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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

## THESIS

**SEQUENCING: TARGETING INSURGENTS AND DRUGS  
IN COLOMBIA**

by

Michelle L. Farrell

March 2007

Thesis Advisor:  
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Jeanne Giraldo  
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<b>THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>		Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.			
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>	<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> March 2007	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE:</b> Sequencing: Targeting Insurgents and Drugs in Colombia		<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Farrell, Michelle L.		<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A		<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.	
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.		<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b>  Peru's success in first defeating the Shining Path guerrilla movement in the early 1990s and then reducing coca cultivation in the mid-1990s demonstrates the effectiveness of a sequential approach to these problems; however, is the sequential approach an effective model for handling the dual threat, particularly in Colombia? This thesis examines the overall effectiveness of two distinctly different strategies for dealing with the dual threat of drugs and terrorism in Colombia: President Pastrana's "drugs first" strategy and President Uribe's unified campaign against both guerrillas and drugs. It finds that President Uribe's unified campaign was more effective than President Pastrana's sequential strategy. While President Pastrana's drugs first strategy was relatively effective in targeting the illicit drug trade, it did not eliminate the illicit drug industry nor did it achieve its secondary objective of weakening the war-making capacity of the FARC-EP. President Uribe's unified strategy met substantial initial success as regional and national security dramatically improved and a weakening of the FARC-EP was observed. Despite such success, elimination of the FARC-EP still remains beyond Colombia's reach and the continuation of counter-narcotic policies seem to be reaping diminishing returns. To continue making progress against both threats a continuation of a comprehensive unified campaign is required.			
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Colombia, President Pastrana, President Uribe, Drug Trade, Coca, Counter-narcotics, FARC, FARC-EP, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Government of Colombia, Insurgency, Terrorism, Plan Colombia, Plan Patriota, Demilitarized Zone, Democratic Defense and Security Policy, DSP			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 125
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UL

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)  
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**SEQUENCING: TARGETING INSURGENTS AND DRUGS IN COLOMBIA**

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Lieutenant, United States Navy  
B.S., Elmira College, 2001

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

from the

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## ABSTRACT

Peru's success in first defeating the Shining Path guerrilla movement in the early 1990s and then reducing coca cultivation in the mid-1990s demonstrates the effectiveness of a sequential approach to these problems; however, is the sequential approach an effective model for handling the dual threat, particularly in Colombia? This thesis examines the overall effectiveness of two distinctly different strategies for dealing with the dual threat of drugs and terrorism in Colombia: President Pastrana's "drugs first" strategy and President Uribe's unified campaign against both guerrillas and drugs. It finds that President Uribe's unified campaign was more effective than President Pastrana's sequential strategy. While President Pastrana's drugs first strategy was relatively effective in targeting the illicit drug trade, it did not eliminate the illicit drug industry nor did it achieve its secondary objective of weakening the war-making capacity of the FARC-EP. President Uribe's unified strategy met substantial initial success as regional and national security dramatically improved and a weakening of the FARC-EP was observed. Despite such success, elimination of the FARC-EP still remains beyond Colombia's reach and the continuation of counter-narcotic policies seem to be reaping diminishing returns. To continue making progress against both threats a continuation of a comprehensive unified campaign is required.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This work would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from a number of colleagues, friends and family. First of all, I would like to thank my two advisors, Drs. Jeanne Giraldo and Douglas Porch, whose insightful guidance, criticism, and most of all patience was instrumental in the completion of this thesis.

A special thanks to my parents, whose support and continual encouragement throughout the years have enabled me to truly strive to reach my utmost potential.

And last but not least to my husband, Brian. Without your love, patience, support, and encouragement, I would have struggled to find the inspiration and motivation needed to complete this thesis. And for that I am forever grateful.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics strategies have played a significant role in U.S. foreign policy, particularly in Latin America. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. counter-insurgency strategies dominated the approach toward troubled Latin American countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua—where leftist insurgents threatened to spread communism in America’s own backyard. In 1986, after President Reagan signed a National Security Directive that established international drug trafficking as a threat to national security, drugs slowly replaced the Soviet threat as a priority of American foreign policy, especially in the Andean region. From this point onward, U.S. supply-sided counter-narcotics strategies would significantly impact U.S. relations with Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Proponents of U.S. supply-side counter-narcotics policies believe the destruction of cultivation in source countries, targeting of production facilities, and interdiction of trafficking routes would increase production costs and reduce the supply of drugs. They assumed that increased costs would be passed on to consumers and the increased scarcity of drugs would result in lesser availability, increased prices, and reductions in drug purity. Yet, after more than two decades of focusing on this supply-side strategy, there has been minimal, if any, effect on the price, purity, and availability of cocaine or heroin in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

U.S. policy in Latin America has long stressed that a war on drugs is central to any effort to undermine armed non-state actors who benefit from involvement in the drug trade. Therefore, the United States has continually advocated unified campaigns against drugs and guerrillas to countries facing a dual threat – Peru in the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia in the 1990s to the present, and in Afghanistan today. However, Latin American governments and militaries

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Justice, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2007* (Johnston, Pa: National Drug Intelligence Center, 2006), p. 3 and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2006* (New York: United Nations, June 2006), p. 368.

have argued that efforts to fight drugs can often undermine counter-insurgency efforts and threaten democratic stability. When the livelihood of the coca-growing peasant is under attack by state eradication efforts, peasants tend to shift their support to armed actors or warlords involved in the drug trade and stop cooperating with the state and its counter-insurgency efforts.

There is extensive literature on the minimal impact that supply-sided counter-narcotics efforts have had on the price, purity and availability of drugs in the United States. But the side-effects of counter-narcotics approaches in the countries themselves have received less attention. Vanda Felbab-Brown, a Ph. D. candidate at MIT, is one of the few political scientists to have examined the problematic relationship between counter-drug and counter-terrorism efforts. In her dissertation “The Coca Connection: The Impact of Illicit Substances on Militarized Conflict,” Felbab-Brown examines how the production and trafficking of illicit drugs fuels militarized conflict. According to her findings, the advantages that insurgents receive from access to drug production and profits are more than simply financial. Their involvement also brings political and military benefits, in addition to profits. This finding challenges the prevailing rationale behind international drug policies, particularly those in Colombia at the onset of Plan Colombia, which claim government suppression of illicit crops will decrease the capability and strength of the guerrillas or terrorists who utilize the drug industry as a source of revenue. According to Falbab-Brown, this suppression has the potential to generate popular support for the insurgency – a key element in its survival. Her analysis clearly demonstrates the potential for counter-narcotics efforts to undermine counter-terrorism objectives when a source country is faced with the dual threat of drugs and insurgency.<sup>2</sup>

So how should a country deal with the dual threat of drugs and terrorism? The strategies typically used to eliminate these threats follow either a sequential

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<sup>2</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The Coca Connection: The Impacts of Illicit Substances on Militarized Conflict,” April 2004; Internet; accessed from MIT website [http://web.mit.edu/polisci/students/vfelbab-brown/coca\\_connection.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/polisci/students/vfelbab-brown/coca_connection.pdf) on 10 February 2005 and Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Afghanistan: When Counter-narcotics Undermines Counterterrorism,” *Washington Quarterly* 28, No. 4 (Autumn 2005), pp. 55-72.

method of elimination or a simultaneous method of attacking both threats. Sequential strategies are employed for two reasons: first, to attack the more dangerous threat first. The second is based on the rationale that to eliminate one threat will weaken the other. The sequential method was employed in Peru (the crux of Falbab-Brown's study), where the Shining Path guerrillas were viewed as a greater threat to national security than was the drug trade. Not only did the guerrillas pose a significant national security threat, but they also undermined the government's ability to conduct effective counter-narcotics operations in areas controlled by the guerrillas. Thus, the elimination of the guerrilla threat first was not only thought to be necessary to protect national security but this also allowed the government to attack the drug trade effectively. The Peruvian case suggests that a simultaneous campaign to conquer both drugs and guerrillas is ineffective and even counterproductive because simultaneous efforts against both problems target the livelihood of the peasants (drugs) and tends to push them further into the hands of the guerrillas. Valuable sources of intelligence vital to the counter-insurgency effort are also lost in the process.

In Colombia, proponents for a purely counter-insurgency strategy state Colombia's violence existed decades before the drug industry developed. Although drugs may have escalated the conflict, as Falbab-Brown and economist Francisco Thoumi make clear, they are not the root cause of Colombia's conflict. Therefore, it is agreed that a policy purely focused on counter-narcotics will not bring stability to Bogotá. According to Thoumi, the drug industry developed in Colombia because "institutions were weak, state legitimacy was challenged by many excluded from power, and law enforcement was ineffective and arbitrary."<sup>3</sup> Those who agree with Thoumi, see the insurgents as the principal threat because they undermine the government's legitimacy and challenge its authority in many regions of Colombia. Proponents of a counter-insurgency approach, such as President Fujimori in Peru, argue that if the government can take control,

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<sup>3</sup> Francisco Thoumi, "The Numbers Game: Let's All Guess the Size of the Illegal Drug Industry," TNI Crime and Globalization Paper, December 2003; Internet; accessed from <http://www.tni.org/crime-docs/numbers.pdf> on 05 September 2005.

secure, and maintain a state presence in these regions, counter-narcotics policies (such as alternative development) can then be implemented more successfully.

Others argue that although Colombian insurgents generate revenue from kidnapping, extortion, and other illegal activities. The 1982 decision by the Revolutionary Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) to engage in the drug trade has provided them with the wherewithal to escalate what was a marginal insurgency into a major threat to Colombian political stability. The U.S. and Colombian governments view drugs as the insurgency's economic center of gravity and thus believe that an elimination of the drug trade will decrease insurgent revenues and its capability to fight. Yet, opponents contend that an attack on one source of financing (e.g., the drug trade) will only cause the guerrillas to compensate by seeking other illegal revenue-generating activities (e.g., kidnapping, extortion, cattle rustling, fuel theft, etc.) and may even escalate the conflict as the group tries to protect its main sources of revenue.<sup>4</sup>

Proponents of the simultaneous attack on a dual threat view both guerrillas and drugs as equally threatening. Insurgents are always looking for opportunities to make money. The growth of a globalized drug trade centered in the Western Hemisphere in Colombia has made it increasingly difficult to separate the two threats or at least attack one without impacting the other. Critics of a "simultaneous" strategy contend that, while separating the threats may be difficult, it is the division of resources used to combat the threats simultaneously that actually compromises the ability of the government effectively to eliminate either of the threats.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Phil Williams, "Warning Indicators, Terrorist Finances, and Terrorist Adaptation" in *Strategic Insights* VI, Issue 1 (January 2005) and Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Emma Björnehed, "Narco-Terrorism: The Merger of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror," *Global Crime* 6, no. 3 & 4 (August-November 2004), pp. 318-321.

Ideally, in areas where terrorist organizations are heavily involved in the drug industry, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism strategies should be complementary. Therefore, the target of supply-side counter-narcotics strategies should not be to decrease the number of hectares under cultivation. The ultimate goal is to decrease the resource base of insurgents. It seems rational that counter-narcotics efforts would at least assist the counter-terrorism objective of decreasing the strength of armed non-state actors. Yet, in practice, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism policies may not be mutually supportive, as witnessed by Fujimori's policy in Peru and even U.S. policy in Afghanistan until recently.<sup>6</sup>

The Peruvian case clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of a sequential approach to managing a dual threat. But, as pointed out by Lieutenant Michael Hobaugh in "Colombia's War on Drugs: Can Peru Provide a Recipe for Success," it is not clear that the Peruvian case is either comparable or applicable to Colombia.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the economic factors and successful interdiction tactics, the nature of the Colombian terrorist threat is completely different than the threat posed by the Shining Path in Peru. In Colombia, there are multiple armed non-state actors vying for power, from left-wing insurgent groups such as the FARC-EP and the National Liberation Army (ELN) to right-wing paramilitary organization such as the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), which were demobilized in 2006. The organization of the insurgencies is also far more decentralized than in Peru. In this regard, Colombia is more comparable to Afghanistan which faces a multi-faceted threat from drugs and numerous armed non-state actors. In fact, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to call Colombia the Afghanistan of South America in terms of its history, the fact that the central government in Bogotá has never successfully controlled its hinterland, and the threat combination of drugs and non-state actors.

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<sup>6</sup> For additional information on U.S. policy in Afghanistan see Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Afghanistan: When Counter-narcotics Undermines Counter-terrorism."

<sup>7</sup> Michael Hobaugh, *Colombia's War on Drugs: Can Peru Provide a Recipe for Success?* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2000).

In Colombia, as in Afghanistan, Washington is now supporting unified campaigns against both drugs and terrorism. Since counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism strategies are being applied simultaneously, it is all the more important to understand the interaction of these two approaches in countries facing a threat from multiple armed non-state actors engaged in the drug trade. In Colombia, unlike in Peru, the interaction and impact of counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism strategies has yet to be determined. Therefore, this thesis will utilize Colombia as a case study to address the following questions: What is the relationship between counter-narcotics efforts and counter-insurgency strategies? Do these two strategies support or undermine each other? In other words, what is the best strategy to deal with the dual threat associated with drugs and terrorism? How do you attack each, and in what order?

#### **A. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES**

This thesis is based on an analytical survey of primary and secondary sources regarding the employment of counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency policies in Colombia since the beginning of increased U.S. assistance in 1999. Additionally, it will incorporate interviews conducted with members of U.S. Southern Command as well as members of the U.S. academic community.

Colombia was selected as a case study because it is currently the country where the nexus of drugs and terrorism is most prominent. Although Colombia has been the focal point of U.S. counter-narcotics assistance over the years, only in 2002 was it allowed to be put toward counter-terrorism efforts. While there is a significant amount of literature available on the impact of U.S. counter-narcotics efforts in Colombia on the drug supply, little research has been conducted on how these efforts have impacted Colombia's counter-terrorism initiative against its armed non-state actors. The Colombian case also represents a multi-polar system where there are several armed non-state actors with varying interests; this makes it more comparable than the Peruvian case to the current situation in Afghanistan.

## **B. THESIS ORGANIZATION**

Peru's success in battling the guerrilla threat first (in the early 1990s) and later the drug threat demonstrates the effectiveness of a sequential approach; however, is the sequential approach an effective model for handling the dual threat, particularly in Colombia? To answer this question, this thesis will examine the overall effectiveness of two distinctly different strategies for dealing with the dual threat of drugs and terrorism in Colombia: President Pastrana's drugs first strategy and President Uribe's unified campaign against both guerrillas and drugs. This thesis will argue that President Uribe's unified campaign was more effective than President Pastrana's sequential strategy. While President Pastrana's drugs first strategy was relatively effective in targeting the illicit drug trade, it did not eliminate the illicit drug industry nor did it achieve its secondary objective of weakening the war-making capacity of the FARC-EP. President Uribe's unified strategy met substantial initial success as regional and national security dramatically improved and a weakening of the FARC-EP was observed. With respect to counter-narcotics, President Uribe maintained marginal reductions in total area under cultivation until 2005. Despite such success, elimination of the FARC-EP still remains beyond Colombia's reach and the continuation of counter-narcotic policies seem to be reaping diminishing returns. To continue making progress against both threats, albeit slow, continuation of a comprehensive unified campaign is required. This thesis will conclude by proposing policy recommendations for Colombian government as well as for U.S. policy in Colombia.

Chapter II will provide a foundation for understanding the current conflict in Colombia from a historical perspective. It will discuss the origins of the decades-old civil war as well as the escalating threat posed by the main armed non-state actor in Colombia, the FARC-EP. It will focus primarily on the FARC-EP as this organization is considered the largest threat to consolidation of the Colombian state and the principal target of the state's counter-insurgency campaign.<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>8</sup> Both the AUC and the ELN will only be mentioned briefly as the demobilization process with the paramilitaries and the potential for a cease-fire agreement with the ELN has the potential to



chapter will also show the rise of the illicit drug industry in Colombia during the 1990s and argue that increased guerrilla involvement in this profitable market not only stimulated and sustained their growth but exacerbated the violence. Finally, the chapter will offer a synopsis of the strategies implemented under Colombia's last two presidents to address the dual threat of drugs and insurgency.

Chapter III will analyze the impact of counter-narcotics efforts implemented with U.S. assistance, both before 2002 (when U.S. assistance and most of the Colombian government's efforts were strictly driven by counter-narcotics efforts) and after 2002 (when U.S. assistance and Colombian government efforts supported a unified campaign against both drugs and terrorism). It will argue that Colombian government strategies led to a substantial decline in the amount of coca under cultivation from 2000 to 2002, the returns on increased eradication efforts since 2004 seem to be diminishing. It will also argue that the decreases in cultivation within Colombia were offset by other, negative effects of the counter-drug policies, including environmental degradation, increases in the amount of "attempted" cultivation, and the geographic shifts in cultivation both within Colombia and the Andean region in general. Finally, this chapter will argue that the number of hectares of coca in Colombia is a poor indicator of the effectiveness of U.S. supply-side counter-narcotics policy. Despite record levels of eradication and interdiction, Plan Colombia has failed to decrease the flow of illicit drugs to the United States—one of the underlying objectives for U.S. support of Plan Colombia.

Chapter IV will analyze the impact of Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia" (2000-2002) and President Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy (2003-2005) on the strength of the FARC-EP, one of the main perpetrators of violence in Colombia. It will argue that while Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia" did reduce the number of hectares of coca under cultivation, its impact on the FARC-EP was negligible. Plan Colombia did not substantially weaken the FARC-EP, as proponents insisted, nor did it strengthen the make them marginal actors in Colombia's internal conflict.

organization, as critics of government efforts have charged. Finally, this chapter will acknowledge that President Uribe's "unified" strategy against drugs and insurgents marginally diminished the military threat posed by the FARC-EP.

Finally, after summarizing the effectiveness of each strategy Chapter V will highlight that President Uribe's unified campaign was more effective against the dual threat of drugs and insurgency. The drug trade in Colombia has become a force multiplier for a number of Colombia's armed non-state actors, therefore, to stop targeting the drug trade is an unfathomable option for Bogotá. Despite only marginal changes in coca cultivation levels, President Uribe's counter-insurgency strategy has decreased the strength of the guerrillas and assisted Colombia in consolidating control over its national territory, which in turn has decreased cultivation in areas now under increased state control but increasing it in areas not fully under its control. Therefore, Chapter V will argue that the nature of the multi-dimensional threat confronting the Colombian government calls for a continuation of Uribe's comprehensive unified strategy and conclude by offering some policy recommendations to the Government of Colombia in order to make its unified strategy more effective.

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## II. THREAT ASSESSMENT

### A. INTRODUCTION

As the only South American country that borders both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, Colombia is the fourth largest country in Latin America and one of the continent's most populous nations. Unlike many countries in Latin America, Colombia has never suffered any dramatic economic collapse or periods of hyperinflation. In fact, the Colombian economy produced uninterrupted positive growth from the early 1930s through the late 1990s.<sup>9</sup> However, Colombia's economic performance is often overshadowed by its daunting political history. Considered the longest standing democracy in Latin America, Colombia continues to be plagued by the violence associated with its decades-old civil conflict and the war against drugs. Despite recent reductions in measures of violence (i.e., kidnapping, murder, etc), Colombia remains one of the most violent countries in the world.

The Colombian conflict is both deeply-rooted and complicated, involving two issues (drugs and control of national territory) and complex warring factions (left-wing guerrillas, criminal factions, paramilitary groups, and the Colombian government, which itself is represented by various entities with their own agendas). Since the conflict is deep-rooted, a discussion of the current situation in Colombia is not complete without a brief look at the origins of the problems facing it. This chapter will provide a foundation for understanding the current Colombian conflict in a historical context. It will discuss the origins of the violence as well as the escalating threat posed by the main armed non-state actor in Colombia, the FARC-EP. While there is more than one armed non-state actor in Colombia, this chapter will focus primarily on the FARC-EP as this organization is considered the largest threat to consolidation of the Colombian state and the principal target of the state's counter-insurgency campaign. It will show the rise of the illicit drug industry in Colombia during the 1990s and argue

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<sup>9</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, p. 4.

that increased guerrilla involvement in this profitable market not only stimulated and sustained their growth but exacerbated the civil conflict. Finally, the chapter will offer a synopsis of the programs implemented under Colombia's last two presidents to address not only the escalation of the country's civil conflict but also the economic, political, and social challenges confronting the Colombian state from 1998 to the present.

## **B. ORIGINS OF THE VIOLENCE**

Guerrilla movements in Colombia have their origins in the economic and social inequality and political oppression that are endemic in Colombian society. These movements, particularly the FARC-EP, trace their roots to the peasant struggles of the 1930's and 1940's, when landless peasants supported by reform-oriented Liberals challenged land-owning elites defended by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> Colombia's two traditional parties—the Liberals and the Conservatives—have competed for power since their establishment in the mid-nineteenth century. The competing patronage systems of these two dominant political parties contributed to the tensions and violence between political factions that has characterized Colombian political life for most of the twentieth century. The assassination in 1948 of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a prominent Liberal champion of social and economic reform, escalated the decades-old conflict between these two traditional parties to the next level—civil war. Known as *La Violencia*, the civil war quickly spread from Bogotá throughout rural Colombia eventually claiming over 200,000 lives before exhausting itself in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup>

In an attempt to extinguish the uprising, the Colombian state (controlled by the Conservative Party at the time) increased its use of force and brutality against the Liberal resistance. Correspondingly, thousands of Liberal peasants armed themselves and organized self-defense communities to protect against the expansion of the state-sponsored violence. When Conservative President Laureano Gómez Castro was overthrown by a *coup d'état* in 1953, the military

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<sup>10</sup> While it's true that some Liberals championed the peasantry, it must be noted that Liberal landowners opposed reform.

<sup>11</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth*, p. 23.

government of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla initially negotiated a momentary halt to the violence. However, a little over a year after taking office, the rural violence rekindled forcing General Rojas Pinilla to implement strict countermeasures. The brutal efforts by government troops, police and Conservative paramilitaries to suppress the violence reinforced the need for and maintenance of rural self-defense communities.

By 1957, it was clear that even the factions who backed the overthrow of President Gómez had wearied of the corruption and favoritism of the Rojas Pinilla regime. An escalation of the violence in the countryside and the significant increase in strikes and protests, led to the ouster of the beleaguered general. In 1958, the two parties entered into a comprehensive power-sharing agreement, called the National Front – a pact in which the Liberal and Conservative parties alternated control of the presidency and shared the number of elected and appointed offices in government for the next sixteen years. Although the agreement did bring an end to the heightened levels of violence associated with the years of *La Violencia*, the “restricted democracy” created by the National Front did not permit political participation outside of the Liberal and Conservative parties. This restricted access to political power contributed to the emergence of armed insurgents in the guise of self-defense communities and communist enclaves located in southern Tolima, Meta, and Caquetá. These self-sufficient farming communities would later proclaim themselves to be “independent republics.” The most legendary of these republics was Marquetalia located in the department of Tolima and led by the current leader of the FARC-EP, Manuel Marulanda Vélez (aka “Tirofio” or “Sureshot”).

In 1964, the Colombian Armed Forces were ordered by President Guillermo León Valencia to attack the independent republics in a counter-insurgency campaign called Operation Marquetalia, which fell under Plan LASO (Latin American Security Operation)—a U.S. initiative against real and potential leftist rebels in Latin America, including Colombia. In the case of Colombia, the particular objective of Plan LASO was to destroy the Communist military and

social infrastructure in Marquetalia and the surrounding areas.<sup>12</sup> When the military retreated from these areas, the scattered peasant resistance groups, or rebels, reorganized under a loose alliance supported by the Communist Party, called the Southern Bloc. A year and a half later, this guerrilla coalition would officially become the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)—a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement that, in its view, traced its roots to “the tradition of Colombian agrarian struggle that started in the 1920s.”<sup>13</sup>

### **C. RISE OF THE FARC-EP**

Over the course of multiple decades, the FARC has grown from a small peasant organization to the largest, most capable, and best-equipped guerrilla organization in Latin America. Unlike most revolutionary groups, the leadership of the FARC is also drawn from the peasantry rather than the typical educated middle and upper classes. The organization is based in areas of recent colonization—to include those areas where the “independent republics” previously existed—where it has maintained a base of support and influence, often acting as a *de facto* government through the establishment of schools, a judicial system, health care and other public services.

From its inception until the late 1970s, the FARC expanded cautiously.<sup>14</sup> During this time period, the FARC’s objective was survival. Therefore, significant effort was directed at military ambushes and raids on farms which gained the organization access to weapons, equipment, food, and additional supplies. Such attacks were typically conducted within guerrilla-controlled territory and never significantly disrupted the operational capability of the Colombian government or

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<sup>12</sup> Luis Eduardo Fajardo, “From the Alliance for Progress to the Plan Colombia: A Retrospective Look at U.S. Aid to Colombia” (London, UK: LSE, DESTIN, 2003), p. 15 and Grace Livingstone, *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Fabio Sanchez, Andres Solimano, and Michel Formisano, “Conflict, Violent Crime and Criminal Activity in Colombia” (New Haven, CT: Yale University, November 2002), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> A front is a military unit that is delineated by geographic jurisdiction not necessarily its size. For more information on the creation of FARC fronts see Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth*, pp. 24-29.

its armed forces. By the late 1970s, the military arm of the FARC had reached approximately 1,000 member dispersed throughout the country in nine fronts.<sup>15</sup>

### **1. The FARC's Seventh Guerrilla Conference**

After almost two decades of marginal growth and minimal accomplishments against the Colombian government, the FARC began to reconsider its defensive strategy (which was focused primarily on survival) as it transitioned into the 1980s. The 1980s marked a historic turn in the growth and consolidation of the FARC. In 1982, the FARC held its Seventh Guerrilla Conference where the organization evaluated its strategic objectives, policies, and plans. It was at this conference that the FARC decided to shift from a defensive to an offensive strategy seeking to defeat the Colombian military, thereby, closing in on the organization's ultimate objective of seizing power. The new "strategic plan" set the FARC on a course for expansion and organization into an "Army of the People." Hence, the organization added the term "People's Army" (EP) to its name as a sign of its anticipated evolution from hit-and-run guerrilla warfare to direct, conventional tactics as outlined at the conference. Pledging to double its fronts to 48 and increase the size of its force to a "little guerrilla army" of approximately 28,000 soldiers, the FARC-EP laid out a strategy to expand its influence to areas east of the Eastern Mountain Range and west toward the Central Mountain Range.<sup>16</sup>

The FARC-EP's decision to create an "Army of the People" would require a significant amount of financing. This requirement was taken into consideration in 1982 when the conference conclusions stated that the resources necessary to develop its "strategic plan" could be acquired by any means possible. Since the 1970s, FARC-EP's resources were typically acquired through the kidnapping and extortion of Colombian landlords and prominent business people. The 1982

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<sup>15</sup> Mario A. Murillo, *Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest, and Destabilization* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 76-78 and Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, January 2002), p. 6.



conference reinforced the need to maintain these preexisting practices of acquiring funds as well as retain the FARC-EP's establishment of "revolutionary taxes." Yet, the resources earned through kidnapping and extortion was not adequate to execute the FARC-EP's new "strategic plan." Therefore, during the 1980s the FARC-EP began expanding its influence to mid-sized cities (where it sought to exploit municipal funds) and strategic areas of natural resources (where it sought to exploit regional commodities such as oil, gold, emeralds and coal).<sup>17</sup> At the time the conference took place, elements of the illicit drug industry (particularly the cultivation of coca and poppy) were beginning to materialize in some FARC-controlled regions. In an effort to capitalize on this industry, the FARC-EP laid out formally in the unpublished "Conclusions" of its Seventh Guerrilla Conference its "policy of taxing the drug trade and mobilizing and recruiting people in the lower end of the drug business."<sup>18</sup>

## **2. Guerrilla Involvement in the Illicit Drug Trade**

The evolution of the FARC-EP's role and relationship with the illicit drug trade is extremely complex and has evolved considerably over the years. Initially, the guerrillas opposed the cultivation of coca and found drugs to be counter-revolutionary—a decision heavily influenced by the FARC-EP's political ideologue, Jacobo Arenas.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as drug cultivation expanded into FARC-EP-dominated regions, and peasants became reliant on coca as a form of income, the guerrillas slowly began to accept cultivation out of fear of losing their peasant support base. The FARC-EP's initial association with the illicit drug industry was in the form of taxes levied on local coca farmers in return for protection from the abuses of narco-traffickers as well as from police and anti-narcotic squads.

The ultimate objective of the narco-trafficker is to acquire wealth, while the guerrillas see themselves as representing the interests of its peasant support

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<sup>17</sup> Fabio Sánchez and Mario Chacón, "Conflict, State, and Decentralization: From Social Progress to an Armed Dispute for Local Control, 1974-2002," Working Paper No. 70 (London: Crisis States Research Center, October 2005), p. 7 and Ken Eaton, "Armed Clientelism: The Negative Impact of Decentralization," (Naval Postgraduate School, June 2005), pp. 24-25.

<sup>18</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth*, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

base. The significant presence of guerrillas in drug producing areas offset the narco-traffickers' control over the price of coca leaves, coca paste, and wages. In areas under its control, the FARC-EP traditionally established minimum wages for coca leaf pickers as well as minimum prices for the coca leaf—which narco-traffickers must pay to farmers. In fact, it has been documented that in areas where the guerrillas' presence is weak or nonexistent, the price of labor for *raspachines*, or coca pickers, is lower than in areas where it has a strong military presence.<sup>20</sup> Due to the FARC-EP's efforts to protect its peasant base and regulate market relations between the narco-traffickers and the *cocaleros*, or coca-growing farmers (e.g., forcing drug-traffickers to pay the peasants and laborers the market price of coca leaves and labor), many peasants viewed the FARC-EP as their protectors, thereby winning the organization a substantial amount of popular support in selected areas.

Eventually, the guerrillas expanded their taxation system beyond the coca farmers and established tax structures that extracted revenues at every phase of the illicit drug process—from the transportation of precursor chemical to the transportation of the final product through their zones of influence.<sup>21</sup> Initially, the narco-traffickers collaborated with the demands imposed by the guerrillas, paying the increased labor costs and additional taxes. However, this cooperation collapsed as wealthy drug lords began looking for methods to bring their drug money earned from outside the country back into Colombia. A number of drug lords began investing their newfound wealth in large estates in areas where state presence was weak.<sup>22</sup> Like other wealthy landowners, the drug lords now became vulnerable to both kidnapping and extortion by the FARC-EP and other guerrilla groups. Frustrated with guerrilla demands for “revolutionary taxes” and extortion, the narco-traffickers began supporting, or creating where none previously existed, armed self-defense organizations—which had operated in

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<sup>20</sup> Richani, *Systems of Violence*, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> Alfredo Rangel Suárez, “Parasites and Predators: Guerrillas and the Insurgent Economy of Colombia” in *Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2000), p. 586.

<sup>22</sup> Richani, *Systems of Violence*, pp. 117-119.

Colombia for some time, seeking to protect local communities against extortion, kidnapping and other guerrilla practices.<sup>23</sup> The significant amount of support the paramilitary forces received from the narco-traffickers, and later from their own involvement in the drug trade, continued to escalate Colombia's violent conflict.

### **3. FARC and Drugs in the 1990s: A Qualitative and Quantitative Shift**

The 1990s brought a fundamental shift in the nature of the Colombian conflict. This was a period of growth and strengthening for the FARC-EP—an unintended consequence that originated from a series of tactical successes in U.S. counter-narcotics policies. These successes included the dismantling of the Cali and Medellin drug cartels, disruption of the air bridge from Peru to Colombia, and the initiation of aerial fumigation programs in Colombia. The destruction of the Colombia's two major drug cartels dismantled the most powerful military opponents of the FARC-EP and decreased the ability of drug-traffickers to resist FARC-EP taxes as part of the price of doing business. The successful interdiction of coca being flown from Peru to Colombia processing facilities increasingly pushed coca cultivation into the areas of Colombia where the FARC-EP had a significant presence. This shift in production provided the FARC-EP with unprecedented opportunities to tax the drug trade. And some speculate that the increase in aerial fumigation during this time may have also deepened Colombian coca growers' support for the FARC-EP against a government that was seen as threatening their health and livelihood. All of these events worked together to provide the FARC-EP with unprecedented opportunities to strengthen its decades-long insurgency against the Colombian government during the 1990s.<sup>24</sup>

As drug cultivation shifted to Colombia from Bolivia and Peru the FARC-EP increased its involvement in the illicit drug industry in eastern and southern Colombia, while the paramilitaries vied for control of drug producing areas to the

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick L. Clawson and Rensselaer W. Lee III, *The Andean Cocaine Industry* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin Press, 1996), p. 186.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Peceny and Michael Durnan, *The FARC's Best Friend: U.S. Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s* (Miami: University of Miami, 2006).

north. In 1998 the General Accounting Office (GAO) cited a 1997 inter-agency assessment that insurgents, principally the FARC-EP, provided security to drug traffickers and engaged in “localized, small-scale drug cultivation and processing.”<sup>25</sup> By 1999, the GAO reported guerrillas assisted in not only in providing security for laboratories and other drug activities but also for “storing and transporting cocaine within Colombia.”<sup>26</sup> These qualitative changes in guerrilla involvement were perhaps less significant than the fact that the new coca growing regions in Caquetá and Putumayo, areas where the Colombian state historically had been absent, were effectively controlled by the guerrillas.

There was no question that a nexus existed between the guerrillas and the drug industry, but the amount of revenues earned from illicit drugs was extremely difficult to determine. A number of studies in the late 1990s attempted to establish estimates of guerrilla drug revenues through the use of government data and media reports. In 1994, Luis Alberto Villamarín Pulido, a major in the Colombian Army, estimated that the FARC-EP received \$260 million from illegal drugs,<sup>27</sup> while a more comprehensive study by Renssalaer Lee (1998) estimated the illicit drug income for the FARC-EP to be \$381 million in 1997.<sup>28</sup> An additional study by Ricardo Vargas (1999) determined that from 1991 through 1996 guerrilla groups in Colombia received approximately 44.4 percent of their funding from drug trafficking.<sup>29</sup> Yet, according to Lee’s estimates, 70 percent of FARC-EP revenues in 1997 were related to illegal drugs, placing them on the

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<sup>25</sup> General Accounting Office (GAO), *Drug Control: U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Colombia Face Continuing Challenges*, GAO/NSIAD-98-60 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accounting Office, February 1998), p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> General Accounting Office (GAO), *Drug Control: Narcotics Threat From Colombia Continues to Grow*, GAO/NSIAD-99-136 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accounting Office, June 1999), p. 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Villamarin was an army major at the time of his writing. The work is based on former guerrilla’ testimonies, published material, and presumably confidential intelligence information. See Luis Alberto Villamarin Pulido, *The FARC Cartel*, Alfredo De Zubiria Merlano, trans. (Bogota: Ediciones el Faraon, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Francisco E. Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

high end of Vargas' average.<sup>30</sup> Despite the discrepancies and lack of precision, these estimates clearly indicate that the FARC-EP's expanded role in the illicit drug industry in the 1990s had become one of its main sources of funding.

#### **4. Escalation of the Conflict – FARC-EP on the Offensive**

Increased revenues provided the wherewithal for the FARC-EP to expand into the "little guerrilla army" it had envisioned in 1982, reaching an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 soldier by the end of the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> In late August and early September of 1996, amidst the backdrop of one of the largest peasant mobilizations of the decade,<sup>32</sup> the FARC-EP launched a country-wide military offensive in which a number of simultaneous attacks were launched throughout the country. Approximately 150 people were killed in the attacks, including an unknown number of civilians.<sup>33</sup> During this offensive, a growth in the FARC-EP's military capability was clearly demonstrated as the organization managed to coordinate approximately 400 combatants on 5 fronts and a Special Forces unit in the assault of an army base in Las Delicias, killing approximately 20 and wounding another 20 in the raid while taking 67 soldiers hostage.<sup>34</sup> This attack would serve as the beginning of a series of devastating, large-scale, multi-frontal attacks conducted by the FARC-EP against the Colombian military over the next two years.

By August 1998, the guerrillas conducted one of the most sustained offensives in the country's decades-long civil war. The three-day nation-wide offensive took close to 300 lives, wounded hundreds more and resulted in the

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<sup>30</sup> Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes*, p. 105.

<sup>31</sup> Suárez, "Parasites and Predators," p. 580.

<sup>32</sup> The outbreak in guerrilla violence was not the only problem facing the Colombian government at the time. Throughout the previous two months, close to 240,000 coca growers and *campesinos*, which the government claims were organized and backed by the guerrillas, staged protests in the departments of Putumayo, Caqueta, Guainia, Meta, and Guaviare demanding an end to the government's forced eradication of coca fields and the initiation infrastructure projects, crop substitution programs, and development assistance in affected areas.

<sup>33</sup> United States, Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism – 1996*; Internet; accessed from <http://www.state.gov> on 15 December 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Román D. Ortiz, "Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25 (2002), p. 136.

capture of nearly 100 soldiers.<sup>35</sup> During the offensive, the insurgents assaulted a heavily fortified major military anti-drug base, Miraflores, located in southeast region of the Guaviare province—the heart of Colombia’s coca growing region. Forty other installations were also attacked, including police stations and oil facilities in more than half of Colombia’s 32 provinces.<sup>36</sup> The offensive—described by Alfredo Rangel as “the largest disaster in the history of the insurgency”<sup>37</sup>—came just days before Andrés Pastrana was sworn-in as Colombia’s 60<sup>th</sup> president and clearly demonstrated the Colombian military’s incapacity to confront the guerrillas.

#### **D. PASTRANA’S HOPE FOR PEACE AND PLAN COLOMBIA**

From 1996 through 1998, elements of the FARC-EP’s “strategic plan” seemed to be falling into place as the FARC-EP inflicted a long string of humiliating defeats to the Colombian military. Due to the increased violence and the population’s desire for peace, President Pastrana was elected into office in August 1998 on the promise of peace negotiations with the FARC-EP. In his inaugural address, Pastrana stated that “peace is the most urgent task on our country’s agenda and the best social contract we can make with the future.”<sup>38</sup> Although the track record for negotiations between the government and the

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<sup>35</sup> Latin News. “Colombia Takes Hard Look at Military; Recent Guerrilla Offensive Promotes a Rethink,” *Latin American Weekly Report*, WR-99-33 (28 August 1998), p. 391.

<sup>36</sup> Laura Brooks, “Debate in Colombia Shows Rebel Strength,” *The Washington Post*, Section A (6 August 1998), p. A24.

<sup>37</sup> Alfredo Rangel Suárez was the former security advisor to President Ernest Samper and subsequently served as Director of the Security and Democracy Foundation in Bogotá, Colombia. See Carlos Navarro and Robert Sandels, “Colombia: Andres Pastrana Assumes Presidency” in *NotiSur – Latin American Political Affairs* 8, no. 29 (August 14, 1998); Internet; accessed from <http://ssdc.ucsd.edu/news/notisur/h98/notisur.19980814.html> on 15 October 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, “Pastrana Sworn in as President of Colombia” at CNN.com; Internet; accessed from <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/americas/9808/07/colombia.inaugural/index.html> on 15 October 2005.

FARC-EP over the past two decades was poor,<sup>39</sup> Pastrana's administration was extremely optimistic after Víctor Ricardo, President Pastrana's aide, in June 1998 met with FARC-EP leaders in the jungles of southern Colombia.

### 1. Consolidation of the *Zona de Despeje*

Prior to his inauguration, President Pastrana traveled to FARC-controlled territory to meet with FARC-EP commander Manuel Marulanda in July 1998, where he made some bold overtures in the hopes of developing a favorable climate for peace negotiations—the foundation of his presidential campaign. After months of attempting to bring the FARC-EP to the negotiating table and a series of unprecedented military defeats inflicted upon the armed forces by the FARC-EP, President Pastrana fulfilled FARC-EP demands for negotiations on November 7, 1998 by creating a demilitarized zone, or *zona de despeje* (literally meaning “cleared zone”). Withdrawing all security and military personnel from five municipalities in the departments of Meta and Caquetá, the FARC-EP was granted effective control over a Switzerland-size area in one of its traditional strongholds.<sup>40</sup> [See Figure 2.1] With President Pastrana in attendance, peace negotiations were formally launched in the *despeje* in early January 1999; however, citing security concerns Marulanda failed to show up to the opening ceremony.<sup>41</sup> The guerrilla leader's last-minute no-show embarrassed the

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<sup>39</sup> During the presidency of Belisario Beetancur (1982-1986) the FARC-EP agreed to a cease fire and took steps toward a possible reintegration into the political arena by creating a political party in alliance with the Communist Party called the *Unión Patriótica* (UP). The party's participation in the presidential elections of 1986 was deemed a huge step forward. However, during the administration of President Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) and President César Gaviria (1990-1994) political dialogue with the FARC-EP broke down, which can be contributed to a combination of factors. The first and foremost being the intense right-wing terror campaign against the UP during the late 1980s. Between 1985 and 1989 some 3,000 UP candidates and supporters were killed including the party's 1989 presidential candidate Bernado Jaramillo. This terror campaign explains the FARC-EP's subsequent skepticism with a non-violent solution to the problem and also clarifies the organizations later violations of the previous ceasefire agreement. See Livingston, *Inside Colombia*, p. 184 and Steven Dudley, *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia* (New York: Taylor and Francis Books, Inc, 2004), pp. 77-116.

<sup>40</sup> A “municipality” is larger than a town, and may be more accurately be compared to a county. Nina Serafino. *Colombia: Current Issues and Historical Background* (New York, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2003), p. 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> Cynthia J. Arnson, et al., “The Peace Process in Colombia and U.S. Policy,” (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 2002), p. 9.

president and immediately raised speculation as to the validity of the peace process and overall the FARC-EP's intentions.

**Figure 2.1: Map of the Zona De Despeje in Colombia**



**Source:** Internet; accessed from [http://six.swix.ch/farcep/pagina\\_cultural/N002/zona.html](http://six.swix.ch/farcep/pagina_cultural/N002/zona.html) on 11 February 2006.

Throughout the remainder of President Pastrana's peace efforts, numerous peace dialogues would be frozen and cease fires broken. Within a year of launching negotiations, the Pastrana administration's worst fears were realized. Reports began circulating that the FARC-EP was using the zone to not only cultivate coca but also as an unimpeded training ground for its troops—two items that were forbidden when the deal was negotiated.<sup>42</sup> Despite these reports and the lack of reciprocal gestures of peace from the FARC-EP, the Pastrana administration continued to extend the *despeje's* deadline for close to three years.

Escalating insecurity and guerrilla violence were not the only challenges facing Pastrana's administration. When President Pastrana took office in August 1998, he also inherited a seriously deteriorating economy. The structural reforms

<sup>42</sup> Russell Crandall, *Driven By Drugs: U.S. Policy Towards Colombia* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 73.



initiated by previous administrations coupled with declining prices in the late 1990s for coffee and oil—two of Colombia’s major exports—continued to exacerbate the country’s economic situation. In the 1990s, Colombia opened its traditionally closed economy, while the agricultural sector suffered heavily coca cultivation soared—reaching 160,000 hectares in 1999.<sup>43</sup> According to the GAO, by 1999 Colombia had surpassed Peru and Bolivia as the world’s largest producer of coca, had become the source country for over three-fourths of the world’s cocaine supply, and was the major supplier of heroin to the eastern United States.<sup>44</sup> Toward the end of the decade, the national poverty rate returned to its 1988 level with 64 percent of the population living in poverty.<sup>45</sup> By 1999, the Colombian economy was experiencing unprecedented levels of unemployment (close to 20 percent in major metropolitan areas) and facing negative growth for the first time in over 50 years.<sup>46</sup> On top of that, Colombia’s debt more than doubled during the Samper administration alone, rising from 14.1 percent of GDP in 1995 to 41.3 percent in 1999.<sup>47</sup> This debt and corresponding repayment burden, forced the Colombian government to significantly cutback its budget, particularly in the critical areas of security and social spending further frustrating the government’s capacity to solve its country’s problems.

## **2. Plan Colombia**

With the economy and the security situation deteriorating and illicit drug cultivation on the rise, the Pastrana administration needed a plan of action.

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<sup>43</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Government of Colombia. *Colombia: Coca Survey for December 2002 and Semi-Annual Estimate for July 2003*. (New York: United Nations, June 2003), p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> GAO, *Drug Control: Narcotics Threat From Colombia Continues to Grow*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Carlos Eduardo Velez. *Colombia Poverty Report: Volume I* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, March 2002), p. 12; Internet; accessed from [http://wbIn0018.worldbank.org/LAC/lacinfoclient.nsf/d29684951174975c85256735007fef12/cd4d7bab40aaedfe85256ba300696faa/\\$FILE/Chapters%201,2%20\(484KB\).pdf](http://wbIn0018.worldbank.org/LAC/lacinfoclient.nsf/d29684951174975c85256735007fef12/cd4d7bab40aaedfe85256ba300696faa/$FILE/Chapters%201,2%20(484KB).pdf) on 15 October 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Serafino, *Colombia: Current Issues and Historical Background*, p. 5 and Government of Colombia, *Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State*. (Bogota, COL: Office of the Presidency, October 1999); U.S. Institute for Peace website; Internet; accessed from [http://www.usip.org/library/pa/colombia/adddoc/plan\\_colombia\\_101999.html](http://www.usip.org/library/pa/colombia/adddoc/plan_colombia_101999.html) on 19 August 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Hence, in 1999 President Pastrana unveiled an integrated peace and development plan—commonly referred to as Plan Colombia. The plan consisted of ten strategic elements (summarized in Appendix A), which focused on the achievement of social and economic development while strengthening democratic principles and improving overall security. The proposal called for a total investment of \$7.5 billion, with the Colombian government pledging \$4 billion and the remaining \$3.5 billion anticipated in international aid (predominantly from the United States, the European Union, Canada, Japan and international financial institutions).

The U.S. government in July 2000 approved a \$1.3 billion supplemental assistance package in support of President Pastrana’s Plan Colombia. U.S. assistance—of which 74 percent was allocated to support counter-narcotics measures—is reflective of the overriding policy priority of U.S. anti-drug interests in the Andean region since the 1980s.<sup>48</sup> Plan Colombia aimed to end Colombia’s ‘civil war’, improve the economy and reduce coca production. Overall, its objectives were broadly defined in the original plan with no priority given to one element over another. However, the actual allocation of funding provides a completely different picture. It is clear from Table 2.1 that U.S. support for Colombia in support of Plan Colombia had a predominantly military focus.<sup>49</sup> Yet, it is important to note that the military assistance portion was only seven percent of the original plan.<sup>50</sup> With the United States designated to provide a majority of that seven percent, many members of the international community retracted their pledges of support arguing that they were uncomfortable with what seemed like a U.S.-dominated militarized counter-narcotics strategy.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>48</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth*, p. 62.

<sup>49</sup> The international community saw the potential for a military escalation of the conflict even though the roughly \$1 billion slated for military and police aid consisted primarily of a combination of Huey and Black Hawk helicopters designated only for anti-drug operations. The proposal also called for the creation of two more military counter-narcotics battalions. See Crandall, *Driven By Drugs*, p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> Gabriel Marcella, “The United States and Colombia: The Journey from Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity.” (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2003), p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> Livingstone, *Inside Colombia*, p. 128.

overall plan was dependent on the support of the international community for many of its non-military, or soft, programs. Without strong international support, the United States became the primary source of funding for Plan Colombia. And consequently, those issues that were of most concern to the United States (counter-narcotics and security) received the highest priority when the plan was finally implemented. Therefore, it is important to note that the political environment and the availability of funds strongly favored those programs which supported counter-narcotics objectives, making Plan Colombia predominantly a counter-narcotics initiative.

**Table 2.1: Plan Colombia-Assistance for Colombia (US\$ in Millions)**

Military Assistance	519.2
Police Assistance	123.1
Alternative Development	68.5
Aid to the Displaced	37.5
Human Rights	51.0
Judicial Reform	13.0
Law Enforcement/Rule of Law	45.0
Peace Process	3.0
TOTAL	860.3

**Source:** Crandall, *Driven By Drugs*, p. 155.

While the objectives for Plan Colombia differed slightly for Colombia and the United States, there is a significant amount of overlap.<sup>52</sup> For Colombia, Plan Colombia was viewed as a means to promote peace, revive the economy, and increase security—all of which were believed to be undermined by the presence of illicit drug production and trafficking. By making “the fight against drug production and trafficking one of its top strategic priorities,” Colombia believed it could achieve these objectives.<sup>53</sup> The government’s rationale for targeting the illicit drug trade was based on the belief that illicit drugs were fueling Colombia’s

<sup>52</sup> Connie Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” CRS Report for Congress. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 12 April 2005), p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Government of Colombia, *Plan Colombia*.

internal conflict. Rather than attacking the guerrillas directly, the Colombian government hoped to remove the fuel from the fire by attacking what was believed to be the guerrilla main source of funding—the illicit drug trade. It was believed that by first removing the fuel from the fire, the Colombian government would then be victorious against the dwindling fire. Hence, an explicit goal of Plan Colombia was to reduce the cultivation and processing of narcotics by 50 percent over the next six years.<sup>54</sup>

This focus on counter-narcotics was where U.S. and Colombian interests converged. For the United States, support for Plan Colombia reinforced both U.S. foreign and domestic policy objectives. With respect to U.S. foreign policy, the United States had a national security interest in ensuring regional stability and security in the Andean region through the promotion of peace and economic development. Yet, the plan's reliance on supply-sided counter-narcotics measures would also coincide with the U.S. domestic policy objective of reducing the availability and flow of illicit drugs to the United States. With almost three-quarters of the \$1.3 billion in U.S. assistance directed toward supply-sided counter-narcotics efforts, Plan Colombia is often viewed as an extension of Washington's supply-sided 'drug war.'<sup>55</sup>

In an effort to 'jump start' Plan Colombia, government officials in Washington and Bogotá drafted an annex to the original plan. The annex, entitled *Plan Colombia: Interagency Action Plan*, proposed a plan of action for the first two years. Its specific objectives called for programs to strengthen the Colombian government's presence in southern Colombia—where there has been an increase in coca cultivation and armed groups—while reducing the production, processing and trafficking of illegal drugs in the area.<sup>56</sup> The "Push into Southern Colombia" program, as it was termed, was the centerpiece of U.S.

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<sup>54</sup> Government of Colombia, *Plan Colombia*.

<sup>55</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth*, p. 62.

<sup>56</sup> Colombia's southern departments of Putumayo and Caqueta—which both maintain a significant FARC presence—accounted for over one half of all hectares of coca under cultivation in Colombia in 2000.

assistance, and consequently, the centerpiece of the first phase of Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia's "Ground Zero" was the department of Putumayo, a known stronghold of the FARC as well as an area which witnessed a significant increase in coca cultivation in the late 1990s. Under this program, U.S. funding would create and train two additional counter-narcotics battalions in the Colombian Army, whose primary mission would be to "secure" Colombia's guerrilla-dominated southern departments so the Colombia National Police could conduct counter-drug activities—particularly U.S.-aided drug eradication.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the success of the sequential policy when instituted by Peruvian President Fujimori in the early 1990s, President Pastrana's decision to attack the drug threat before the insurgency drew a number of criticism. First, critics argued that the dual threat of drugs and terrorism stemmed from the lack of state presence in outlying areas. They believed that if the government could gain control of these areas and maintain a formidable presence, it could eliminate not only the threat posed by the guerrillas, but also the drug trade. This is a form of the sequential policy just reversed—targets the guerrillas, then the drugs. A second set of critics believed that removing the fuel from the fire was an impossible endeavor. While you could not remove fuel from an already existing fire, they believed it was possible both to directly put out the fire and prevent additional fuel from further igniting the pre-existing flames. According to such critics, the insurgency has been a thorn in the side of the Colombian government since its conception well over forty years ago and to remove one source of its funding would only force the organization to capitalize on other prior funding sources. Hence, these critics proposed a simultaneous counter-insurgency campaign (to decrease guerrilla presence in outlying areas) and a counter-narcotics campaign (targeting a major source of guerrilla funding).

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<sup>57</sup> Adam Isacson, "U.S. Military Aid to Colombia: The Human Rights Implications," (Washington, DC: Center for International Policy, Fall 2000); Internet; accessed from <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/090001.htm> on 11 November 2005.

## E. URIBE'S HARD-LINE STANCE

From 2000-2002, the number of armed attacks by the FARC-EP increased considerably, particularly with the dissolving of the *zona de despeje* by President Pastrana in February 2002. In 2002, public frustration with the ill-fated peace process had grown as attacks on civilians and infrastructure by the FARC-EP since mid-January made war or peace the primary vote-determining issue in the mid-year presidential election. The mid-year presidential elections in 2002 also served as grounds for increased attacks by the FARC-EP, who sought to challenge the electoral process through intimidation and violence. The landslide victory of Álvaro Uribe Vélez in the 2002 presidential elections was no exception as the FARC-EP attempted to assassinate him three times in the six months leading up to the May elections. Uribe's commitment to end Colombia's decades-old civil war by taking a hard-line stance against armed groups, particularly the FARC-EP, may have won him the election but it did not sit well with the guerrillas. Upon taking office on August 7, 2002, President Álvaro Uribe experienced first-hand the FARC-EP's strength and extended reach as his inauguration was overshadowed by an unprecedented urban mortar attack by the guerrillas attempting to kill him.

President Uribe made combating the insurgents an overriding priority and defining objective of the Colombian government. His administration's commitment to end Colombia's violent history is exhibited in its security policy entitled the Democratic Security and Defense Policy (DSP). The underlying principles behind the strategy are to regain control of Colombia's ungoverned spaces and provide an increased level of security to *all* sectors of society by establishing or reinstating the rule of law throughout the country.<sup>58</sup> According to the policy, terrorism is viewed as the main threat to peace and democracy in Colombia.<sup>59</sup> The main component of the strategy has been to develop and improve the capabilities and capacity of the Colombian armed forces and police units and

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<sup>58</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, "Democratic Security and Defense Policy" (Bogotá, COL: Ministry of Defence, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

deploying them across the country to challenge the guerrillas—a policy which has been primarily funded through U.S. aid and a one-time “security tax” on upper-income individuals and corporations. The increased military expenditures have been also augmented by a significant expansion in the eradication of illicit crops—mainly through the extension of the aerial spraying campaign. This expansion of the drug war aims to deny revenues to guerrillas and paramilitary organizations as well as reduce coca and opium cultivation. The DSP also increased protection of Colombia’s oil and natural gas pipelines, which the guerrillas often threatened attacks against for extortion purposes.<sup>60</sup> With a majority of its emphasis directed at security programs and counter-narcotics, Uribe’s Democratic Security and Defense Policy complements a number of objectives originally developed in *Plan Colombia*.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, placed terrorism at the forefront of U.S. policy. In response, the United States launched an initiative entitled the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)—a protracted struggle against terrorist and those state and/or organizations that aided them. When Colombia was included in the GWOT, it brought a major policy shift with regards to the allocation of U.S. assistance in Colombia. By mid-2002, the U.S. Congress had changed the law governing aid destined for Colombia, now allowing all previous aid given solely for counter-narcotics efforts to be used in a “unified” campaign against Colombian guerrillas and paramilitaries—organizations who were already on the State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO).

In the beginning of 2004, the role of the United States in Colombia expanded considerably as it became involved with Plan Patriota. Plan Patriota, the military component of Plan Colombia, has been fundamental to President Uribe’s DSP. It represents a complex joint military effort between the U.S. and Colombia. Plan Patriota, implemented by Colombian forces and assisted by U.S. military advisors, is aimed offensively targeting the FARC-EP and recapturing

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<sup>60</sup> International Crisis Group, “Colombia: President Uribe’s Democratic Security Policy” in *Latin America Report 6* (13 November 2003), p. *i*.

FARC-EP-controlled territory primarily in southern Colombia. This offensive is the possibly the largest and most sophisticated military offensive carried out in the country by either side during 40 years of insurgency and counter-insurgency.

The initial military offensive against the FARC-EP took place from June through December 2003, resulting in the removal of the FARC-EP from Bogotá and Cundinamarca Department surrounding the capital. In early January 2004, a second offensive called Operation New Year was launched in the department of Caquetá against the FARC-EP's 15<sup>th</sup> Front. This operation ended in December 2006 but not before expanding to include the attempted removal of FARC-EP forces from the Meta, Guaviare, and Antioquia departments.<sup>61</sup> On 01 December 2006, President Uribe blessed Plan Victoria, a strategy that will replace Plan Patriota. Plan Victoria will be the hallmark of the security policy for the next four years. According to open source reporting, approximately "14,300 troops will participate in this new campaign in the south, 3,000 less than in the first phase but with increased air and river support."<sup>62</sup> Unlike Plan Patriota, there will be less battalions, more mobility, and fixed bases in towns previously recovered by the Army (e.g., Miraflores and Calamar (Guaviare)).<sup>63</sup>

Along with his counter-insurgency campaign, President Uribe intensified the Washington-funded war on drugs as Colombia continued to set records in hectares of coca eradicated (both aerial and manually) and interdictions. Despite these record-setting figures and increased security throughout the country, President Uribe's simultaneous strategy is beginning to witness diminishing returns (particularly with regard to the war on drugs). Overwhelmingly reelected to a second-term in May 2006 (a first in the nation's history), President Uribe will be hard-pressed during his second term to outperform the strides his simultaneous campaign against drugs and insurgency made during his first term

<sup>61</sup> United States, "Plan Colombia: Elements for Success" Staff Trip Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2005), p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Joint Interagency Task Force South, "International Cocaine Weekly Round-Up" 08-15 December 2005; OSC; access number FBS20061215750135.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



as resources and funding for future counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency operations become strained. While proponents of President Uribe's simultaneous campaign contend that guerrilla involvement in the drug trade makes it impossible to separate the two, critics of this method point out that while separating the threats may be difficult, the division of resources to combat the dual threat simultaneously actually reduces the strength and ability of the government to effectively eliminate either threat.

#### **F. SUMMARY**

This chapter provided a foundation for understanding the ongoing conflict in Colombia from a historical perspective. The origins of the Colombia's decades-old civil are deeply rooted in political and social issues stemming from the early twentieth century, not the drug trade. However, the shift in the cultivation of coca from Peru and Bolivia to Colombia in the 1990s significantly contributed to the escalation of the conflict. Revenues from all aspects of the illicit drug trade fueled increased guerrilla activity and growth, thereby, exacerbating conflict within Colombia. President Pastrana and President Uribe each had a distinctly different strategy for attacking the dual threat facing Colombia. The next two chapters will analyze the results and impact of these two policies to determine which is more effective against both threats.

### III. IMPACT ON COUNTER-NARCOTIC OBJECTIVES

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Reducing and ultimately cutting the flow of illegal drugs to the United States has been a top priority for the U.S. government since the 1980s. To achieve this objective, the U.S. government has emphasized targeting the drug supply at critical points along the grower-to-user chain linking the consumer in the United States to the grower in a source country. This strategy continues to be a main component of the U.S. government's policy towards many Latin American countries. President Nixon proclaimed the initial 'War on Drugs' more than three decades ago, from which time the United States has repeatedly pressured drug source countries in Latin America to curb the flow of illegal drugs. President Reagan reaffirmed Nixon's 'War on Drugs' in 1982 by declaring drugs a threat to the national security of the United States.<sup>64</sup> This declaration intensified the pressure exerted by the United States on its hemispheric neighbors, particularly the Andean countries of South America, to combat their country's illicit drug cultivation and production. President Bush, Sr. in 1989 declared that the "gravest domestic threat facing our nation today is drugs," and announced the "Andean Strategy" to reduce the amount of illicit drugs entering the United States.<sup>65</sup> As a strong proponent of supply-side drug policy, the United States has offered numerous aid packages to Andean countries over the last three decades for their support in counter-narcotics efforts.

One such country is Colombia, whose involvement in the illicit drug industry gained them notoriety in the 1970s with the production of cannabis. In the 1980s, Colombia became the world's main producer and supplier of cocaine. By the 1990s, with increased U.S.-funded interdiction and eradication efforts in

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<sup>64</sup> Bruce M. Bagley and Juan G. Tokatlian, "Dope and Dogma: Explaining the Failure of U.S.-Latin American Drug Policies," in *The United States and Latin America in the 1990s: Beyond the Cold War* ed. Jonathan Hartlyn, Lars Schoultz, and Augusto Varas (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 216.

<sup>65</sup> E.C. Bertram (et. al.), *Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 114.

Peru and Bolivia, Colombia began substituting its imported coca base with domestic sources as it developed into the world's largest coca growing nation. Coca cultivation in Colombia rose by 187 percent from 1989 to 2000, increasing from 42,400 hectares to 122,000 hectares respectively.<sup>66</sup> Today Colombia is the only country where the three main plant-based illegal drugs are produced in significant amounts and the source of 70 percent of the world's cocaine.

In recent years, Colombia has become the leading recipients of U.S. financial aid. This increased assistance began, in part, to the U.S. government's approval in July 2000 of a \$1.3 billion supplemental assistance package in support of Plan Colombia—an integrated strategy originally developed by Colombia's former President Pastrana (1998-2002) to confront a number of problems facing Colombia. U.S. assistance—of which 74 percent was allocated to support counter-narcotics measures—reflected the overriding policy priority of U.S. anti-drug interest in the Andean region since the 1980s.<sup>67</sup> However, following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, U.S. assistance expanded beyond counter-narcotics support to include counter-terrorism. Expansion of U.S. assistance coincided with the implementation of President Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy—a policy which directly targets the armed insurgents while maintaining the aggressive counter-narcotics policies implemented under Plan Colombia.

This chapter will analyze the impact of counter-narcotics efforts implemented under Plan Colombia, both before 2002 (when U.S. assistance and most of the Colombian government's efforts were strictly driven by counter-narcotics efforts) and after 2002 (when U.S. assistance and Colombian government efforts supported a unified campaign against both drugs and terrorism). It will argue that while Plan Colombia witnessed a substantial decline in the amount of coca under cultivation from 2000 to 2002, the returns on increased eradication efforts since 2003 seem to be diminishing. This is partially due the lack of coordination between eradication and alternative development as

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<sup>66</sup> Livingstone, *Inside Colombia*, p. 99.

<sup>67</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth*, p. 62.

well as improved techniques utilized by farmers to protect their crops from fumigation. It will also argue that the decreases in cultivation within Colombia has overshadowed a number of unintended consequences and discouraging trends (i.e. environmental degradation, increases in the amount of “attempted” cultivation, and the geographic shifts in cultivation both within Colombia and the Andean region in general). Finally, this chapter will argue that the number of hectares of coca in Colombia is a poor indicator of the effectiveness of U.S. supply-side counter-narcotics policy. Despite record levels of eradication and interdiction, Plan Colombia has failed to decrease the flow of illicit drugs to the United States—one of the underlying objectives for U.S. support of Plan Colombia.

## **B. THE AERIAL ERADICATION CAMPAIGN**

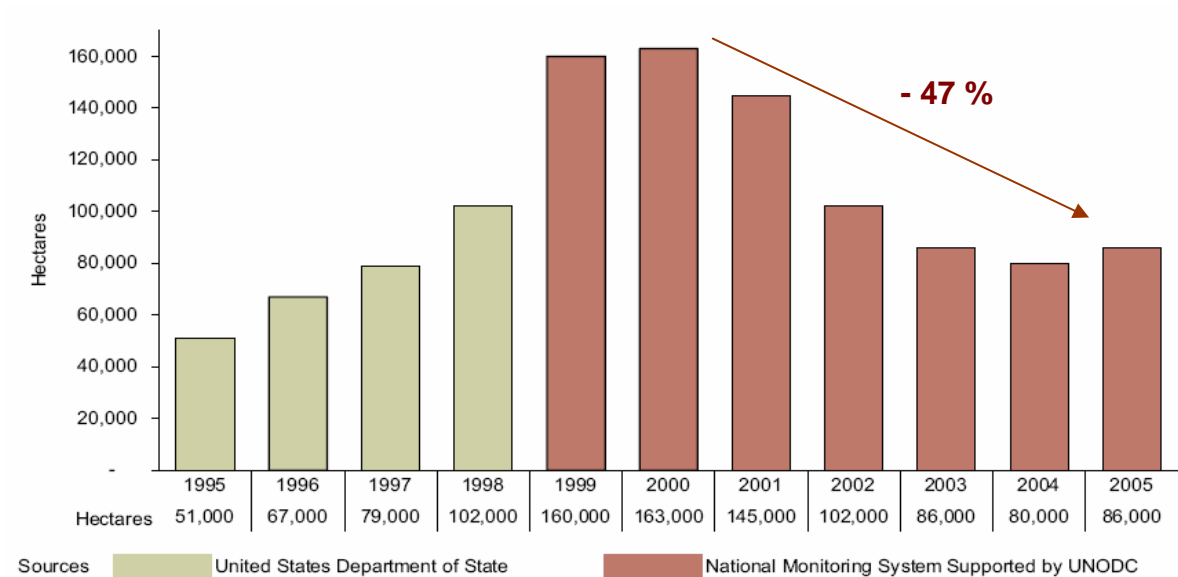
One measure of effectiveness proposed by the Colombian government for Plan Colombia was a 50 percent reduction in the cultivation and production of illicit drugs over a six-year period.<sup>68</sup> To meet this goal, emphasis was placed on eradication, both voluntary and forced. While eradication and alternative farming programs were both in place prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia, this initiative significantly increased the funding allocated for aerial spraying, traditionally the cornerstone of American supply-side counter-drug policy. Based upon statistics alone, it would appear that Plan Colombia was a success. According to the United Nations, Plan Colombia has decreased coca cultivation in Colombia by 47 percent (or by 77,000 hectares) since its initial implementation in 2000.<sup>69</sup> [See Figure 3.1] This decrease corresponds to an intensification of the aerial eradication campaign—which is a significant component of Plan Colombia.

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<sup>68</sup> Government of Colombia, *Plan Colombia*.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Government of Colombia, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005* (New York: United Nations, June 2006), p. 10.

**Figure 3.1: Coca Cultivation In Colombia 1994 – 2005 (in hectares)**



**Source:** UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005*, p. 10.

A substantial portion of the decrease in coca cultivation, or 61,000 hectares, in Colombia occurred during Plan Colombia’s initial phase—a time when the plan’s focus was purely counter-narcotics driven. Even more indicative of the success of Plan Colombia’s “Push into Southern Colombia” is that the largest reductions in coca cultivation during this period occurred in the southern departments of Putumayo and Caquetá—the two departments where the aerial fumigation campaign was the most intense. In 2000, over 50 percent of Colombia’s coca was grown in the departments of Putumayo and Caquetá, with a total of 66,022 and 26,603 hectares, respectively.<sup>70</sup> By the end of 2002, cultivation in these two departments decreased to 22,137 hectares of coca (13,725 hectares in Putumayo and 8,412 hectares in Caquetá), representing only 22 percent of the nation’s total cultivation.<sup>71</sup>

In 2002, the total number of hectares of coca eradicated substantially increased to 122,695—a 45 percent increase from 2001. While the eradication

<sup>70</sup> UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Survey for December 2002 and Semi-Annual Estimate for July 2003*, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

campaign maintained record levels of hectares sprayed following 2002 [see Figure 3.2], the change in coca cultivation in Colombia was statistically insignificant by the end of 2005, with the United Nations reporting no change and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) estimating a decrease of eight percent, or 8,600 hectares in the areas traditionally imaged and surveyed since 2002. However, ONDCP reported 39,000 additional hectares of coca in Colombia was observed in newly imaged areas in 2005 (outside the 2004 survey area).<sup>72</sup> The ratio of hectares sprayed to hectares reduced has increased since 2002, an indication that the aerial eradication campaign is on a path of diminishing returns. Rather than deterring farmers to plant coca, eradication efforts seem to be encouraging farmers to plant *more* coca in anticipation of potential loss due to eradication. The State Department's annual *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* statistics for Colombia clearly highlights this observation. The report delineates how much coca the Colombian government has eradicated each year plus how much coca they estimate was left over. Adding these two numbers together, gives a rough estimate as to how much Colombians have attempted to plant each year. [See Table 3.1] As fumigation has increased, the estimated overall cultivation, or 'attempted' cultivation, has risen sharply. As more is sprayed, more is planted—54 percent more just since Plan Colombia began in 2000.

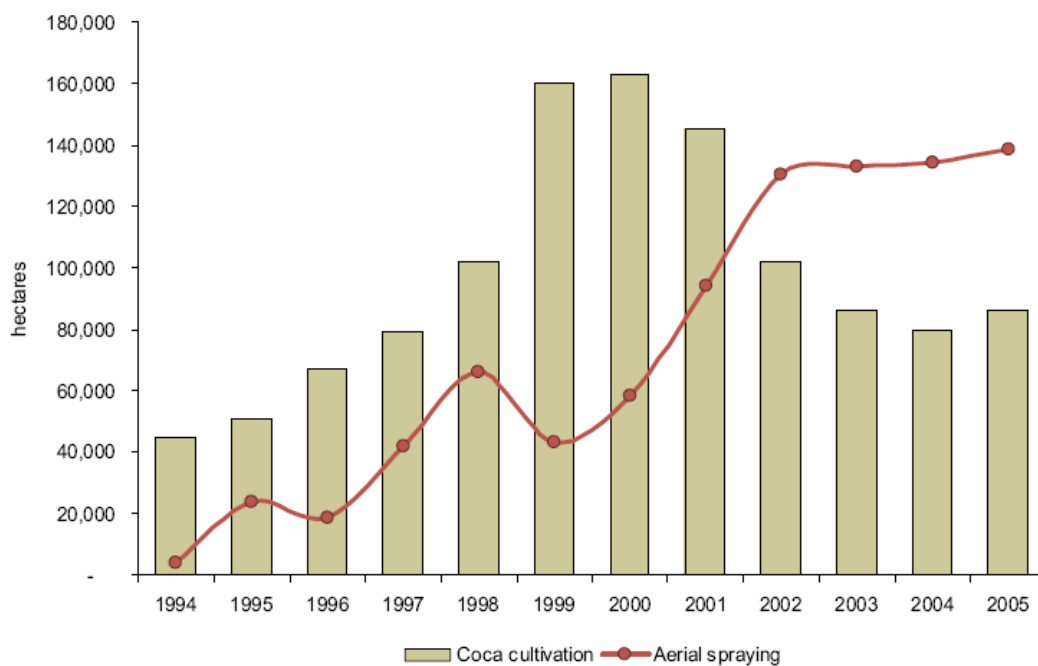
The increase in attempted cultivation is partially due to the fact that the aerial eradication campaign may not have actually reduced the supply of cocaine as farming techniques continue to adjust to fumigation efforts. After numerous years of spraying, it has been observed that farmers are covering their coca

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<sup>72</sup> In an effort to improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the estimate, the 2005 survey expanded by 81 percent the size of the landmass that was imaged and sampled for coca cultivation. The newly imaged areas showed about 39,000 additional hectares of coca. Because these areas were not previously surveyed, ONDCP believes it is impossible to determine for how long they have been under coca cultivation. Due to the uncertainty and the significantly expanded survey area, a direct year-to-year comparison is not possible. According to an ONDCP press release, they believe that the higher cultivation figure in the 2005 estimate does not necessarily mean that coca cultivation increased in 2005; but rather reflects an improved understanding of where coca is now growing in Colombia. Office of National Drug Control Policy, "2005 Coca Estimates for Colombia," Press Release: 14 April 2006.

leaves with sugar-cane syrup or pruning the fumigated bushes so they will continue to grow after fumigation. Coca farmers are also increasing the density of their coca bushes, utilizing new fertilizers, and implementing leaf picking systems as measures to increase their productivity.<sup>73</sup> Another factor that contributes to the ineffectiveness of the aerial eradication campaign is the “decrease of the average size of coca fields since 2001.”<sup>74</sup> In 2003, 93 percent of all coca fields were less than three hectares.<sup>75</sup> By the end of 2005, the average coca field size decreased even further to 1.13 hectares.<sup>76</sup> Although the U.S. Department of State claims that aerial spraying is precise, smaller fields make it extremely difficult for both detection and eradication to be accurate.

**Figure 3.2: Comparison of Net Coca Cultivation and Accumulated Sprayed Areas (hectares) 1994 – 2005**



**Source:** UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005*, p. 82.

<sup>73</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia,” *Latin America Report*, no. 11 (January 27, 2005), p. 23 and Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug Control Strategy 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 2007), p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Government of Colombia, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2003* (New York: United Nations, June 2004), p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005*, p. 11.

**Table 3.1: Coca Cultivation in Colombia, 1999-2005 (in hectares)**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Potential Harvest</b>	122,500	136,200	169,800	144,450	113,850	114,000	144,400 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Aerial Eradication</b>	43,246	47,371	84,251	122,695	132,817	136,555	138,775
<b>Estimated Cultivation</b>	167,746	183,571	254,051	267,145	246,667	250,555	283,175

<sup>a</sup> This figure includes the additional 39,000 hectares coca found in 2005. See footnote #9 for further information.

**Source:** United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports* covering 2005 and 2006.

According to the U.S. Department of State, verification flights continue to indicate a high degree of planting in previously sprayed fields.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, it must be noted that the decline in cultivation cannot be fully attributed to the aerial eradication campaign. In fact, according to the governor of Putumayo, nearly one half of the decrease in coca cultivation (14,296 hectares) in the Putumayo department in 2002 was accomplished through manual eradication and alternative development.<sup>78</sup> Suggesting that manual eradication coupled with alternative development is a more effective and sustainable method of eradication than aerial spraying. Manual eradication, in itself, is often viewed as more effective than aerial eradication because it guarantees the complete physical destruction of the crop, not just one harvest. Manual eradication may be slow, labor intensive, and subject to FARC-EP ambushes, but it has a longer-lasting effect than aerial eradication. Plus, manual eradication involves a long-term presence of government security force on the ground and places the government in contact with civilian populations in areas it previously abandoned. Since 2002, this strategy has been realized and implemented by President Uribe as both funding for alternative development and manual eradication figures are on the rise. [See Table 3.2]

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<sup>77</sup> United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2003* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2003), p. IV-19.

<sup>78</sup> Latin American Working Group, "Explore the Issue: The Numbers Game—Coca Cultivation in Colombia" (Washington, D.C.: Latin American Working Group, April 2003); Internet; accessed from <http://www.lawg.org/countries/Colombia/crop-figures.htm> on 15 November 2005.



**Table 3.2: Eradication (in hectares) and Alternative Development (in thousands of dollars) for Colombia, 2000 – 2006**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Aerial Eradication</b>	47,000	84,250	122,695	127,000	136,555	138,775	160,000 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Manual Eradication</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	21,000	27,159	31,285	42,111
<b>Alternative Development</b> <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A	49,400	54,900	60,844	70,694	83,257

<sup>a</sup> This figure represents estimate for 2006 as stated by the Office of National Drug Control Policy in the *National Drug Control Strategy 2007*.

<sup>b</sup> The alternative development figures represent funding allocated by USAID.

**Sources:** United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports 2001 – 2006*; Internet; accessed from <http://www.state.gov/p/in/rls/nrcrpt/> on 10 March 2006 and United States Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *Fiscal Year 2007 Congressional Budget Justification* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, April 2006).

In 2005, the Government of Colombia (GOC) initiated Mobile Eradication Groups (GMEs) as part of their manual eradication program. These groups were composed of 30 civilians who, under the protection of the National Police and the Army, traveled deep into areas where coca and opium crops proliferated to manually eradicate them. By the end of 2005, the GOC increased the number of these 30-member groups to 60.<sup>79</sup> Following domestic and international opposition to fumigating key national parks and indigenous reserves (deemed safe havens for narco-terrorists), President Uribe opted to launch a massive manual eradication operation in January 2006. This eradication offensive, called Operation Colombia Verde (or Green Colombia) was launched on January 19, 2006 in one of Colombia's largest national park, Sierra de la Macarena National Park, using the GMEs. Within the first couple of weeks of implementation, the eradication teams were attacked eight times by the guerrillas. Since February 2006, these eradication teams have drop from a force of 930 to 111 by April 2006, primarily out of fear of future guerrilla attacks.<sup>80</sup> The offensive culminated on August 3, 2006 following the death of five members of the GME, killed by a

<sup>79</sup> United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2006), p. 101.

<sup>80</sup> El Pais, "Colombia's Uribe Vows to Persevere in La Macarena," 7 April 2006. Open Source Center (LAP20060407347002).

high power land mine camouflaged amongst the coca bushes.<sup>81</sup> President Uribe then announced the resumption of aerial fumigation of the remaining coca crops in the park. This effort strongly reinforces the need for the Colombian government to control and secure the area of operations as a prerequisite to the program's implementation—a primary reason why Plan Colombia has depended on the aerial eradication campaign over manual eradication.

### **1. Environmental and Health Consequences**

Despite the estimated decrease in cultivation since 2000, there were a number of less obvious side effects associated with the intense aerial fumigation campaign. The first and most obvious is the environmental degradation caused not only by chemical run-offs into streams, but also from further destruction of the Amazon eco-system. As more and more land is fumigated, drug producers continue to push further into the Amazon, where detection and fumigation efforts are difficult to conduct. Cultivation of coca and the processing of cocaine in these areas cause even greater harm to the environment. According to research cited by the International Crisis Group, “for every hectare cultivated, three to four hectares of forest have been destroyed, while water and soil have been largely contaminated due to the many chemicals used in processing coca leaf.”<sup>82</sup>

The second unintended consequence is the effect that the aerial spraying campaign has on legal crops and animals. In fact, herbicides do not only kill coca, but also any plants it may come in contact with. Although the campaign originally targeted only large-scale plots of coca (three hectares or more), by 2002 this distinction had been abolished.<sup>83</sup> Plots of coca intermixed with legal crops have become legitimate targets since 2002, thereby, increasing the number of legal crops destroyed by fumigation. U.S. and Colombian governments view farmers who intersperse food and illegal crops as criminals, and therefore, are not worthy or eligible for compensation or aid. Unfortunately,

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<sup>81</sup> Ricardo Vargas Meza, “The Sierra de la Macarena: Drugs and Armed Conflict in Colombia” in *Transnacional Institute's Drug Policy Briefing*, no. 19 (September 2006), p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia,” p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2003*, p. 23.

there have also been numerous accounts where spraying has destroyed a number of alternative development projects and resulted in the death of cattle and other farm animals.<sup>84</sup> An inter-governmental commission led by the Colombian Government Ombudsman observed such damages up to 150 feet from the nearest coca field.<sup>85</sup> These continual errors on behalf of the aerial fumigation campaign has contributed to the view upheld by many farmers that you're "sprayed if you do [plant coca], sprayed if you don't."<sup>86</sup> This sort of collateral damage is not going to win the government the necessary support it needs from the rural population to defeat the insurgents.

## 2. Internal "Balloon Effect"

The third unintended consequence is what some drug academics have termed the "balloon effect"—a term that refers to squeezing one part of a balloon only to see it bulge elsewhere. This term has been used to describe the tendency of drugs popping-up in new areas in response to forced eradication campaigns. Although there was a significant decrease in coca cultivation in Colombia overall from 2000-2005, especially within the Putumayo department, these figures are somewhat misleading because they mask shifts in cultivation both within Colombia and to other Andean nations.

As noted earlier, the most significant decreases in coca cultivation within Colombia in 2002 occurred in the departments of Putumayo and Caquetá—where approximately 80 percent of the aerial campaign was directed. Yet, according to the 2003 United Nations Survey, coca cultivation has witnessed a large-scale geographic shift to the neighboring departments of Nariño and Guaviare. The increase in Nariño is of particular significance because, prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia, Nariño only accounted for 6 percent of Colombia's national total. By 2002, Nariño was the second leading coca growing

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<sup>84</sup> Ted Carpenter, *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 163.

<sup>85</sup> Betsy Marsh, *Going to Extremes: The U.S.-Funded Aerial Eradication Program in Colombia* (Washington, D.C.: Latin America Working Group, March 2004), p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

department (15 percent of the national total) behind Guaviare (27 percent).<sup>87</sup> The rise of coca cultivation in Nariño and Guaviare signify that a significant number of farmers in the Putumayo region have migrated and are re-planting elsewhere. This is an ironic development considering that aerial spraying efforts in Guaviare in the mid-to-late 1990s originally spurred the shift of coca cultivation to Putumayo and Caquetá.<sup>88</sup>

From 2003 to 2005, the “balloon effect” was also apparent in Colombia as the increased aerial spraying campaign produced only a minimal change in Colombia’s overall coca cultivation. In 2004, decreases in areas with high levels of eradication (Putumayo, Nariño, and Guaviare), were countered by increases in other departments, to include Meta and Arauca. In fact, the decrease in Guaviare of 6,400 hectares was offset by the increase of 5,900 hectares in its neighboring department of Meta—an area not targeted heavily by the aerial eradication campaign in 2004. Despite record high aerial eradication levels in the departments of Meta and Nariño in 2005, Meta produced the largest percentage of the nation’s coca under cultivation (20%) and Narino came in a close second with 16%.<sup>89</sup> The Narino department only witnessed a two percent drop in the area under cultivation even though it set a record of 57,630 hectares eradicated. Looking at Figure 3.3, the aerial eradication campaign in Narino destroyed a large portion of the coca crop (annotated in blue); however, coca cultivation increased in other areas of the Narino and in the surrounding departments of Putumayo and Cauca (annotated in red). The increase in Putumayo corresponds to a doubling of the area under coca cultivation between 2004 and 2005, from 4,390 hectares to 8,960 hectares.<sup>90</sup> Coca cultivation in Putumayo had declined significantly until 2004, but this year’s increase could

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<sup>87</sup> UNODC, Colombia: Coca Survey for December 2002 and Semi-Annual Estimate for July 2003, p. 14.

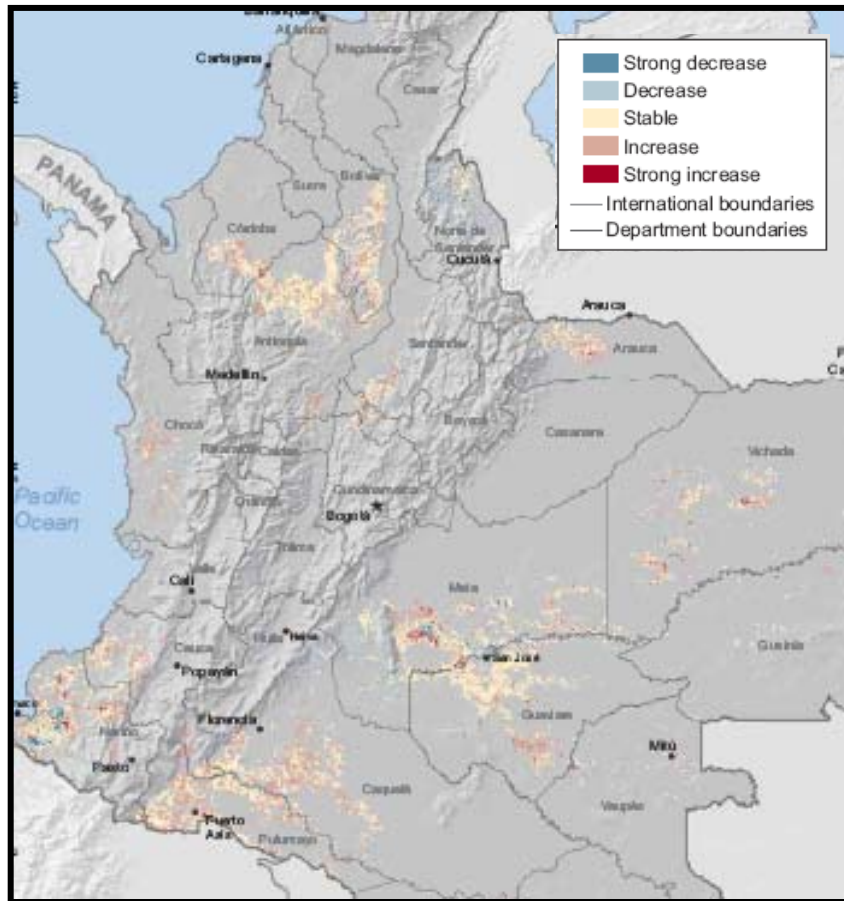
<sup>88</sup> Martin Jelsma, “Vicious Circle: The Chemical and Biological ‘War on Drugs’” (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Transnational Institute, March 2001), p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005*, p. 21, 23.

<sup>90</sup> In 2000, Putumayo used to be the center of coca cultivation in Colombia, with 66,000 hectares. *Ibid*, p. 13.

indicate a return of farmers to coca cultivation. According to the United Nation’s *Coca Cultivation Survey*, 65 percent of the fields detected in 2005 were new—indicating the extreme mobility of coca within Colombia and the strong motivation of farmers to continue planting it.<sup>91</sup>

**Figure 3.3: Coca Cultivation Density Change in Colombia, 2004-2005**



**Source:** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Government of Colombia, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005* (New York: United Nations, June 2006), p. 12.

### 3. External “Balloon Effect”

Reductions in coca cultivation in Colombia mean little if the overall cultivation levels within the Andean region have remained stable. According to the United Nations and U.S. State Department figures [see Table 3.3], Colombia witnessed a decrease of 77,000 hectares and the Andean region overall has

<sup>91</sup> UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005*, p. 11.

observed a decrease (down 28% or 61,400 hectares) since 2000.<sup>92</sup> The only overall decreases in overall cultivation in the Andean region occurred from 2000-2003 and since 2003 cultivation in the Andean Ridge has been on the rise, albeit slowly.

**Table 3.3: Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region, 1994-2005 (in hectares)**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	% Change 2004-2005
Bolivia	48,600	48,100	45,800	38,000	21,800	14,600	19,900	21,600	23,600	27,700	25,400	-8%
Peru	115,300	94,400	68,800	51,000	38,700	43,400	46,200	46,700	44,200	50,300	48,200	-4%
Colombia	51,000	67,000	79,000	102,000	160,000	163,000	145,000	102,000	86,000	80,000	86,000	8%
Total	214,900	209,500	193,600	191,000	220,500	221,000	211,100	173,100	153,800	158,000	159,600	1%

Sources      United States Department of State      National Monitoring System Supported by UNODC

**Source:** UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005*, p. 19.

While UNODC states that Peru and Bolivia observed only marginal decreases in 2005, the U.S. Department of State indicates in its *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006* that both Bolivia and Peru observed increases in coca cultivation of 8 and 38 percent, respectively, for 2005.<sup>93</sup> And according to the State Department's annual report, Ecuador (which borders Colombia's Putumayo department) has experienced increases in coca cultivation within its borders. In 2005,

Ecuadorian security forces located and destroyed about 36,160 cultivated coca plants in small, scattered sites...While not commercially significant, the extent of cultivation was about double that of 2004. Together with the discovery of a small, partially harvested opium poppy plantation, they suggest that growers are testing the feasibility of drug crop cultivation in Ecuador.<sup>94</sup>

Although these increases are relatively small in terms of hectares, cultivation and production in these countries needs to be continually evaluated as Plan Colombia progresses. In fact, the UN Development Program asserted that any reductions in coca cultivation within Colombia should not be considered a

<sup>92</sup> UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2005*, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006*, p. 90 and p. 116.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

success, but rather the “fundamental lag time in the balloon effect while the crops are reestablished throughout the region.”<sup>95</sup> If coca cultivation continues to rise in neighboring countries, clearly, any decline in Colombian coca cultivation may not be a sign of a successful U.S. strategy.

### **C. OTHER COUNTER-NARCOTICS EFFORTS**

While the main thrust of anti-drug efforts associated with Plan Colombia have been in the form of eradication, the Plan did recognize the need to carry out other forms of counter-drug efforts—to include alternative development and interdiction. Plan Colombia expanded and supported a number of interdiction programs already in place; however, it failed to adequately link alternative farming programs to the eradication campaign. Despite recent increases in alternative development aid, the program has suffered from a lack of initial funding. The steady increase in aerial spraying in the last decade makes it abundantly clear that forced eradication when not combined with alternative development will not discourage farmers from growing coca.

#### **1. Alternative Development**

Plan Colombia did recognize the need to link alternative farming programs to its intense eradication campaign. These measures resemble the “carrot and stick” approach which attempt to shift peasant farmers to alternative crops in regions where coca is historically grown.<sup>96</sup> Since funding for the plan was initially skewed toward security, alternative development programs were initially lacking adequate funding. A significant number of families initially volunteered to transition to alternative legal crops with the support of government-funded alternative agriculture initiatives but they soon went back to growing coca when they realized the government would not stand by their word. Between December 2000 and July 2001, 33 eradication pacts involving 37,775 families were signed in nine districts of the Putumayo region. By March 2002, 21 percent of the aid for food security project had been delivered and only 24 percent of the total number

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<sup>95</sup> United Nations Development Program, *National Report on Human Development for Colombia, 2003* (Washington, DC: United Nations, 2003), p. 310.

<sup>96</sup> Carpenter, *Bad Neighbor Policy*, p. 112.

of families committed to the pacts had received full or partial delivery of their promised aid.<sup>97</sup> In principle, these pacts and food security projects were necessary elements of a successful alternative development project. The failure of the government to deliver aid and supplies cast a number of doubts in farmers' minds as to the viability of the programs, thereby, forcing them to revert back to illicit crops despite their willingness to change.<sup>98</sup>

Funding was but one problem associated with the alternative development program in Colombia. Since Plan Colombia began in 2000, substantial lack of coordination between fumigation and alternative development programs has developed. Data released by the United Nations in *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey for 2004* indicates that spraying is not going hand-in-hand with alternative development. As Table 3.4 points out, in several of the departments with the most coca and the most spraying, investments in alternative development have been minimal at most. In Guaviare, the second most sprayed department in the country, only \$500,000 has been dedicated to alternative development efforts and Nariño, the third most sprayed department, has only seen \$11 million. A successful strategy needs to incorporate both sticks (eradication) and carrots (alternative development). Such poor implementation decisions severely hindered the government's relations with the rural populace, even driving some into the arms of the insurgents. As eradication efforts increased, many farmers, instead of shifting to legal crops, simply migrated. Those farmers, who did remain attempting to grow alternative crops, continued to complain of the inadequacy of governmental support for these programs.

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<sup>97</sup> Marsh, "Going to Extremes: The U.S.-Funded Aerial Eradication Program in Colombia," p. 14.

<sup>98</sup> According to an article in the *Houston Chronicle*, "Legions of coca farmers say they would embrace legal crops if they could. But in deep rural areas—where there are no banks, little technical support and few, if any, roads to get food crops to market—many say that coca is their only option." See John Otis, "Officials Urge Farmers to Try Alternative to Coca Crop," *Houston Chronicle*, 14 July 2000; Internet; accessed from <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/special/drugquagmire/603102.html> on 12 January 2006.



**Table 3.4: Spraying vs. Alternative Development in Top Seven Coca Producing Departments in Colombia**

Department	Coca Cultivation 2000-2004	Spraying 1999-2004	Alternative Development 1999-2007
Putumayo	138,812	148,751	\$54,500,000
Guaviare	96,485	108,686	\$500,000
Nariño	63,750	100,837	\$11,000,000
Meta	63,324	19,249	\$4,700,000
Caquetá	63,261	76,924	\$5,800,000
Nortede Santander	30,992	48,586	\$47,900,000
Vichada	27,521	4,357	\$0

**Source:** UNODC, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2004*.

Many of the alternative development initiatives that were funded faced a number of difficulties since the areas of concern were typically remote areas with poor soil and in regions with the least amount of government authority and presence. Alternative crop programs are clearly necessary in the implementation of an effective counter-narcotics program. However, the underlying reality is that most Colombian peasants can make from four to more than ten times the income from cultivation of coca than they could make from the cultivation of legal crops.<sup>99</sup> Even when faced with the possibility of aerial fumigation, many, if not most, peasants are willing to take the risk. The poor soil that is not suitable for most crops works well for both the coca plant and poppies. Other factors which favor the cultivation of coca are the short time window before the first harvest, the large potential production from each plant, and the characteristics of the market.<sup>100</sup> Most coca plants can provide an initial harvest at 18 months and sustain maximum harvest yields at three years. A mature and well-maintained coca plant can be harvested up to six times per year and produce leaves for up to 25 years.<sup>101</sup> The marketing of coca is also less burdensome than legal crops. Coca leaves, unlike legitimate crops, can be preserved for extended periods of

<sup>99</sup> Carpenter, *Bad Neighbor Policy*, p. 107.

<sup>100</sup> Livingstone, *Inside Colombia*.

<sup>101</sup> Carpenter, *Bad Neighbor Policy*, p. 107.

time and typically farmers do not have to deal with the cost of transportation as the buyers (drug traffickers) typically purchase the coca directly from the farmers.

Although alternative development funds were initially skewed due to increased security and eradication efforts, President Uribe under his Democratic Security and Defense Policy has substantially increased the allotment of funding for alternative development. President Uribe's increased effort to target the guerrillas is a necessary step toward increasing security within the country. By increasing security and his establishment of the Coordination Center for Integrated Action (CCIA)—an “interagency organization to reestablish governance in previously ungoverned spaces of Colombia through synchronizing military operations with the operations of other ministries”—the Uribe administration seems to be addressing a number of issues that have plagued the implementation of alternative development projects in the past.<sup>102</sup> The increased importance placed on alternative development by President Uribe can also be observed in his expansion of the Forest Ranger program—which pays rural families to pull up any coca and maintain an area coca-free in areas where the eco-system is fragile (i.e., national parks).<sup>103</sup> As measures of security continue on a downward trend and control is established in remote areas where coca has traditionally flourished, alternative development needs to continue to be pushed to the forefront of Colombian policy.

## **2. Interdiction**

Effective interdiction efforts require a significant amount of coordination and intelligence. Besides establishing two additional counter-narcotics battalions, a portion of U.S. aid has been dedicated to technical assistance, training, and equipment for Colombia's armed forces and police enabling them to seize, destroy, and disrupt the trafficking of illicit crops. According to the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for 2006*, Colombia had a record

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<sup>102</sup> United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006*, p. 90 and p. 102.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

year with respect to interdiction efforts—with Colombia’s police and military forces captured 223 metric tons of cocaine and cocaine base in 2005.<sup>104</sup>

While governmental agencies continue to insist that interdiction efforts have resulted in record number of arrests and seizures, it is obvious that police and military seizures would increase if more personnel were directed at the problem. However, what is being observed is an adaptation to interdiction. Just like in the 1990s when the U.S. put a significant amount of pressure on interdiction efforts from the Caribbean route, we began to see Mexico become a significant alternative transit route. It is the same internally in Colombia, suppression along one route merely pushes trafficking in another direction. While trafficking may be a continuous problem, the improved intelligence collection capabilities of the Colombian military and police as well as improvements in mobility have significantly increased their effectiveness to detect and destroy drug processing labs as well as intercept processing material. Proponents of interdiction efforts cite increased numbers of interdictions and arrests as justification for continued program support and increased spending. These operations are intended to hit the traffickers where it hurts and decrease the supply of cocaine available to be shipped to user countries and/or increase its price. It is extremely difficult to verify that increases in seizures represent an actual reduction in illicit drug production and trafficking. In fact, as will be discussed in the next section, the availability and price of cocaine in the United States does not indicate that such a reduction has taken place.

#### **D. IMPACT ON U.S. MARKETS**

The overall decrease in coca cultivation in Colombia since 2000 has been praised by the Bush administration as proof that Plan Colombia is a huge success. Despite heavy criticism regarding the unchanged cultivation statistics since 2003, U.S. officials continue to contend that Plan Colombia “has had

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<sup>104</sup> United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006*, p. 101.

exceptional success in pursuing the goals it established.”<sup>105</sup> In fact, when Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice spoke in Bogotá in April 2005, she clearly acknowledged Plan Colombia as a success and reemphasized the need for its continued support by affirming that “you don’t stop in midstream on something that has been very effective.”<sup>106</sup> However, the number of hectares of coca in Colombia is a poor indicator of the effectiveness of U.S. supply-side counter-narcotics policy. Despite record high seizures and hectares eradicated, Plan Colombia has not decreased the flow of illicit drugs to the United States—one of the principle objectives of U.S. supply-sided counter-drug policy.

### **1. Price and Purity**

U.S. supply-side policies aim to reduce the availability of illicit drugs in the United States enough to drive up prices and drive down purity. In theory, these higher prices for a lower-quality product would then reduce drug use, both by dissuading people from becoming involved with drugs and by prompting those who are already using drugs to seek treatment or otherwise cut back on their consumption. In November 2005, John Walters, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), stated the “we have seen for the first time a decline in the purity of cocaine in the United States and an increase in price at the retail level.”<sup>107</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, cocaine prices witnessed a substantial decline and have been on a gradual decline throughout much of the 1990s with the price of cocaine fluctuating between \$100 and \$200 per gram. [See Figure 3.4] According to Office of National Drug Control Policy, from February 2005 to September 2005, the price of a gram of cocaine rose 19 percent, to \$170, while

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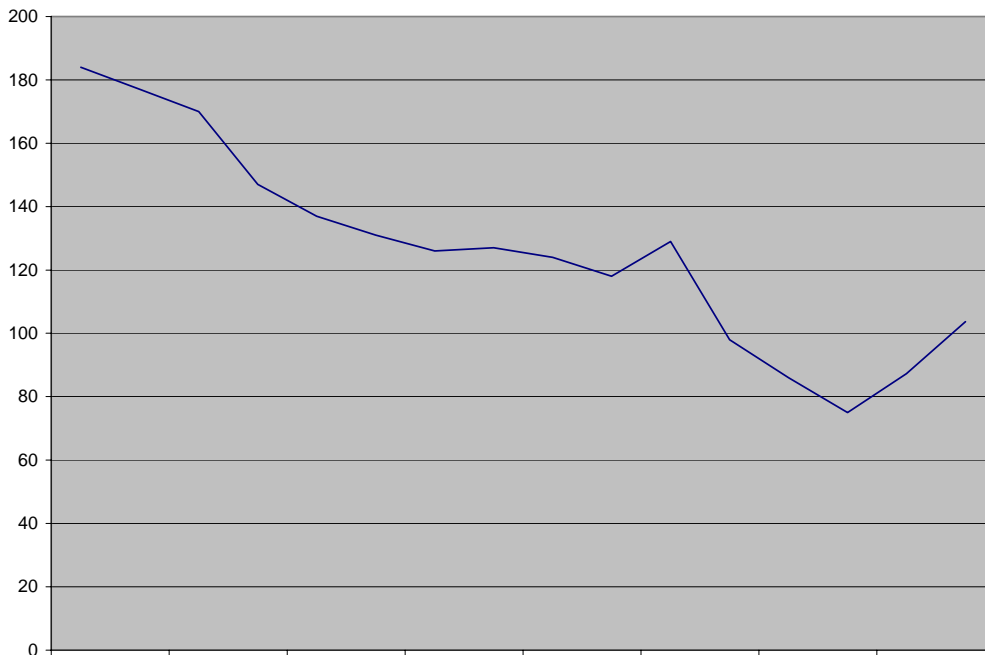
<sup>105</sup> Roger F. Noreiga, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, “Plan Colombia: Major Successes and New Challenges,” Statement before the House International Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 11 May 2005; Internet; accessed from <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/2005/q2/46564.htm> on 28 August 2005.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> John Walters, Director of Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), “Progress Report on Anti-Drug Efforts in Colombia,” Foreign Press Center Briefing, 17 November 2005; Internet; accessed from <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/speech05/111705.html> on 12 December 2005.

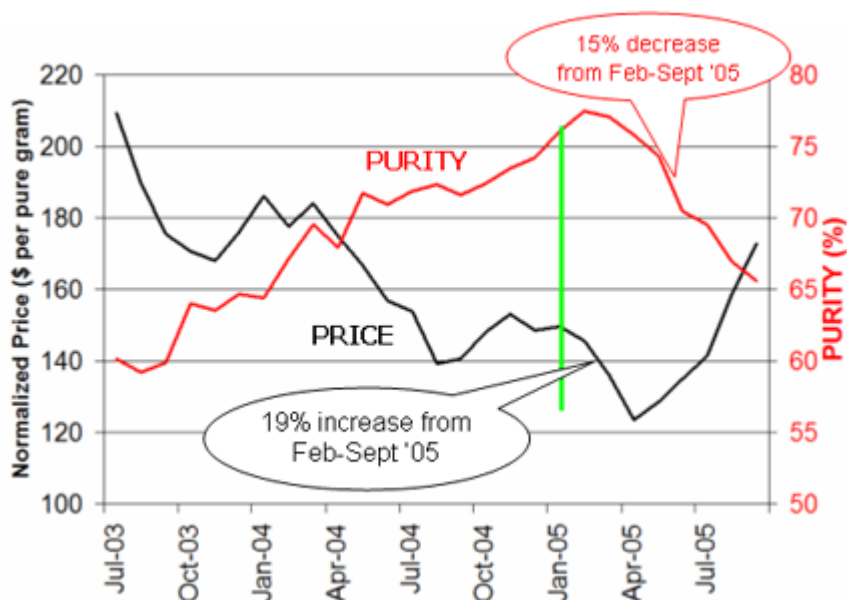
the purity level fell 15 percent. [See Figure 3.5] Yet, this price increase falls well within the average price fluctuations for cocaine over the last decade. The same holds true for purity levels. [See Figure 3.5] Since the early 1990s, cocaine purity levels have fluctuated from 55 to 75 percent. The new purity levels for cocaine in September 2005 (approximately 65 percent) fall within the long-run average of the last decade. Plan Colombia began in 2000 and the ONDCP's assessment of its success, based on eight months worth of data from 2005, is extremely premature. Although it is possible that stockpiles of coca and lag times may have been a contributing factor in the inability of the United States to experience an increase in price and/or decrease in purity levels until 2005, but this new trend has the potential to be merely a short-term fluctuation—similar to those observed in 2000. This trend has not been consistent for a long enough period to provide proof of sustained success in U.S. supply-side efforts. In fact, looking at Figure 3.4 it seems that price and purity have been merely pushed back to what they were in early 2004—four years after the start of Plan Colombia.

**Figure 3.4: U.S. Retail Prices of Cocaine, 1990-2005 (US\$)**



**Source:** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2006*, p. 368.

**Figure 3.5: Purity and Price of South American Cocaine**



**Source:** John Walters, *Report on Progress in Colombia*, 17 November 2005; Internet; accessed from <http://www.pushingback.com/archives/05nov.html> on 12 February 2006.

## 2. Availability

In the *National Drug Threat Assessment for 2007*, produced by the Department of Justice's National Drug Intelligence Center, states that "despite the fact that the highest record level of interdiction and seizures were recorded in 2005, there have been no sustained cocaine shortages or indications of stretched supplies in domestic markets."<sup>108</sup> ONDCP announced in November 2005 that prices have increased; however, law enforcement reporting throughout the first half of 2005 does not reflect a decrease in retail level cocaine availability.<sup>109</sup> This reporting corresponds with the latest National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) data which shows that the percentage of state and local law enforcement agencies reporting high or moderate availability of cocaine in their area has not changed appreciably from 2003 through 2005.<sup>110</sup> As cocaine remains widely available, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) concluded in September 2005 that the number of cocaine users in the United

<sup>108</sup> United States Department of Justice, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2007*, p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

States had remained stable—although high—at roughly two million users.<sup>111</sup> Thereby, indicating that increased supply-side efforts have not transferred into reductions in demand. The monitoring of these figures will be of particular importance in the next years as a decrease in drug availability and use in 2006 may be indicative of price increases and purity reductions experienced in 2005. A decrease in availability and use would lend more credibility to the ONDCP's claim that Plan Colombia is finally experiencing success on the streets of the United States.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

With respect to its counter-narcotics objectives, Plan Colombia has brought mixed results. According to data provided by the United Nations, Colombia achieved its goal of a 50 percent reduction in coca cultivation by the end of 2004. While these statistics are very encouraging, they overshadow a number of unintended consequences and discouraging trends.

The cornerstone of Plan Colombia's counter-narcotics efforts has been the aerial eradication campaign. The intensification of the fumigation campaign from 2001 to 2002 contributed substantially to the overall decrease in cultivation. In fact, 73 percent of the overall reduction (or 61,000 hectares) was achieved from 2000 to 2002—when strategy was driven solely by counter-narcotics. Despite record breaking eradication figures since 2003, the returns seem to be diminishing as farming techniques (i.e. coating coca plants with sugar-cane syrup, pruning fumigated bushes, etc.) outmaneuver fumigation efforts. Aerial eradication has not only encouraged farmer to plant smaller plots of coca—which make detection and eradication efforts more difficult—but has also encouraged them to plant more. This point was reinforced when John Walters, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), acknowledged that in 2004 “coca growers re-planted and reconstituted their crops faster than we have seen

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<sup>111</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health National Findings* (Washington, DC: September 2005).

them do in the past.”<sup>112</sup> As these new crops transpire, it corroborates the “balloon effect.” That is, when production is squeezed somewhere, it simply springs up elsewhere. As documented in the *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Surveys* conducted by the United Nations, eradication has created geographic shifts in cultivation both within Colombia and the entire Andean region in general.

There are a number of reasons why the aerial eradication effort has not deterred coca farmers from planting more coca. The first reason has to do with the initial lack of funding allocated for alternative development. It was apparent from a number of reports originating from the department of Putumayo (the focus of Plan Colombia’s initial phase), that a significant amount of farmers were willing to transition to legal crops as long as the government provided some form of assistance. The failure of the government to deliver aid and supplies and uphold its end of the contract, cast doubts in farmers’ minds as to the viability of such programs. Secondly, there has been consistently a lack of coordination between eradication efforts and alternative development. In several of the departments where a majority of the cultivation and spraying is concentrated, alternative development has been minimal at most. The use of purely “stick” strategies (i.e. eradication) is not enough to encourage farmers to plant legal crops. With no other alternatives available, many farmers see coca as their only option, and therefore, have planted more coca in anticipation of future losses. Alternative development must go hand-in-hand with eradication if counter-narcotics efforts are to be successful.

While the sustained cultivation reductions in the department of Putumayo prove the necessity of the carrot and stick approach, it also highlights the effectiveness of manual eradication. In 2002 alone, more than one half of the decrease in cultivation in Putumayo was the result of manual eradication coupled with alternative development. Not only does manual eradication ensure

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<sup>112</sup> John P. Walters, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), “The Andes: Institutionalizing Success,” testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, 11 May 2005.



complete destruction of the illicit crops but it also initiates a state presence in a number of rural areas that have traditionally been abandoned by the Colombian government. Yet, for such projects to be carried out security is a paramount concern and often a prerequisite—as illustrated by the recent guerrilla attacks on eradication teams in the La Macarena National Park.

Despite record high seizures and hectares eradicated, Plan Colombia has not decreased the flow of illicit drugs to the United States—one of the underlying objectives of U.S. support for Plan Colombia. While minor fluctuations in both cocaine prices and purity levels have been observed, these levels are within the historic averages for the last decade. While the recent increase in the price of cocaine and the decrease in purity levels may signify that counter-narcotics efforts in Colombia are beginning to affect supply, this assessment is still premature as no decreases in availability have been noted.

## IV. IMPACT ON THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA – PEOPLE’S ARMY (FARC-EP)

### A. INTRODUCTION

One of the principal problems facing President Pastrana upon taking office in August 1998 was the increased level of violence being experienced throughout the country. An underlying fundamental assumption of Plan Colombia was that Colombia’s increased violence was fueled by illicit drugs.<sup>113</sup> This point is reinforced by a 2001 RAND report that insists:

Current instability in Colombia derives from the interaction and resulting synergies stemming from two distinct tendencies: the development of an underground criminal drug economy and the growth of armed challenges to the state’s authority. ...the strength of the guerrillas is directly linked to the guerrilla’s control of drug producing and drug processing areas.<sup>114</sup>

All of Colombia’s armed non-state actors (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces (AUC)) fund their operations, at least in part, from income generated by the illicit drug industry. In recognition of the relatively strong correlation between the strength of armed non-state actors and the increasing drug industry, one of the secondary objectives of Plan Colombia was to diminish the war-making capacity of these organizations by reducing the funding they derived from the illicit drug industry. The Colombian government believed that, by striking the drug trade, it was also striking the economic center of gravity of the guerrillas.<sup>115</sup> By destroying illicit drug fields, production facilities, and transportation networks, the government believed that it could also degrade the guerrillas’ ability to continue the war.

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<sup>113</sup> This rationale has been supported by a number of academic scholars. See Jennifer Holmes, Sheila Amin Gutierrez de Pineres, and Kevin Curtin, “Drugs, Violence and Development in Colombia: A Department Level Analysis” (Dallas, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2004).

<sup>114</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombia Labyrinth*, p. xii.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Despite Pastrana's efforts, high levels of violence continued throughout much of Colombia and many Colombians became disenchanted with the fruitless results of President Pastrana's three years of peace negotiations and counter-narcotic efforts implemented under Plan Colombia. Hence, in 2002 a hard-right candidate, Álvaro Uribe, was elected into office promising to take a hard-line stance against the insurgents. Acknowledging that the situation in Colombia required a long-term strategy, the Uribe administration developed a "Democratic Security and Defense Policy"—or "unified" campaign against both drugs and insurgents. The main principal behind this strategy was to reinstate the rule of law and regain control over the country, thereby, denying sanctuary to armed non-state actors—the main perpetrators of violence in Colombia. President Uribe's strategy also continued and expanded counter-narcotic efforts initiated under the Pastrana administration—especially the aerial eradication campaign. With Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy primarily focused on security and counter-narcotics operations, its objectives are complementary to a number of those laid out in Plan Colombia.

This chapter will attempt to determine the impact of Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia" (2000-2002) and President Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy (2003-2005) on the strength of the FARC-EP, one of the main perpetrators of violence in Colombia. Since strength is an ambiguous and relative term, the strength of the FARC-EP will be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively by evaluating changes in the organization's area of influence, membership numbers as well as composition, activities (or operations tempo), popular support, strategies and tactics, revenues, and relationships with other state and non-state actors.

It will argue that while Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia" did reduce the number of hectares of coca cultivation, its impact on the FARC-EP was negligible. Plan Colombia did not substantially weaken the FARC-EP, as proponents contested, nor did it strengthen the organization, as critics of government efforts have charged. The illicit drug industry was not the FARC-

EP's center of gravity but rather one of many enablers in funding its operations. As a result, reductions in coca cultivation had little impact on the FARC's capacity to act. Although the targeting of the illicit drug industry, primarily through aerial eradication, may have slightly increased the FARC-EP's support based, it was not the over-arching cause for an increase in FARC-EP strength prior to 2002. Rather, the peace negotiations conducted with the FARC-EP by the Pastrana administration (1998-2002) undermined the secondary objective of Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia"—to decrease the war-making capability of the FARC-EP. In fact, this chapter will argue that actions undertaken by the Pastrana administration in the name of peace facilitated an increase in the FARC-EP's strength prior to 2003.

Finally, this chapter will acknowledge that President Uribe's "unified" strategy against drugs and insurgents has marginally diminished the threat posed by the FARC-EP. The reorganization and fortification of the Colombian military—which was originally instituted by the Pastrana administration and continued by President Uribe—enabled the military to go on the offensive against the FARC-EP resulting in a decrease in estimates of FARC-EP forces. While the overall number of guerrilla attacks is down, the FARC-EP still exerts some amount of control over approximately one third of Colombian territory and remains a formidable threat to the Colombian state.

## **B. THE PASTRANA ADMINISTRATION**

As mentioned earlier, an underlying fundamental assumption of Plan Colombia was that Colombia's increased violence was fueled by illicit drugs. Plan Colombia's initial focus on the southern departments of Colombia—a FARC-EP-dominated area which witnessed a number of devastating insurgent attacks from 1996-1998—strongly suggested that the government's initial concern was focused on the threat posed by the FARC-EP. In Chapter III it was acknowledged that Colombia witnessed a substantial decline in the amount of coca under cultivation from 2000 to 2002, primarily a direct result of the intense aerial fumigation campaign. According to proponents of Plan Colombia,

decreases in FARC-EP strength should correlate with the reported decreases in cultivation if, in fact, the illicit drug industry is the FARC-EP's economic center of gravity. However, opponents of Plan Colombia's initial phase contended that the intense aerial fumigation campaign would drive peasants into the hands of the guerrillas, as was observed in Peru a decade earlier.

This section will review the impact of Plan Colombia (2000-2002) on the strength of the FARC-EP. Looking at changes in the FARC-EP's base of support, its relationship with internal actors and the organization's sources of economic sustainability will assist in determining if FARC-EP strength actually decreased as a result of counter-narcotics efforts directed in FARC-controlled areas. It will argue that while the "Push into Southern Colombia" may have forced some disgruntled and economically desperate coca farmers to join the ranks of the FARC-EP, this phenomenon was not a common occurrence. The change in roles and relationships between the FARC-EP and the cocaleros (or coca growers) as well the FARC-EP's employment of brutal violence against the local populous proved to be detrimental to their popular support. It will also argue that Plan Colombia only minimally affected the FARC-EP's economic base. The granting of the *zona de despeje* by President Patrana would ultimately prove to be a strategic mistake as it gave the FARC-EP the opportunity to capitalize further on the illicit drug industry in an area uncontested by the state.

### **1. Impact on Popular Support for the Guerrillas**

Critics of Plan Colombia often argue that the rise in membership numbers for the FARC-EP since 1998 [See Table 4.1] can be attributed to the U.S-backed aerial eradication campaign associated with Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia. According to the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), a non-governmental agency located in Bogotá, an estimated 200,000 people were uprooted between 1999 and 2003 as a result of counter-

narcotics operations directed at the southern provinces in Colombia.<sup>116</sup> For small farmers who may have been forced to cultivate coca by armed non-state actors or out of pure necessity to survive, aerial fumigation can strip them of their means of survival.<sup>117</sup>

The overall lack of viable alternatives for farmers can place those whose fields have been fumigated in a difficult position. In order to maintain an income and provide food for their families, they typically can choose to: 1) relocate to another department; 2) plant coca and hope that they will not be fumigated again; or 3) join one of the armed groups. The “balloon effect” predicts that a number of farmers are pursuing option one.<sup>118</sup> While it is apparent that many farmers have moved to other provinces to plant coca, some testimonies received by non-governmental organizations has confirmed that “young farmers from Putumayo, the focus of early spraying efforts, are joining the FARC-EP or the AUC after their crops are destroyed by aerial fumigation.”<sup>119</sup> It is plausible that fumigation programs whose purpose it is to destroy the economic base of the FARC-EP may actually be furthering the growth and support the FARC-EP, and the AUC, receive from the rural population. Some peasants whose livelihoods are

116 According to government statistics, in the year 2000 alone 7,428 people were displaced in the department of Putumayo. In 1999—prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia—only 368 people officially registered as displaced. This number rose to 17,143 in 2001—over a 200 percent increase—and to 33,914 (approximately 10 percent of the department's population) in 2002. These figures were taken by the Social Solidarity Network, a government agency responsible for delivering humanitarian aid to Colombians displaced by the conflict. It must be remembered that these figures only represent those people who are officially registered as displaced. It does not include those who do not register out of fear of retaliation by armed actors or those who are not recognized by the agency because they do not possess land titles. See Witness for Peace, “Colombia’s First Two Years,” April 2003, p. 12; Internet; accessed from <http://www.witnessforpeace.org/pdf/putumayo0403.pdf> on 28 November 2005 and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Colombia: Government Response to IDPs Under Fire as Conflict Worsens” *Global IDP Project*, 27 May 2005, p. 4; Internet; accessed from <http://www.internal-displacement.org> on 11 January 2006.

117 Individuals who flee from fumigation, however, are generally not considered internally displaced persons (IDPs) according to government standards. They are termed “voluntary migrants,” which prevents them from receiving assistance provided to registered IDP households. See Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, *Colombia’s War on Children* (New York, N.Y.: Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, February 2004) p. 14; available from <http://www.watchlist.org/reports/colombia.report.pdf>; Internet; accessed on 11 January 2006.

118 For further information on the “balloon effect” refer to Chapter 3 – Impact on Counter-narcotics.

119 Witness for Peace, “Colombia’s First Two Years,” p. 105.

threatened by aerial fumigation efforts may view such actions as an attack against the peasantry, which only continues to erode the relationship between the government and the rural populace (which is already weak in these areas). Undoubtedly, anger over fumigation and economic desperation has prompted some peasants to join or support the FARC-EP; however, this phenomenon has not assumed the substantial proportions it has in other cases like Peru. The lack of peasant mobilization to their cause and the harsh tactics and strategies employed by FARC-EP are some of the reason why counter-narcotics efforts did not overwhelming pushed peasants into the arms of the FARC-EP.

**Table 4.1: Estimates on FARC-EP Membership<sup>120</sup>**

Year	Colombian Ministry of Defense	U.S. Department of State
1990	5,800	N/A
1998	11,930	7,000 – 10,000
2000	N/A	10,000 – 15,000
2002	16,980	12,000 – 18,000
2004	12,000	9,000 – 12,000

**Sources:** Nina Serafino, “Colombia: Conditions and U.S. Policy” (Washington, D.C.: CRS Report for Congress, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division, 2001), p. 9; Ana Hutchinson, testimony before Committee on International Relations, *International Global Terrorism: Its Links with Illicit Drugs as Illustrated by the IRA and Other Groups in Colombia*, 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, April 24, 2002, p. 32; U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 2005), p. 109; John A. Cope, “Colombia’s War: Toward a New Strategy” in the Institute for National Strategic Studies’ *Strategic Forum*, no. 194 (October 2002), Footnote 5 and Stephen Johnson, “Helping Colombia Sustain Progress Toward Peace,” in *Executive Summary Background*, no. 1887 (October 19, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> It is important to note that these numbers do not include the FARC-EP’s urban militia. The FARC-EP’s urban militia—its method for making the organization’s presence known and felt in the urban areas—in 2002 was estimated to be between 2,500 and 6,000 members and consisted primarily of two groups: the Bolivarian Militia and the Popular Militia. The difference is that the Bolivarian Militia has a military structure and composed of people suited for direct physical combat while the Popular Militia is composed of individuals whose age or physical condition prevents them from participating in direct combat with the enemy. The political-military roles of these urban groups vary: “from facilitate the movement of the guerrillas from and to the cities; to provide logistical support, medical supplies, ammunition, refuge for wounded combatants and weapons; and to extract protection rents from merchants, including those in downtown Bogota.” See Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence*, pp. 79-80.

Despite these assertions by government critics, it can be contested that the expansion of the aerial eradication campaign associated with Plan Colombia did not win the FARC-EP popular support. This is most clearly evident in the lack of peasant protests against Plan Colombia, in stark contrast to FARC-backed mobilization against government fumigation programs just four years earlier. In 1996, the initiation of a U.S.-supported fumigation program in the departments of Guaviare and Caquetá, witnessed one of the largest peasant mobilizations of the decade—with more than 200,000 participants.<sup>121</sup> Backed by the FARC-EP, the weeks of marches ended when the Colombian government agreed to carry out infrastructure projects, crop substitution programs, and development assistance in the affected areas. These protests showed that the FARC-EP had built an impressive support base in a number of rural areas. Yet, prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia, with its focus on aerial fumigation, Colombia did not witness a mass mobilization of peasants. Since the government never followed through on its commitments made in response to the 1996 marches, the marches were generally regarded as a failure. A number of the local peasants, who lost income from the protests, directed their anger and mistrust not just at the Colombian government, but also at the FARC-EP. As a result, when the FARC-EP attempted to mobilize the peasantry against Plan Colombia, their efforts not only failed, but may also have been counter-productive. In Putumayo, the FARC-EP imposed a blockade of commercial and transport activity on the local population in defiance of the upcoming initiation of Plan Colombia, leading some analysts to assert that such actions against the populace have significantly eroded the FARC-EP's support base.<sup>122</sup>

**a. Relations with the Cocalers**

The FARC-EP traditionally has received a substantial amount of support from Colombia's *cocaleros*, or coca growers; however, the FARC-EP's increased involvement in the drug trade has fundamentally altered the

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<sup>121</sup> Adam Isacson, "The Tragedy of Alternative Development in Colombia," *Colombia Journal Online*, December 3, 2001; Internet; accessed from <http://www.colombiareport.org/colombia92.htm> on 15 January 2006.

<sup>122</sup> International Crisis Group, "War and Drugs in Colombia," p. 12.



organizations relationship with the *cocaleros*. In an interview conducted by Scott Wilson (a journalist for the Washington Post) with a farmer in a small village within the department of Meta, villagers stated that the FARC-EP was the sole buyer of coca. According to residents, the FARC-EP pays residents \$820 per 2.2 pounds of coca base, which is approximately \$150 less than the going rate in other regions.<sup>123</sup> This indicates a significant shift in the FARC-EP's relations with the *cocaleros*. Rather than looking out for the interests of the peasants—as it did when it first became involved in the illicit drug industry—the FARC-EP is now exploiting them. In this sense, the FARC-EP is perceived as both a defender and a danger to the peasant farmers who cultivate coca as their primary means of economic activity. This phenomenon is further developed in a recent paper entitled, “Shooting Up: The Drug Industry and Military Conflict,” by Vanda Felbab-Brown. She argues that “belligerent groups are frequently tempted to control the entire drug industry in their region, but by doing so they severely compromise the political benefits they gain by being protectors of the peasants against traffickers.”<sup>124</sup> This seems to be precisely what happened to the FARC-EP as it increased its involvement in the illicit drug industry in the late 1990s. The mutually beneficial relationship that had previously existed between the FARC-EP and the *cocaleros* against a common threat (the narco-traffickers) is no longer present. Without the presence of “thuggish” traffickers, the FARC-EP is able to reap the financial income of increased involvement but at the cost of the political benefits it derived from the peasants in FARC-dominated coca-producing areas.

**b. Relations with the Paramilitaries**

Although there was an increase in the number of Colombian armed forces in the department of Putumayo as a result of Plan Colombia's “Push into Southern Colombia,” this did not translate into an improvement in security for the region. In fact, although it is extremely difficult to find official statistics regarding violence specifically within the department of Putumayo (i.e. homicides,

<sup>123</sup> Scott Wilson, “Colombia's Rebel Zone: World Apart; Tour Reveals Force's Growing Isolation,” *The Washington Post*, Section A, 18 October 2003, p. A01.

<sup>124</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Shooting Up: The Drug Trade and Military Conflict,” paper presented at APSA Annual Meeting 2005, p. 26.

disappearances, etc.), interviews conducted by a variety of non-governmental organizations have shown that violence has actually increased in the department since the onset of Plan Colombia. In an evaluation conducted by Witness for Peace (WFP), a politically independent human rights organization, the Colombian health ministry—DASALUD (Departamento Administrativo de Salud)—stated that there were at least 307 homicides in Putumayo from January to July of 2002, representing an increase of seven percent from the homicide rate one year prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia.<sup>125</sup> It was also concluded by the national Human Rights Ombudsman's office in October 2002 that "in recent months, the security situation in Lower and Middle Putumayo has worsened considerably and the presence of illegally armed groups has strengthened."<sup>126</sup>

The increased violence in Putumayo was a partial result of the arrival and strengthening of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) in the region—an umbrella paramilitary organization in Colombia with known historic ties to Colombia's armed forces. Up until the end of 1997 when the AUC announced the creation of its southern bloc, the FARC-EP's control in the Putumayo region went undisputed. By 2000, the presence of the AUC could be felt throughout a number of major urban areas in lower and middle Putumayo, including Puerto Asís, La Hormiga, Orito, and El Placer. While the AUC has gained control of a number of urban areas, the FARC-EP continues to control most of the rural areas in the lower and middle Putumayo region. Therefore, while it is true that Plan Colombia has weakened the FARC-EP throughout a number of urban areas in Putumayo, it has done so by strengthening the AUC, not by undermining the FARC-EP's drug revenues.<sup>127</sup>

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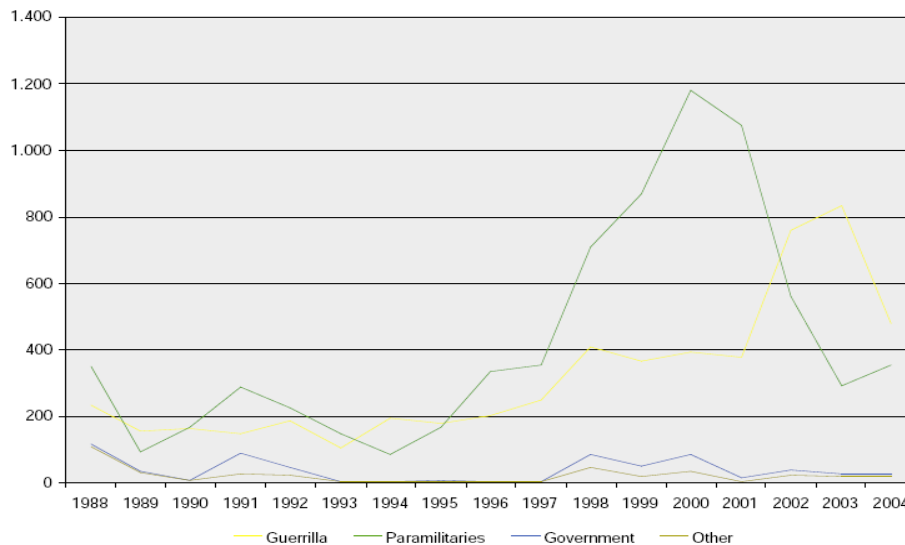
<sup>125</sup> Witness for Peace, "Plan Colombia's First Two Years: An Evaluation of Human Rights in Putumayo – 2003," April 2003, p. 6; Internet; accessed from <http://www.witnessforpeace.org/pdf/putumayo0403.pdf> on 28 November 2005.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

There are a number of reasons that contribute to the paramilitary take over in regions of southern Colombia. One factor can be attributed to the local population's growing dissatisfaction with the guerrillas. Although this dissatisfaction goes back to the failed peasant protests in 1996, the FARC-EP has not helped the situation by reacting both violently and indiscriminately to the paramilitary offensive—often killing more civilians than it does paramilitary forces. Historically throughout Colombia violence against civilians has been predominant linked to the actions of the paramilitaries. Yet since the end of 2001 [see Figure 4.1], guerrilla forces have surpassed the paramilitaries with respect to the number of civilian casualties inflicted.<sup>128</sup> The increase in civilian casualties inflicted by the guerrillas has two explanations: first, is the retaliation against those who support the paramilitary incursion into southern Colombia. Second, the FARC-EP has increasingly turned to gas cylinder bombs, which tend to be an indiscriminate weapon. These indiscriminate acts of brutality did not win the hearts and mind of the local population.

**Figure 4.1: Civilian Casualties Due to Attacks**



**Source:** Jorge Restrepo, Michael Spagat, Patrick Reanier, and Nicolás Suárez, “Civilian Casualties in the Colombian Conflict: Geo-referencing Human Security,” Paper prepared for the Twenty-Fifth Annual ESRI International User Conference, 2004, p. 14.

<sup>128</sup> Jorge Restrepo, Michael Spagat, Patrick Reanier, and Nicolás Suárez, “Civilian Casualties in the Colombian Conflict: Geo-referencing Human Security,” Paper prepared for the Twenty-Fifth Annual ESRI International User Conference, 2004, p. 14.

## 2. Consolidation of the *Zona de Despeje*: A Strategic Mistake

The initial phase of Plan Colombia failed to drastically impact the strength of the FARC as ongoing political negotiations between the FARC and the Government of Colombia further exacerbated the situation. As previously mentioned, after taking office, President Pastrana met FARC-EP demands for negotiations by creating a demilitarized zone, or *zona de despeje* (literally meaning “cleared zone”), withdrawing all security and military personnel from five municipalities in the departments of Meta and Caquetá.<sup>129</sup> [See Figure 2.1] The decision to grant the FARC-EP a sizeable demilitarized zone (DMZ) without conditions, while meant as a gesture of good will and “confidence building,” would prove to be a critical error on the part of the Pastrana administration as it represented a considerable step forward for the insurgents both in terms of its geographical dimensions and strategic relevance. The *zona de despeje*, which was approximately the size of Switzerland, gave the FARC-EP de facto recognition as a belligerent and acceptance by the government as the only recognized power in the DMZ. In this sense, the FARC-EP created a scenario similar to what existed during the period of the “independent republics” nearly four decades ago. The DMZ was used politically as a means to display to the population and the international community its ability to offer a credible alternate form of governance. It also offered a number of military advantages. The *zona de despeje* militarily gave the insurgents a “safe haven” from which they were able to launch numerous attacks against Colombian forces. It has also been reported that the *despeje* was used by the guerrillas to cultivate coca and train troops—two items that were forbidden when the negotiations were made.<sup>130</sup> The detention of kidnapped victims and the stockpiling of weapons were also common in the *despeje*.<sup>131</sup> In granting the *despeje*, the Pastrana administration essentially gave the FARC-EP not only the element of time, but also a means by which they could expand and further develop their organization.

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<sup>129</sup> Serafino, *Colombia: Current Issues and Historical Background*, p. 17-18.

<sup>130</sup> Crandall, *Driven By Drugs*, p. 73.

<sup>131</sup> Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*, pp. 172-173.

In areas where the FARC-EP has exerted a significant amount *de facto* control (e.g., the *despeje*), it has been widely criticized for its practice of forced recruitment. In fact, the Colombian press has reported in 2000 that the FARC-EP publicly stated that all persons between the ages of 13 and 60 in the *zona de despeje* were liable for military service with the guerrillas.<sup>132</sup> According to information obtained by the United Nations, fear of forced recruitment by the FARC-EP was a common reason for displacements in the southern part of the country.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, it's plausible that part of the significant rise in FARC-EP membership and strength through 2002 (see Table 4.1) was due to FARC-EP's consolidation of the *zona de despeje*, which enabled it to implement a policy of forced conscription.

Some academics do contend that popular support for the guerrillas has grown by focusing on the increased number of rural inhabitants who have migrated to FARC-EP-dominated regions—particularly the *zona de despeje*. Prior to the FARC-EP's consolidation of the *despeje* in 1999, the population of the region was estimated to be 100,000. When the Colombian military reoccupied the *despeje* in February 2002, it was reported that the population in the region had grown to almost 740,000.<sup>134</sup> Although this may be indicative of popular support, to say that migration was solely based on support for the insurgents is to overlook the fact that individuals may have been merely attempting to flee the violence associated with other regions at the time. According to the New York Times, there were only four killings in the first six months that the FARC-EP controlled the *despeje*, in contrast to the typical ten

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<sup>132</sup> United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2001); Internet; accessed from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/wha/8326.htm> on 13 January 2006.

<sup>133</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council, *Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Colombia*, 28 February 2002, para. 227; Internet; accessed from [http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/34c2bdd5aa7c0d8bc1256b9d005ab9bd/\\$FILE/G0211115.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/34c2bdd5aa7c0d8bc1256b9d005ab9bd/$FILE/G0211115.pdf) on 13 January 2006.

<sup>134</sup> James J. Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia: A Revolutionary Exception in an Age of Imperialist Expansion," *Monthly Review* 57, no. 4 (September 2005), p. 24.

killings a week in just months before guerrilla consolidation.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, it is not improbable to assume that migration patterns reflect a desire for security not political ideology. In fact, Steven Dudley, a journalist who lived in Colombia for five years, also questions the depth of peasant support for the FARC-EP. After attending the Bolivarian Movement's (the FARC-EP's clandestine political party launched in the *despeje*) first political rally, Dudley concluded that most peasants are forced into support the FARC-EP.<sup>136</sup>

In addition to imposing its own law in the *despeje*, the FARC-EP also began to restrict and regulate the illicit drug industry within its borders. To strengthen peasant support within its controlled zone, the FARC-EP imposed a minimum coca price and eliminated a number of intermediaries. The granting of the *despeje* enabled the FARC-EP to expand its involvement in the illicit drug trade. It was not long before the FARC-EP took control over the sale of cocaine to exporters and controlled refining laboratories.<sup>137</sup> The organization even went as far as constructing runways in the *despeje* to facilitate the drug industry as well as its weapon imports.<sup>138</sup> Considering the significant involvement of the FARC-EP in the illicit drug industry within the borders of the *despeje*, it is no wonder that individuals such as retired Colombian colonel Villamarin have referred to the FARC-EP as a "drug cartel" even though there is no evidence that the FARC-EP has been involved in the international distribution of cocaine to its final markets in the United States and Europe.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Larry Rother, "Colombia Rebels Reign in Ceded Area," *New York Times*, 16 May 1999, sec. 1, p. 18.

<sup>136</sup> Although a FARC leader had told Dudley the previous day that the rally would be "transcendental," he had his doubts and began asking the movement's "supporters" how they felt. Not surprisingly, no one spoke until one elderly peasant said looking around, "It's dangerous to talk because they forced us to come here." Later, a local teacher informed Dudley that "the FARC levied fines on those who did not attend the event and 'in this difficult economic crisis it's easier to get involved than pay.'" See Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*, pp. 176-179.

<sup>137</sup> Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes*, p. 228.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Villamarin Pulido, *The FARC Cartel*.

### 3. Impact on Drugs as a Source of Revenue

An objective of Plan Colombia—secondary to the destruction of the illicit drug industry—was to degrade the FARC-EP’s ability to carry on the war. In targeting the drug trade, the Government of Colombia hoped to strike what was believed to be the FARC-EP’s economic center of gravity. While the underground nature of the illicit drug trade makes it extremely difficult to obtain relatively accurate estimates of the FARC-EP’s income received through its involvement in the drug industry, this section will prove that Plan Colombia’s “Push into Southern Colombia” did not impact the FARC-EP’s revenue base. As Chapter III pointed out, Plan Colombia reduced cultivation primarily in Colombia’s southern department of Putumayo; however, this initial phase of the plan had little impact on estimated FARC-EP revenues.

Due to the variety of methods and data used to generate such estimates, it is relatively ineffective to conduct a year-by-year comparison with multiple different estimates. According to a report issued by the International Crisis Group (ICG), it argues that estimates (to include Rensselaer (1998) and UNDP (2004)) of FARC-EP drug-related income are highly overstated and offers a more accurate estimate of \$100 million per year based on interviews it conducted.<sup>140</sup> This estimate is still a significant number considering that in the past decade the FARC may have earned upwards of \$1 billion with a mere \$16.425 million spent per year on maintaining an army of 15,000 combatants.<sup>141</sup> From this perspective, even if all drug-related revenues were eliminated (as the Government of Colombia set out to do in Plan Colombia by targeting the FARC-controlled drug producing areas in southern Colombia) it may not be considered a fatal blow to the insurgency as such losses would likely be offset in the near term by the organizations accumulation of money from the drug trade or by an increase in other activity (i.e., extortion, kidnapping, cattle rustling).

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<sup>140</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia,” p. 19.

<sup>141</sup> Expenses based on the International Crisis Group’s estimation that it would cost approximately \$3 day to maintain an armed insurgent. See, International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia,” p. 19.

One of the most detailed and an in-depth investigation into the FARC-EP's economic situation was a study released by the Colombian Finance Ministry in early 2005. With unlimited access to all information held by the all branches of the Colombia government regarding the FARC-EP, the Finance Ministry's elite Financial Information and Analysis Unit (UIAF) was tasked to provide a detail economic analysis of the FARC-EP. According to the published report, income generated from the FARC-EP's participation in the illicit drug industry (to include charging for the protection of illegal crops, collecting coca leaf harvest, producing coca base, taxing production laboratories, charging a "per gram tax," cocaine sales and charging traffickers for use of runways) amounted to approximately 37.000 billion pesos in 2003.<sup>142</sup> The investigation revealed, contrary to traditional belief, that kidnapping and stolen livestock generated more income for the FARC-EP in 2003 (88.560 and 52.668 billion pesos respectively) than their involvement in the illicit drug industry.<sup>143</sup> While the illicit drug industry does provide the FARC-EP with a substantial amount of financing, the UIAF concluded that the government must fight kidnapping and cattle rustling in conjunction with their fight against drugs in order to impact the economic apparatus of the FARC-EP.<sup>144</sup>

The initial phase of Plan Colombia focused on disrupting elements of the drug industry in southern Colombia, leaving the FARC-EP to capitalize not only on other income generating activities but also on increasing its involvement in the drug trade within the uncontested *zona de despeje* granted by President Pastrana. While Plan Colombia may have decreased some of the revenues the FARC-EP was making off the illicit drug industry in southern Colombia, the *zona de despeje* enabled the FARC-EP to compensate for this loss. In December 1998, when the government ordered the withdrawal of the Army and the police to facilitate the dialogue with the FARC-EP, there were, officially recorded, 6,300

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<sup>142</sup> Unattributed, "Colombia: Secret Report Reveals How FARC Manages Their Finances," *Semana*, 30 January 2005; Open Source Center (LAP2005013000024).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



hectares planted with coca throughout the 42,000 sq km demilitarized zone and no signs of poppy plantations. In fact one week after President Pastrana called for the retaking of the *despeje*, counter-narcotics police confirmed the existence of vast areas planted with coca and poppy, 16,000 and 420 hectares respectively.<sup>145</sup> Hence, the establishment of a safe haven (*despeje*), hampered the effectiveness of Plan Colombia to significantly decrease the war-making capacity of the FARC-EP.

### **C. THE URIBE ADMINISTRATION**

By 2002, it was apparent that a counter-narcotics strategy alone was not going to defeat the insurgents. From 2000-2002, the number of armed attacks by the FARC-EP has increased considerably, particularly in 2002 with the dissolving of the *zona de despeje* by President Pastrana in February. The mid-year presidential elections in 2002 also served as grounds for increased attacks by the FARC-EP, who traditionally challenge the electoral process through intimidation and violence. The landslide victory of Álvaro Uribe Vélez in the 2002 presidential elections was no exception as the FARC-EP attempted to assassinate him three times in the six months leading up to the May elections. Uribe's commitment to end Colombia's decades-old civil war by taking a hard-line stance against armed groups, particularly the FARC-EP, may have won him the election but it did not sit well with the guerrillas. Upon taking office on August 7, 2002, President Álvaro Uribe Vélez experienced first-hand the FARC-EP's strength and extended reach as his inauguration was overshadowed by an unprecedented urban mortar attack by the guerrillas attempting to disrupt the ceremony and kill him.

The Uribe administration's commitment to end the violence is exhibited in its security policy entitled the Democratic Security and Defense Policy (DSP). The DSP is a long-term strategy designed to address the security situation in Colombia. The underlying principles behind the strategy are to regain control of Colombia's ungoverned spaces and provide an increased level of security to *all*

<sup>145</sup> "The FARC Crops," in *Cambio* (Bogotá), 11 March 2002; Open Source Center (LAP20020311000002).

sectors of society by establishing or reinstating the rule of law throughout the country.<sup>146</sup> Along with regaining control of Colombia's outlying areas, the policy is also augmented by a significant expansion in the eradication of illicit crops—mainly through the extension of the aerial spraying campaign. With a majority of the plans emphasis directed at security programs and counter-narcotics, Uribe's DSP complements a number of objectives originally developed in *Plan Colombia*.

This section will review the impact of Uribe's DSP (a joint counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency campaign) on the strength of the FARC-EP. By observing changes in FARC-EP membership levels, its operational activity and intensity, as well as the country's overall security indicators, this section will prove that Uribe's joint (or unified) strategy has been relatively effective in targeting the FARC-EP. A decline in overall security indicators, membership numbers and operational activity, seem to indicate that the efforts to target both drugs and the insurgency has substantially weakened but not eliminated the FARC-EP. However, in Uribe's second term he will be hard-pressed to show continuing security successes as the FARC-EP adapt and reductions in security indicators begin to plateau.

### **1. Impact on Membership**

The Colombian military claims that the decrease in FARC-EP membership since 2002 [see Table 4.1] can be attributed the implementation of President Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy, especially its military component, Plan Patriota. Both U.S. and Colombian military statistics agree that FARC-EP membership has declined from 18,000 to 12,000 by the end of 2004.<sup>147</sup> However, such claims might be suspect as there is a significant need for both countries to demonstrate progress in the Colombian military's recent campaign against the FARC-EP.

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<sup>146</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, "Democratic Security and Defense Policy" (Bogotá, COL: Ministry of Defense, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>147</sup> Veillette, "Plan Colombia: A Progress Report," p. 9 and Bantz Craddock, "Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, USA" Senate Armed Service Committee, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, 15 March 2005.

Nevertheless, while the membership estimates in Table 4.1 may be optimistic, the general trend regarding a decrease in FARC-EP combatants since 2002 is consistent with news sources and numerous studies conducted by the Conflict Analysis Resource Center (CERAC).<sup>148</sup> According to CERAC, the number of guerrillas killed per quarter reached an all time peak after President Uribe took office in August 2002. [See Figure 4.2] Although the number of guerrillas killed began to decrease in mid 2003 (possibly as a result of a reduction in paramilitary activity due to implementation of the demobilization process), there still remains a significant gap between the number of guerrillas and government forces killed per quarter. This information is also concurrent with information released by Joint Task Force Omega—the headquarters command created to implement Plan Patriota. [See Table 4.2] According to the statistics from 2004-2005, Joint Task Force Omega has seized a substantial number of ammunition and logistic stockpiles, dismantled over 650 FARC-EP camps and captured or killed close to 800 FARC-EP combatants.<sup>149</sup> Yet, due to the unconventional nature of the FARC, it is difficult to evaluate success through conventional measures (i.e., number of guerrillas killed, etc.). Therefore, in order to determine the impact of President Uribe’s Democratic Security and Defense Policy on the strength of the FARC-EP, analysis must go beyond mere membership figures.

The increased military pressure from President Uribe’s DSP has taken a toll not only on FARC membership levels but also on its political structures. At the cost of maintaining territorial control, the DSP has forced guerrilla fronts to reduce into smaller, more mobile units. The DSP has closed off many major cities and urban center to the FARC; however, the FARC still maintains a significant presence in smaller regional towns. The inability of the FARC to reach major population areas has damaged their indoctrination and political campaign,

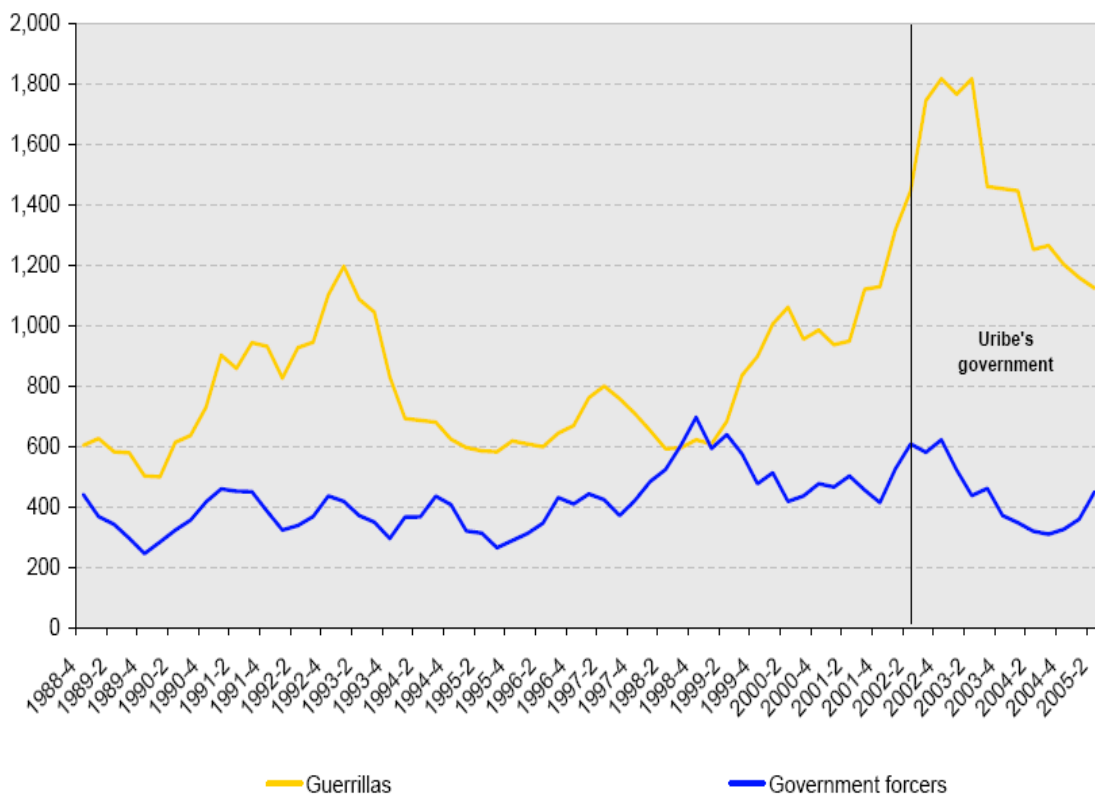
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<sup>148</sup> CERAC is a research organization specializing in data-intensive studies of conflict and criminal violence. Based in Bogotá, Colombia, CERAC’s research is based on comprehensive database containing more than 21,000 events from 1988 – June 2005 of the conflict in Colombia. For further information see [www.cerac.org.co](http://www.cerac.org.co).

<sup>149</sup> United States, “Plan Colombia’: Elements for Success,” p. 12.

with the most substantial impact being on their ability to recruit volunteers.<sup>150</sup> The Government of Colombia reported 1,110 desertions for FARC fighters from January – September 2006, bringing the estimated total FARC desertions to 5,100 since the demobilization program was implemented for individuals in January 2003.<sup>151</sup> While desertions from the FARC are on the rise, one must remember that most desertions are by low level members and many of them children.<sup>152</sup>

**Figure 4.2: Number of Government Forces and Guerrillas Killed by Quarter, 1988 – June 30, 2005**



**Source:** Michael Spagat and Joe Restrepo, “The Colombian Conflict: Where is it Heading?” CERAC, Conflict Analysis Resource Center, Colombian Conflict Database, November 2005; Internet; accessed from [http://www.cerac.org.co/pdf/CSISPresentationwithtext-V10\\_Low.pdf](http://www.cerac.org.co/pdf/CSISPresentationwithtext-V10_Low.pdf) on 4 December 2005.

<sup>150</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, “Tougher Challenges Ahead for Colombia’s Uribe,” Latin American Briefing No. 11 (Bogotá: 20 October 2006), p. 12.

<sup>151</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, “Tougher Challenges Ahead for Colombia’s Uribe,” p. 12.

<sup>152</sup> Douglas Porch, “Uribe’s Second Mandate, the War, and the Implications for Civil-Military Relations in Colombia,” in *Strategic Insights* V, Issue 2 (February 2006).

**Table 4.2: Colombian Military Reports on Results for Joint Task Force Omega, 2004-2005**

	2004	2005	Total
Battles	505	317	822
COLMIL Troops Killed .....	67	25	92
COLMIL Troops Injured .....	328	78	406
FARC Members Killed .....	264	204	468
FARC Members Captured .....	217	394	611
FARC Deserters .....	97	76	173
<b>Material Captured</b>			
Guns, Rifles, Support Arms .....	265	431	1,451
Explosive Devices .....	2,752	3,074	5,826
Explosives (KLS) .....	16,335	28,339	44,674
Grenades .....	4,440	5,962	10,402
Munitions .....	630,428	826,022	1,456,450
Communication Equipment .....	235	363	598
Mined Camps .....	206	88	294
FARC Camps .....	421	619	1,040
Caches .....	117	363	480
Cultivated Hectares .....	1,277	1,167	2,444
Coca Paste and Base .....	10,292	869	11,161
Laboratories .....	32	196	228
Vehicles .....	255	117	432

**Source:** United States, “Plan Colombia’: Elements for Success,” p. 12.

## 2. Impact on Operational Activity

An initial glance at Figure 4.4 suggests that Plan Patriota has significantly weakened the guerrillas as the numbers of guerrilla attacks since its implementation has significantly decreased. Yet, many analysts contend that the drastic reduction in guerrilla attacks is a result of a deliberate decision by the FARC to go into a “tactical retreat,” and, therefore, are not necessarily a sign that the FARC-EP is on the ropes.<sup>153</sup> In other words, the FARC-EP’s “tactical retreat” is a consequence of Plan Patriota not a knock out blow to the organization. Since 1999, increased aid and training from the United States coupled with increased resources for defense from both the United States and the Colombian government has strengthened the Colombian military’s capacity to counter the guerrillas.<sup>154</sup> In anticipation of Uribe’s heavy-handed offensive, the guerrillas

<sup>153</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) International Monitoring Reports, “Two Analysts See Serious Problems with Government’s Security Policy,” 20 April 2004; retrieved from Lexis Nexis.

<sup>154</sup> Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” p. 13.

have decided to retreat into the jungle, halt most attacks, and avoid direct engagements, thereby, returning to its traditional guerrilla warfare tactics implemented prior to its transition to “mobile warfare” in the late 1990s (i.e., landmines, ambushes, and other small-scale indirect attacks). This withdrawal not only conserves FARC-EP strength but also seeks to win back the support it may have lost from the local population during the late 1990s and early 2000s when it responded to the paramilitary offensive with a heavy hand. Now the government is accused of using excessive force. Even General James Hill, former commander of the U.S. Southern Command, stated that Plan Patriota began “with an attack on rural areas where local peasant farmers support the FARC.”<sup>155</sup> It may be that the military is viewed as the “aggressor” because it targets the people who give food and support the rebels. This may have been precisely what the guerrillas needed to improve their standing with the local population. Nevertheless, even a strategic retreat, one endorsed by Maoist theory of revolutionary warfare, is a sign of weakness. Hence, President Uribe’s security policy can be credited with “diminishing the FARC’s ability to carry out offensive actions in a sustainable, coherent manner.”<sup>156</sup>

However, during the last two years there have been periods of a week or two in which it has appeared as though the FARC-EP has shown spasms of activity. After a two year lull, the conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP attacks intensified in 2005 and 2006.<sup>157</sup> The FARC-EP announced in February that it was bringing to an end its policy of “tactical withdrawal” and moving into an offensive phase called “Plan Resistencia.”<sup>158</sup> This announcement was immediately followed by major attacks and an increase

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<sup>155</sup> James Brittain, “The Objective Reality of Plan Patriota” *Colombia Journal Online*, 24 January 2005; Internet; accessed from <http://www.colombiajournal.org/colombia201.htm> on 8 February 2006.

<sup>156</sup> Bantz Craddock, “Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, USA” Senate Armed Service Committee, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, 15 March 2005.

<sup>157</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, “Tougher Challenges Ahead for Colombia’s Uribe,” p. 16.

<sup>158</sup> *El Tiempo*, 3 May 2005.

in the frequency of armed clashes. Examples include: the February 2005 attack on the Iscuandé marine base in southwestern Colombia; the April 2005 attack on Toribio in the province of Cauca; the June 2005 attack against military position in the location of Puerto Asís in the province of Putumayo; and recent attacks in December 2005, February 2006, and August 2006 against Colombian soldiers protecting manual eradication workers in a rural area near the Macarena National Park.<sup>159</sup> Although Uribe's security policy has placed a significant amount of pressure on the FARC-EP, it continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience. The aforementioned sporadic and devastating attacks prove that the FARC-EP is far from defeated. The military's offensive under Uribe has brought the number of clashes with the guerrillas to near all-time highs which, in turn, has decreased the number of FARC-EP forces and placed the FARC-EP back on the defensive. Nevertheless, while attacks by the FARC-EP have subsided under President Uribe, it is important to note that they are now consistent with the historical average. [See Figure 4.3]

Prospects for the FARC in 2006 are different then when President Uribe took office in 2002. When Uribe was inaugurated four and a half years ago, the FARC launched mortar attacks against the Presidential Palace in an attempt to take Uribe's life. While the FARC took a more offensive posture as the presidential elections drew near, the organization attempt to launch countrywide attacks did not have nearly as grand an impact as those during the presidential inauguration in 2002.<sup>160</sup> This comparison shows that the challenges and threat

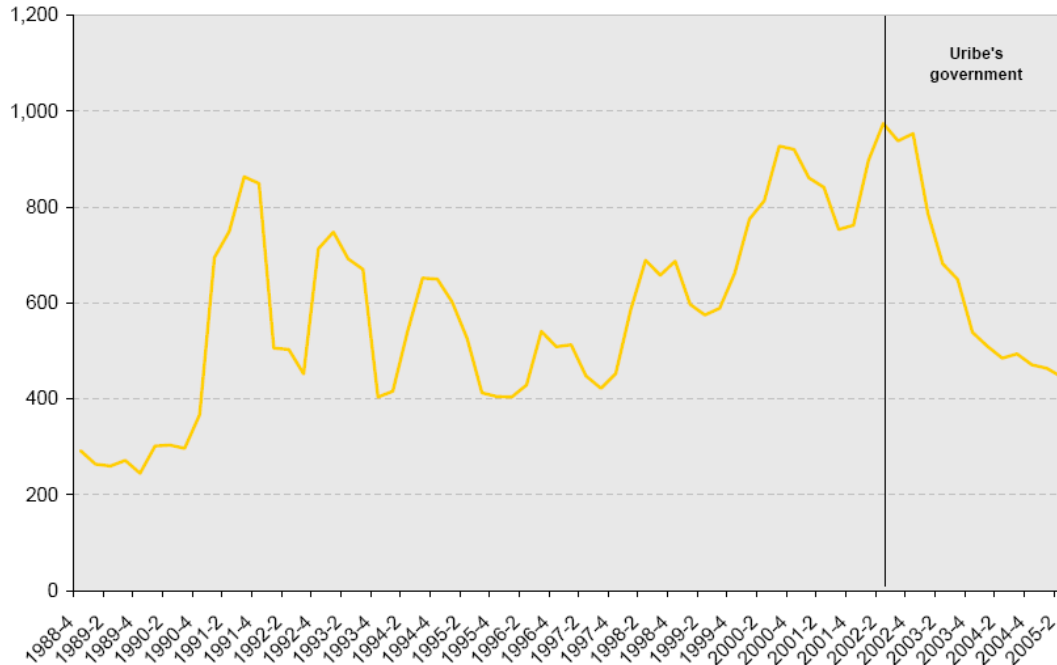
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<sup>159</sup> For additional information regarding these attacks see "The Americas: A New Offensive?" in *The Economist* 374, Issue 8715, p. 58; Dan Molinski, "Colombian Rebels Attack Another Town as Offensive Widens," *The Associated Press*, April 22, 2005; retrieved from Lexis Nexis; Margarita Martinez, "Colombian Troops Hit Back at Rebels," *The Independent*, June 28, 2005, p. 27; retrieved from Lexis Nexis; "The Americas: One and a Half Steps Forward, One Back," in *The Economist* 378, Issue 8459, p. 46; Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Pulling Colombia's Coca By Hand," *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 February 2006; Internet; accessed from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0224/p07s02-woam.html> on 25 February 2006; and Vargas, "The Sierra de la Macarena."

<sup>160</sup> Rodrigo Pardo, "A New Uribe? Alvaro Uribe's Second Term Challenges," (Washington D.C.: *Inter-American Dialogue*, November 2006), p. 9.

posed by the FARC-EP have diminished. It also exemplifies that Uribe's DSP has weakened the guerrillas' ability to act.

**Figure 4.3: Number of Guerrilla Attacks by Quarter 1988 – June 30, 2005**



**Sources:** Michael Spagat and Joe Restrepo, "The Colombian Conflict: Where is it Heading?" CERAC, Conflict Analysis Resource Center, Colombian Conflict Database, November 2005; available from [http://www.cerac.org.co/pdf/CSISPresentationwithtext-V10\\_Low.pdf](http://www.cerac.org.co/pdf/CSISPresentationwithtext-V10_Low.pdf); Internet; accessed on 4 December 2005.

### 3. Impact on Overall Security

Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy registered a significant degree of progress, as reflected in the overall decrease in kidnappings, homicides, and acts of terrorism throughout Colombia.<sup>161</sup> [See Table 4.3] These measures can be directly tied to two measures implemented through President Uribe's DSP: the redeployment of troops to main roads and population center as well as obtaining a ceasefire by the paramilitary forces prior to negotiations for demobilization.<sup>162</sup> While the security indicators listed in Table 4.4 continue on a downward trend, very few government reports address the fact that the number

<sup>161</sup> Government of Colombia, "The Uribe Administration: 3 Years of Progress in Colombia" (Washington D.C.: Embassy of Colombia, September 2005), p. 1; available from <http://www.coltrade.org/Progress.pdf>; Internet; accessed on 20 January 2006.

<sup>162</sup> Adam Isacson, "Failing Grades: Evaluating the Results of Plan Colombia," in *Yale Journal of International Affairs* (Summer/Fall 2005), p. 147.



of cases of torture, extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, and internal displacement are on the rise in Colombia.<sup>163</sup> According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that forced disappearances increased in 2005.<sup>164</sup> And close to one million people have been displaced since President Uribe took office in 2002. CODHES cites more than 300,000 new internally displaced people were recorded in 2005.<sup>165</sup> These figures are significant as they represent an escalation of the conflict since 2002 and its devastating consequence on local communities and an opening of support for the guerrillas to capitalize on.

According to a recent report by the International Crisis Group, “the police and army are now in all 1,098 municipalities.<sup>166</sup> Their presence is restricted to urban areas and the FARC-EP continues to move more or less freely in large swaths of the countryside.”<sup>167</sup> The main problem with the increased government presence in a number of long-neglected zones is that it is predominantly comprised of military or police forces and little, if any, non-military investment has been done. As Adam Isacson points out,

The result has been a frustrating pattern in which a military offensive clears out armed groups but the civilian government fails to establish itself. When the military withdraws—which is inevitable, since 360,000 troops and police cannot administer all of

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<sup>163</sup> Amnesty International, “Colombia: International Community Must Demand Action on Human Rights,” 01 February 2005; Internet; accessed from <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR230022005?open&of=ENG-2AM> on 27 January 2007 and United Nations, High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia*, 20 January 2006.

<sup>164</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, “Colombia: humanitarian situation remains of concern”, 01 February 2006; Internet; accessed from <http://www.icrc.org> on 20 January 2007. ICRC reported 317 forced disappearances in 2005, up 13.6 per cent from 2004.

<sup>165</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Colombia: Government “Peace Process” Cements Injustice for IDPs,” 30 June 2006, p. 4; Internet; accessed from [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/2F1618E6C169F2EBC125719C002F6421/\\$file/Special%20Country%20Report%20Colombia.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/2F1618E6C169F2EBC125719C002F6421/$file/Special%20Country%20Report%20Colombia.pdf) on 20 January 2007.

<sup>166</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, “Tougher Challenges Ahead for Colombia’s Uribe,” p. 2.

<sup>167</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia,” p. 22.

a territory more than twice the size of California—the illegal armed groups simply reenter the zone, filling the security vacuum and restoring the status quo.<sup>168</sup>

So while the Colombian armed forces have increased operations against illegally armed groups, the lack of government presence means that the victory is incomplete and the FARC-EP still pose a formidable threat.

**Table 4.3: Security Indicator in Colombia 2002-2006**

<b>INDICATORS</b>	<b>2002-2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Homicides	- 37 %	- 10 %
Kidnappings (total)	- 72 %	- 19 %
Kidnappings w/ Extortion	- 76 %	- 34 %
Victims of Massacres	- 63 %	N/A
Mobility on Highways	+ 45 %	+ 5 %
Terrorist Acts	1645 (2002)	611 (2005)
Fuel Theft	- 87 %	

**Sources:** Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” p. 8; “Colombia: Defense Minister Reports on Results of Public Force Activity in 2006,” *National Defense Information System*, 21 December 2006, Open Source Center (LAP20061228062002); “Colombia: Kidnapping Rates Continue to Decline,” *El Pais*, 24 January 2007, Open Source Center (LAP20070124347001); “Fuel Theft Declines for Sixth Year” *El Pais* 12 February 2007, Open Source Center (LAP20070212335001); U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, “Colombia: Background Notes” October 2006; available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm>; Internet; accessed on 20 January 2007.

The FARC-EP’s recent actions indicate that they are attempting to wait out the storm (the military’s offensive campaign) and conserve its strength and firepower by engaging in indirect attacks against the military. While the Colombian armed forces may now be a stronger and more formidable force than a decade ago, the FARC-EP’s “retreat” in 2004 was merely a tactical adjustment. It remains a significant threat to the Colombian government. The FARC-EP remain strong enough to dominate up to one third of the country, mostly the deep jungles of the south and east, where the army lacks the manpower and other resources necessary to challenge them. Furthermore, recent attacks by the FARC-EP demonstrate that the Colombian military is still far from acquiring the

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<sup>168</sup> Isacson, “Failing Grades,” p. 150.

superiority necessary to overwhelm and extinguish the insurgency. The result is the continuation of the stalemate.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Colombian efforts to target the FARC-EP—either indirectly through Plan Colombia or directly through Plan Patriota—have made significant progress. Yet, the FARC-EP is far from defeated.<sup>169</sup> The Colombian government, and its ally the United States, developed two distinct yet complementary strategies to deal with the dual threat of drugs and terrorism. The first strategy embodied in President Pastrana’s Plan Colombia was fundamentally a counter-narcotics strategy until mid-2002. The second strategy was President Uribe’s Democratic Security and Defense Policy, which emphasized the need for a unified strategy to target drugs and terrorism simultaneously. Each strategy has been analyzed with the objective of determining what impact, if any, they had on the strength of the FARC-EP. The findings suggest a number of conclusions about the changing dynamics of the Colombian conflict. By understanding these dynamics, the Government of Colombia, as well as the United States (a major source of financial, technical, and operational support for Colombia), will better be able to target resources and adjust strategies.

As a secondary objective, Plan Colombia sought to decrease the strength of Colombia’s armed non-state actors whose resources, it was calculated, came largely from the drug trade. Unfortunately, this has not proven to be the case. As coca cultivation figures in Colombia have allegedly decreased since 2000, FARC-EP membership, presence, and attacks continued to rise through 2002.

There are a number of reasons why Plan Colombia “Push into Southern Colombia” was ineffective against the FARC-EP. First, the underlying logic that targeting the drug trade would reduce the financial capacity of the FARC-EP was flawed. There is no question that the intensification of the Colombian conflict in the mid-to-late 1990s was tied almost directly to the increased involvement of

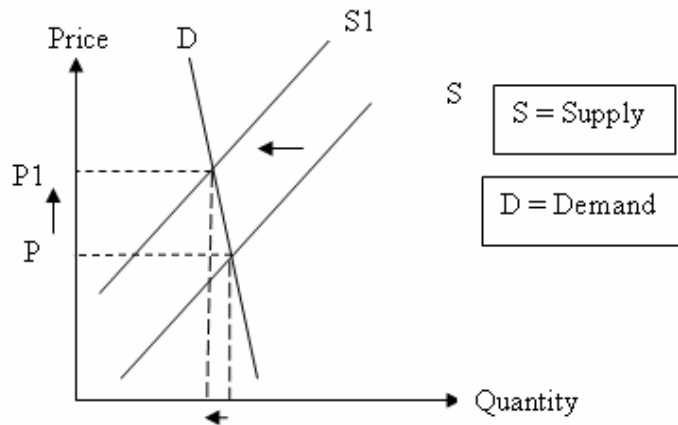
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<sup>169</sup> Bantz Craddock, “Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, USA” Senate Armed Service Committee, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, 15 March 2005.

armed non-state actors (particularly the FARC-EP) in the illicit drug industry. Narcotics thus provided a resource windfall which enabled the FARC-EP to transition to the offensive as illustrated in the series of humiliating defeats it inflicted on the Colombian military from 1996-1998. Logically, one might conclude that if the FARC-EP's participation in the illicit drug trade intensified the conflict by providing the guerrillas with vast amounts of money, denying them access to such funds would contribute to a de-escalation of the conflict. This was in fact the logic underlying Plan Colombia's secondary objective to decrease the strength of the FARC-EP. Yet, the basic principle of economics—the law of supply and demand—suggests a different conclusion. Figure 4.4 demonstrates that given the inelasticity of demand for drugs, a reduction in supply (shift in the supply curve from  $S$  to  $S_1$ ) will in fact increase the price (from  $P$  to  $P_1$ ). Therefore, supply-reduction strategies (such as eradication) have the tendency to increase rather than decrease, the revenues of guerrillas involved in the drug trade.

Due to the underground nature of the illicit drug industry, the impact of a reduction in coca cultivation in Colombia since 2001 on FARC-EP revenues remains in question. However, we do know that although the drug industry represents a significant portion of FARC-EP's income, it may not be their center of gravity—"the hub of all movement upon which everything depends"—which if taken out would lead to the breakdown of the organization. Even if all drug-related income were eliminated, it would not deliver the fatal blow calculated by Plan Colombia. The guerrilla's loss of drug-related funds would most likely be offset by either money accumulated from the drug trade in previous years or an increase in other activity (i.e. kidnapping or extortion). If the report disclosed by the Colombian Finance Ministry in January 2005 is relatively accurate, then President Uribe's DSP through the observed reductions in kidnappings and extortion may be hurting the FARC-EP financially.

**Figure 4.4: Supply and Demand for Drugs**



The second reason why efforts to decrease the strength of the FARC-EP through counter-narcotics efforts were ineffective has to do with President Pastrana's mismanagement of the peace negotiations with the FARC-EP from 1998-2002. The granting in 1998 of a demilitarized zone without any conditions or stipulations to the FARC-EP would prove to be a critical error. The demilitarized zone was both viewed as a political and military success for the rebels. As the only recognized power within the zone, the FARC-EP used it as a "safe haven" from which to launch attacks, to further expand its role in the illicit drug trade, as well as a place to harbor kidnapped victims and train and develop its own forces. The peace process offered the FARC-EP both the time and space to further develop and strengthen its force. While President Pastrana justified his actions as a necessary first step in building trust and mutual confidence, this trust significantly deteriorated in 2000 as Congress approved Washington's \$1.3 billion contribution to Plan Colombia—severely hampering the negotiation process until its demise in February 2002. While Plan Colombia attempted to decrease the strength of the FARC-EP indirectly, it negatively impacted President Pastrana's peace negotiations as the FARC-EP consolidated its power and expanded in the *despeje*. While negotiations were a critical first step in determining if a peaceful solution could be attained, its failure proved the

FARC-EP was not serious about ending the conflict. Hence, the Colombia population was more apt to support a more confrontational route as proposed by President Uribe in 2002.

According to Vanda Felbab-Brown, when guerrilla movements have connections with the narcotics trade (e.g., the Shining Path in Peru), government “efforts to eradicate crops and combat drug traffickers will strengthen the alliance between the guerrillas and the peasants and the guerrillas and the drug traffickers and hamper the government’s overall strategy for ending the militarized conflict.”<sup>170</sup> In applying this finding to Colombia, one would expect that the counter-narcotic operations (e.g., the extensive aerial eradication campaign) implemented under Plan Colombia would have pushed a notable number of peasants into the hands of the guerrillas. Yet, this has not been the case. Unlike with the Shining Path in Peru, eradication did not seem to contribute significantly to the strengthening of the FARC-EP. Besides the fact that Peru has a significant indigenous population that views growing coca as part of its cultural heritage, the primary reason for the difference is that the nature of the Colombian threat is inherently different than the threat posed by the Shining Path. In Colombia, there are multiple non-state actors vying for power, from the left-wing guerrillas (e.g., ELN and the FARC-EP) to right-wing paramilitary groups (e.g., AUC). The arrival and increased presence of the paramilitaries into southern Colombia, especially the department of Putumayo, in 1997 just prior to the implementation of aerial fumigation campaign was a contributing factor in the weakening of the peasant-guerrilla alliance. A significant increase in violence soon ensued as the paramilitaries and the FARC-EP contested for control in Putumayo. The civilian population in Putumayo was regularly targeted and killed by both the FARC-EP and the AUC for “collaborating” with the other side. The paramilitary presence also contributed significantly to the increased tendency for the FARC-EP to resort to brutality—to the point where the FARC-EP in 2001 surpassed the paramilitaries with respect to total number of civilian casualties

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<sup>170</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The Coca Connection”, p. 37.

inflicted. Therefore, the inability of the FARC-EP to protect the local population from the wrath of the paramilitaries and the FARC-EP's continued heavy-handed response to the paramilitary offensive lost the FARC-EP substantial local support in the process. By the time Plan Colombia's aerial eradication campaign began, the FARC-EP's relationship with local population had been fundamentally altered to the point where no policy would have substantially pushed the peasants into the arms of the guerrillas.

As far as President Uribe's "unified" strategy is concerned, it would seem just by looking at the statistics—reductions in the measures of violence, reductions in crop cultivation, and the reductions in guerrilla attacks—that it is a resounding success. Yet, Uribe's strategy is *not* a resounding success as the FARC-EP still poses a formidable threat. The reduction in violence can be primarily attributed to the ongoing demobilization process with the paramilitaries (AUC) and not necessarily due to a reduction of guerrilla forces. As the paramilitaries are removed from the conflict, the FARC-EP may be less inclined to use brutality against the civilian population. Furthermore, counter-narcotics efforts may undermine the military's counter-insurgency by pushing coca-growing peasants into solidarity with the FARC-EP.<sup>171</sup> Despite government efforts to take control of FARC-EP-dominated territory, their presence has only been felt in population centers, thereby, leaving the FARC-EP to move relatively free in the countryside. Although the military was hailing the FARC-EP's retreat in 2004 as a victory, the counteroffensive launched in late 2005 (although relatively small in nature) proves that this retreat was merely tactical in nature. Military clashes with the FARC-EP have hovered at all-time highs under President Uribe, but the FARC remain an extremely formidable force at approximately 12,000 strong according to Government of Colombia estimates. As military forces continue to progress into FARC-EP-dominated territory, the FARC-EP will maintain the tactical advantage of information superiority (i.e., intelligence) and knowledge of

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<sup>171</sup> The Peruvian experience accentuates this finding. See Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Coca Connection," pp. 36-37.

the terrain. Until the government can maintain a formidable presence and control in *all* areas of Colombia, the FARC-EP will not be defeated.



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## **V. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Upon separate discussion regarding the overall impact of Colombian counter-narcotics efforts implemented within the framework of Plan Colombia as well as the impact of both Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia" (2000-2002) and President Uribe's Democratic Security and Defense Policy (2003-2005) on the strength of the FARC-EP, it is now possible to separately analyze President Pastrana's sequential strategy and President Uribe's unified strategy against the dual threat of drugs and terrorism. This chapter will argue that while each strategy made substantial strides against one of the two threats, they both failed to eliminate either threat; however, President Uribe's unified campaign was more effective than President Pastrana's drugs first strategy. While President Pastrana's drugs first strategy was relatively effective in targeting the illicit drug trade in Colombia (represented by the substantial decrease in the number of hectares cultivated from 1999 to 2003), it did not eliminate the illicit drug industry nor did it achieve its secondary objective of weakening the war-making capacity of the FARC-EP. On the other hand, President Uribe's unified attack met substantial success with respect to security (as signified by the improved security indicators listed in Table 4.3) lead to an observed weakening of the FARC-EP; however, a total elimination of the FARC-EP remains out of sight and the continuation of counter-narcotic policies seem to be reaping diminishing returns as cultivation figures change only marginally. Despite these results, this chapter will also argue that if resources will allow, a unified campaign is the best strategy for dealing with the dual threat of drugs and terrorism in Colombia. The chapter will conclude by proposing policy recommendations for the Colombian government to improve the effectiveness of its current unified campaign.

### **B. PRESIDENT PATRANA'S SEQUENTIAL STRATEGY**

In the two years leading up to President Pastrana's inauguration, the Colombian country experienced a remarkable increase in violence and insecurity

as guerrilla forces launched a nation-wide offensive against government installations and its armed forces. Yet, escalating insecurity and violence were not the only challenges facing the Pastrana administration. The country's economy exacerbated experiencing unprecedented levels of unemployment (close to 20 percent in major metropolitan areas) and facing negative growth for the first time in over 50 years.<sup>172</sup> On top of that, Colombia's debt more than doubled during the Samper administration alone and the repayment burden associated with it, forced the Colombian government to cutback significantly its budget, particularly in the critical areas of security and social spending which hindered the capacity of the Colombian government to solve its problems.<sup>173</sup> The devastating attacks by FARC-EP forces from 1996 to 1998, clearly demonstrated the incapacity of the Colombian government and military forces to counter the guerrilla threat at the time—one of the major reasons why President Pastrana was elected on a platform for peace.

Without the resources necessary to launch an effective counterinsurgency campaign against the guerrillas, President Pastrana was more or less obligated to implement a sequential strategy to handle the increased threat posed by drugs and armed non-state actors in Colombia. Although it was recognized that drugs were not the root cause of Colombia's armed conflict, the substantial amount of funding allocated for Plan Colombia by the United States, which was dedicated to counter-narcotics initiatives, induced President Pastrana to implement a drugs first strategy. By the end of 2002, Pastrana's drugs first strategy—which a majority of the funding was dedicated to the aerial eradication campaign—had decreased the amount of coca under cultivation, thereby, returning it to 1998 levels. Yet, this decrease in cultivation did not translate into a weakening of the FARC-EP as many analysts and policymakers had presumed. In fact, during President Pastrana's time in office, the FARC-EP actually increased in strength as the size of its force and the organization's number of attacks increased.

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<sup>172</sup> Serafino, *Colombia: Current Issues and Historical Background*, p. 5 and Government of Colombia, *Plan Colombia*.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

While an underlying assumption of Plan Colombia was that a reduction in the drug trade would deprive the guerrillas of a valuable source of funding, critics argued that drugs were not the only source of income for the insurgents. Therefore, critics of the Plan believed that targeting the drug trade would merely increase the guerrillas' involvement in other income generating activities such as kidnapping and extortion. But, kidnapping and extortion rates witnessed a downward trend beginning in 1999 just prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia.<sup>174</sup> Other critics of Pastrana's drugs first strategy, to include Falgab-Brown, claim that while the impact of efforts to target the drug trade on guerrilla financial resources remain questionable, counter-narcotics initiatives in Peru demonstrate that such efforts strengthen the alliance between the guerrillas and the peasants. Due to the peasants' mistrust and disenchantment with the FARC-EP following the 1996 peasant marches and the FARC-EP's increased brutality against civilians in response to the amplified paramilitary presence in southern Colombia at the onset of Plan Colombia, the counter-narcotics efforts associated with its "Push into Southern Colombia" did not coincide with a notable influx of peasants flocking into the arms of the insurgents. During President Pastrana's term in office, the FARC-EP had continued to increase in strength despite decreases in cultivation, a downward trend in kidnappings, and the inability of the FARC-EP to capitalize on the population's anger against the aerial eradication campaign.

What factor did cause the substantial increase in FARC-EP strength during President Pastrana's term in office? FARC-EP strength increased from 2000 to 2002, not as a result of Plan Colombia's "Push into Southern Colombia" but as a result of President Pastrana's handling of the insurgent threat. It could be argued that President Pastrana's approach to handling the dual threat of drugs and terrorism was in fact not sequential but simultaneous. While President Pastrana did not directly confront the guerrillas militarily, he did enter into peace

<sup>174</sup> Mauricio Rubio, "Kidnapping and Armed Conflict in Colombia," Paper presented at the PRIO Workshop on "Techniques of Violence in Civil War," August 2004; Internet; accessed from <http://www.prio.no/cscw/pdf/micro/techniques/Kidnapping%20and%20armed%20conflict%20in%20Columbia.pdf> on 28 February 2006.

negotiations with the FARC-EP from 1998 to 2002. The decision by the Government of Colombia in 1998 to grant the FARC-EP a demilitarized zone (*zona de despeje*) the size of Switzerland without conditions or stipulations would prove to be a critical error as the *despeje* was viewed as a political and military success for the guerrillas. As the only recognized power within the zone, the FARC-EP used it as a “safe haven” from which to launch attacks, to further expand its role in the illicit drug trade, as well as a place to harbor kidnapped victims and train and develop its own forces. Therefore, the peace process offered the FARC-EP both the time and space necessary to further develop and strengthen its force. While Plan Colombia attempted to decrease the strength of the FARC-EP indirectly, President Pastrana’s peace negotiations were having the direct opposite effect as the FARC-EP capitalized on the illicit drug industry, consolidated its power, and expanded in the *despeje*. President Pastrana’s peace overtures both negated and impeded the ability of Plan Colombia initially to target effectively the FARC-EP’s involvement in the illicit drug industry.

### **C. PRESIDENT URIBE’S UNIFIED STRATEGY**

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 highlighted to U.S. policymakers the role illicit drug economies play in undermining government stability through the funding of armed non-state actors, to include terrorists. Following 9/11 the fight against terrorism was placed at the forefront of U.S. policy around the world. When Colombia was included in the Global War on Terrorism, it brought a major policy shift with regards to the allocation of U.S. assistance in Colombia. By mid-2002, the U.S. Congress agreed that a war on drugs is central to any effort to undermine armed non-state actors who benefit from involvement in the drug trade. And the laws governing aid destined for Colombia were changed, now allowing all previous aid given solely for counter-narcotics efforts to be used in a “unified” campaign against Colombian guerrillas and paramilitaries—organizations who were already on the State Department’s list of Foreign

Terrorist Organizations. Upon his election into office in 2002, President Uribe embodied this unified strategy in his Democratic Security and Defense Policy (DSP).

Rather than being on the defensive, President Uribe's DSP increased the size and capabilities of the Colombian military enabling them to take an offensive against the both the FARC-EP and the illicit drug industry. Plan Patriota, the war strategy of the DSP, sought to halt the FARC-EP's reach, logistics, and their organization. The Colombian government would stop the guerrillas from achieving their strategic plan of assuming power through its control of entire regions in the south and east. By re-controlling cities and key economic areas from FARC-EP control, the Colombian government has left the guerrilla organization with the smallest percentage of territory under its control in its entire history.<sup>175</sup> Overall, the insurgents have lost territory as observed in their expansion and growth along Colombia's border regions. Increasing the number of confrontations with the guerrillas since he took office in 2002, President Uribe's policy decreased FARC-EP membership numbers and forced the FARC-EP into a "tactical withdrawal," thereby, decreasing the organization's operational activity. However, the FARC-EP remained a formidable force of approximately 9,000-12,000 strong. The organization has learned to adapt to and continues to maintain the will and capability to fight—as exemplified in their use of landmines to halt manual eradication efforts in La Macarena National Park.

Despite a sixth consecutive record year for illicit crop eradication and continued aggressive interdiction programs, President Uribe's extension of Plan Colombia's counter-narcotics efforts only showed marginal changes by 2005. In fact, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) reported that an additional 39,000 hectares of coca in Colombia was observed in newly

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<sup>175</sup> Unattributed, "Colombian Government Readying Peace Proposal for FARC," *Semana*, 14-20 September 2006; Open Source Center (FEA20060815026374).

imaged areas in 2005 (outside the 2004 survey area).<sup>176</sup> The ratio of hectares sprayed to hectares reduced has increased since 2002, an indication that the aerial eradication campaign is on a path of diminishing returns. Rather than deterring farmers to plant coca, eradication efforts seem to be encouraging farmers to plant *more* coca in anticipation of potential loss due to eradication. Farmers continue to adapt to the situation (i.e., decreases in the size of areas under cultivation, covering coca leaves or pruning them after fumigation, etc.) as well as seeking other areas in which to continue growing coca. All in all the aerial fumigation campaign has inconvenienced coca farmers, but does not seem to have affected the guerrilla economy or decreased their involvement in the illicit drug trade.

#### **D. SEQUENTIAL OR UNIFIED: WHICH IS BEST FOR COLOMBIA?**

The Peruvian case clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of a sequential approach in managing a dual threat; however, it is not clear that the Peruvian case is either comparable or applicable to Colombia. In Colombia, there are multiple armed non-state actors vying for power, from left-wing insurgent groups such as the FARC-EP and the National Liberation Army (ELN) to right-wing paramilitary organization such as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), all of which either incorporated or have links to criminal organizations. President Pastrana applied a drugs first sequential approach to tackling the multi-dimensional threat in Colombia under the assumption that elimination of the drug industry would deprive the guerrillas of a valuable source of funding, limiting their capability and reducing troop levels. However, despite decreases in the area under cultivation, President Pastrana failed to eliminate the drug trade and

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<sup>176</sup> In an effort to improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the estimate, the 2005 survey expanded by 81 percent the size of the landmass that was imaged and sampled for coca cultivation. The newly imaged areas showed about 39,000 additional hectares of coca. Because these areas were not previously surveyed, ONDCP believes it is impossible to determine for how long they have been under coca cultivation. Due to the uncertainty and the significantly expanded survey area, a direct year-to-year comparison is not possible. According to an ONDCP press release, they believe that the higher cultivation figure in the 2005 estimate does not necessarily mean that coca cultivation increased in 2005; but rather reflects an improved understanding of where coca is now growing in Colombia. Office of National Drug Control Policy, "2005 Coca Estimates for Colombia," Press Release: 14 April 2006.

actually increased the strength of the FARC-EP. As President Pastrana's policy proved eliminating the FARC-EP by targeting drugs was difficult for a number of reasons.

For one thing, the underlying logic that targeting the drug trade would reduce the financial capacity of the FARC-EP was flawed. Given the inelasticity of demand for drugs, a reduction in supply will in fact increase the price. Therefore, supply-reduction strategies (such as eradication) have the tendency to increase rather than decrease, the revenues of guerrillas involved in the drug trade. Secondly, the government failed to consider the extreme mobility of coca within Colombia. While some initial decreases in cultivation were made, eradication has merely created geographic shifts in cultivation both within Colombia and the entire Andean region in general. Without close to 100% territorial control, the Colombian government will be ineffective in reducing such shifts.

Lastly, it's important to remember that, the sheer scale of the illicit drug industry (typically measured in dollars) is an important determinant of the potential contribution it potentially makes to terrorism. According to Mark Kleiman, to make "drug policy serve the anti-terror effort, shrinking dollar volumes (and secondarily, the volume of the physical flows of drugs and personnel) is a central task."<sup>177</sup> The correct weighing of drug control objectives against anti-terrorist objectives depends in part on how much drug industry actually contributes to the threat of terrorist action, and how much anti-drug efforts could do to reduce that contribution. Not only did the record high seizures and hectares eradicated during President Pastrana's time in office not decrease the flow of illicit drugs to the United States, but it was later assessed that the FARC-EP's drug related income may not be their center of gravity. If all drug-related income were eliminated, it would not deliver the fatal blow initially calculated by Plan Colombia.

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<sup>177</sup> Mark A. R. Kleiman, "Illicit Drugs and the Terrorist Threat: Causal Links and Policy Implications," Report prepared for the Congressional Research Service, 18 October 2002.



An argument for simultaneously attacking a dual threat can be made when the threats are so interlinked that they require simultaneous attention. The rise of the FARC-EP as the *de facto* government in many rural areas of Colombia coupled with their increased involvement in the illicit drug industry called for the need to simultaneously attack the dual threat of drugs and the insurgency. There are number of reasons why a simultaneous campaign is the best option for Colombia. First of all, President Pastrana's failure to decrease the strength of the FARC-EP through a purely counter-narcotics strategy, increased the government and public's awareness that a military solution might be the only effective strategy in eliminating the FARC-EP. The use of military force could possibly provide the pressure required to persuade the guerrillas to eventually take peace negotiations seriously. Secondly, the center of gravity of the FARC-EP was not its involvement in the drug industry but its territorial control and recognition as the *de facto* government in outlying areas of Colombia. Bringing these areas under the effective control of the Colombian government would be a devastating blow to the strength of the FARC-EP as such actions would decrease the ability of the insurgency to feed on the local population. Thirdly, battling narco-guerrillas has the advantage of resolving both the guerrilla and drug problems in a particular area if operations are coordinated. Increased aerial eradication since 2003 has begun to log diminishing returns, which should argue for the importance of manual eradication. However, counter-narcotics measures such as manual eradication (as observed in La Macarena) will not be successful without first eliminating the threat guerrillas pose to eradication teams and alternative development programs—signifying that counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics policies must go hand-in-hand.

#### **E. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The nature of the multi-dimensional threat confronting the Colombian government calls for a continuation of Uribe's comprehensive unified strategy. Close to one year has transpired since President Uribe began his second presidential term. Although weakened, the FARC-EP still dominate up to one third of the country, including the deep jungles of the southern and eastern

Colombia where the military lacks the manpower and the resources to challenge them. While peace negotiations with the FARC-EP remain a possibility during Uribe's second term, the FARC-EP has yet to show a real willingness to engage in peace talks. Uribe's military efforts against the FARC-EP are not viewed as a failure; however, there is still much progress to be made. While the Government of Colombia acknowledges that it cannot kill every last rebel, it seeks to inflict a strategic defeat on the FARC-EP. Only then will a peace process with FARC-EP be successful.

The following recommendations are offered to the Government of Colombia in an effort to assist in furthering its comprehensive unified strategy against the dual threat of drugs and terrorism:

**1. Coordinate Military/Police Actions with Developmental Projects**

In its unified campaign the Government of Colombian has failed to win the hearts and minds of population who live in the territory it is seeking to control. While the military and/or police have established a presence in all 1,098 municipalities in Colombia, alternative development projects, economic opportunity, social investment and rule of law often failed to follow suit. While security and order are important foundations, it must be followed and balanced with viable economic and social development options. Not offering viable alternatives increases the need and desire for the local population to revert back to its dependence on the guerrillas and/or the illicit drug trade. Hence, military operations (whether their counter-insurgency or counter-narcotics driven) need to be coordinated with developmental assistance programs or else areas of recent acquisition will fall back into the hands of the insurgents over time. The Government of Colombia's establishment of the Coordination Center for Integrated Action (CCAI), an interagency organization to reestablish governance in previously ungoverned spaces of Colombia through synchronizing military operations with the operations of other ministries, is clearly a step in the right direction. However, substantial effort should be placed on ensuring this strategic level coordination center trickles down to the tactical level.

## **2. Define Responsibilities and Enforce Cooperation Among Services**

To be effective, a unified campaign needs to be coordinated not just among state agencies (as discussed above), but also among security forces. In Colombia, the national police are typically tasked with the counter-narcotics campaign while the military primarily handle the threat posed by illegally armed non-state actors. However, as these non-state actors have become closely linked with the illicit drug trade, the military and police roles in targeting narco-guerrillas have overlapped. As with many Latin American countries, rivalry runs deep among the different branches of the military and Colombia is no exception. Animosity between the army and the police in Colombia is fierce and has fostered an atmosphere of distrust and a lack of cooperation between the two organizations. This is particularly true with respect to intelligence sharing. All military intelligence entities function to provide usable information to their specific command so as to carry out the objectives inherent to their mission. Despite increasingly overlapping mission, the national police and military fail to share information. This lack of intelligence sharing has cost money, lives, and resources. The roles of each of the security entities must clearly be defined, intelligence sharing agreements among services developed, and increased joint cooperation and coordination must be promoted and encouraged to effectively fight against Colombia's dual threat.

## **3. Be Alert to Finite Resources**

It is a harsh fact that resources are finite. With U.S. assistance and funding from his "war tax," President Uribe was able to fund both an intense military initiative against the FARC-EP as well as an intense counter-narcotics campaign against the illicit drug trade. As the involvement of the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to escalate, it is inevitable that U.S. assistance to Colombia will decrease. The potential decrease in external funding and the depletion of funds provided by the "war tax" will severely impact the resources available to President Uribe to conduct a simultaneous campaign, especially if the present scandal over paramilitary influence in the military and government

grows. If Uribe is unable to find additional external funding or does not get the population's approval for an additional "war tax," his administration must become masters at resource allocation as there will be no room for errors or miscalculations. A thorough and accurate understanding of the enemy (FARC-EP and the drug trade) will be paramount as this will assist the state in determining what actions are more likely to break the will of the FARC-EP, thereby, bring them to the negotiating table.

#### **4. Negotiations May Not Be the Answer**

President Uribe was re-elected in August 2006 with 62 percent of the vote. He has now been elected twice to win the war and knows that he cannot go down in history as the man who failed to achieve peace. Acknowledging the impossibility of eliminated every FARC-EP guerrilla during his last term in office, President Uribe understands that he must break the will of the FARC-EP to fight and push them to the negotiating table in order for the prospect of peace to emerge. However, President Uribe must progress cautiously and attentive in the demobilization of the paramilitaries and the potential cease-fire agreement with the ELN, as the agreements developed with these organizations will likely set the baseline for an eventual agreement with the FARC-EP. President Uribe needs to take the needs of the Colombia state into consideration when he discusses the issue of peace negotiations and not his presidential legacy. Using the Pastrana administration as an example, if the Uribe administration enters into negotiations with the FARC-EP too soon, it would negate the success of Uribe's DSP to date by providing the FARC-EP with time (and potentially space if a DMZ is granted) to regenerate its organization.

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Monterey, California
3. Dr. Jeanne Giraldo  
Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California
4. Dr. Douglas Porch  
Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California
5. LT Michelle Simmons  
United States Southern Command  
Miami, Florida