ecuador and Venezuela, where chemical spraying is prohibited within 10 kilometers of the borderline. In 2006–2007, the CNP sprayed more than 15,600 hectares of coca near the border with Ecuador, which resulted in diplomatic skirmishes between the two countries.¹²³

For a long time the U.S. government had been insisting that the eradication is unsuccessful only at first sight, because it simply needs time before it shows positive results. Towards the end of George W. Bush's presidency, policymakers both in Washington and Bogotá finally acknowledged that fumigation is an expensive program with poor results. As a consequence, in the 2008 counternarcotics budget aerial eradication received slightly less funding (approximately a 20 million dollars decrease).¹²⁴ Chemical and forced manual eradication, however, still remained the most important element of the counternarcotics efforts.

The U.S. government also continued to support research to find a more effective way to destroy the coca bush. In late 2006, Congress authorized that fungal plant diseases called mycoherbicides be tested against illicit drug crops.¹²⁵ The U.S. government, Congress and Southern Command had also long been pressuring the government of Colombia to undertake research into a fungus which occurs naturally in coca. This fungus, *Fusarium oxysporum*, was rejected for use both for environmental and political reasons back in 1999. *Fusarium* is a very dangerous fungus which mutates easily and hence makes it difficult to predict its impact on the fragile Amazon ecosystem. In point of fact it can be considered a biological weapon.¹²⁶ The Andean governments have vehemently refused and decisive-

/media/WOLA%20Chemical%20Reactions%20Februaryuary%202008.pdf (accessed September 19, 2010).

¹²¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2009, 19.

¹²² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey (June 2007), 74, http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/icmp/colombia_2006_en_web.pdf (accessed November 9, 2007).

¹²³ U.S. Department of State, Fiscal Year 2008 Budget, 59.

¹²⁴ Washington Office on Latin America, Chemical Reactions, 1. See also U.S. Department of State's Fiscal Budget Reports for respective years.

¹²⁵ Washington Office on Latin America et al., Evaluating Mycoherbicides for Illicit Drug Crop Control: Rigorous Scientific Scrutiny is Crucial, February 2007, 3, http://www.wola.org/media/Mycoherbicide_Research_Plan.pdf (accessed October 22, 2007).

¹²⁶ For the fungus' characteristics and risks see *Ibid.*, 4–5.

ly prohibited the application of any mycoherbicides, but this eventuality cannot be completely excluded in the future. Some argue that its efficacy is uncertain, because growers can use a fungicide or can breed a coca resistant to the fungus. On the other side, advocates argue that it may be less damaging to the ecosystem than chemical herbicides.¹²⁷ The debate about the most efficient weapon against the coca bush only illustrates the principle behind the war on drugs: every means should be considered to prevent coca from growing.

In order to alleviate the negative side-effects that aerial eradication is having on coca growing peasants, alternative development schemes were implemented. Prior to the adoption of Plan Colombia, USAID's engagement in Colombia was virtually none (although some alternative development projects were started in 1985). Between 1996 and 2000 it provided a mere 18.6 million U.S. dollars used primarily for promoting alternative economic development, the administration of justice, and respect for human rights.¹²⁸ Although this funding increased substantially with the announcement of the Plan, it did not represent more than 20% of the total U.S. assistance. This ratio changed to 55% to 45% for military and non-military assistance in 2007, but alternative crop programs remained under-financed. Although a new civil-military strategy named *Integrated Action* was launched in 2009 (with pilot projects started already in 2007), which combined military offensive with non-military projects (land distribution, aid for internally displaced people, voluntary eradication, alternative crops cultivation, provision of basic services), the rural communities tended to view this as just another strategy "designed at a desk in Bogotá."¹²⁹ The farmers did not trust a central government that had so often disappointed them.

Most of the coca is cultivated in areas of extreme poverty where living standards are appalling. Approximately 35% of Colombians live in poverty and therefore constitute an almost endless supply of cheap workforce.¹³⁰ Indeed, in 2007

¹²⁷ Tim Golden, "Fungus Considered as a Tool to Kill Coca in Colombia," *New York Times*, July 6, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/06/world/fungus-considered-as-a-tool-to-kill-coca-in-colombia.html> (accessed September 2, 2010).

¹²⁸ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Drug Control: U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results*, GAO-01-26, October 17, 2000, 32, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0126.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2007).

¹²⁹ Isacson and Poe, *After Plan Colombia*, 2.

¹³⁰ Data vary according to chosen indicators. According to the CIA World Factbook it is 37.2% (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>, accessed February 21, 2013); according to the World Bank it is 34.1% (<http://data.worldbank.org/country/colombia>, accessed February 21, 2013).

it was estimated that 80,000 households were involved in coca cultivation,¹³¹ all from poor rural areas. Understandably, forced eradication backed by no food or financial assistance further aggravates the already precarious living conditions of Colombian peasants.

Although alternative development projects should in theory literally follow the spraying planes, this has not always been the case. For example, while the department of Putumayo was subject to the most intensive spraying, between 2002 and 2004 it obtained almost 35% of the total alternative development budget which was, of course, instantly mirrored in the coca cultivation reduction from 66,000 to 4,400 hectares. Following this short-term success however, since 2005 it has been reduced to only 0.4% which resulted in an immediate increase in coca cultivation from 4,400 to 12,250 hectares.¹³² This was also the case in the departments of Meta, Caquetá, Guaviare, and Vichada which accounted for 40% of the total cultivation but received only about 5% of the total budget.¹³³

Another shortcoming was that the projects often concentrated on the areas with strong governmental presence because it facilitated their implementation instead of addressing the most remote areas which had long been neglected. The Afro-Colombian population of the Pacific coast's Nariño department suffered the most. In addition to discrimination, forced displacement, intimidation, violence, and disadvantaged access to governmental schemes, they were struck by fumigations more than other regions: about one-third of the total number of hectares sprayed between 2001 and 2008 was in Nariño.¹³⁴ On the other hand, the fact that the incentive to cultivate licit crops was poor is reflected in a 2005/2006 UNODC survey, which found that overall "only 9 percent of the coca farmers reported having received any kind of assistance to stop growing coca plants," – and no farmers did so in Nariño.¹³⁵ The adverse effects of chemical eradication and the internal war on the Afro-Colombian communities thus contrast strikingly with the lack of

¹³¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region. A Survey of Bolivia, Colombia and Peru* (June 2008), 59, http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Andean_report_2008.pdf (accessed September 16, 2010).

¹³² Washington Office on Latin America, *U.S. Congress Takes Step in the Right Direction on Colombia*, June 6, 2007, 27, http://wola.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=viewp&id=452&Itemid=8 (accessed September 16, 2010).

¹³³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region*, 59.

¹³⁴ Calculation based on the data from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2009* (June 22, 2010), 77.

¹³⁵ Washington Office on Latin America, *Chemical Reactions*, February 2008, footnote, p. 25.

adequate assistance and programs mitigating these damages, which often led to their displacement and further impoverishment.¹³⁶

By and large, aerial eradication has proved rather controversial and counter-productive. Its evaluation is based on flawed methodology, its implementation is problematic, it is too costly but not very effective. It is especially harsh on coca growing peasants, who earn the least of all those involved in the drug trade. What is more, it incites rather than deters growing more coca, because the temporary decline in production drives up coca leaf farm-gate prices, it contributes to the deforestation, and drives peasants deeper into the jungle, into national parks, and into border areas. At the same time, the alternative development programs that accompany eradication are poorly designed, administered, and underfinanced. Overall, the effectiveness of the eradication efforts is more than questionable: the estimated area under coca cultivation remains stable, while cocaine production continues to be robust and cocaine and heroin street prices keep falling.¹³⁷

Conclusion

Ten years and almost six billion dollars after the implementation of Plan Colombia, the traffic in drugs is still booming and there is still plenty of cocaine available in the U.S. Many claim that drug processing and trafficking will not cease as long as the demand for narcotics continues. Yet the traffic in drugs cannot be simply explained by demand and supply. It must be remembered that it is the Colombian government and the elites who failed to implement necessary and long-overdue reforms to modernize their rigid class-ridden social systems, improve tax collection, introduce a universal conscription to the army, or distribute unused arable land, and thus contributed to the impoverishment and polarization of Colombian society. Bad policies, mismanagement, a lack of political will, and most importantly the complicity of individuals who fail to resist the temptation of profit and thus allow the drugs to flow – all of these have contributed to sustaining the production and supply of drugs. Drugs are simply too good a business.

¹³⁶ For the indigenous and Afro-Colombians see Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli, *Stopping irreparable harm: acting on Colombia's Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities protection crisis* (Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre June 2012), http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/04fcd8f818b16e1c31c4306ad74dfb70.pdf (accessed March 5, 2013).

¹³⁷ Coletta A. Youngers and John M. Walsh, *Development First. A more humane and promising approach to reducing cultivation of crops for illicit markets* (Washington Office on Latin America, March 2010), 3–4, http://justf.org/files/pubs/1003wola_df.pdf (accessed March 30, 2011).

Although U.S. assistance has been crucial in helping the Colombian government to fight organized crime and subversion, the counterdrug efforts have been a failure so far. It is impossible to speak about partial successes in eradication unless the drug availability on the U.S. market decreases and the trend is sustained, because *this* is the actual goal of the war on drugs. So far, all decreases in street-level drug availability and retail prices were temporary.¹³⁸ Still, U.S. government officials emphasize that without such policies the situation would have been even worse. They admit that counternarcotics efforts have above all a symbolic value which “lies in the demonstration of [its] national will to oppose drug smugglers, to defend [the U.S.] borders and to protect the security and well-being of U.S. citizens.”¹³⁹ But apart from this symbolic value, they also claim to have “a real value [which] is derived from the disruption of trafficking organizations and seizure of drugs, thereby raising their cost of doing business.”¹⁴⁰ Instead of raising the costs however, it raises the profit, which in turn makes interdiction losses more inconsequential.

As ardent critics of the counterdrug policy maintain, “both history and theory suggest that the prospects [of the counterdrug strategy] are not bright because the principal flaws are inherent in the strategy itself.”¹⁴¹ Enormous amounts of drugs would have to be seized in order to significantly affect prices on the U.S. market; virtually *all* coca in *all* coca-growing countries would have to be eradicated *at the same time* in order to influence the total potential cocaine production. For instance, due to the balloon effect, the recent decline in production in Colombia has been offset by increases in production in Peru and Bolivia. Furthermore, the failure of the supply-side counternarcotics policies (eradication, interdiction) has been demonstrated by the downward trend in cocaine price on the U.S. market, even though the availability, quality and prices should have been falling due to increased shipments to other markets in West Africa and Europe.¹⁴² Recent

¹³⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁹ U.S. General Accounting Office, Drug Control: Increased Interdiction and Its Contribution to the War on Drugs, T-NSIAD-93-4, February 25, 1993, 4, <http://archive.gao.gov/d42t14/148735.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴¹ Washington Office on Latin America, In Dubious Battle. Fumigation and the U.S. War on Drugs in Colombia, June 2006, 3, <http://www.wola.org/media/Drug%20Policy/In%20Dubious%20Battle%20--%20Fumigation%20in%20Colombia%20--%20WOLA%20June%202006.pdf> (accessed October 24, 2007).

¹⁴² Washington Office on Latin America, Latest Comprehensive Analysis Shows Resilience of Cocaine Market, Despite Disruptions, April 14, 2009, http://wola.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=viewp&id=900&Itemid=8 (accessed August 18, 2010); U.S. Government Accountability Office, Drug Control. International Programs Face Significant Challenges Reducing the Supply of

reports actually show that “cocaine’s U.S. retail price per pure gram in 2007 was the lowest figure on record – nearly 22 percent lower than in 1999, the year before Plan Colombia was launched.”¹⁴³ These failures only suggest that the anti-drug war’s emphasis on supply-side policies is misguided and wrong.

Above all, however, it must be acknowledged that when clear indicators of success and failure are not established, it is impossible to evaluate any policy, and the program can be perpetuated endlessly due to its deep institutionalization. As it has been mentioned, existing evaluation methods are incorrect and unreliable, yet they are used as rationale for continued existence of a host of agencies. What is more, the fragmented purview and responsibility for overseas and domestic drug-related programs and the lack of evaluation measures make these agencies unaccountable for any failures or mismanagement of their resources. As some commentators rightly observed: “historically, the State Department, more than the DEA, was given blame for failed efforts in other countries, [...] but now [...] almost nobody takes responsibility. If opium production is booming in Afghanistan, who does Congress blame? Nobody.”¹⁴⁴

One can only wonder why the U.S. government continues to ignore recommendations from many independent think-tanks and nongovernmental organizations and refuses to change a policy – which has proven to be ineffective. Is it because too much money of the U.S. tax payers has been spent over the years and it would be scandalous to admit that it had been in vain? Is it because the U.S. decision-makers truly believe in the righteousness of their strategy? Or is the primary goal of the counterdrug strategy actually not the elimination of drugs? Is it too good a business for all the private contractors who work in Colombia, for Monsanto, the producer of Roundup herbicide, or for the U.S. banks which “launder” millions of narcodollars every year? Given the mediocre results of the intensive chemical and manual eradication and the enormous environmental damage that has been caused by the incorrect use of herbicides it is unacceptable that this strategy continues unaffected.

The new Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos (since 2010) has greatly benefited from the tough strategies of his predecessors, and could, to some extent, soften his discourse and policies. While emphasizing security and the consolidation of the state’s presence in remote areas, in October 2012 he opened

Illegal Drugs but Support Broad U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives, a statement of Jess T. Ford (July 21, 2010), 5, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10921t.pdf> (accessed September 17, 2010).

¹⁴³ Washington Office on Latin America, Congress to Take Up New Drug Policy.

¹⁴⁴ Lee Hudson Teslik, *The Forgotten Drug War*, Backgrounder, Council on Foreign Relations, April 2006.

negotiations with the leftist guerrillas who had been previously categorized as combatants in an internal conflict. President Santos also focused on long overdue reforms such as land reform or compensation for victims of the internal conflict, introduced anti-corruption measures, and reforms aimed at improving the justice system.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, in isolated rural areas other criminal activities, apart from growing illicit crops, have occurred, such as illegal mining, so-called BACRIMS (*bandas criminales*), created by the demobilized members of paramilitary groups, but also by members of state security forces have been mushrooming all over the country.¹⁴⁶ Sabotages of infrastructure have also been on the rise: between 2011 and 2012, attacks on pipelines grew by more than 250%.¹⁴⁷

Indeed, internal and regional stability are U.S. priorities and to this end the U.S. helped prevent Colombia from descending into an abyss of violence and chaos. Thanks to this sustained assistance Colombia has also become more democratic, improved in upholding the rule of law, and has strengthened the judiciary. Yet it must be remembered that winning the war against illegally armed insurgents would not necessarily bring about an end to drug production. As long as the drug trade is profitable, there will always exist groups willing to take over the illegal trade. It would therefore be a mistake to withdraw all assistance from Colombia, because it is indispensable for the further stabilization of the country. However, the U.S. should adjust its policies so that they are acceptable for the EU and the international community, and should at the same time keep pressuring the Colombian government to adopt the necessary reforms and do away with the level of impunity for serious violations of human rights. Above all, however, the highly dubious strategy of chemical eradication should be terminated and substituted for more sophisticated programs aiming to curb drug demand and boost economic development, employment and the production of licit crops.

¹⁴⁵ Beittel, *Colombia: Background*, 7–10.

¹⁴⁶ For the recent situation in Colombia under the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos see U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2012 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Washington, DC (March 2012): 170–78, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/184314.pdf> (Volume I, accessed March 3, 2013); Beittel, *Colombia: Background*.

¹⁴⁷ Beittel, *Colombia: Background*, 17–18.