

The “War on Drugs” meets the “War on Terror”

The United States’ military involvement in Colombia climbs to the next level

By Ingrid Vaicius and Adam Isacson

In 2000 – an age ago, in foreign-policy terms – U.S. involvement in war-torn Colombia was big news. The Clinton Administration moved through Congress a special aid bill just for Colombia and its neighbors. By the time President Clinton signed the controversial package into law in July, a profusion of front-page articles, op-eds, congressional floor speeches and television coverage had put Colombia near the top of Washington’s list of international priorities.

One of the legislation’s main backers, then-Drug Czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey, predicted that the \$1.3 billion contribution to “Plan Colombia” – \$860 million of it for Colombia, three-quarters of that for Colombia’s police and military – would “strengthen democracy, the rule of law, economic stability, and human rights in Colombia.”¹ Its critics warned of serious consequences. “It risks drawing us into a terrible quagmire,” warned the late Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minnesota). “History has repeatedly shown, especially in Latin America – just think of Nicaragua or El Salvador – that the practical effect of this strategy now under consideration is to militarize, to escalate the conflict, not to end it.”²

A lot has happened since the 2000 debate. Fighting between the government, two leftist

guerrilla groups and right-wing paramilitaries worsened, killing about 4,000 people and forcing over 350,000 from their homes last year. The Colombian government’s attempts to negotiate peace with guerrilla groups came to a crashing halt in February 2002. Three months later, Colombians elected Álvaro Uribe, a hard-line president who promised to put the country on a total-war footing. Drug production continued to explode. The human rights situation worsened. “Democracy, the rule of law, economic stability and human rights” have eroded further.

An observer in the United States would have had to watch Colombia closely, though, to notice most of these



Secretary of State Powell on his long-delayed December 2002 visit to Colombia, pictured with Police Chief Teodoro Campo and Defense Minister Marta Lucía Ramírez. (State Department photo)

sour developments. Colombia has received much less attention from the Bush Administration and the U.S. media lately, especially since September 11, 2001. That terrible day, Colin Powell was to pay his first visit to Bogotá as secretary of state. He would not set foot in Colombia for another fifteen months, when he arrived for a twenty-two hour stay in December 2002. A country that Gen. McCaffrey described three years ago as “out of control, a flipping nightmare” has been eclipsed by higher-priority “war on terror” countries, and by the administration’s charge toward war in Iraq.³

Inattention from the very top, however, has not meant that the policy has stood still. In fact, U.S. policy toward Colombia is marked by two contradictory trends: although Colombia is becoming a lower priority, the size and purpose of the U.S. military aid are expanding rapidly. This

is a dangerous paradox. As CIP warned three years ago, the United States is still “getting in deeper” – but with less public debate or top-level supervision than before.*

Overall military and police aid amounts are increasing, with new Colombian units getting support to operate in new parts of the country. An August 2002 change in U.S. law has broadened the purpose of lethal assistance – for years limited to counter-narcotics – to include “counter-terrorism.” The change allows U.S.-aided units to go on the offensive against the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN), and the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). U.S. Special Forces are now in Colombia training thousands of soldiers to guard an oil pipeline and to hunt insurgent leaders. Meanwhile, efforts to assist the conflict’s victims, build a func-

* See the CIP International Policy Report Getting In Deeper, published in February 2000.

All U.S. Aid To Colombia, 1997-2003

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002, estimate	2003, requested
Military and Police Assistance Programs							
(millions of dollars; numbers <i>underlined and italicized</i> are estimates taken by averaging previous two years)							
International Narcotics Control (INC)							
State Department-managed counter-drug arms transfers, training, and services	33.45	56.5	200.11	686.43	46.35	253	284.2
Foreign Military Financing (FMF)							
Grants for defense articles, training and services	30	0	0.44	0.4	4.49	6	98
International Military Education and Training (IMET)							
Training, usually not counter-drug	0	0.89	0.92	0.9	1.04	1.18	1.18
Emergency Drawdowns							
Presidential authority to grant counter-drug equipment from U.S. arsenal	14.2	41.1	58	0	0	0	0
"Section 1004"							
Authority to use the defense budget for some types of counter-drug aid	10.32	11.78	35.89	90.60	150.04	84.99	102
"Section 1033"							
Authority to use the defense budget to provide riverine counter-drug aid to Colombia	0	2.17	13.45	7.23	22.3	4	13.2
Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA)							
Grants for anti-terrorism defense articles, training and services	0	0	0	0	?	25	?
Excess Defense Articles (EDA)							
Authority to transfer "excess" equipment	0.09	0	0	0.41	0.46	0.44	0.44
Discretionary Funds from the Office of National Drug Control Policy	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	88.56	112.44	308.81	785.97	224.68	374.61	499.02
Economic and Social Assistance Programs							
(millions of dollars; numbers <i>underlined and italicized</i> are estimates taken by averaging previous two years)							
Economic Support Funds (ESF)							
Transfers to the recipient government	0	0	3	4	0	0	0
Development Assistance (DA)							
Funds for development projects	0	0.02	0	0	0	0	0
International Narcotics Control (INC)							
State Department - managed funding for counter-drug economic and social aid	0	0.5	5.75	208	5.65	127.5	154.8
Subtotal	0	0.52	8.75	212	5.65	127.5	154.8
Grand Total	88.56	112.96	317.56	997.97	230.33	502.11	653.82

tioning judicial system, and salvage Colombia's rural economy are off to a shaky start.

It is remotely possible that U.S. counter-terror aid and President Uribe's draconian security policies could add up to a push strong enough to force the guerrillas and paramilitaries to collapse, like a house of cards. A more likely outcome is that these policies cause the war to grind on further and fail to hinder the drug trade, creating pressures for even more security assistance and perhaps a greater U.S. military role.

U.S. policy toward Colombia needs to change before the crisis engulfs Colombia's neighbors and other U.S. interests. Understanding what an alternative policy would look like requires a review of past failures and present dangers.

U.S. aid since the late 1990s

Long before George W. Bush entered the White House, critics of the U.S. approach to Colombia contended that it was too focused on drug-war priorities and relied too heavily on the country's troubled security forces. The policy, they argued, ignored the complicated, deep-rooted origins of Colombia's conflict.

In a weakly governed country with stark social inequalities and historically abusive and corrupt security forces, focusing U.S. largesse on the police and military to fight drugs – a symptom more than a cause of the country's problems – would have grave consequences. "It will lead to the escalation of the social and armed conflict, fail to solve the drug-trafficking problem, endanger the peace process, attack indigenous populations' culture and life styles, seriously hamper the Amazon eco-system, worsen the humanitarian and human rights crisis, promote forced displacement and further worsen the social and political crisis," warned a June 2000 letter from seventy-three Colombian non-governmental organizations.⁴

These warnings went unheeded. Between 1999 and 2002, the United States gave Colombia \$2.04 billion. Of that amount, 83 percent – \$1.69 billion, or nearly \$1.2 million per day over four years – has gone to Colombia's military and police. This pattern continues in the Bush Administration's aid request for 2003, which still awaits

final approval as the 108th Congress convenes. The United States would spend approximately \$654 million this year, half a billion of it for Colombia's security forces.⁵

Since 1999, U.S. aid has included eighty-four helicopters; the creation of new brigades in Colombia's army and navy; grants of cargo and attack aircraft, patrol boats, communications and intelligence-gathering equipment, uniforms, and small arms; and the training of over 15,000 Colombian military and police (6,300 of them in 2001 alone). Hundreds of U.S. troops and private contract personnel work on Colombian soil as trainers, intelligence-gatherers, spray pilots and mechanics, among other duties. Since 1996, U.S. pilots on anti-drug missions have sprayed herbicides over more than a million acres of Colombian territory.

Aid to Colombia's police

During most of the 1990s (until about 1999), Colombia's National Police received nearly all lethal U.S. aid. Washington was wary of getting too deeply involved in the country's conflict, and the early-90s effort to dis-

mantle the Medellín and Cali cartels had forged a closer relationship with the police than with the armed forces, which were marred by allegations of corruption, human rights violations, and collusion with the rightist paramilitaries. The Clinton Administration nonetheless shifted the bulk of aid to the military in 1999 and 2000, arguing that the guerrillas' and paramilitaries' entry into the drug business made many counter-narcotics missions

too dangerous for the police to perform alone.

Though the Colombian armed forces now get most of the aid, Washington's commitment to the police – especially its counter-narcotics division (DIRAN) – is still large. The unit performs most drug interdiction and works with the DEA to arrest drug traffickers. In rural zones where peasants grow illegal drug crops, U.S.-granted DIRAN Air Service helicopters protect the U.S. contractor pilots who spray herbicides over fields where illegal drug crops are grown, risking ground fire from insurgent groups (spray planes were hit 180 times in 2001).⁶ Over the past few years, the United States has provided the

Helicopter transfers since 1998		
	Colombian National Police	Colombian Armed Forces
Western Hemisphere Drug Elimination Act, 1998	6 UH-60 Blackhawks	
Emergency Drawdown, 1998	3 Bell-212s	
Two no-cost leases, 1999		33 UH-1H "Hueys"
"Plan Colombia" aid package, 2000	2 UH-60 Blackhawks 10 UH-1H "Hueys"	14 UH-60 Blackhawks 25 UH-1H "Hueys"
Proposed pipeline-protection assistance, 2003		Approximately 12 UH-1H "Hueys"



DIRAN Air Service with Blackhawk and Huey helicopters, C-26B reconnaissance planes, and construction upgrades to several of its bases throughout Colombia.⁷ The Drug Enforcement Administration has created and completely funds four Sensitive Investigative Units (SIUs) within the Colombian National Police, elite units that carry out risky missions against drug traffickers.⁸

The Bush Administration asked Congress for \$120.5 million to support Colombia's police in 2003.⁹ A worldwide anti-terror appropriation that became law in August 2002 adds more funding: \$4 million to create police units to protect construction of reinforced police stations in guerrilla-controlled areas, and \$25 million for anti-kidnapping units (shared with the Colombian Army).¹⁰

The DIRAN came under a cloud of scandal in 2002, when investigators revealed that several high-ranking officers had stolen at least \$2 million in U.S. aid intended for administrative expenses.¹¹ Though investigations continue, the scandal forced the dismissal of twelve officers and the reassignment of DIRAN director Gen. Gustavo Socha.

Counter-Narcotics Brigade

Colombia's armed forces, especially its army, now receive most U.S. assistance. Since 1999 more than half of all aid to Colombia's army has gone to create and maintain a new 2,300-man brigade. The "First Counter-Narcotics Brigade" operates in the departments (provinces) of Caquetá and Putumayo in Colombia's far south. This Pennsylvania-sized zone, which accounts for over one-third of all coca (the plant used to make cocaine) grown in Colombia, is fiercely contested by the FARC – for whom it has been a key stronghold for decades – and the paramilitaries, who arrived in the late 1990s and now control most major towns.* The new army unit's original mission was to attack drug-processing labs, to apprehend traffickers, and to clear armed groups from areas of drug-crop cultivation (or at least to clear them long enough for the U.S.



Caquetá and Putumayo

herbicide spray planes to pass through). An August 2002 change in the law allows the Counter-Narcotics Brigade to use its equipment and training for "counter-terrorism" as well as anti-drug missions; as a result, some of the brigade's operations may come to resemble the U.S.-supported counter-insurgency efforts commonplace in Latin

* For more information on this zone, see CIP's April 2001 publication Plan Colombia's "Ground Zero."

America during the Cold War.

Tens of millions of dollars each year cover the rather high cost of fueling and maintaining the dozens of donated helicopters used to transport the Counter-Narcotics Brigade over roadless, dangerous southern Colombia. These are operated by U.S.-trained pilots of the Colombian Army's Aviation Brigade, based in the central department of Tolima, for which the Bush Administration has requested over \$76 million in 2003.¹² Some of the helicopters' pilots – including co-pilots of those used to transport the Counter-Narcotics Brigade – are not Colombian military personnel but civilians working for private U.S. companies on State Department contracts. None are U.S. citizens.¹³

Aid to Colombia's Navy and Air Force

Much additional aid has gone to Colombia's Marine Corps (part of the Colombian Navy) to stop drug trafficking on the country's thousands of miles of rivers. U.S. funding – most of it through the defense budget, not the foreign aid budget, an unusual move – helped create a Riverine Brigade, founded in 1999, with five battalions in some of the most conflictive parts of the country (Putumayo, Guaviare, Guainía, and the Magdalena Medio and Urabá regions). The five battalions will encompass fifty-eight individual "riverine combat elements" (RCEs), smaller units of four boats each, deployed in remote areas. As of September 2002, U.S. funding had helped create thirty-three RCEs.¹⁴ Colombia's Coast Guard has also received boats and training to stop maritime trafficking.

Colombia's 7,000-member air force also benefits from U.S. aid. Much is related to the so-called "airbridge denial" program, in which U.S. personnel identify possible drug-smuggling flights that the air forces of Colombia or Peru must interdict. U.S. radars and surveillance flights using runways in Colombia and neighboring countries gather information about suspicious planes, which Colombia's air force – using U.S.-donated A-37 attack aircraft, among other planes – seeks to contact and force to land. This program, which some have called the "shootdown policy" due to the frequent fate of suspicious flights, has been suspended since April 2001, when the Peruvian Air Force fired upon a small plane carrying a family of U.S. missionaries, killing two. Bush Administration officials had estimated that the program would begin again in the fall of 2002, while they developed new procedures and re-trained pilots in Oklahoma. As of January 2003, however, a final decision to reinstate the program continues to be delayed.¹⁵

Human rights concerns have also affected the flow of

aid to Colombia's air force. The "Leahy Amendment," which has been part of foreign aid law since 1997, prohibits aid to foreign military units that include members who have committed gross human rights violations with impunity. Human rights groups for years had criticized the air force's failure to investigate or prosecute those responsible for a 1998 bombing that killed eighteen civilians in Santo Domingo, Arauca department. Years of inaction on the Santo Domingo case forced the State Department, following the Leahy Amendment, to cut off assistance to Colombia's 1st Air Combat Command (CACOM-1) in January 2003.¹⁶

Training and intelligence

While big-ticket items like helicopters, aircraft, radar sites and base construction attract the most attention, other, less-expensive types of aid perhaps have even more impact. U.S. military trainers offer thousands of courses per year to their Colombian counterparts in topics ranging from marksmanship to helicopter repair to human rights. U.S. military units on Colombian soil – usually Marines and Special Forces – trained more than half of the 6,300 Colombian military and police personnel who got U.S. training in 2001.¹⁷ The rest attended U.S. military institutions, including 151 at the U.S. Army's Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the successor to the controversial School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia.¹⁸

"Light-infantry skills," the most frequent subject taught, make up much of the training offered to the Counter-Narcotics Brigade. The term refers to the tactics and capabilities necessary for small units to operate in difficult terrain, whether for counter-narcotics or counter-insurgency: marksmanship and weapons familiarization, ambush techniques, camouflage, communications, map and compass reading, and similar skills.

The United States is also stepping up one of the most controversial types of assistance: intelligence. Colombia's armed forces are getting more information than ever from U.S. communications intercepts, aircraft and satellite photography, and human sources. U.S. personnel are also offering their Colombian counterparts equipment and

training to improve their own ability to collect and analyze intelligence.

A classified Clinton Administration "Presidential Decision Directive," PDD-73, prohibited intelligence-sharing with the Colombian security forces unless specifically for counter-narcotics purposes. Pentagon officials told *The Washington Times* in February 2002 that the PDD-73 restrictions had them "frustrated and fuming."¹⁹ As of October 2002, the Clinton-era rule remained in effect, but a Bush Administration revision (now known as an NSPD, or National Security Presidential Directive), allowing the United States to share intelligence about guerrilla and paramilitary activity without regard to drugs, was nearing completion – and may now be in place.²⁰ As a result, the United States may share intelligence it gathers about non-drug threats, including such tactical information as insurgent groups' movements and locations.

Social and economic aid

This multifaceted military-aid buildup has been controversial, particularly among liberals and moderates. Nonetheless, many would-be skeptics were assuaged by the social and economic aid that accompanied the weapons and training. "Many members of Congress who were really quite leery of deepening our military involvement in Colombia supported Plan Colombia on the basis of its balance," said Rep. Nita Lowey (D-New York), the top Democrat on the House subcommittee that appropriates the foreign aid budget. "I count myself among them."²¹

About one in six dollars from "Plan Colombia" and subsequent aid packages has helped coca-growers switch to legal crops, offered emergency assistance for people displaced by the conflict, aided the judiciary and the prosecutor's office, provided protection for governmental and non-governmental human rights workers, and assisted demobilized child combatants. "This bill makes it clear that we have not forgotten the poorest people in Colombia," said Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Illinois) during the 2000 Plan Colombia debate.²²

Appropriating \$343 million for these non-military priorities between 2000 and 2002 indicates that Washington at least partially recognizes that Colombia's crisis is too complex to solve by military force alone. It is also in line with U.S. counter-insurgency doctrine, which – though it has brought disastrous results in third-world conflict zones from Vietnam to Central America – continues to guide much U.S. aid to developing countries in conflict. Counter-insurgency is not just a military strategy: it emphasizes the importance of winning the population's

Training, 2001	
Most-offered courses	Top U.S. locations
1. Light Infantry	1. Fort Benning, Columbus, GA
2. Riverine	2. Lackland and Randolph Air Force Bases, San Antonio, TX
3. "Miscellaneous Operations" (not defined)	3. Fort Rucker, AL
4. Defense acquisition phase III	4. Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, Fort McNair, Washington, DC
5. Coastal	5. Portsmouth, VA

“hearts and minds” in order to restore government control over a guerrilla-dominated area. As a U.S. Army field manual explains, “The successful counterinsurgent must realize that the true nature of the threat to his government lies in the insurgent’s political strength, not in his military power. Although the government must contain the insurgents’ armed elements, concentration on the military aspect of the threat does not address the real danger.”²³

Yet the U.S. approach to Colombia appears to neglect even these basic tenets of counter-insurgency. Massive aerial herbicide fumigation is fueling anti-government sentiment in a guerrilla-controlled area. The social and economic component of Washington’s aid has been overshadowed, particularly in most Colombians’ perceptions, by the far larger military-aid outlay.

It has also suffered from very serious implementation problems. Some aid programs, particularly emergency humanitarian assistance, appear to be reaching target populations – though, as U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Anne Patterson admits, they “represent a drop in the bucket in relation to the real needs of Colombia’s displaced persons.”²⁴ But other crucial efforts have struggled in the face of bureaucratic obstacles, the Colombian government’s institutional shortcomings, and a tendency to exclude local governments, non-governmental organizations and communities on the receiving end.

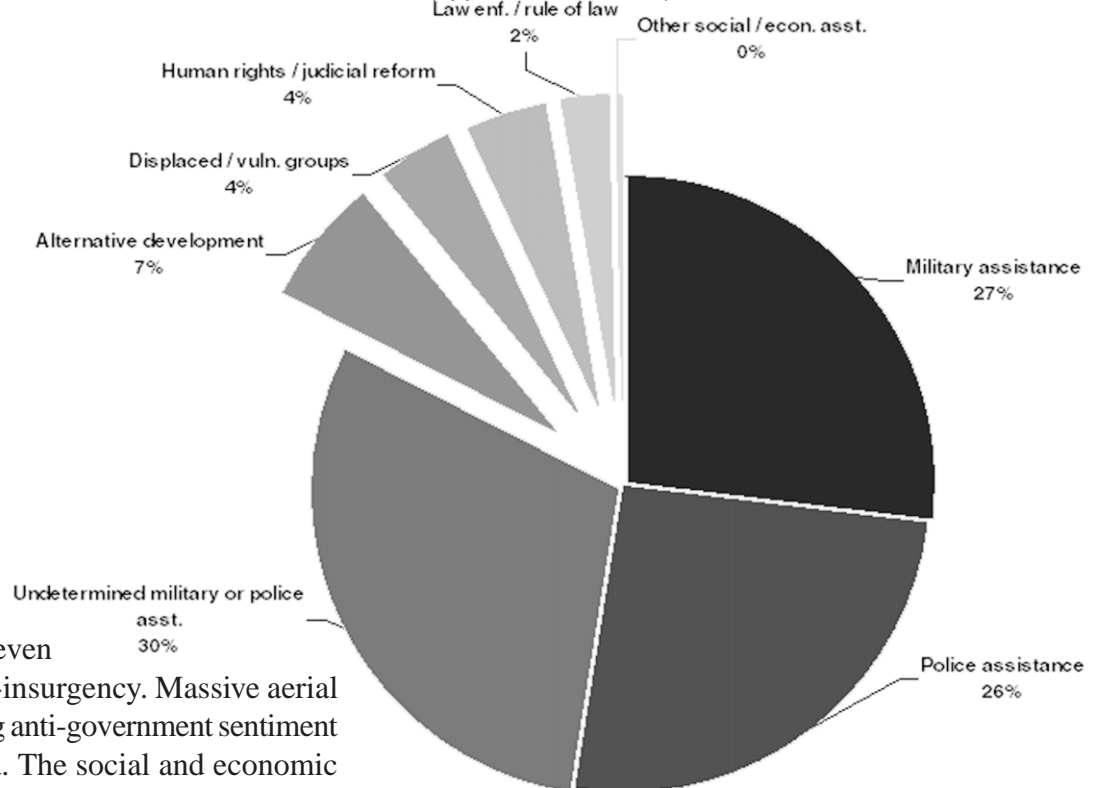
An alternative-development scheme in Putumayo – the epicenter of expanded fumigation – has virtually collapsed. Aid for judicial reforms lags badly as well; in September 2002 – two years after the “Plan Colombia” appropriation – the House Appropriations Committee reported that more than half of such funds remained unspent.²⁵ The troubling outcome is that thousands of people directly impacted by U.S. military programs have not been reached by the economic aid that was supposed to accompany them.

The “push into southern Colombia” begins

While it has arrived much faster than most social and economic aid, the 2000 “Plan Colombia” aid package’s

All U.S. Aid to Colombia, 1997-2003

(approx. \$2.92 billion)



military component also got off to a slow start. It has taken time to select and train 2,300 members of the Counter-Narcotics Brigade (many of whom have since rotated to other units), improve bases, deliver helicopters, and train people to fly them. The last helicopters and most of the first pilots were not ready, for instance, until the summer of 2002.²⁶ Eight AT-802 spray aircraft are still being delivered as this report goes to press.²⁷

Even as military-aid deliveries were just getting underway, though, the U.S. and Colombian governments significantly expanded herbicide fumigation in and around Putumayo, where the Plan Colombia-supported brigade operates. Increasing spraying in this zone was a key objective of the so-called “push into southern Colombia,” the name that the 2000 package’s designers gave to their aid for the new brigade and related units. A first round of spraying in Putumayo fumigated 25,000 hectares between December 2000 and February 2001, even before the Counter-Narcotics Brigade had all three of its component battalions.²⁸

Above U.S. objections, the government of Andrés Pastrana suspended fumigation after this first round, in order to give Plan Colombia’s alternative development component a chance to take hold.²⁹ The effort to help coca-growing peasants adopt legal alternatives took the form of a series of “social pacts,” in which signers would receive basic assistance, followed by technical and infrastructure support, in exchange for eradicating all their coca

within twelve months after first receipt of aid. By July 2001, 37,000 families in Putumayo – just under half of the department’s population – had signed “pacts” and were awaiting assistance.

The assistance failed to arrive. Alternative development money was delayed by bureaucracy, forced to pass through several agencies before reaching the peasants: the State Department’s Bureau for International Narcotics; the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); the Colombian government’s Plan Colombia implementing agency; the Colombian government’s alternative-development agency, PLANTE; and five Colombian non-profit organizations, with no previous ties to Putumayo, contracted to deliver the assistance. The security situation in Putumayo – which, despite the presence of two army brigades, a naval brigade, and police, is marked by constant territorial disputes between guerrillas and paramilitaries – slowed aid delivery further; the FARC killed two alternative-development workers in September 2001.³⁰

By April 2002, only 8,500 of the 37,000 pact-signing peasant families had received any assistance.³¹ “One of you said that our alternative crop program for some reason is not a failure. If it’s not I’d certainly hate to see what one looks like,” Rep. David Obey (D-Wisconsin), the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, told witnesses at a hearing that month.³²

By July, though, momentum behind renewed fumigation was irresistible. Helicopters had been delivered and sixty-six pilots and crew had completed training.³³ The incoming president, Álvaro Uribe, shared Washington’s enthusiasm for fumigation: “The goal is to destroy 100 percent of the coca crop. We will not stop. We will spray and spray.”³⁴ Between July and October 2002, the “push into southern Colombia” began in earnest, as U.S. and Colombian forces sprayed 60,500 hectares in Putumayo and Caquetá.³⁵ The two countries’ governments erased earlier distinctions between large-scale coca-growers and small family plots. “Since July 28, there is no longer any differentiation between ‘small’ and the ‘industrial’ plots. If you grow coca, the Colombian Police will spray it,”



Ambassador Patterson warned in October 2002.³⁶

Since the spraying was not accompanied by a credible alternative devel-

opment effort in Putumayo, thousands of peasants who had their crops eradicated suddenly found themselves with no way to make a living. Putumayo community and church leaders interviewed by CIP in November 2002 spoke of a humanitarian disaster. Since spraying damaged food crops, they said, many families in FARC-controlled rural areas, unable to travel to paramilitary-controlled towns, were going hungry. Great numbers of people were leaving Putumayo, some across the border into Ecuador and others to plant coca elsewhere in the country. Young people, lacking other economic opportunities, were volunteering to join the FARC or the paramilitaries.

The result has been the very opposite of counter-insurgency: though “the strengthening of the state” was a central goal of Plan Colombia, the spraying served only to increase Putumayo residents’ distrust for – or even hatred of – Colombia’s government. “They [the government] broke their promises to us and now there is hunger,” one peasant leader told CIP.

“Many of us believe that they want to expel us and take our land.”³⁷

Indeed, U.S. officials’ recent statements indicate that de-populating rural Putumayo may be part of the strategy. First, there is an open recognition that the “social pact” scheme was a failure. Adolfo Franco, the Latin American Affairs chief at USAID, told a House subcommittee in April 2002 that it was a “fallacy” to believe that “large-scale assistance to provide new sources of income to 37,000 families can be identified, tested and delivered in one year.”³⁸ It is impossible to assist most coca-growers in rural Putumayo, a secret 2001 USAID study concluded, because of the security situation, the poor soils, and the zone’s isolation from markets.³⁹

Second, USAID is re-tooling its alternative-development effort in a way that, officials hope, will encourage coca-growers to move away from Putumayo, preferably to town centers – perhaps after being pushed out by the spray planes. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman explained in April 2002, “If you can employ somebody outside of the county, and they will move there for a job, it’s something that they ought to do.”⁴⁰ Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), a key architect of U.S. drug policy, observed in September 2002 that “many of the people who are working in the coca fields of Colombia are not native – ruralists to that area. They are, in fact,

“They broke their promises to us and now there is hunger. Many of us believe that they want to expel us and take our land.”

urban people who, because of economic circumstances were attracted to go into the rural areas and work the coca fields. And for them, alternative development is not developing agriculture, but rather developing jobs back in the urban areas.”⁴¹ “They will have to relocate,” a State Department official told CIP in January, “though ultimately it’s their choice.”⁴²

USAID has not given up completely on rural Putumayo. Instead of blanketing the zone with “pacts,” its contractor, Chemonics Inc., has inked several agreements with entire villages to deliver aid in exchange for immediate eradication. This model, however, has only reached a few thousand Putumayo residents. The rest – the tens of thousands whom Washington hopes will simply move elsewhere – will receive little more than herbicides. It is not unreasonable to imagine that many will grow coca elsewhere or make common cause with illegal armed groups.

Conditions

The U.S. Congress has not been blind to these risks. Members of both houses have voiced concern about the health, environmental and social impacts of fumigation. Legislators have also expressed doubts about the Colombian armed forces’ human rights record and the danger that U.S. assistance could indirectly contribute to abuses. Some worry about military over-commitment.

As a result, foreign aid law includes several conditions and limitations on U.S. assistance to Colombia. These conditions have themselves become focal points of debate, as watchdog groups and some members of Congress have sharply criticized the administration’s claims to have met them.

Fumigation certification

The 2002 foreign aid law (which remains in effect until Congress passes the 2003 law) sought to limit fumigation’s collateral effects. It prohibited new herbicide purchases until the State Department certified to Congress that (1) herbicide use was consistent with U.S. domestic regulations and posed no unreasonable health or environmental risks (a conclusion to be reached after consulting the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture and the Centers for Disease Control); (2) procedures were available to compensate people whose health or legal crops were damaged by fumigation; and (3) alternative-development programs were functioning in areas where spraying is to take place.

In September 2002, the State Department certified that

all three conditions were met. It found that health and environmental risks were “not unreasonable,” despite EPA observations that significant spray drift occurs and that data about the spray mixture were insufficient to judge many health claims. “The health and environmental analyses provided to the Congress do not sufficiently substantiate the conclusion that the chemicals used in the aerial fumigation of coca pose no unreasonable risks or adverse effects to humans or the environment,” observed David Sandalow of the World Wildlife Federation.⁴³

The certification included a lengthy description of the Colombian government’s procedure for compensating victims of indiscriminate spraying – but was unable to document any results. “As of the end of August 2002,” the State Department reported, the Colombian government had “received over 1,000 complaints through the streamlined complaint resolution procedure.” Of those, fourteen sites had been physically verified, and only one had been approved for compensation.⁴⁴

The State Department chose a very broad interpretation of the third condition requiring alternative development availability in zones to be sprayed. It considered an entire department of Colombia – most are as large as mid-sized U.S. states – to be open for spraying as long as an alternative-development project was underway somewhere within its borders. Such projects did not even have to be U.S.-funded. Fumigation took place in seventeen departments in 2001, though USAID funds alternative-development projects in nine; in the rest, the State Department report cited projects funded by the Colombian or other governments.⁴⁵ “The report did not provide a serious treatment of this provision,” wrote Lisa Haugaard of the Latin America Working Group, which has closely followed compliance with the conditions.⁴⁶

Human rights certification

“Members of the security forces sometimes illegally collaborated with paramilitary forces,” acknowledged the State Department’s March 2002 human rights report.⁴⁷ Congress, concerned about this persistent pattern of indirect abuse, placed a human rights certification requirement in the 2002 foreign aid law. Unlike a similar provision in the 2000 “Plan Colombia” aid package, the 2002 law did not carry a waiver allowing the President to skip the restrictions for “national security” reasons. It also required the process to occur twice by withholding 40 percent of military aid for a second round of certifications.

In May and September 2002, the State Department duly certified that Colombia’s armed forces were (1) suspending members alleged to have violated human rights or

assisted paramilitaries; (2) cooperating with civilian investigators and judges in human rights cases; and (3) taking effective measures to sever links with the paramilitaries. Heavily citing Defense Ministry statistics, the State Department’s September 2002 report names twenty-one military personnel under suspension (seven above the rank of sergeant, and none above major), and documents eleven incidents of combat against paramilitaries over four months (May to August).⁴⁸

Major human-rights documentation groups disputed the certifications, presenting substantial evidence that Colombia’s military fell far short of every requirement. A response from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Washington Office on Latin America named several high-ranking officials who have avoided suspension and prosecution despite facing serious allegations, and documented episodes of military-paramilitary collaboration by commission or omission.⁴⁹ “During the 1980s, U.S. officials repeatedly certified that the Salvadoran military was respecting human rights, even when they knew that to be false. The State Department today is perilously close to repeating that mistake in Colombia,” Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont), a chief architect of the human rights conditions, said in September 2002. “The big picture and a close look at the facts do not support this certification.”⁵⁰

Troop cap

“Sooner or later,” Ambassador Patterson warned in October 2002, “official Americans will be killed in Colombia carrying out their duties; when that happens, it will be big news.”⁵¹ Congress has shared these concerns about proximity to Colombia’s conflict. The original 2000 “Plan Colombia” aid package law limited the U.S. presence in Colombia to a maximum of 500 military person-

nel and 300 U.S. citizen contractors; the 2002 foreign aid law changed the figures to 400 and 400. On November 13, 2002, the Bush Administration reported, 267 military personnel and 270 contractors were present in Colombia.⁵²

The law, though, does not cover all U.S. troops in Colombia. It only applies the “cap” to U.S. personnel in Colombia “in support of Plan Colombia.” Several new military aid programs – such as the pipeline-protection plan discussed below – are not for counter-narcotics and thus not considered part of “Plan Colombia.” As a result,

Disputed Human Rights Certifications	
State Department memorandum, September 9, 2002	Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and WOLA memorandum, September 2002
According to the civilian director of the Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Colombian Armed Forces — in accordance with Colombian law and practice — are suspending ... military personnel alleged to have committed gross violations of human rights or to have aided or abetted paramilitary groups.	There is no evidence to show that the Commander General of the Colombian Armed Forces is exercising the power held by this office to suspend high-ranking officers. To the contrary, our evidence shows that these officers remain on active duty and in command of troops.
During the administration of former President Pastrana there was a steady improvement in Colombian Armed Forces’ cooperation with civilian authorities in the investigation, prosecution, and punishment in civilian courts of military personnel credibly alleged to have committed gross violations of human rights or to have aided and abetted paramilitary groups.	Colombia’s armed forces continue to dispute the jurisdiction of cases involving the investigation and prosecution of alleged human rights violations by members of the military. This violates both Colombian law and a presidential directive issued by President Andrés Pastrana.
The Colombian Armed Forces are taking effective action to sever links between military personnel and paramilitary units at the command, battalion and brigade levels.	There is no evidence that the Colombian Armed Forces have arrested key paramilitary leaders or high-ranking members of the Armed Forces credibly alleged to have collaborated with paramilitary groups.

though U.S. officials promise to continue obeying the cap, they are not legally bound to do so if non-drug activities call for more than 400 troops on Colombian soil.⁵³

The “cap” on contractors, meanwhile, only applies to U.S. citizens. Citizens of other countries working for U.S.-funded contractors – such as the foreign nationals employed by DynCorp, Inc. to copilot the Counter-Narcotics Brigade’s helicopters – are not included within the “contractor cap.”⁵⁴ As “Plan Colombia”

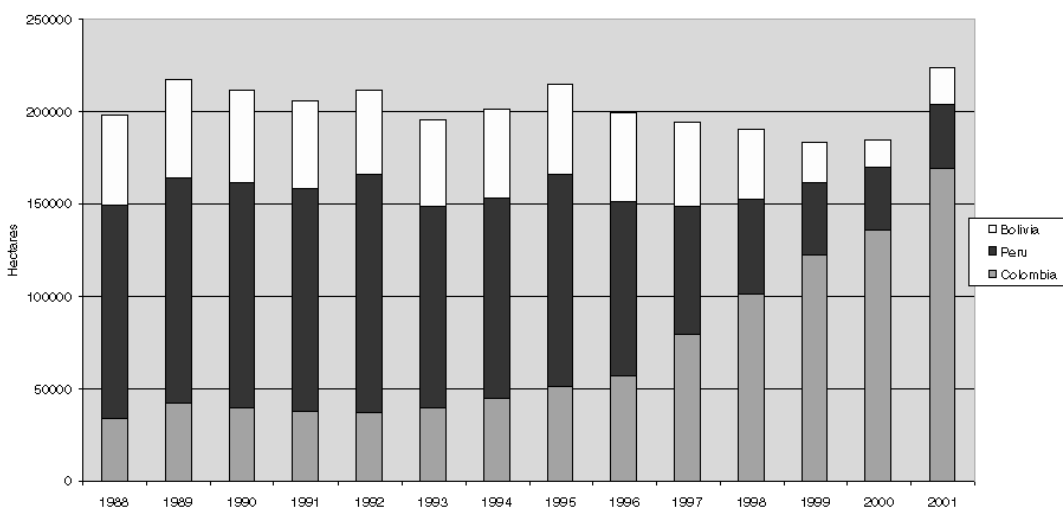
gives way to “counter-terror” aid initiatives, the “troop cap” will become irrelevant if not amended.

Lack of results

While the disputed certifications feed concerns about unintended consequences, the policy’s defenders cannot even claim that the ends justify the means. So far, U.S. assistance to Colombia has yet to demonstrate progress toward its stated goals. “The Committee is disappointed with the results of ‘Plan Colombia,’ which has fallen far short of expectations,” noted the Senate Appropriations Committee’s narrative report on the 2003 foreign aid bill. “Neither the Colombian government nor other international donors have lived up to their financial commitments,

and the amount of coca and poppy under cultivation has increased. In addition, peace negotiations have collapsed, the armed conflict has intensified, and the country is preparing for a wider war which few observers believe can be won on the battlefield.”⁵⁵

The White House does not appear to be progressing toward its goal of a 50 percent reduction in Colombian coca-growing by 2005. Coca is difficult to estimate – CIA figures made public in March 2002



	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Colombia	34000	42400	40100	37500	37100	39700	44700	50900	57200	79500	101800	122500	136200	169800
Peru	115530	121685	121300	120800	129100	108800	108600	115300	94400	68800	51000	38700	34100	34000
Bolivia	48925	52900	50300	47900	45500	47200	48100	48600	48100	45800	38000	21800	14600	19900

showed a significant increase, while statistics from the UN Drug Control Program and the DANTI showed a reduction.⁵⁶ Both sources seem to indicate, though, that the overall amount of coca grown in Colombia is somewhere near 150,000 hectares, or three times as much as it was when the United States began large-scale spraying in 1996.* That year, only four (perhaps five) of Colombia’s thirty-two departments had 1,000 or more hectares of coca. In 2001, the UN/DANTI study found that much coca in thirteen departments.⁵⁷ Fumigation has proven able to reduce coca-growing in limited areas, but growers have been far more agile. New crops keep appearing in previously untouched parts of Colombia’s vast savannahs, jungles and even coffee-growing zones.

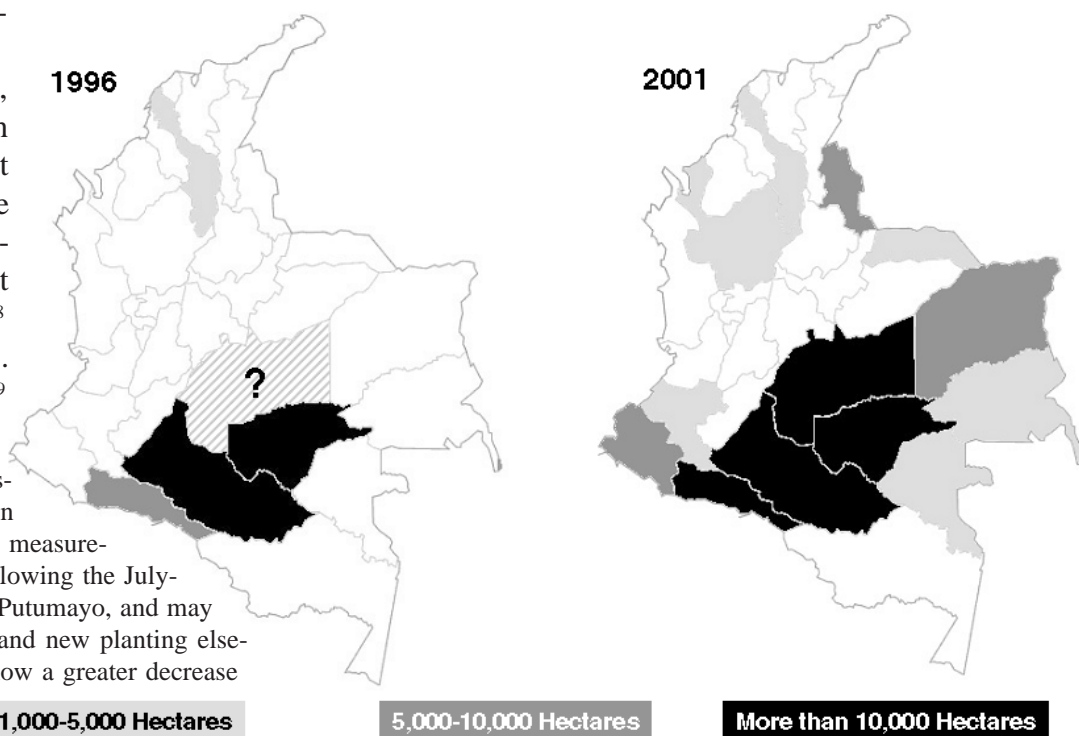
Since at least the late 1980s, total coca cultivation in South America – perhaps the most meaningful estimate of the drug’s availability – has remained remarkably steady at roughly 200,000 hectares.⁵⁸ The price of cocaine on U.S. streets has hardly budged.⁵⁹

* The United States will release estimates of 2002 coca cultivation in early March 2003. Since satellite measurements will occur immediately following the July-October fumigation campaign in Putumayo, and may not take into account replanting and new planting elsewhere, the 2002 statistics may show a greater decrease than probably exists.

Though the DEA noted a drop in purity levels in 2000, Administrator Asa Hutchinson gave the credit not to fumigation, but to law enforcement efforts hindering the processing of “an over supply of coca production in South America.”⁶⁰

Clinton and Bush Administration officials repeatedly argued that military training and engagement would ease Colombia’s human rights crisis and encourage the armed forces to end collaboration with paramilitary death squads. Sadly, the human rights situation shows no signs of improvement; in fact, it has worsened. The Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), a widely

Departments where coca is grown in Colombia



“I think the whole policy is stupid and doomed.” - Rep. David Obey (D-Wisconsin), the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, May 2002

cited Colombian non-governmental organization, estimated that violence forced 353,120 people from their homes during the first nine months of 2002, more than in all of 2001.⁶¹ The Colombian Commission of Jurists reported in September 2002 that political violence was killing an average of twenty people per day, double what the CCJ was reporting in 1998.⁶² Military-paramilitary linkages remain a huge problem: in January 2003, Human Rights Watch reported that “there were numerous and credible reports of joint military-paramilitary operations and the sharing of intelligence and propaganda” in 2002.⁶³

Clinton Administration proponents of Plan Colombia also argued that the aid package would speed President Pastrana’s peace process with the FARC by forcing the guerrillas to negotiate “in good faith.”⁶⁴ The opposite happened: Plan Colombia gave the upper hand to hardliners on both sides, further polarizing an already difficult attempt at dialogue. On February 20, 2002, talks with the FARC collapsed, and a renewal seems highly unlikely in the near term.

War on terror

Plan Colombia’s architects also promised that they would achieve their goals without “mission creep.” During the 2000 debate, U.S. officials assured skeptics that they had no interest in supporting an El Salvador-style counter-insurgency campaign against the FARC, ELN and AUC. Gen. Barry McCaffrey, the drug czar, stated the policy clearly in November 2000: “The primary focus of this supplemental effort is to provide support for Colombia’s intensifying counter drug effort. As a matter of Administration policy, the United States will not support Colombian counterinsurgency efforts.”⁶⁵

At the time, there was little debate over this point; the administration and Congress both saw drugs as the main U.S. interest, peace talks with the guerrillas were ongoing, and little appetite existed – beyond a few voices on the right – for a costly plunge into Colombia’s seemingly endless war. Washington endeavored to limit its aid to drug-war priorities by providing assistance only through counter-narcotics funding accounts, overwhelmingly favoring security-force units

with counter-drug responsibilities, and building “firewalls” like PDD-73. Meanwhile, watchdog groups denounced any assistance that appeared to “cross the line” between the drug war and Colombia’s larger war.

On a single September morning, however, the drug war was instantly eclipsed by a new overseas crusade: the global “war on terror.” This eclipse was not total in Colombia, though, as the FARC, ELN and AUC are all on the State Department’s list of international terrorist organizations (with the AUC, ironically, added on September 10, 2001). For Bush Administration officials and their supporters in Congress, the two “wars” simply overlap.

The advent of the “war on terror” has kept Washington from learning any lessons from its lack of results in Co-

In Their Own Words: In the months after September 11, U.S. officials began comparing Colombia’s armed groups to international terrorist organizations with global reach, like Al Qaeda.

“The FARC are doing the same thing as global-level terrorists, that is, organizing in small cells that don’t have contact with each other and depend on a central command to organize attacks, in terms of logistics and financing. It is the same style of operation as Bin Laden.” – Sen. Bob Graham (D-Florida), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, September 29, 2001⁶⁷

“The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), are on the list because they participate in terrorist activities. They will receive the same treatment as any other terrorist group, in terms of our interest in pursuing them and putting an end to their terrorist activities. ... It will include the use of all the resources in our power as well as those available to the countries in the region ... where appropriate, as we are doing in Afghanistan, the use of military force, if that is appropriate to put an end to their activities.” – State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Francis X. Taylor, October 14, 2001⁶⁸

“There’s no difficulty in identifying [Bin Laden] as a terrorist, and getting everybody to rally against him. Now, there are other organizations that probably meet a similar standard. The FARC in Colombia comes to mind, the Real IRA comes to mind, all of which, both of which are on our terrorist list down at the State Department.” – Secretary of State Colin Powell, October 25, 2001⁷⁰

“It is not just narcotics. It has developed into terrorism and we need to fight terrorism in our hemisphere.” – Chairman Rep. Mark Souder (R-Indiana), chairman of the House Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources Subcommittee, November 8, 2001⁷¹

“The terrorist threat also goes beyond Islamic extremists and the Muslim world. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia poses a serious threat to US interests in Latin America because it associates us with the government it is fighting against.” – CIA Director George Tenet, February 6, 2002⁷²

“Let’s face it, the FARC, ELN and AUC are terrorists who support their activities with drug money. Although they do not have the reach of Al Qaeda or Hamas, they do have international reach, which includes smuggling drugs out of Colombia and into the United States and Europe.” – Rep. Cass Ballenger (R-North Carolina), chairman of the House Western Hemisphere Affairs Subcommittee, April 11, 2002⁷³

“Some caution us against providing assistance to Colombia, invoking the specter of Vietnam. But the true comparison is with Afghanistan under Taliban rule, only this time located in our own hemisphere.” – Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Illinois), chairman of the House International Relations Committee, April 24, 2002⁷⁴

lombia. Instead, the military-dominated approach is intensifying. Even before September 11, 2001, the new Bush Administration had initiated a “review process” to explore the possibility of going beyond the drug war to help Colombia’s government fight the guerrillas and the paramilitaries.⁶⁶ In the wake of the tragedy, key officials and members of Congress began aggressively pushing to adopt a counter-terror stance. Comparisons between Colombian groups (usually the FARC) and al-Qaeda began to show up in the press with some regularity.

The counter-terror mission’s proponents gained momentum after the Pastrana government’s peace talks with the FARC collapsed on February 20, 2002. On March 6, the House of Representatives passed a resolution calling on President Bush to submit legislation “to assist the Government of Colombia to protect its democracy from United States-designated foreign terrorist organizations” – in other words, to allow Colombia to use U.S. military aid in its war against the guerrillas and paramilitaries.⁷⁵

Protecting an oil pipeline

In fact, the broadened mission’s first manifestation appeared several weeks earlier. The Bush Administration’s 2003 foreign aid request to Congress, submitted on February 4, 2002, included the first significant non-drug military aid to Colombia since the Cold War: \$98 million to help the Colombian Army protect the 480-mile long Caño Limón-Coveñas oil pipeline. A U.S. oil company, Occidental Petroleum of Los Angeles, owns 44 percent of the crude that flows through the Caño Limón tube, which Colombian guerrillas dynamited 166 times in 2001.⁷⁶ “Clearly we have an energy threat,” warned Rep. Mark Souder (R-Indiana) in May 2002. “Colombia is either our seventh or eighth largest supplier of oil. Our economy depends on that. We already have instability in the Middle East. We have more compelling reasons to be involved in Colombia than almost anywhere else in the world.”⁷⁷

The \$98 million would go through a non-drug budget account, the Foreign Military Financing Program, a category that as recently as the late 1990s was mainly used to grant military aid to the Middle East. It would buy about a dozen helicopters, training, intelligence and equipment for the Colombian Army’s 18th Brigade, based in Arauca department on the Venezuelan border; a new 5th Mobile Brigade; and Arauca-based marine and police units. In addition to helicopters, the head of the U.S. Southern Command said in April 2002, the units will receive “weapons and ammunition, vehicles, night vision devices, and communications equipment.”⁷⁸ U.S. personnel stationed in

Arauca will train at least 4,000 of their Colombian counterparts, starting with the 18th Brigade.⁷⁹

“I think that these brigades that we’re talking about will be very offensively oriented,” said Gen. Galen Jackman, the Southern Command’s director of operations. “That is focused the enemy, as opposed to a static defense around the pipeline.”⁸⁰

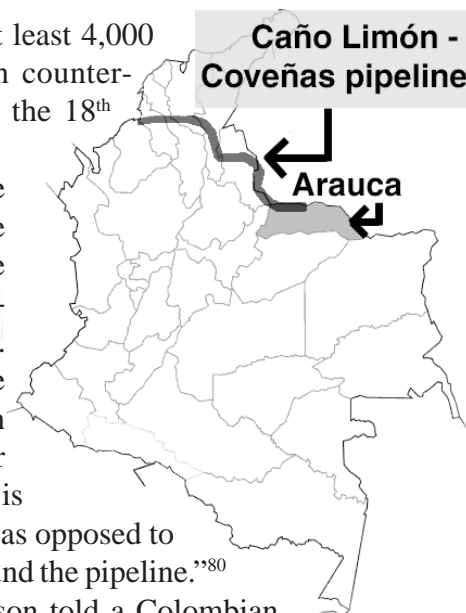
Ambassador Patterson told a Colombian newspaper that pipeline defense could be only a first step. “There are more than 300 strategic infrastructure points for the United States in Colombia. ... But first we’ll see how this Caño Limón project goes.”⁸¹

As of mid-January 2003, the \$98 million still awaits approval from a Congress whose budget appropriations process is seriously behind schedule. Passage is nonetheless likely, particularly since the Republican-dominated legislature’s haste to approve the 2003 budget will leave little opportunity for debate or amendments. This leaves few chances for the proposal’s many fierce critics, such as Rep. Gene Taylor (D-Mississippi), who warned in May 2002, “I think it is insane for this nation to spend \$98 million to protect a pipeline that Occidental Petroleum owns with American lives. I am going to make this as personal as humanly possible. President Bush, I will send my kids to guard that pipeline when you send your kids to guard that pipeline.”⁸²

H.R. 4775 and the “unified campaign”

Though the 2003 foreign aid bill awaits debate, the Bush Administration already received an early \$6 million to “jump-start” the pipeline-protection program, thanks to another piece of legislation: a \$28.9 billion “emergency” budget outlay for counter-terrorism (H.R. 4775) signed into law on August 2, 2002. As a result, at least sixty U.S. Special Forces are in Arauca, where training is beginning in January 2003.⁸³

The importance of H.R. 4775 goes well beyond the pipeline plan. A single sentence in the bill laid the groundwork for a dramatic shift in U.S. policy. H.R. 4775 changed U.S. law to allow the Colombian government to use all past and present counter-drug aid – all the helicopters, weapons, brigades and other initiatives of the past



“We could find ourselves engulfed in a morass that would eat up American soldiers like we have not seen in years.” - Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Missouri), the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, May 2002

several years – against the insurgents. The legislation calls this “a unified campaign against narcotics trafficking [and] against activities by organizations designated as terrorist organizations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).”⁸⁴

An attempt to remove this provision, led by Reps. Jim McGovern (D-Massachusetts) and Ike Skelton (D-Missouri), failed in the House of Representatives, though it lost by a narrow margin of 192-225. With the stroke of a pen, billions of dollars of drug-war aid suddenly became “counter-terror” aid. “This is a major policy change,” warned Rep. Skelton, the senior Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee. “We could find ourselves engulfed in a morass that would eat up American soldiers like we have not seen in years.”⁸⁵ Added Rep. McGovern, “the United States will be plunging head first into a grinding, violent and deepening civil war that has plagued Colombia for nearly four decades.”⁸⁶

“Counter-terror” assistance: new initiatives

Removing the “line” between counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism paves the way for a much broader variety of U.S. military-aid activities. Indeed, U.S. officials sound ambitious: “Our main objective is to help transform the Colombian military to a force that is capable of defeating the terrorist organizations, establishing presence and defense, in order to provide a safe and secure environment and governance throughout Colombia,” the Southern Command’s Gen. Jackman told Britain’s *Jane’s Defence Weekly* in December 2002.⁸⁷

Beyond the pipeline program, recent press reports indicate that Southern Command is about to help Colombia’s Army create a new commando unit. *Jane’s* explains, “The commando unit, to be modeled on a US Army Ranger battalion, will learn long-range tactical level reconnaissance and surveillance, and direct action focused on terrorist leaders. ... Troops have already been selected for the commando battalion and have begun preliminary training. The unit is set to be operational by the end of FY03 [Fiscal year 2003].”⁸⁸

In addition to the \$6 million down payment on pipeline protection, H.R. 4775, the August 2002 supplemental budget bill, included \$29 million for two other non-drug initiatives. \$25 million from the State Department’s Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) account – a program

that has never before provided more than a trickle of aid to Latin America – will support anti-kidnapping (GAULA) units in Colombia’s army and police (Colombia’s guerrilla groups, which raise much of their funds through ransoms, are responsible for the majority of the world’s kidnappings). The rest will fortify vulnerable police stations in guerrilla-dominated areas.⁸⁹

Another U.S.-funded initiative to increase police presence is the establishment of mobile “*carabiniero*” squads to operate in rural Colombia. The United States will help to equip and train sixty-four of these new 150-man police units, to be deployed throughout zones where Colombia’s government maintains little presence.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, the Bush Administration is deciding whether to seek a re-negotiation of its Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) – sections of airports or military bases in Ecuador (Manta), El Salvador (Comalapa), and the Netherlands Antilles (Aruba and Curacao). According to agreements signed with each country after the 1999 closure of Howard Air Force Base in Panama, U.S. military planes may use these installations for counter-drug or search-and-rescue missions only.

While changes to PDD-73 broaden the United States’ ability to share non-drug intelligence with the Colombians, the FOL agreements still prohibit U.S. forces from acting on any such intelligence gathered by aircraft flying in and out of the third-country bases. As U.S. military officials have explained to CIP, if an aircraft departs the Manta FOL and spots a column of guerrillas while flying over Colombian territory, the law would not allow the pilot to notify Colombia’s security forces.⁹¹

The outcome of a possible re-negotiation attempt would be far from certain. Allowing U.S. forces on counter-insurgent missions to use their territory would mean a large change in a neighboring country’s relationship to



Colombia's conflict. "Our country cannot become a new Cambodia or a new Laos, in case Colombia's war escalates into a Vietnam," warned Juan José Pons, the president of Ecuador's Congress, in 2000.⁹²

Pressures for greater military aid

Beyond these initiatives, it is not yet clear how U.S. activities will expand to match Washington's much more ambitious mission in Colombia. While the purpose of U.S. military aid has expanded remarkably, we have not seen a similar expansion in the amount of U.S. assistance – at least not yet.

Certainly, military aid is rising – Colombia's security forces will get over \$100 million more in 2003 than they did in 2002. The pipeline program accounts for most of that increase. Yet another \$100 million would have only marginal impact on the direction of a conflict involving nearly 40,000 well-funded insurgents. Pressures for dramatically increased military assistance are likely to build up over the next year or two.

The fifty-four Plan Colombia helicopters delivered to Colombia's Army offer an example of how these pressures will mount. Until 2002, if the Colombian military sought to use the helicopters for a mission without an explicit counter-narcotics purpose, the U.S. embassy was legally bound to prohibit their use. "Right now, if the FARC is attacking place X, Y or Z in Colombia and it's not connected to narcotics, we don't allow the Colombians to use those helicopters," the State Department's Marc Grossman said in early 2002.⁹³

Today, that prohibition no longer exists – but the U.S. embassy still must deny many of Colombia's requests to use the choppers, for the simple reason that fifty-four helicopters do not go very far in a large country with an armed conflict and an active anti-drug operation competing for U.S.-provided assets. "U.S. resources in Colombia are limited. U.S. helicopters and intelligence will not in themselves enable Colombians to eliminate terrorism in a country the size of France and the United Kingdom combined," explains Ambassador Patterson.⁹⁴

With the mission far broader than the resources available, U.S. officials are likely to be frustrated by having to continue saying "no" to their Colombian military partners. Accumulated frustrations would likely motivate a new request to Congress for still more military hardware. The same dynamic of expanded mission, resource pres-

sure, and escalating aid levels could play out for any other aspect of security assistance, from new brigades to the number of U.S. advisors.

By any measure, then, the U.S. military commitment to Colombia is very likely to continue increasing. Preliminary reports about the United States' 2004 foreign aid request to Congress – which could be issued as early as February 2003 – indicate that it may be at least \$100 million higher than 2003 levels (and thus over \$200 million higher than 2002). Beyond this, the crystal ball is hazy. Will military-aid levels grow to \$1 billion or more by 2005? Will we see an increased U.S. military presence in Colombia to carry out this expanded mission?

U.S. policymakers may soon find that "counter-terrorism" and "counter-insurgency" are identical in Colombia.

How much aid or U.S. involvement is enough to guarantee success? Does the United States even have a definition of what "success" would look like?

"What the administration has not done yet, in my view, is to clearly describe what our stake is in Colombia, what changes are needed to the current policy, and what we hope to achieve by making these changes. ... Nor has the administration, in my view, outlined the costs and benefits of our deeper involvement in this issue," warns Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Connecticut), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Western Hemisphere subcommittee.⁹⁵

Counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency

It is difficult to answer these questions, because the Bush Administration is doing two contradictory things at the same time. Decisionmakers are expanding the U.S. security commitment to Colombia, even while they lower the country's rank on their list of foreign policy priorities. Top policymakers, focused on Iraq, North Korea, and terrorist groups with "global reach," have not crafted a coherent strategy that reflects Colombia's complicated challenges. Instead, they have opted for steady military-aid increases within the framework of a blanket "counter-terror" approach.

A key danger of drifting into Colombia's conflict under the banner of "counter-terrorism" is that U.S. policymakers may soon find that "counter-terrorism" and "counter-insurgency" are identical in Colombia. Unlike other second-tier "war on terror" countries like the Philippines, Georgia or Yemen, where the terrorist enemy is a shadowy group of a few dozen or a few hundred, Colombia's three "terrorist" groups are real armies. They have tens of thousands of members, control significant

amounts of territory, and have long histories. A “counter-terror” effort in Colombia, then, risks evolving into an El Salvador-style counter-insurgency campaign – complete with U.S. advisors accompanying combat operations (something they do not do now) – in a country fifty-three times larger than El Salvador, with eight times as many people.

The financial cost of such a campaign would be staggering. Consider the potential cost of helicopter purchases alone: “At the end of the conflict in El Salvador, the military had 50 helicopters while Colombia, fifty times larger, has only roughly four times as many,” the Defense Department’s assistant secretary for international security affairs, Peter Rodman, told a Senate subcommittee in April 2002.⁹⁶

The cost could be even higher – and chances for success still fewer – if Washington chooses to bail out an elite that has made few sacrifices toward its own war effort. The Southern Command’s Gen. Jackman reminds us, “I think it’s important to underscore that this is Colombia’s conflict to win, an important lesson we learned from our experiences in Vietnam.”⁹⁷ Yet a Colombian law excludes conscripts with high school degrees – meaning all but the poor – from service in combat units. “How do I make a case of dumping U.S. dollars and equipment into a region here when you can’t get college-aged kids to serve in the military, to take on the AUC and the FARC?” Sen. Dodd asked in April 2002.⁹⁸

A wealthy minority with a history of tax evasion has yet to contribute sufficient resources to its war effort. “They’re spending for military budget, about 3.5 percent of GDP,” said Rep. Obey, citing combined military and police expenditure. “You might be able to beat Grenada with that kind of a budget, but I don’t see them handling their own military problems.”⁹⁹ Colombia’s new president, Álvaro Uribe, declared a one-time “war tax” on the wealthiest Colombians; in the best of cases, though, this levy would only raise an additional 1.2 percent of GDP for one year.¹⁰⁰ “I have got to tell you, every time I come back from Colombia, I come back with the same sick conclusion, and that is that the Colombians are going to do their utmost to get us to fight this civil war for them,” warned Rep. Taylor in May 2002.¹⁰¹

The human cost could be nightmarishly high as well. The El Salvador example is once again instructive. It took twelve years and nearly two billion dollars of military aid to achieve only a stalemate in El Salvador, after fighting killed 70,000 people and exiled over a million. A central goal of U.S. policy should be to avoid such a humanitar-

ian disaster – especially on the scale of a country the size of Colombia.

Human rights

Central to avoiding further humanitarian disaster is avoiding any possibility that U.S. assistance could benefit paramilitaries, whether directly or indirectly. This will be harder to do as military assistance increases and broadens in scope.

While guerrilla brutality is worsening to sickening levels, the Colombian military’s toleration and abetting of paramilitaries also continues in much of the country. CIP staff visited eight departments of Colombia in 2001 and 2002; in each, we heard denunciations from local officials, labor leaders, human rights defenders, and church representatives of routine military-paramilitary cooperation, such as ignoring AUC roadblocks, vacating zones before paramilitary attacks, or soldiers and paramilitary thugs appearing together in public.

As the U.S. aid mission expands, it remains to be seen whether existing legal safeguards will be enough to prevent our assistance from reaching unintended beneficiaries. In an unlikely but not impossible scenario, for instance, the United States might tell the Colombian military that guerrillas are in village X, only to see military personnel share this intelligence with paramilitaries who go on to massacre civilians in village X.

The future: recommendations for a new policy

2003 is likely to be another grim year for Colombia. Hard-line President Uribe continues to act on his belief that “only bullets will win this war,” declaring a state of emergency but failing to reclaim significant amounts of guerrilla-held territory.¹⁰⁵ The guerrillas remain far from renewed peace talks. The FARC, its hard-line leaders increasing the group’s military savagery and political isolation, has increased its share of killings and its ability to operate in urban areas. The paramilitaries, seeking negotiations with a president whom its leaders profess to admire, continue their systematic violence against labor leaders, human rights defenders, journalists and other non-violent reformers. Meanwhile, as their bosses focus their attentions on other parts of the world, mid-level State and Defense Department officials are putting the finishing touches on their 2004 aid request to Congress.

These officials – and the members of Congress who must consider their proposed strategy – would do well to



Colombia is 53 times larger than El Salvador.

heed a piece of advice attributed to Will Rogers: “If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging.” The drug war has so far failed to yield a shred of progress in Colombia. It is unlikely that success lies in adding a second war (on terrorism) – with a special emphasis on helping a U.S. oil company – while lesser amounts of economic assistance lag behind.

“The United States shares Colombia’s vision of a prosperous democracy, free from the scourges of narcotics and terrorism, which respects human rights and the rule of law,” reads a December 2002 State Department report.¹⁰⁶ It is impossible to realize this vision, however, with a strategy that overwhelmingly favors the armed, repressive part of Colombia’s state. Security, of course, is of crucial importance, but it is achieved through neither helicopters nor a focus on drugs and oil pipelines.

In order to achieve true security, decreased drug production and the demobilization of armed groups, the Center for International Policy recommends the following changes to U.S. policy in Colombia.

- **Recognize that “security” is more than a military goal.** “We can’t have alternative development,” Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told a Senate caucus in September 2002, “until we’ve gotten a much better security system.”¹⁰⁷ The deputy secretary articulates a widespread but misguided belief that military and economic aid must occur sequentially, one before the other. In practice, efforts to address the root causes of the conflict cannot wait until some future moment when “security conditions” are considered to exist. A soldier can be stationed every few square feet in a zone – but the zone still won’t be secure while the population is hungry, distrustful of the state, and courted by armed groups.

Counter-drug aid in the Bush Administration’s 2003 request

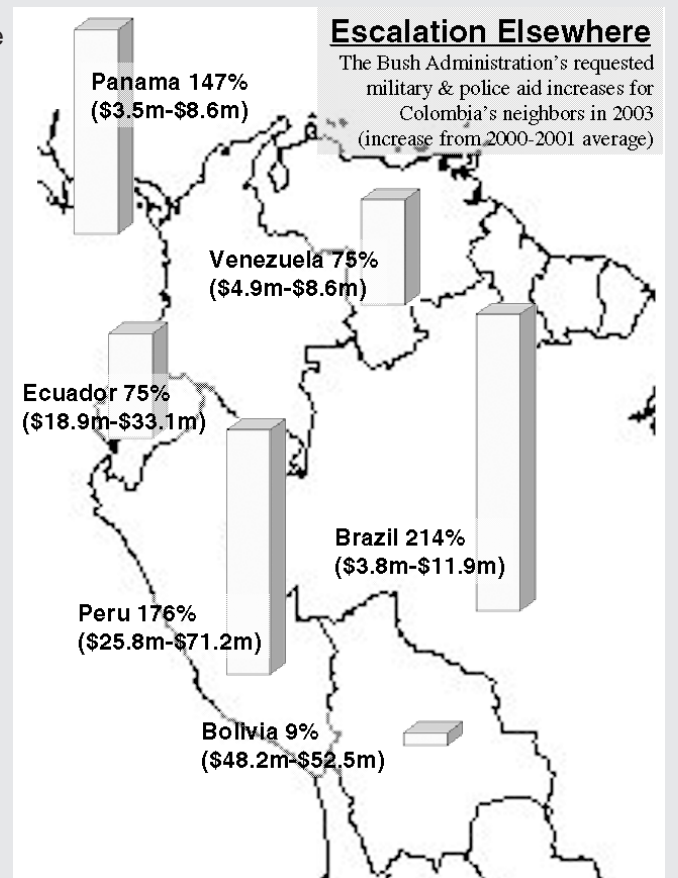
The 2003 foreign aid bill, still before Congress as this report goes to press, includes more than just pipeline-protection aid and counter-terrorism initiatives. The drug war still serves as the framework for most U.S. assistance to Colombia.

If Congress grants President Bush his entire request, the 2003 bill would provide Colombia with \$538 million in assistance, of which \$383 million would go to the police and military. (An additional estimated \$115 million in military aid would come through Defense Department’s annual budget.) \$155 million in economic and social assistance would go toward such programs as alternative development (\$54.5 million), assistance to the displaced and other vulnerable groups (\$45.5 million), “support for democracy” (\$24 million) and protection of human rights workers, witnesses, prosecutors and judges (\$2 million). It is probable, though not certain, that human rights and fumigation conditions will once again appear in the law.

As in 2002, most of this assistance is part of the “Andean Regional Initiative,” the name that the Bush Administration has given its counter-drug assistance package to Colombia and six of its neighbors – Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela – all of which would see military and police aid increases if the administration’s request is fulfilled.

Much aid to Colombia will maintain the counter-drug military and police units that the United States has helped to create or support during the past several years. Follow-on training, equipment upgrades, fuel, and helicopter maintenance will be major expenses, as will the cost of supporting a dramatic expansion in aerial fumigation (from 84,000 hectares in 2001 to over 130,000 in 2002, with a goal of 200,000 hectares sprayed in 2003).¹⁰²

The United States will use some of these funds to help create yet another unit in the Colombian military: a second army counter-narcotics brigade. This 1,700-man unit, which will operate in the eastern departments of Guaviare, Guainía and Vichada, will use some of the helicopters granted to the First Counter-Narcotics Brigade by the 2000 “Plan Colombia” aid package.¹⁰³ The Southern Command estimates that the cost of setting up the brigade will be \$30 million: \$18 million for equipment and \$12 million for training. U.S. Special Forces teams would train each of the brigade’s four battalions over the course of a year, one battalion per quarter.¹⁰⁴



The United States should recall the dictates of its own counter-insurgency doctrine, which emphasizes the importance of winning the population’s “hearts and minds.” This means that spending for basic needs in Colombia

must increase dramatically (easily done by cutting high-cost military-aid initiatives) and speed up significantly. It makes no sense to avoid assisting populations in conflictive or isolated areas – these are the zones where governance most needs to be strengthened.

• **Abandon fumigation in favor of an eradication strategy that actually strengthens the Colombian government.** A government that expects to control its territory cannot enforce its laws anonymously, from a spray plane. Few Colombian coca-growers have had significant contact with their government, which they associate only with military patrols and herbicides. Achieving a lasting drop in illicit coca cultivation will require government representatives to be present in drug-cultivation zones, explaining to coca-growers face to face that their illegal activity must cease and that alternatives are available. Without such regular contact, the most systematic, efficient fumigation effort imaginable would still be tantamount to counter-insurgency in reverse, creating new support for illegal armed groups and encouraging coca-growers to set up elsewhere in Colombia's vast untouched wilderness.

Nonetheless, at present the U.S. and Colombian governments are immovably committed to expanded fumigation. This raises a more immediate humanitarian issue: spraying must at least be accompanied with emergency food assistance for coca-growing families whose means of subsistence has been destroyed. Starving people is neither a moral nor an effective eradication strategy.

• **Let local populations take the lead in their own development and security.** Washington and Bogotá will not succeed if they dictate social reforms, changes in agrarian policy, or security decisionmaking to affected populations. Instead of paternalistic handouts like the failed “social pacts,” the government should follow the lead of governors and mayors, peasant organizations, producer federations, indigenous organizations and others who understand their communities' challenges and needs. Ideas for local alternatives abound throughout Colombia, from the detailed proposals issued by governors in southern Colombia to the “life plans” of indigenous *cabildos*. Some U.S.-funded programs, such as efforts to strengthen municipal governments in southwest Colombia or the revamped USAID program in Putumayo, are making some effort to build local capacities. These efforts are small, however, reaching only a minuscule fraction of those af-

ected by rural Colombia's violence and economic collapse, and should be significantly expanded.

• **Increase third countries' involvement and assistance.** Helping Colombia out of its multiple crises calls for more than bilateral cooperation. Yet most European donors and Colombia's neighbors have distanced themselves from the United States' military-dominated strategy. Other donors must be brought into the design and implementation of a common, coordinated assistance effort. This would require U.S. officials to yield on occasion to the priorities of European donors and democratically elected Andean neighbors.

• **Reduce and reorient security assistance to help Colombia's government make security a “public good.” Deliver such aid transparently and subject it to strict human rights standards.** Aiding Colombia's military and police is a potentially dangerous undertaking. The United States' often tragic history of security assistance to Latin America is well documented, while the Colombian military's historic role has been to protect the interests of a powerful few, often against non-violent opponents.

Nonetheless, Colombia's civilian population faces immediate threats from illegal armed groups, and it is the state's job to protect them. Colombia and its security forces must break radically with past patterns and make security a public good – available to all, even the poor, the powerless, and the opposition. This goal does not guide current U.S. aid to Colombia; instead of protecting the weak, our assistance protects spray planes and oil pipelines. U.S. security assistance must be decreased and reoriented toward helping Colombia's security forces fulfill their long-neglected responsibility to the country's most vulnerable citizens.

As the past has shown, without extreme vigilance even this aid can end up fortifying Colombia's unjust order and worsening the human rights climate. Any military aid to Colombia must therefore be provided in a very transparent way – detailed information about assistance must be freely available to both

countries' citizens – and subject to rigorous human rights conditions forcing a cutoff if human rights violations go unpunished.

• **Make further assistance contingent on Colombia paying a greater share.** Colombia is simply too big for the United States to come to its rescue. Whether military or economic in nature, U.S. assistance will have only mar-



The governors of Tolima, Cauca, Nariño and Putumayo have developed detailed plans for developing and pacifying their departments, but lack funding to carry them out.

ginal impact if not accompanied by a significant increase in Colombians' own contribution. This will require privileged Colombians to undergo deep sacrifices, which would be another major break with the past.

- **View security and human rights as inseparable and mutually reinforcing.** Human-rights priorities must be central to all U.S. assistance. This means consistently enforcing human rights law, interpreted strictly (“complying” should mean “fully complying,” not “sometimes complying”). Human rights measures should be seen as a useful tool for encouraging action against paramilitary groups and for ending the impunity that allows so much abuse and corruption to continue. Making human rights a central priority means taking a strong and vocal stand on behalf of threatened human rights defenders, union leaders, journalists and other non-violent reformers – even if they criticize U.S. policy. Washington must not offer unqualified, blanket support for President Uribe’s security initiatives, several of which risk endangering civilians by placing them in the midst of conflict.

- **Keep the troop cap and restrictions on U.S. personnel in combat.** Pressure to change the U.S. presence in Colombia, such as an increase in the troop cap or a deployment of U.S. advisors to accompany combat operations, would be a signal that Washington is crossing a dangerous threshold. Existing limits on U.S. personnel in Colombia – whether in the law or as a matter of policy – should be preserved.

- **Invest more on drug treatment.** Studies have demonstrated that increasing addicts’ access to treatment programs at home is more cost-effective than interdiction and eradication abroad. Though the Clinton and Bush administrations have raised the treatment budget since the mid-1990s, far too many addicts cannot enter programs for lack of funds. A significant reduction in demand at home would mean much less money for guerrilla and paramilitary weapons and abuses.

- **Recognize that Colombia’s problems are complex and inter-related, and that focusing too much on one aspect courts failure.** The State Department’s December report indicates that, on some level, U.S. officials know this already. “Colombia’s problems are complex and do not lend themselves to any easy or rapid solution,” the report reads. “The country’s present-day troubles reflect numerous, deeply-rooted problems including limited or non-existent government presence and law enforcement capability in large areas of the interior, the dramatic expansion of illicit drug cultivation contributing to endemic violence, and deep social and economic inequities.”¹⁰⁸

The Center for International Policy shares this analysis, which we note makes no mention of oil pipelines or “narco-terrorism.” A genuine U.S. and Colombian effort to address these “deeply-rooted problems” would be a radical break with historic patterns and policies, more revolutionary than anything Colombia’s insurgents claim to be fighting for.

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⁹⁹ U.S. Embassy Bogotá, October 8, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, April 24, 2002.

¹⁰¹ Peter Rodman, assistant secretary of defense for International Security Affairs, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, April 24, 2002 <<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/columbia/02042402.htm>>.

¹⁰² Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, September 17, 2002.

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