

PLAN COLOMBIA
Some Differing Perspectives

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FOREWORD

This is one in the Special Series of monographs stemming from the February 2001 conference on *Plan Colombia* cosponsored by the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College and The Dante B. Fascell North-South Center of the University of Miami. This monograph, with an introduction by Dr. Gabriel Marcella, includes four short, but interesting and important papers presented at the conference. General Charles E. Wilhelm, a former Commander-in-Chief of the United States Southern Command; General Alvaro Valencia Tovar, a former commander of the Colombian Army; Dr. Ricardo Arias Calderon, a former Vice President of Panama; and Mr. Chris Marquis, a correspondent for the *New York Times*, present four distinctly differing views regarding *Plan Colombia*.

Their perspectives reflect the uncertainty and confusion expressed at the conference regarding U.S. policy in Colombia and the implementation of *Plan Colombia*. In that connection, there appears to be no consensus on what *Plan Colombia* is and what it is not. This disarray, as well as additional questions generated from it, demonstrates a pressing need to pursue the debate. This is important because, one way or another, *Plan Colombia* affects us all.

The Strategic Studies Institute and the North-South Center are pleased to offer these four differing perspectives on *Plan Colombia* to help inform the ongoing national and international debates concerning security issues that affect the vital interests of the United States, Colombia, and the entire global community.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

PREFACE

This volume in our “Plan Colombia” series contains four expert presentations which were made to the February 2001 Miami symposium. The writers are a high-ranking retired military commander from Colombia and one from the United States, a leading Panamanian political figure, and a U.S. journalist. As might be expected, they look at the complex dilemma of Colombia from somewhat different angles.

Yet, unlike the fable of the elephant and the blind men, the authors offer us more elements in common than contrasting views. First, it is clear that none of them offers a panacea or quick-fix solution or even believes that any short-term solution is possible. That judgment is critical for the Bush administration as it faces the need to develop and explain its own approach to the Congress and to the American public, audiences who are inherently against long-term involvements when they can be avoided.

Second, each writer, in his own way, gives at least tentative or conditional support to *Plan Colombia* as designed by the Colombian Government and as supported by the United States, with a Congressional commitment of \$1.3 billion last year. No one states that the plan is perfect. But, as General Valencia points out, action is far better than “theoretical arguments” at this point, and the plan should be adjusted in the light of experience as time goes on. This is a sensible and pragmatic approach. All four agree, as well, that international support is crucial; Colombia cannot go it alone.

Third, the authors acknowledge that the real heart of the plan is what General Wilhelm calls the “soft component” consisting of “peace process, alternative development, social participation, human development, economic assistance, and fiscal and judicial reform.” Yet, as he states, the U.S.

assistance package so far (\$1.3 billion of the overall plan's requirement of \$7.5 billion) is focused on the military, or "hard" component.

Finally, the writers, especially Ricardo Arias Calderón of Panama, are keenly aware of the inability to contain the Colombian problems to Colombia. There is already a spill-over effect on Colombia's neighbors, and it can only increase. That understanding, plus an acknowledged need to give more attention to the social and economic issues, undoubtedly lies behind the Bush administration's new Andean Regional Initiative, announced May 17, 2001.

The Bush administration placed high priority, early in its tenure, on the economic integration of the Americas. That objective includes achievement of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas by the year 2005, and within the framework of democratic governance as agreed at the Third Summit of the Americas held February 2000 in Quebec City. A worsening of the situation in Colombia can cast serious doubt on the attainment of these goals.

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PLAN COLOMBIA: An Introduction

Gabriel Marcella

Colombia is the most compelling issue on the hemispheric agenda. The United States, the co-responsible party in consumption, is committed to support Colombia in fighting illegal narcotics. The central question is whether this will be enough to restore peace, economic growth, and a functioning democratic order to a deeply troubled nation. This monograph will explore the fundamental elements of the policy challenge for the United States and regional partners.

U.S. National Interests at Stake.

The national interests at stake for the United States are central to our well-being as a society, to regional security and international order, and to the future of economic integration (the Free Trade Area of the Americas) within a democratic framework for the Americas. U.S. trade with Colombia exceeds \$10 billion annually. The internal violence of Colombia not only depresses economic growth, but it also directly affects the sovereignty of Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil. Contraband, drug trafficking, money laundering, gun running, displaced people, the "balloon effect" of coca cultivation, corruption, and violence know no international boundaries. The Andean region, Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, the United States, Canada, and Europe comprise the theater of operations for international organized crime peddling cocaine and heroin, and enormous levels of institutional corruption. Estimates run as high as 90 percent for the amount of cocaine entering the United States that comes from Colombia, with Peru and Bolivia providing the balance. Drug related crime and violence,

accidents, the medical costs of addiction, rehabilitation, incarceration, and up to 52,000 deaths per year are a staggering cost to U.S. society.

Thus geopolitical calculus places the Colombian crisis within a new threat analysis that defies precise definition, that relies on the weakness of a failing state rather than the strength of a military power hostile to the United States. At the base of the new threat is an illegal international drug economy supported within Colombia by a criminal enterprise abetted and in alliance with insurgents and paramilitary forces, and externally by drug users estimated to number between 3.5 million (addicted) to 12 million in the United States alone. The institutional capacity of Colombia to deal with public security, to control its borders, and to protect the lives of its citizens has declined to such a degree that it's become a Hobbesian hell.¹ Its troubles are due not only to drugs, but also to the lack of state authority, legitimacy, and effective governance in major portions of a national territory three times the size of Montana, with enormous empty spaces absent government presence. The prospect of an autonomous Farlandia in eastern Colombia is not far-fetched.

The U.S. Response.

The United States has been providing economic and military assistance to Colombia for many years. The strategic imperative increased dramatically since the proclamation of *Plan Colombia* by President Andrés Pastrana in 2000. The strategic theory behind *Plan Colombia* is stunningly simple. It links economic development to a peace process with the insurgents. The central premise is that drug money feeds the coffers of the insurgents, whose attacks give rise to the self-defense organizations known as the paramilitaries. If the money is taken away, the insurgents cannot mount the attacks, they become less threatening, and the paramilitaries, who

originated to fill the security void left by the absence of public security, have less reason for being.

The prospects for bringing the insurgents and the paramilitaries to the peace table are enhanced because they have less justification to wage war against the state and against each other. *Plan Colombia* endeavors to strengthen the state, reenergize an economy with nearly 20 percent unemployment, generate the conditions necessary for the pursuit of peace, control the expansion of illegal crops and drug trafficking, and restore civil society. It is nothing less than a grand strategy for remaking Colombia into a dignified and secure democracy. It is not a military strategy nor is it an American plan, contrary to press commentary in the United States, Colombia, Latin America, and Europe. The United States will meet its obligation to *Plan Colombia* with a package of \$1.3 billion designed to provide military support (61 percent of the package) to help with the eradication of coca fields and dollars for alternative crops to wean away peasants from coca; bolster the economic infrastructure; strengthen institution building; and support the peace process. Some of the money will also go to Ecuador and Bolivia. The total plan will cost \$7.5 billion, with \$4 billion to come from Colombia and \$3.5 billion from the international community and the United States.

Plan Colombia is a carefully thought out set of mutually reinforcing initiatives that also recognizes the justice of "shared responsibility" between producing and consuming countries. There is no alternative to it. Yet, it will not succeed unless there is a security shield. Unless the Colombian security forces (military and police) can reestablish effective control over the national territory, the economic support and the institution building are not likely to take deep root in such an environment of insecurity. Thus Bogotá must establish sufficient military asymmetry on the battlefield to convince the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN) to negotiate an end to the conflict and deal with the paramilitaries in some effective fashion. There cannot be

three competing systems of law and order within a nation aspiring to democracy. Neither the insurgents nor the paramilitaries have any incentive at this moment to negotiate a true peace, rather than a tactical one designed to weaken the government. The peace process has no hope of success until the battlefield situation is decidedly in favor of the government.

Can *Plan Colombia* Work?

There are critics of U.S. support to *Plan Colombia* and even of the plan itself. The more informed nonideological critics argue that a policy based merely on counternarcotics support is *ipso facto* doomed to failure because the insurgents will find other sources of funding for their military operations, such as the lucrative kidnapping that reputedly netted the FARC \$250 million in 2000. Therefore, the threat to the Colombian state will survive by simply readjusting its political-military strategy. They argue further that were Colombia to achieve the objective of seriously reducing coca production in the high production areas of Putumayo, Caquetá, and Guaviare, the production would shift to other parts of Colombia, as is occurring into Nariño and the northeast. With sufficient demand in the United States and elsewhere, the production may also shift to Peru and Bolivia, if not Ecuador and Venezuela, thus recreating the problem of an illegal international economy elsewhere in the Andes.

The concern about the “balloon effect” is well-founded. Until 1997 the main producers of coca were Bolivia and Peru. By 1998 Colombia supplanted them with huge industrial size plantations in the southern departments, in addition to smaller peasant-owned plots. The relative success of Peru and Bolivia is instructive for the policy debate on Colombia. Peru and Bolivia reduced “illegal” coca production by close to 70 percent through a combination of voluntary and forced eradication, interdiction, and alternative cropping. The April 2001 shooting down of the

innocent American missionary flight in Peru bares the risks of air interdiction (such as the concept of due process in law), but the operations worked in seriously stemming the traffic. President Hugo Banzer of Bolivia promised to eliminate illegal coca cultivation completely by 2002. The new government in Peru will also face the challenge of maintaining the regime of incentives and disincentives in place. Similarly, the long-term prospects in Colombia will depend upon the central government's ability to mobilize enough resources, people, and programs for the long haul in order to integrate the *cocaleros* as dignified citizens of the nation. Bogotá hammered out *The Interagency Action Plan* in order to implement the 10-point *Plan Colombia* in the southern departments (mostly Putumayo). Yet, it is not clear that Colombia has the institutional capability and the political will to sustain a national program of the magnitude engendered by *Plan Colombia*. There are a lot of ifs in the future of *Plan Colombia*, mainly because of the government's manifest institutional weakness, as well as the reluctance of the European Community to fund its portion of "shared responsibility."

Thus, the United States must continue to stiffen the back of its allies. It is the only nation with the capacity to do so and to provide the full spectrum of support, from the diplomatic to the economic, military, and technical advice. Neither the Europeans nor the Latin Americans can aggregate the combination of political will and resources, and mobilize international support. An unwritten rule of international burden-sharing in the Americas is the United States will provide the leadership and most of the means, others may fall in line. Nothing of magnitude in the Hemisphere happens without U.S. leadership or support. That is partly the burden of history and the burden of a reluctant superpower. The United States has drawn the line in the sand with the commitment of Blackhawk and Huey helicopters to support the Colombian military and police in counternarcotics operations and with additional resources

for economic development, the peace process, and the judicial system.

In the American political process there is bipartisan support for Colombia, but there is no willingness to cross the line into counterinsurgency support. This is appropriate and ultimately to the advantage of both Colombia and the United States. The history of counterinsurgency support teaches that for the ally in the field to win, the United States should not make the sacrifices for it. The sacrifices in this case must be borne by the people of Colombia. They must undergo the frustration and the agony of learning, of making fundamental changes in institutional performance, of resurrecting an expensive judicial system which now permits close to 95 percent impunity for murders, and, finally, even of sharing the burden of war. Currently, the soldiers doing the fighting and the dying are from the poorer elements of society. Those with high school diplomas or higher are by law exempt from combat risk. The Colombian government and the armed forces must get serious about winning the war. Once all elements of society are engaged in the national cause, once the risk of combat is shared by rich and poor, the military and police will have better resources, leadership, intelligence, logistics, morale, and ultimately better support from the people of the nation. This will strengthen the Clausewitzian trinity of the people, the government, and the armed forces. Without it, the correlation of forces for the people and government of Colombia will continue to be problematic.

The bottom line on the prospects of *Plan Colombia* is a lot of ifs: if the government can sustain a national effort across the spectrum of policy instruments, establish decisive asymmetry on the battlefield, obtain foreign economic assistance, gain regional cooperation on border control, reform and rebuild institutions while fighting on all fronts, and do all of this by respecting the humanitarian norms of armed conflict.

The following commentaries by former Commander in Chief of the United States Southern Command, General Charles E. Wilhelm; former Commanding General of the Colombian Army, Alvaro Valencia Tovar; former Vice President of Panama, Ricardo Arias Calderón; and Chris Marquis of the *New York Times*, provide the fabric of pluralism on the merits of Plan Colombia. The views expressed by these distinguished authorities evidence the intense hopes, the cautious concerns, and the differing perspectives of a respected voice in the international community, of seasoned military leaders who know Colombia deeply, and of a journalist who brings forth the uncomfortable metaphors of the American experience in the 20th century.

ENDNOTE

1. For further background on the societal environment and strategic options in Colombia, see David Passage, *The United States and Colombia: Untying the Gordian Knot*, The Letort Papers, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2000; Gabriel Marcella and Donald Schulz, "Colombia's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads," *Strategic Review*, Winter 2000, pp. 3-22; Gabriel Marcella, *Plan Colombia: The Strategic and Operational Imperatives*, Special Series, *Implementing Plan Colombia*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 2001; Joseph R. Nuñez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia: A New Strategy for Peace*, Special Series, *Implementing Plan Colombia*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, May 2001.

A VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

Charles E. Wilhelm

"Does *Plan Colombia* move us in the right direction?" *Tal vez, el problema es la pregunta. . . .* Perhaps the problem is the question.

Plan Colombia does not move Colombia forward on a single axis as the question above implies. On the contrary, the plan is a comprehensive and integrated strategy intended to move Colombia forward on ten axes conceived collectively to solve the complex and interwoven social and security problems that have tormented the country for more than 4 decades.

In my view, too much attention has been paid in the United States to the so-called "hard component" of *Plan Colombia* (counterdrug measures and military reform), while not enough has been paid to the "soft component" (peace process, alternative development, social participation, human development, economic assistance, and fiscal and judicial reform). Perhaps this is so because the lion's share of the \$1.313 billion U.S. assistance package focuses on the hard component. But at the end of the day, it is important to remember that *Plan Colombia* is not a \$1.313 billion military strategy with a small social component—it is a \$7.513 billion peace strategy with a subordinate counterdrug component.

In an attempt to drive this point home, when I accompanied President Clinton on his trip to Cartagena in August 2000 during which he announced approval of the U.S. assistance package, I urged members of the bipartisan delegation to "remember 1882." I was asked, "What happened in 1882?" I replied, "Nothing terribly important that I can recall, but 1882 is not a date. The 18 and 82 reflect respectively the percent budget split between the hard and soft components of *Plan Colombia*."

President Andrés Pastrana is keenly mindful of this. During mid-January 2001, I visited with him at Casa Narino. We talked for 45 minutes. Even though I am a retired military officer, we spent only 10 minutes discussing military matters associated with the hard component of *Plan Colombia*. The other 35 minutes were spent discussing technologies and capabilities that could be applied to advance the social, economic, and humanitarian components of the strategy.

During my visit I met not once with Minister of Defense Luis Ramirez, nor did I meet with my friends and former professional colleagues Generals Tapias, Mora, or Velasco. Rather, I met with Eduardo Pizano, Claudia de Francisco, Olga Echeverri, Fernando Medellin, Juan Manuel Santos, and others whom President Pastrana has tapped to oversee and implement the soft component. We did not talk about helicopters and counterdrug battalions. We talked about housing for displaced people, development of municipal complexes in the south, and support for agriculture.

My point is simply this: public statements and press accounts have given *Plan Colombia* a distorted image. I don't know of a single official, either U.S. or Colombian, who has suggested that Colombia's problems are amenable to a military solution. That is why *Plan Colombia* has been embraced in both Washington and Bogotá. In my view, it correctly identifies the range of actions, in the proper proportions, that are required to suppress the illegal drug industry and to restore peace, security, and stability in Colombia.

Now I'd like to take a stab at answering another key question. Is *Plan Colombia* working? The right answer is that it's too early to tell, but there are some promising early indicators. While expanding on this point, I'd like to take leave of generalities and deal with hard facts and figures. In my view, the Colombia debate begs for this kind of treatment. Too many positions and too many accounts of conditions in Colombia are built on frameworks of hearsay,

speculation, supposition, and conjecture. The salient facts are as follows:

- Coca eradication operations were initiated in Putumayo Department on December 19, 2000. As of January 31, 2001, 24,123 hectares had been sprayed. This represents 28 percent of the 90,000 hectares under cultivation. Bear in mind, this was accomplished in just 6 weeks.

- Of this total, 22,332 hectares, or 92 percent, are in the AUC-dominated southwestern region of Putumayo.

- The eradication operations have not been uncontested. Eight aircraft have been hit by groundfire since operations began, but no aircraft or crew have been lost.

- The first and second battalions of the counterdrug brigade formed and trained under *Plan Colombia* have taken the field and are providing security for eradication operations.

- These units have engaged and destroyed 40 targets in Putumayo to include coca base labs, cocaine hydrochloride labs, and weapons storage facilities.

- There have been no reported human rights violations during these operations. Moreover, since the first battalion was formed in April 1999, no human rights complaints have been recorded against any members or units of the counterdrug brigade.

- The Colombian armed forces and National Police have been criticized for failing to work together. First-phase operations in Putumayo under *Plan Colombia* have witnessed unprecedented coordination and cooperation between the military and police. Combined military and police forces have shared U.S.-supplied helicopters while moving in and out of the area of operations; joint briefings are being conducted and intelligence is being shared.

- There is a civil dimension to these operations. Working together, the U.S. Agency for International Development

(USAID) and the Colombia National Plan for Alternative Development (PLANTE) have secured agreements with 1,453 families in the Puerto Asis municipality. These agreements provide for the voluntary eradication of almost 3,000 hectares of coca. PLANTE and USAID were hoping to conclude voluntary eradication agreements with a total of 5,500 families by the end of March 2001. Achievement of this goal would result in elimination of more than 10,000 hectares. By augmenting the “stick” of forcible aerial eradication with the “carrot” of alternative development in exchange for voluntary manual eradication, resistance by local officials is lessening.

- Developments are looking up in other parts of Colombia as well. On April 21, 2001, in Vichada department of eastern Colombia, Colombian soldiers supported by three U.S.-built Black Hawk helicopters captured the notorious Brazilian outlaw Luis Fernando Da Costa, believed to have been trading guns and cash with the EARC in exchange for cocaine.¹

To resort to a football metaphor, we are in a sense seeing Superbowl XXXV replayed . . . at least from the Baltimore Ravens' perspective. The Ravens put together a team and a game plan emphasizing a strong defense and a low-risk offense. They stayed the course with their strategy even through that agonizing stretch in October 2000 when they went more than 20 quarters without scoring a touchdown. They followed their strategy and game plan to the letter. They made it to the Super Bowl, and, once there, they won convincingly. I would be the last person to trivialize the struggle in Colombia, but there are strategic parallels with the Ravens, and these parallels can be instructive. *Plan Colombia* was carefully conceived. It is a balanced plan with soft and hard components. It emphasizes the soft over the hard. It will not achieve success overnight, and pitfalls will be encountered along the way. But at this very early stage, the organizations created under the strategy are doing what they were intended to do, desired results are being achieved,

and the strategy is being executed as it was conceived and written.

While it is entirely too early to declare victory, it is high time to stop prophesying defeat. In answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, "Is *Plan Colombia* moving us in the right *direction*?" I would answer yes, it is moving us in the right directions.

If the engagement of U.S. armed forces in Colombia is not instructive to them, then perhaps they are not paying sufficient attention. Here is a short list of six issues that deserve consideration by our men and women in uniform.

- *U.S. military-to-Colombian military engagement versus direct involvement.* Colombia is not and will not become another Vietnam.

- *The subordinate role of the military component to the social components of Plan Colombia.* What lessons should we draw from that in Colombia and, more important, from other countries we contemplate assisting?

- *Limits imposed by the U.S. Congress on our engagement.* Are they wise or not? Was I out in left field when I acceded in my congressional testimony to a 500-soldier troop limit and 300-person contractor limit?

- *The regional, hemispheric, and global implications.* They have always been considered, but have we given sufficient attention to unintended and second-order repercussions?

- *The power of the Interagency when done right, and the impotence of the Interagency when done wrong.* Is our interagency approach in Colombia enhancing our power or rendering us impotent?

- *The power of information and the penalties that are paid when it is not capitalized upon.*

I would like to close with some elaboration on that last bullet. At the end of January 2001, I called Colombian

Ambassador to the United States Luis Alberto Moreno at the Colombian Embassy in Washington. He was not having a good morning because of an article that appeared on the front page of *The Washington Post* that very day, dealing with atrocities perpetrated by the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) in Chengue.² I had read the article once, and now I went back and read it several more times. A light went on. That article was a little over 2,900 words long. By my count, only 500 of those words could be attributed to official sources of the Colombian government. If we fail to present our version of events to the news media, thus capitulating in the information struggle, how will we fare in seeking to advance our strategy before the court of public opinion, a strategy that is controversial at best?

ENDNOTES

1. "Manhunt ends with arrest," *The Sentinel*, Carlisle, PA, April 23, 2001, p. A3.

2. Scott Wilson, "Chronicle of a Massacre Foretold," *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2001, pp. A-1, A-24.

A VIEW FROM BOGOTA

Alvaro Valencia Tovar

Introduction.

Plan Colombia is in essence a joint effort of the Colombian and U.S. Governments to confront the profound crisis of that South American country. It is focused on drug dealing and its collateral activities, insurgent guerrillas, and self-defense outlaw bands euphemistically labeled “paramilitaries.”

The plan recognizes the fact that narcotrafficking and its impact on the Colombian nation are not simply one nation's problems but rather an international issue that bears enormous implications for the entire region and elsewhere. The scope of the plan encompasses four major components: social, economic, judicial, and military.

But even these four components give no true inkling of the breadth of the total Colombian drug phenomenon, particularly as it relates to the assignment of blame and responsibility. Colombia must, of course, shoulder a great deal of the blame for producing the raw materials—coca (used to make cocaine) and poppy flowers (used to make opium). But the other five aspects of the total drug cycle involve international participation:

- *Manufacturing.* The process of converting the raw materials to finished drugs relies on chemicals produced in industrialized countries.

- *Export.* Delivery of drugs out of Colombia is a gigantic enterprise carried out by the international mafia.

- *Distribution.* The smuggling of drugs into market countries involves a chain of non-Colombian intermediaries.

- *Money laundering.* The conversion of drug money into legitimate monetary instruments involves the entire international banking system.

- *Consumption.* Obviously if there were no demand, there would be no production. The countries that comprise the market for illegal drugs must shoulder a large share of the total drug problem.

Options with Regard to Plan Colombia.

In view of the controversy that has arisen since promulgation of the plan, two major options may be envisaged with regard to its disposition. The first would involve full revision prior to implementation. Such revision would occur after a stage of debate in both countries, particularly at congressional levels. Input would also be solicited from neighboring Andean countries and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), with the latter given an opportunity to speak on human rights violations and the military component of the plan. Criticisms and recommendations emerging from such discussion would be considered by the plan's authors in any revisions undertaken prior to further implementation.

The second option, diametrically opposite to the first, would be simply to proceed with implementation at this time, though allowing for mid-course adjustments and modifications as accumulative experience confirmed, invalidated, or otherwise qualified continuance of earlier selected courses of action.

In order to ascertain the better of the two options, we should consider that this is the first time an international effort has been mounted to cope with the drug issue. Lacking a basis of concrete previous experience, the plan is essentially theoretical. Modifying the plan before application, therefore, risks transforming it simply into another theoretical construct. Sooner or later, we must dive in and test the water, allowing ourselves flexibility through

feedback mechanisms to correct course as we learn what works and what doesn't. We cannot achieve perfection at this point, and any effort to do so will only occasion endless delay.

Plan Colombia is more of a broad catalogue of intentions than a detailed description of specified actions. In this regard, it is analogous to a future contingency plan rather than to an operational plan for implementation today in a real-world crisis against a real-world foe. Even if *Plan Colombia* was fully agreed to by all affected parties and resources were fully forthcoming, we would still face the task of drafting detailed operational plans under each of the plan's component parts for implementation on the ground or sea, in the air or space, or at the negotiating table.

I thus conclude that the second option is more desirable. In sum, it will allow progressive refinement and correction of courses of action that admittedly cannot be certified perfect today. Any grand human endeavor faces obstacles and difficulties. We know that at the start. What really matters is having the resolve to meet and overcome each obstacle in turn so that in time we will achieve the designated objective. *Plan Colombia* is beset by highly contentious issues which will evoke intensified opposition, misunderstanding, and recrimination as the plan is gradually applied in practice. We should do our best to identify and analyze these issues now, at least in broad terms, so that as they become salient we shall have ready at hand the facts, arguments, and arrangements to meet them.

Main Obstacles To ***Plan Colombia***.

I shall discuss the most significant and foreseeable of these issues under three categories: political, international, and Colombia's internal conflict.

Political. Internal factionalism in both Colombia and the United States could be a serious impediment to the plan. With the recent change in administrations in the United

States, new policies could emerge, and the dynamics of political party support could change. In Colombia, those who like and support President Andrés Pastrana are for the plan, whereas his political opponents are against it, frequently even those who lack familiarity with the plan and thus are in no position to judge it.

Much of the opposition to the plan is expressed in terms of intentional disinformation, particularly regarding its military component. The weight of this component is deliberately exaggerated in portrayals to the public, leaving the impression that *Plan Colombia* is a unidimensional militaristic approach to what is acknowledged to be an essentially socioeconomic problem. The fact that less than 20 percent of the assistance contemplated under the plan goes to strengthen the military is purposely downplayed or ignored by the plan's opponents.

Unfortunately, Colombian authorities made a serious blunder in their unveiling of the plan. There was no strategy or public relations campaign for winning public support. It need not have been that way because the enormous social and economic benefits inherent in the plan could have served as an excellent basis for appeals to public opinion. Instead, there was a sudden announcement that a bilateral plan had been approved by the two governments. The suddenness and lack of prior public dialogue startled people and undermined prospects for acceptance. Moreover, the people thereby became more susceptible to the unfounded charges that the plan would pave the way to direct intervention by the United States and eventually transform Colombia into another Vietnam. The public dialogue that then followed was marred by the paucity of reliable information, with the result that public suspicion and opposition had blossomed by the time the issue reached Congress.

Still another source of political opposition to the plan arrived in the form of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to the cause of human rights. These NGOs,

often on the basis of disinformation, argue that any strengthening of Colombia's military forces will encourage even more human rights violations. NGOs in Colombia pass allegations to their proxies in the United States and Europe, who accept them at face value without further investigation. Two Colombian NGOs are particularly notorious for their bias against military institutions; their accusations rarely reflect the realities and complexities of the episodes they so glibly discuss. These NGOs virtually never approach accused military or police for comment before public accusations are leveled. Thus the accused lack opportunities to defend themselves or justify their behavior.

The Colombian administration and the Ministry of Defense have disseminated a stern policy to protect human rights and give full expression to international humanitarian law. The commanding general of the armed forces and the commanders of the three services have each taken strong actions to implement the governing policy at all echelons of command. Officers charged with supervision and support of human rights measures are functioning at battalion level and above. According to a report published by the Office of the Attorney General, a drastic decrease of human rights abuses has occurred. Specifically, a mere two percent of such incidents reported in the year 2000 were committed by military personnel, though admittedly a good number of these are still under investigation.

It is significant that Colombian military institutions show the highest level of prestige among national institutions, higher even than that of the Catholic Church, according to a survey conducted by a private polling organization known for the accuracy of its reports. If military misbehavior was prevalent, such public approval ratings would be unattainable.

An army doesn't need to increase its strength to violate human rights. But it does need increased strength to cope with the military dimension of Colombia's total drug problem. The army as a matter of military philosophy

believes that support by the civilian population is fundamental to counteract domestic subversion and defeat guerrilla movements. It thus recognizes that to commit human rights abuses among the very people whose support it requires is counterproductive to accomplishing its mission.

Plan Colombia has as one of its basic planks judicial reform, which itself unfortunately is politically controversial, for complex reasons. In Colombia, there are more lawyers than all the other professionals together. To reach a consensus among them, even at the levels of the Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, and Ministry of Justice, is extraordinarily difficult. Despite this difficulty, the Military Code, one of the major sources of concern within Colombian jurisprudence, has already been reformed, and similar efforts are under way in other fields of justice. The proportion of lawyers in Congress remains high, however, and their national inclination toward litigious disputation has brought about endless delays and postponements of projects submitted by the executive.

International. Turning now to international impediments to successful implementation of *Plan Colombia*, we should first take note of the posture of countries neighboring Colombia. The possibility of spillover of the Colombian narco-trafficking mess to the territory of adjacent countries has provoked strong negative reactions, particularly in Venezuela and Ecuador. The same failure to exploit public dialogue as a means of gaining popular approval *within* Colombia has plagued efforts to secure the understanding, cooperation, and support of Colombia's neighbors. Proper preparatory communication with foreign governments and news media did not take place.

Obviously, the possibility of spillover exists; in fact, some spillover has been occurring for a long time, certainly predating the emergence of *Plan Colombia*. Displacement of workers from the drug plantations and processing plants to neighboring lands has taken place whenever Colombian

authorities conducted police actions near Colombian borders. But this unavoidable peril could be contained and managed by international cooperation and surveillance, under combined accords and planning.

Another troubling factor on the international landscape is the reservations of the European Union (EU). Several European governments are supporting the Colombian peace process and even extending loans and economic assistance to support the improvement of social, economic, and quality-of-life conditions in Colombia. Yet, these same governments are distinctly lukewarm toward *Plan Colombia* itself, mainly because of its military provisions. More specifically, they believe that the peace process does not justify investments in the armed forces by the Colombian state, particularly when such forces are seen to be an indirect agent of human rights abuses rather than a guardian against such abuses. However, this thinking seems not to consider that the outcome of the peace process is still uncertain, and that the insurgents have thus far refused to accept a cease-fire and suspension of armed hostilities against the military and civilian communities.

Colombia's Internal Conflict. Finally, with regard to obstacles to a successful realization of *Plan Colombia*, we turn to those growing out of the insurgency and counterinsurgency within Colombia's own borders. The guerrillas' strategy has turned toward intensifying attacks against small villages garrisoned by small police detachments wholly incapable of sustaining, let alone winning, armed clashes against far superior insurgent forces. This change of strategy is due to the serious setbacks suffered by guerrilla units in 1999 and 2000 when they tried to escalate the war from direct, elusive tactics to direct confrontation with large army units in pitched battles.

Although harassment of the civilian population by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) occurred long before *Plan Colombia* was ever envisioned, the FARC argues that its attacks against small villages are a reaction

against the plan. The obvious but still worrisome reason for this position is the need to block approval of *Plan Colombia's* military component, which will enhance the broad capabilities of the armed forces even though the assistance provided by the plan is narrowly directed to fight narco-trafficking. This fact is additional proof that the close alliance between the FARC and narco-trafficking is the main source of revenue for the FARC in conducting its insurrection.

Other internal impediments to *Plan Colombia* derive from difficulties inherent to the peace process itself. Stagnating support for the peace process is often based on the allegation that "the government is not making sufficient progress in its campaign against the self-defense groups." This allegation is disingenuous, since it is being used by FARC and FARC sympathizers as an indirect argument against the plan itself. Behind the urgings for the government to take a more aggressive stance against the self-defense groups lie two self-serving goals: (1) to force the government to destroy the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), which is the main foe of the FARC; and (2) to discredit *Plan Colombia* as being responsible for the stagnation of the peace process.

The final internal impediment to *Plan Colombia* is the tendency to politicize what should remain purely military and technical issues. Although partial provision of resources has been accomplished, and the first counternarcotics brigade has been equipped and trained, the whole effect of the plan can make itself felt only after a considerable period of time. Meanwhile, however, the arrival of U.S.-supplied helicopters is being delayed as a result of lengthy discussions in the U.S. Congress about the *types* of helicopters to be furnished. For the sake of both optimal effectiveness and timeliness, it is best to resolve such technical issues on the basis of technical considerations, that is to say, nonpolitical considerations.

Major Strategic and Operational Issues in ***Plan Colombia***.

Let us turn now to the major strategic and operational issues that present themselves with regard to *Plan Colombia* in order to formulate some broad recommendations:

- *Develop and Implement an Energetic Policy Toward Neighboring Countries.* Strong action is needed to minimize the hostile attitude of Colombia's neighbors toward the plan. Misconceptions and exaggerated estimates of spillover must be clarified if regional opposition is to be neutralized.

A presidential summit of countries contiguous to Colombia should be convened by President Pastrana with the following goals: convey a clear understanding that the Colombia situation bears enormous implications not only for the immediate region itself but for the entire world; based on a candid and unblushing recitation of all the relevant facts, transform the present attitude of hostility and suspicion into one of cooperation, understanding, and positive support; work out a combined strategy for counteracting the spillover that would tend to be generated by *Plan Colombia*; create a combined body consisting of members from each of the countries, chartered to plan, direct, and supervise the actions growing out of the steps described above.

- *Intensify Public Information and Diplomacy.* Colombia's best allies are the facts; thus a concerted effort should be made to disseminate these facts to all parties who directly or indirectly can ultimately exercise an effect on the success of *Plan Colombia*.

Both through public information programs and diplomatic channels, efforts should be made to provide a better understanding of the plan—aimed especially at disabusing world public opinion of the deliberate disinformation that so frequently marred the plan's popular

reception. Also ripe for publicizing are the positive results to be expected from the dual Colombo-American effort. Particular attention should be directed to the plan's military component, justifying it on the grounds that the insurgency-narcotrafficking alliance is a threat against all the world's nations, not just against Colombia's internal security.

- *Build Programs for Drug Crop Farmers Based on True Sympathy and Understanding.* Let's face it, the farmers are being asked to give up their livelihoods even as they confront possible legal consequences. In all proposed crop eradication and substitution programs, not to mention family displacement programs, careful attention must be given to the psychological, legal, and economic plight of affected farmers.

To elaborate on the point preceding, dealing with the human infrastructure of the narco business requires the attention of our best and most sensitive minds. The complex socio-economic entanglement of displaced persons, rural unemployment, endemic poverty, low quality of life, decay of the coffee industry, and lucrative salaries paid by narco dealers has brought tens of thousands of campesinos into the traffic. Returning them to a traditional but improved life will be an enormous task requiring understanding of all the circumstances that gradually drew them into criminal activity.

Alternative cultivation is not possible in the Amazon jungle where the soil is poor and the consuming centers too distant for commercial purposes. The only practical alternative employment of the manpower involved lies in the eradication by hand of the cultivated zones that were created from destroyed tropical woodland, thus restoring the original fragile environment. Return of the cultivators and their families to their original working areas should be encouraged and facilitated by enlightened government policies along with this process. *Plan Colombia* will be a most valuable tool for the accomplishment of these ends.

Conclusion.

Plan Colombia is thus far the most audacious and well-conceived venture ever undertaken to solve the global problem of narco trafficking. It merits strong support from all societies and states. Obstacles and difficulties must be confronted with strong leadership and political will. The plan's weaknesses should be overcome during the gradual process of implementation as experience is gained. Skepticism and cynicism can be overcome by the gradual emergence of positive results. To retreat at this late stage into theoretical arguments will come to nothing. What is required now is a pragmatic approach marked by action, boldness, and resolve.

Much still remains in implementing the plan. Steering agencies linked to certain aspects of the plan need to be established, and many of those that are established need to be enlarged to handle the developing tasks and responsibilities. Operational leaders must avoid allowing their emerging organizations to become bogged down in bureaucratic wheel-spinning, thus losing sight of their urgent missions. More plans, more strategy, more tactics will need to be conceived. All this will constitute a challenge of extraordinary magnitude, but it should be approached by our two countries with optimism, a creative spirit, and an iron will to be successful.

A VIEW FROM PANAMA

Ricardo Arias Calderón

As one with considerable experience in formulating the security doctrine of Panama, which shares a common border with Colombia, I would like to discuss *Plan Colombia* with regard to its broad regional and even global implications. Decades ago, organized violence was unleashed in Colombia, originally as a product of the traditional political conflict between conservatives and liberals. It eventually became enmeshed with common legal delinquency. Later, the violence turned into insurgency and came to be led by guerrillas of diverse Marxist-Leninist persuasions and nationalistic expressions. At present, it is headed by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), with approximately 26,000 soldiers, and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), with approximately 5,000 soldiers. More recently, the organized violence has had diverse ties with narcotic producers and traders and, for this reason, has had at its disposal large sums of money. Furthermore, it has provoked the emergence of opposing paramilitary organizations, especially the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (ACU), with approximately 8,000 soldiers. The ACU has lately gained in strength and developed tacit acceptability to many segments of society despite or perhaps because of its brutal methodology.

The insurgent organizations have faced one another, the narcotic organizations, and the paramilitary in a complicated and changing network of confrontations, alliances, and betrayals. But above all they have faced the armed forces (approximately 146,000 soldiers, of which some 60,000 are combat available), and the national police forces (120,000) of the Colombian state. For years the government's armed organizations have sacrificed the lives of their members in seeking to safeguard the security of a majority of Colombian citizens, while at the same time

paradoxically maintaining different forms of complicity with the paramilitary and even in some cases, it is suspected, with the narcotic organizations.

In the conflict between the irregular organizations and the regular military and police organizations of Colombia, the value of the military and police has often been suspect, particularly in terms of their respect for human rights, their commitment to social justice, and their compliance with the norms of legality and decency. While acting in the name of the only authority which has a valid claim to legitimacy, that is to say the government of the country, the military and police have worked under conditions that rendered this legitimacy at times questionable due to the government's own behavior. The civil violence in Colombia is neither provoked nor sustained by foreigners, but rather is indigenous. It grows out of Colombia's own social, economic, political, and cultural conditions. While in earlier stages some of the insurgent organizations have had foreign support from Castro's Cuba, that no longer seems likely with the disintegration of the Soviet orbit. Nor has the United States heretofore been a primary actor in the conflict, though it has had a stake in it through its opposition to all guerrillas connected to the communist movement. This stake increased significantly in recent years because of the fight against narcotics production and traffic.

Given the decades during which successive Colombian governments attempted unsuccessfully to eliminate the insurgency with firepower, it seemed reasonable to conclude with President Andrés Pastrana that the only road left towards lasting peace is the road of negotiation. Clearly, his stalwart attempt to negotiate peace has been the most decisive, systematic, and courageous of any previous efforts, moreso even than that of conservative former President Belisario Betancur.

But unfortunately the negotiations have not yet advanced on any substantive issues, probably because of the

intransigence of the guerrillas. From the Report of the Institute for European and Latin-American Relations (IRELA) dated September 16, 1999, a few statistics regarding the guerrillas are worth recalling: the guerrillas are thought to be present in some form or other "in 43 percent of the municipalities of the country"; and "the intake of the FARC in 1997 was approximately \$463 million as against expenses of \$78 million and the intake of the ELN in the same year around \$340 million as against expenses of \$39 million." These factors distinguish the Colombian guerrillas from their Central American counterparts: a sufficiently ample territorial base in their country to provide support for recruitment and training, a launch-pad for attacks, a sanctuary for repose and security, and very substantial financial self-sufficiency.

The IRELA report concluded that neither the guerrillas nor the government could defeat each other militarily, and that the negotiations were going to be difficult because "the guerrilla has no motivation of sufficient weight to engage in serious negotiations, given the improbability of suffering a military defeat, the relative rural support they enjoy, and the juicy benefits from the activities which they conduct to finance the war."

In these circumstances, one can question whether weariness with a life of fighting is sufficient motive for the guerrillas to conclude a good-faith peace negotiation. Is it not possible, then, as Pastrana's term comes to an end and so, too, his capacity to shape events, for the population to become so frustrated with an apparently endless and fruitless negotiation that segments of Colombian society begin in desperation to seek a solution to the crisis from the brutality of the ACU? And, in a similar vein, could it not happen that, in the present mood of public opinion, a successful electoral alternative could emerge committed to an all-out war with all its dire human consequences? The presidential pre-candidacy of Alvaro Uribe Vélez, former governor of Antioquia, may well represent such an alternative. To representatives of the guerrillas with whom

I have talked, I have communicated this concern: if they fail to negotiate with a President who has had the courage to propose real negotiations, they may have to deal instead with a President disposed to wage all-out war and to face the AUC rather than the armed forces. It would be tragic for Colombia.

In the meanwhile, negotiations falter, the conflict worsens, and the international community grows increasingly concerned. In the Internet web presentation by the Colombian government itself, one reads this appraisal:

As far as the evolution of the armed conflict in particular, one observes a clear intensification. While 90 municipalities registered FARC and ELN guerrilla presence on the national territory, this number had increased to 310 in 1991 and to 369 in 1998. [This presence] . . . has also grown . . . in organizational terms. In 1989 45 FARC fronts and 19 ELN fronts were registered, while by 1995 16 and 14 new fronts had been created respectively in each of these organizations. In 1996, the estimate is that the FARC has 66 fronts and the ELN 40, distributed respectively in seven and five regional blocks throughout the country. . . . [I]nvaluable . . . lives . . . are lost [between 30 and 40,000 per year—Author]. . . . At the present time, one can say that in terms of the GDP [economic growth is substantially impaired] as a consequence of the armed conflict.

Moreover, according to a news cable from Reuters dated December 27, 2000, an army report establishes that the groups in conflict are causing an ecological disaster of unsuspected proportions. Concurrently, in a publication of the American Forum for the Transition Teams of the New U.S. Administration entitled *The Western Hemisphere: An American Policy Priority*, one finds among the early flash points with potential to consume administration resources the following assertion: Colombia and neighbors: to confront the *steadily deteriorating politico-security situation in Colombia*, a much firmer, more substantial political commitment will be necessary from Washington and other capitals. Similarly, the 11th Inter-American Dialogue Report, entitled *A Time of Decisions, U.S. Policy*

in the Western Hemisphere, dated December 14, 2000, warns:

Colombia faces the most severe challenges. As the nation's democratic institutions are battered by a relentless guerrilla war, horrendous human rights abuses, pervasive criminal violence, and economic recession, the Colombian government is increasingly losing control over the country. The recently approved U.S. aid package of \$1.3 billion is intended to help reverse this situation, but may not be adequate to address the fundamental task of restoring authority and credibility to the Pastrana government. It is difficult to imagine how the government can successfully pursue the goals of peace and reconciliation without a stronger, more professional army that can respond effectively both to the guerrillas and paramilitary groups. But the government also needs to manage the peace process better and make a more effective commitment to protecting human rights. The continuing lukewarm support for Colombia's struggle from Latin American and European governments is troublesome as well. The danger is great that the violence in Colombia will worsen and the country will deteriorate further.

Both the American Forum and the Inter-American Dialogue Report, in pointing out the deteriorating situation, recognize a most important dimension of the violence in Colombia and of the attempted peace negotiation, namely, its regional and even global dimension. In fact, as the conflict intensifies, its spillover potential increases both in terms of the organizations in conflict intruding in the frontier areas of neighboring countries and in terms of a growing number of inhabitants of Colombia seeking safety by moving within the country or fleeing to neighboring countries and even more distant countries (particularly the United States). There are currently some 1.5 to 2 million displaced persons within Colombia as a result of the conflict. Moreover, the flight of uncounted numbers to other countries occurs either in clandestine, illegal fashion, mostly persons from the humbler classes, or in formal, legal fashion, mostly persons of middle and upper class extraction.

The very concept of *Plan Colombia*, which was originally somewhat ill-defined, has been transformed by international interaction. When first mentioned by President Pastrana in December 1998 in Puerto Wilches, it was presented as a way for the guerrilla to participate in the development, design, and execution of the projects that would be simultaneous with the negotiations. These projects were expected to generate investment for the zones affected by violence, illegal crops, and environmental damages. *Plan Colombia* was even, it is said, part of the pre-agreements between the government and the FARC. But since its 3-year cost has been estimated at \$7.5 billion, the Pastrana government sought to obtain somewhat less than half (\$3.5 billion) from the international community, while itself providing a little more than half (\$4 billion). It had recourse to the ideas of the U.S. government, which, given its own priorities and political realities, has influenced the concept of the plan to emphasize the fight against drugs. The drug fight in turn led to increased emphasis on the plan's military aspects since it would be impossible to thwart the guerrillas' drug activities without resort to armed force.

The plan includes a complex set of objectives and programs on the basis of ten strategies: economic; fiscal; peace; national defense; judicial and human rights; anti-narcotics; alternative development; social participation; human development; and international. But of the \$1.319 billion voted by the U.S. Congress to support *Plan Colombia*, some 65 percent or \$862.3 million, is reportedly for Colombia, 14 percent for neighboring countries, 17 percent for U.S. agencies, and 4 percent for other purposes. Of the funds for Colombia, 70 percent is for the fight against production and commerce of drugs. Moreover, of those same funds for Colombia, 58 percent is for military assistance, and 14 percent for police assistance. Among its key elements are establishment of three new anti-narcotic battalions and provision to the military forces of 60 helicopters—42 Hueys and 18 Black Hawks—as well

as electronic equipment for intelligence-gathering through satellite information. Also a key element is the training of about 30,000 additional Colombian military personnel by U.S. advisers, in part through subcontracting this task to private companies.

Such percentages as those above reflect, of course, only the U.S. contribution, not the whole cost of the plan. But the U.S. contribution is the only portion of the cost that is relatively assured. Thus these percentages are indicative of the importance assigned to different components of the plan.

But to render the military anti-narcotic strategy effective and, to the extent they are interconnected, the anti-guerrilla strategies as well, requires that neighboring countries actively support *Plan Colombia*, establishing, for example, a tight security circle around Colombia. This is precisely what Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama have all indicated they are unwilling to do, so as not to be drawn into the internal Colombian conflict. And they have expressed their concern that as presently conceived, *Plan Colombia* will intensify the conflict and will increase its spillover potential, thereby rendering each of the neighboring countries more insecure.

In speaking of the neighboring countries one should distinguish between those countries that have armed forces, like Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador, all of which could actively support Colombia since they can effectively defend themselves if necessary. Nevertheless, it has not been possible to persuade these four countries to act jointly, although in all four cases there have been preventive movements of military units to their frontier with Colombia. Peru, while President Fujimori was in charge, showed a willingness even to confront the guerrillas militarily, though Vladimir Montesinos, head of the intelligence office of Peru, was instrumental in selling arms to the guerrillas.

Now that Fujimori's regime has come to an end, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador could come closer in their position regarding Colombia. It is desirable that they assume a more dynamic and effective shared role in support of the efforts of the Colombian government to bring the guerrillas to genuine peace negotiations. Clearly the intensified violence in Colombia cannot but be a seriously destabilizing factor in a sub-region which is already the least stable in Latin America. The reluctance of Colombia's neighbors to act supportively invites a more unilateral type of action on the part of the United States, which is hardly desirable. It would also seem that Brazil should have a leadership role to play in this respect, both because of its size and weight and because it is a much more stable democracy than the other neighboring countries. If Latin America, now beginning to reach its maturity both politically and economically, wishes for the United States to abstain from intervention, it must show greater initiative in tackling its own stability and security problems.

For the four neighboring countries that have armed forces, another impediment to adopting a common position may be the present government of Venezuela. In contrast to the position of former President Fujimori of Peru, President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has shown evident sympathy for the Colombian guerrillas, a fact that has generated manifest tensions with the Colombian government. This sympathy, combined with Chavez's tendency to act on his own, often counter to U.S. interests, and to express public admiration for Castro, has been vaguely defined as "bolivarianism." In a worst-case scenario, Chavez could continue to act or at least speak counter to the United States, draw closer to Castro's view of independence and sovereignty, while at the same time being helpful to the Colombia guerrillas. One would thus have in northern South America and the Caribbean a triangle of countries with radical internal and external policies, unresponsive to the influence of the American superpower, but responsive only to their own initiative and convergent development.

While this scenario is not a given (and there are serious reasons for this fact), nevertheless the possibility points to new forms of radicalism that can find expression within certain countries, and to their clustering regionally and even more widely. (Chavez, for example, is acting through the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) beyond our hemisphere.)

Among the countries neighboring Colombia, Panama presents a case apart for a couple of reasons. One, because it chose the Costa Rican model of total demilitarization in public security. Its Constitution forbids the existence of any military organization. Two, because it now owns and administers fully the Canal, which leaves Panama exposed to international realities, both regional and global, which can represent a danger for Panama's and the Canal's security. The only way in which Panama can under these conditions safeguard the Canal while remaining demilitarized is for it to practice a very demanding policy of neutrality, not just on behalf of the Canal as established by the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, but on behalf of the country as a whole. This policy requires that Panama abstain from taking part in both conflicts between states and within states. But since the Colombian conflict is on Panama's very frontier and is intruding onto its territory, Panama is required to integrate its frontier region fully into the rest of the country, develop its frontier police, and consider, if and when necessary, requesting the presence of United Nations or Organization of American States (OAS) observers or even peacekeepers. Agreeing to a new U.S. military presence in Panama, even in the province of Darien, is not an option for the Panamanian people; it runs counter to the fundamental need of the country: to establish a new model of relationship with the United States after nearly a century of subordination to the U.S. military.

It should be made clear, however, that Panama's neutrality in no way implies nonrecognition of the government of Colombia as the legitimate authority of that country or that it does not recognize the right of that

government to elaborate and implement *Plan Colombia* with the financial help of whichever other country is willing to contribute to it. This authority carries with it, of course, the responsibility of the Colombian government to prevent armed incursions as well as the displacement of its population from its territory into Panamanian territory. If it is unable to accomplish this task—given the fact it has agreed to negotiate peace formally with the guerrilla groups, inviting foreign observers as witnesses of the process—the government of Colombia should accept the right of the Panamanian government to keep lines of communication open with whatever armed organizations have it in their power to affect Panama's borders. This latitude would enable Panama simply to seek by way of persuasion and diplomacy respect for the integrity of Panamanian territory and Panamanian neutrality. It would not be a license to intervene in the negotiations as such. Moreover, Colombia and Panama should jointly request the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to coordinate the reception of displaced persons coming from Colombia to Panama and their return to Colombia under conditions of security and dignity.

Mention should also be made of the larger global context of *Plan Colombia*, specifically the role that the European Union (EU) can and should play. Clearly for Spain there is a role to play. Otherwise, its carefully cultivated special relationship to Latin America through the yearly Ibero-American Summits might reveal itself to be without political substance. After all, it is this relationship that underpins Spain's growing flow of investments towards Latin America. For the rest of the EU, one should be reminded of its effort to relate directly to Mercosur, to Mexico, and to the whole of Latin America in commercial competition with the United States. Were the EU to be effectively absent from the efforts to resolve the Colombian conflict, which presently constitutes the gravest challenge to the democratic stability of the region, its efforts to

maintain and develop its Latin American connection would be seriously weakened.

In order to provide a means for a greater Latin American regional contribution to the peace negotiation and *Plan Colombia*, as well as a greater European and global contribution, it would be desirable to draw influential Latin American and European countries more closely and effectively into the negotiation process through some mechanism not unlike the Contadora Group. One could conceive of such a pro-Colombia group consisting of representatives from Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Spain, with the Foreign Affairs Commissioner of the EU serving as a helpful go-between and, if necessary, a gadfly to make sure the negotiation process continues uninterrupted and reaches early substantive even if not definitive agreements. Such agreements might include an early cease-fire, which at first could be temporary, as well as an early end to acts of personal terrorism. These agreements would be effective tests of whether both sides in the negotiation are equally interested in retaining the basic responsibility for peace in Colombian hands. (We Panamanians know the cost in the latter 1980s of being unable to resolve our conflicts amongst Panamanians; since then, I hope we have learned our historical lesson. For this reason, we can speak frankly to our Colombian neighbors and brothers.) Such a mechanism might take some of the pressure from the United States, which now seems somewhat imprudently to emphasize the growing militarization of its aid, in part out of a sense of being left alone in the role of support of the Colombian government and people.

After all, we need focus on one question. The Colombian population is forty million; it lives in a territory of 1,140,000 square kilometers and had in 1999 a Gross Domestic Product of \$71,462 million. Colombia is located at the very northern tip of South America, and is surrounded by five other nations, among them the largest in Latin America (Brazil), the one with most oil (Venezuela) and the one with

the Canal between the oceans (Panama). Colombia is endowed with some of our richest cultural traditions and its history was the major setting for our foremost hero, Bolivar. But unfortunately this country is being used as one of the world's largest producers of narcotics and Colombia's people are still suffering from the continent's longest lasting experience of organized violence. Now we must ask ourselves: Is the future of such a people our collective concern or not? And if it is, What can each of our countries do without denying our respective realities and without being disrespectful to that people's own identity and self-determination? What can we do which renders our solidarity effective for Colombia's sake as well as for our own?

One thing is clear: the answer is not nothing, cannot be nothing.

A VIEW FROM PEORIA

Chris Marquis

My father is a “rock-ribbed” conservative—a bridge-loving, tennis-playing, home-owning, drug-hating, Air Force vet and family man. He doesn’t like the war in Colombia. He worries that American is sliding into another morass. He is skeptical and pessimistic, and that can’t all be because his son is a journalist. I mention my dad because the American public is just beginning to tune in to *Plan Colombia*, and not all the critics out there are tree-hugging, navel-gazing, pot-smoking liberals. Whoever implements *Plan Colombia* is going to have to persuade people like my father, and the lawmakers who represent him in Washington.

There is, however, a growing consensus in the United States that something must be done about Colombia. The stakes are simply too high to walk away. But what and how? Defenders of *Plan Colombia* emphasize that we’re not barreling our way into another Vietnam. This is different, they say: there are safeguards, personnel caps, and limits on the American mission. Others feel the more accurate analogy lies with the El Salvadorian model, where the United States plunged into a civil war fueled by competition with communism. Neither model seems very accurate, and I would submit that neither is very desirable. The peace that was eventually established in San Salvador came at the price of unimaginable carnage for a tiny country, and fueled some extraordinarily bitter divisions in the U.S. Congress.

Lots of smart people studied these wars and proposed changes in the previous American strategy. *Plan Colombia*, they decided, had to be first and foremost a Colombian plan, or at least perceived as one. Even as it provided for military aid, it had to emphasize economic development and negotiations as the ultimate solutions. Colombia’s

neighbors had to bless the plan or at the very least not oppose it. And perhaps most significantly, American troops were not to engage in combat. Their participation had to be dictated by the fight against drugs and not by the many-sided civil war.

What I just described is the war that Congress believes it is now preparing to fight. On Capitol Hill support for *Plan Colombia* is like ice on a frozen lake—it's broad but thin. There are a handful of Republicans, Congressmen John L. Mica and Danny L. Burton spring to mind, who are adamant in their support of Colombia. They have been shouting for more combat helicopters for years. Their passion, however, is for supporting the national police, not the Colombian armed forces. That wrinkle is truly the new aspect of this plan. Many lawmakers in both parties have reservations about entering into an alliance with a military with such a dismal human rights record. Here, there are shades of El Salvador, where at times we discovered the enemy was us. In this regard, Congressman Benjamin Gilman's decision to withdraw his support from *Plan Colombia* was a stunning blow. Gilman, then Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, had fought harder than anyone to win support for the plan. Gilman's defection should give pause to those taking congressional support for granted. If and when the fighting intensifies and U.S. casualties result, expect a lot of hand wringing and more changes of heart.

President George W. Bush has voiced support for *Plan Colombia*, but it remains to be seen how deep that commitment really is. Bush appears eager to reorient our Latin American policy toward Mexico in pursuit of a hemispheric free trade agreement. Also, anyone familiar with Secretary of State Colin Powell's views on warfare might wonder how he feels about a scenario in which there is no explicit exit strategy nor a clear definition of success. We should never forget the alarming fact that, for all our efforts in the anti-narcotics crusade, they have done nothing to stem or even reduce the flow of drugs into the United States.

One of Secretary Powell's tasks will be to mobilize the support of Colombia's neighbors, who are alarmed at the prospect of a spillover across their national borders. And he must attend as well to the Europeans, who appear almost gleeful that the United States is having difficulties with its military-led approach. And I argue that it *is* a military-led approach. Until you can show me the money allocated and spent in support of social development, we've got on our hands essentially a U.S.-backed military strategy. To me, all of this adds up to a massive public relations challenge on top of a chaotic war. I just hope my dad is wrong.

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Plan Colombia provided funds that helped human rights organisations - but some argue that militarisation has only increased risks. For Ricardo Vargas Meza, a Colombian sociologist who has studied the history of the plan, those worst-affected are civilians. "There were very tough measures against the civilians, like food control," he explained. Plan Colombia was an initiative aimed at combating drug cartels and left-wing insurgent groups and fostering economic development in Colombia. How effective was Plan Colombia in terms of decreasing drug production, generating economic development and reducing violence? In theory, "Plan Colombia" is a two-year Colombian government program of \$7.5 billion, with the US providing the military muscle and token funds for other purposes, and some \$6 billion from the Colombian government, Europe, the IMF, and the World Bank for social and economic programs that Colombia is to prepare. According to non-US diplomats, the draft of "Plan Colombia" was written in English, not Spanish. The military program (arms, training, intelligence infrastructure)