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Plan Colombia – Six Years Later: The Center for International Policy releases a new report on Putumayo and Medellín, Colombia

In July 2000, President Clinton signed into law a big aid package called “Plan Colombia,” with the ambitious goal of helping Colombia to resolve its related problems of drug trafficking and violence. Since then, the United States has given Colombia \$4.7 billion. No other country outside the Middle East comes close. Of that aid, 4 out of every 5 dollars – \$1.5 million per day – has gone to Colombia’s police and military.

Since 2002, meanwhile, Colombia’s government has been led by a president, Álvaro Uribe, whose governance strategy – called “Democratic Security” – heavily favors military force.

Has this combination of two largely military strategies worked? After so much investment in weapons and offensives, is the country more secure, better governed, and out from under the illegal drug economy?

No, mostly not, finds *Plan Colombia – Six Years Later*, a new report from the Center for International Policy.

In July, exactly six years after Plan Colombia’s inception, CIP Colombia Program Director Adam Isacson visited Putumayo, the southern jungle department where U.S.-funded Plan Colombia operations began. He also went to Medellín, Colombia’s second-largest city which, due to its sharply reduced rates of violence, is often viewed as a showcase of the Uribe government’s U.S.-backed security policies.

In Putumayo, where the United States has invested hundreds of millions, CIP found that conditions had improved only slightly. While massacres are less frequent and road travel is easier, guerrillas remain strong and active in the countryside, and supposedly demobilized paramilitaries continue to dominate the main towns. Cultivation of coca, which was reduced by an initial blitz of fumigation, is rebounding as the spray planes have followed the plant elsewhere in Colombia. And alternative-development programs have yielded mostly disappointing results. Putumayo, where Plan Colombia began, is still in crisis, and distrust of the Colombian government remains very strong.

In Medellín, the “miracle” of declining crime rates owes only partially to Uribe’s “Democratic Security” strategy. Increased military and police presence have made some difference, but two other factors have been at least as important.

First, “the paramilitaries won.” Though officially demobilized, local paramilitary leader “Don Berna” and his men now control much of Medellín’s organized crime. Their dominion over the city’s vast, historically conflictive slums is no longer disputed with guerrilla militias or other criminal gangs. As a result, they are killing far fewer people.

Second, Medellín’s city government is investing its own resources in poor neighborhoods’ governance, and in the reintegration of former rank-and-file paramilitary fighters and gang members. Medellín’s government has filled much of the vacuum left by the central government’s lack of a well-thought-out, well-financed strategy for assisting former combatants. In most Colombian cities and towns, though, this vacuum remains in place, leaving few options for thousands of unemployed men whose main skill is killing.

With twenty pages of narrative, graphics and photos, *Plan Colombia – Six Years Later* offers a rare, unvarnished view of conditions “on the ground” in Colombia and the impact of the United States’ high-profile, high-cost strategy. The report is available free of charge, as a PDF file in English, at <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/0611ipr.pdf>.