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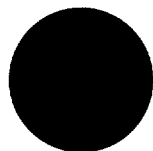
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Two Wars or One?

Drugs, Guerrillas, and Colombia's New *Violencia*

William M. LeoGrande and Kenneth E. Sharpe

The recently approved \$1.3 billion aid package for the war on drugs in Colombia and the Andean region marks a major shift in U.S. policy, reminiscent of the shift in 1980–81 that deepened U.S. involvement in El Salvador's civil war. By focusing on military aid and options in the name of fighting the traffic in illegal drugs, the United States is preparing to join the Colombian armed forces in a counterinsurgency war against Marxist guerrillas—a war that has been raging inconclusively for more than 40 years. Until recently, Washington has been wise enough to minimize its role in this protracted conflict, both because of the Colombian military's abysmal human rights record and because the war can only end through negotiations.

The rationale for abandoning this restraint is what U.S. drug czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey has called a “drug emergency” in Colombia—a dramatic increase in coca leaf cultivation in the southern provinces of Putumayo and Caquetá, strongholds of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest of three leftist guerrilla movements. McCaffrey and other Clinton administration officials argue that Colombia is losing the drug war because it cannot eradicate coca in the areas under guerrilla control, and it is losing the guerrilla war because the Colombian armed forces are outgunned by insurgents flush with the “taxes” they collect from coca growers.

By outfitting the Colombian army to wage a counterinsurgency war, Washington hopes to enable elite “eradication battalions” to “push into southern Colombia” where

small peasants grow coca under the FARC's protection. Thus, in the vain hope that joining two losing ventures will somehow produce success, Colombia's two wars—against drugs and guerrillas—will become one war. In fact, whether pursued separately or together, neither of these wars is winnable. The military escalation contemplated by the United States will only intensify the violence in Colombia, make a negotiated settlement of the insurgency more difficult, and have no impact whatsoever on the supply of drugs entering the United States.

The Drug War

For Washington, the drug war in Colombia is just one front in a global struggle. In response to drug abuse and addiction at home, the government tries to restrict the supply available from abroad, thereby raising street prices enough to reduce domestic demand. Since the late 1970s, the United States has attacked marijuana, heroin, and cocaine production and trafficking in such “source” countries as Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia by eradicating crops, attacking refining labs, seizing shipments, and arresting traffickers.

Despite tactical successes in each of these areas, source country operations have consistently been a strategic failure, never significantly raising the price of cocaine or heroin in the United States for more than a few months. In fact, while spending on eradication and interdiction programs has grown from a few million dollars in the early 1970s to billions annually today, the street price of a pure gram of cocaine has dropped from \$1,400 to under \$200

during that time, and the price of heroin has dropped from about \$4,000 to a few hundred dollars. This strategic failure is not due to a lack of will or resources, but rather to the structure of the market for illegal drugs, which invariably thwarts Washington's best efforts to suppress supply.

Drugs are so cheap to produce, the barriers to entry in the market are so low, and the potential profits are so enormous that market forces invariably attract willing growers, producers, and traffickers. Official measures of success—tons of cocaine seized, numbers of traffickers arrested, acres of coca leaf eradicated—are as misleading as the “body counts” during the Vietnam War because high profits generate a limitless supply of new growers and traffickers even as the war on drugs drives some out of business. Analysts of the drug market refer to this as the balloon effect: squeeze the trade in one place and it pops up somewhere else.

Even if the United States could significantly cut coca acreage, the market structure for cocaine would undermine the drug war in another way. Most of the markup on drugs occurs after they enter the United States; the actual costs of growing and processing illegal drugs abroad are a tiny fraction of their street price. In 1997, the price of the coca leaf needed to make a pure kilo of cocaine was \$300. Refined and ready for export from Colombia, it was worth \$1,050. The cost of smuggling that kilo into the United States raised its price in Miami to \$20,000, and black market distribution costs raised its retail price in Chicago to \$188,000. This means that even an incredibly successful crop eradication program that tripled the price of coca leaf to \$900 would raise retail prices in the United States imperceptibly.

Nevertheless, the United States has expended billions of dollars trying to reduce source country drug supplies. The main thrust of U.S. strategy in Colombia in the 1980s and early 1990s was to target major drug trafficking organizations, which im-

ported most of their coca leaf from Peru and Bolivia. Breaking the big cartels, it was thought, would disrupt distribution networks in the United States and raise prices. Under U.S. pressure, the Colombian government went after the drug lords, either to prosecute them or extradite them to the United States. By the mid-1990s, the principal leaders of the Medellín and Cali cartels had been killed or captured. But smashing the cartels did not reduce the flow of drugs. It simply changed the structure of the industry, creating space in the market for many new small and intermediate producers whose business plan, as described by a Colombian weekly, was to “export a little, earn a lot, and make little noise.” Some of the business was displaced to Mexico, whose growing criminal enterprises replaced the Cali cartel as the major distributor of cocaine to the western United States.

For Colombia, the cost of attacking the cartels was severe. The drug lords, who had been living in relative peace with the government, retaliated by killing hundreds of government officials, judges, police officers, and journalists, including Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, Attorney General Mauro Hoyos Jiménez, and Liberal Party presidential candidate Luís Carlos Galán. Corruption infected every institution of government involved with the drug war, including the executive branch, the judiciary, and the security forces.

As Colombian coca leaf production expanded in the mid-1990s, the emphasis of U.S. policy shifted from a war against traffickers to a war against growers. Coca leaf acreage increased from 37,500 hectares (about 94,000 acres) in 1991 to 122,500 hectares (306,00 acres) in 1999, despite an aggressive aerial fumigation program that began in 1994. The increase followed U.S. eradication and interdiction efforts in Bolivia and Peru, which reduced coca production in those countries but led the Colombian traffickers to seek new sources of coca leaf closer to home. Since no legal crop in

Colombia's coca growing regions is nearly as profitable as coca, the traffickers found no shortage of growers, especially in areas outside the government's control.

This pattern of displacement is typical. During the past decade, despite Washington's best efforts, there has been little change in the total amount of land planted in coca in the Andean region—about 200,000 hectares. Faced with eradication campaigns, peasants simply plant elsewhere. Reliance on aerial fumigation in Colombia over the past several years has led peasants to retreat deeper into the Amazonian rain forest and has recently called forth a revival of production in Bolivia and Peru.

In short, the new eradication campaign that Washington envisions in southern Colombia will have little effect on regional cocaine production and supply, and no impact on the retail price of drugs in the United States. Moreover, it will entail significant collateral damage. Reinvolving the Colombian military in counternarcotics operations risks further corruption—a common pattern whenever Latin American militaries have touched the tar baby of the drug war. Before his death in 1989, Colombian trafficker José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha provided multimillion-dollar payoffs to entire brigades of the Colombian army, according to bank records. Throughout the 1990s, traffickers have paid the police and military to overlook processing labs and smuggling. The low salaries paid to soldiers and police make such corruption inescapable. Militarization of the drug war will inevitably deepen the narco-military connection.

More serious, however, is the violence that this policy will inflict on the civilian population. The coca growers who will be displaced from their lands by crop spraying and the deployment of elite army battalions are mostly poor peasants who fled to this frontier region in the 1960s and 1970s because they were previously displaced by violence, often at the hands of large landowners. They are civilians, not organized criminals

or guerrilla combatants. They grow coca because it is one of the only crops that can provide them a livelihood. The “push into southern Colombia” will add tens of thousands of these farmers and their families to the 1.5 million Colombians already displaced by the war, and it will surely produce more recruits for the guerrillas. In this way, Washington's escalation of the drug war will inevitably escalate the guerrilla war as well.

The Guerrilla War

Colombia's two major guerrilla movements, the aforementioned FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), were founded in the 1960s, but their roots lie further back, in *la Violencia*. From 1948 to 1958, partisans of the Liberal and Conservative parties fought a civil war that cost the lives of some 200,000 people. The ghastly violence of the period was only nominally about party politics. Primarily rural, *la Violencia* was an explosive expression of peasant grievances and local conflicts. Weak governmental authority in many areas gave rise to armed self-defense groups of various ideological stripes. These same factors, along with the added fuel provided by revenue from the drug trade, remain central to understanding Colombia's contemporary violence.

La Violencia ended with the creation of the National Front in 1958, a pact between Liberal and Conservative leaders to form a consociational system in which the two parties alternated in power and shared control of the government. The corollary to this elite arrangement was that other political parties and movements were effectively excluded from politics, an exclusion enforced by repression when necessary. The armed forces remained formally subordinate to civilian rule but exercised near autonomy on issues of national security and enjoyed impunity despite persistent and serious human rights violations. The National Front formally ended in 1974, but the two traditional parties continued to

divide government offices between them into the mid-1980s.

Colombia's guerrilla movements arose in resistance to the National Front. Founded in 1966, the FARC grew out of rural self-defense groups organized by the Colombian Communist Party during *la Violencia*. Its leader, Manuel "Tirofijo" ("Sureshot") Marulanda, took up arms in 1949 at the age of 19. The ELN was organized by students inspired by the example of the Cuban Revolution, and has focused its attention on the oil industry, blowing up pipelines and kidnapping oil executives for ransom. In the 1970s, several new guerrilla groups developed, the most important of which was the Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19th Movement, M-19), founded in reaction to alleged fraud in the 1970 presidential election.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Colombia's guerrilla wars were low-intensity affairs. None of the half-dozen guerrilla groups (which operated independently) could seriously challenge the armed forces for control of the state, but neither could the armed forces defeat the guerrillas, especially those with a well-established rural base. For three decades, a stalemate prevailed.

Every Colombian president since Belisario Betancur (1982–86) has recognized the need to find a political solution to the insurgency. In 1984, Betancur signed a cease-fire with the FARC and M-19, which lasted for about a year, despite efforts by the armed forces to subvert it. The cease-fire with the M-19 ended when guerrilla commandos seized the Palace of Justice and the military assaulted the building without presidential authorization, leading to the death of 11 Supreme Court justices.

The FARC used the cease-fire to test the openness of Colombian politics. In 1985, it organized the Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union, UP), which achieved some modest electoral success in 1986, winning about a dozen seats in the national legislature and several dozen municipal posts. A wave of repression ensued, in which some 3,000 UP ac-

tivists, candidates, and elected officials were murdered by rightist paramilitary groups, thereby eliminating the Patriotic Union as a viable party. The FARC had no incentive to lay down its arms, and the war went on.

Presidents Virgilio Barco, César Gaviria, and Ernesto Samper all conducted negotiations with various guerrilla groups, leading to the demobilization of the M-19 and several smaller organizations in 1991. But talks with the FARC and the ELN made no headway, as these larger groups refused to settle for amnesty alone, demanding negotiations on a fuller agenda of social and economic reforms.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia's violence became more intense and more complex. Intensification of the war was fueled by revenue from the drug trade. Estimates of how much money the FARC raises from taxing drug production and commerce in its zones of control vary enormously, from a low of about \$100 million a year to a high of \$500 million. Regardless of the amount, there is no doubt drug revenue has enabled the FARC to significantly expand its ranks, increase its firepower, and extend its area of operations. In 1986, the FARC had about 9,000 combatants operating on 27 "fronts" (local self-supporting and semi-autonomous units). By 1999, it had 15,000 combatants on some 60 fronts, and was active in 40 percent of Colombia's municipalities. In the past few years, the FARC has taken the initiative, inflicting a series of embarrassing defeats on the army, and the conflict has begun to spill over into neighboring countries.

The war became more complex with the rise of the paramilitary right, or "self-defense" groups, many of which made their appearance in the 1980s. The paramilitaries sprang from multiple roots. Some were organized and financed directly by drug traffickers in retaliation for guerrilla kidnappings of their relatives. Others were organized by local landowners and mid-level military officers intent on eliminating grass-

roots activists and leftist politicians. Still others were organized by the armed forces as part of a national counterinsurgency strategy (that U.S. military advisers helped design) in which local self-defense militias would confront the guerrillas in areas where the military's presence was weak.

The paramilitaries have flourished as a result of two enabling conditions: financing from the drug trade and tolerance (and sometimes active assistance) on the part of the Colombian armed forces. Most paramilitary groups are financed by drug money; they are either paid directly by traffickers, engage in trafficking themselves, or tax drug commerce in areas they control. The paramilitaries, with about 6,000 members in all, have coalesced around the leadership of Carlos Castaño and his United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), an alliance formed to give the paramilitaries a national political voice.

Civilian governments in Colombia have regarded the paramilitaries as criminal but have never been able to bring them under control because of the close ties these groups have enjoyed with the armed forces. The military has a long, well-documented history of condoning and cooperating with paramilitary operations. In recent years, as the military has come under pressure from national and international human rights groups, abuses by the armed forces have fallen dramatically, but abuses by the paramilitaries have risen, leading some analysts to conclude that state-sponsored violence is being privatized.

By the late 1990s, Colombia's agony appeared to be reaching a point of crisis. The guerrilla war was expanding and intensifying. Paramilitary violence against suspected leftist sympathizers and other "social delinquents" was growing apace. Kidnappings by guerrillas and paramilitaries alike had become epidemic. From 1987 to 1997, a rising tide of criminal as well as political violence took the lives of more people than were killed in *la Violencia*. The government

seemed unable to provide even a modicum of personal safety for its citizens.

Pastrana's Quest for Peace

The United States welcomed the election of Andrés Pastrana to Colombia's presidency in June 1998. Having disengaged from Colombia politically and diplomatically (though not militarily) during the Samper administration because of its ties to drug traffickers, Washington was eager to resume active cooperation with the new government to fight the drug war. On balance, the Clinton administration also supported Pastrana's pledge to negotiate peace with Colombia's guerrilla movements, although some U.S. officials were skeptical about whether the guerrillas were really interested. During an October 1998 state visit to Washington, however, Pastrana convinced the administration to back his strategy of "peace first." By negotiating an end to the guerrilla war, he argued, the government would regain control over Colombia's territory, thus facilitating drug eradication and interdiction programs in areas controlled by the FARC.

Pastrana had run for president on a peace platform, harnessing a deep popular desire for an end to Colombia's decades of violence—a desire that gave rise to a powerful civic peace movement in 1997. Before his inauguration, Pastrana met with the FARC's legendary commander, Manuel Marulanda, to initiate new peace talks. Immediately after his inauguration, he replaced the entire high command of the armed forces, signaling his intention to crack down on the military's human rights abuses and its silent partnership with rightist paramilitary groups.

But the decision that sowed the seeds of Pastrana's subsequent political problems both at home and abroad was his agreement to temporarily withdraw Colombian troops from a 16,200-square-mile zone in southern Colombia to create a safe venue for peace talks with the FARC. This concession was

bitterly opposed by the armed forces (which had subverted a similar plan during the Samper administration) and by conservative Republicans in the U.S. Congress. Within the Clinton administration, the creation of the demilitarized zone fed the suspicions of some officials—especially in the Pentagon and the office of the drug czar—that Pastrana was naive and soft on the guerrillas. The zone also impeded the drug war, since antidrug operations there had to be suspended.

The peace talks got off to an inauspicious start when Marulanda failed to appear for the opening ceremony with Pastrana on January 7, 1999. Later that month, the talks faltered over a FARC demand that the government take decisive action against the paramilitary right before negotiations could begin. Pastrana's subsequent firing of two generals with links to the paramilitaries was seen in the armed forces as craven surrender to the FARC's demands.

Tensions between Colombia's president and the military precipitated a crisis in May when Pastrana's minister of defense, Rodrigo Lloreda, and two dozen generals resigned, publicly condemning Pastrana's conduct of the peace process. By some accounts, only quick endorsement of the president by armed forces chief Gen. Fernando Tapias prevented a coup d'état. Pastrana accepted Lloreda's resignation but refused to accept the others. In a four-hour meeting with the high command, the president reaffirmed his commitment to the peace process but agreed to take greater heed of the military's views about how to conduct it. In practice, that meant putting more military pressure on the guerrillas.

Washington's "Drug Emergency"

The May crisis, followed by a major FARC offensive in early July 1999, set off alarm bells in Washington, prompting a major policy review. General McCaffrey stole a march on other administration officials by announcing his own proposal for \$1 billion

in new counterdrug assistance—a move that annoyed his colleagues but put them on the spot politically. For months, House Republicans had been blasting the Clinton administration for not doing enough to stem the tide of drugs and guerrillas in Colombia; McCaffrey's plea confirmed their critique. In the administration's internal debate, the need to appear tough on drugs trumped concerns about human rights and the fragility of the peace process.

In August, Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering traveled to Colombia to warn Pastrana that he risked losing U.S. support if he made any further concessions to the guerrillas. On the other hand, if Colombia would craft a comprehensive national plan to take the offensive against both the guerrillas and the drug traffickers, Pickering promised a significant increase in U.S. aid. Pressure from Washington, combined with pressure from his own armed forces, pushed Pastrana toward a strategy of escalating the counterinsurgency war.

Over the next several months, U.S. and Colombian officials cooperated closely on the design of "Plan Colombia"—a \$7.5 billion program for fighting Colombia's two wars and restoring its economy. The strategic thrust of the plan is a "push into southern Colombia" by the armed forces in order to destroy coca cultivation in areas controlled by the FARC. To help fund the plan, the Clinton administration requested a total of \$1.6 billion in aid for Colombia for FY 2000 and FY 2001, and Congress approved \$1.3 billion, of which about \$862 million is destined for Colombia (the rest will go to antidrug efforts elsewhere in Andean region). Seventy-five percent of the total is earmarked for military or security assistance.

Though couched within a counterdrug framework, the elements of Washington's military aid program for Colombia are taken straight from the Pentagon's counterinsurgency handbook for El Salvador. The Colombian army, like its Salvadoran counterpart in the 1980s, is mainly a static defense force;

rank-and-file soldiers are poorly trained, weakly motivated, and ineffective at searching out and destroying guerrillas. To remedy such deficiencies, the United States will send hundreds of military advisers to train several rapid-deployment battalions, provide helicopters to make these elite forces more mobile, and intensify intelligence gathering so they know where to deploy. Once trained, the new battalions will push into FARC territory to secure the area for coca eradication. Some U.S. officials insist with a straight face that the purpose of this program is solely to combat drug trafficking, not counterinsurgency. No one in Colombia believes that, and no one in Washington ought to either.

Other U.S. officials acknowledge that this new policy targets the guerrillas, arguing its aim is to force them to the bargaining table. By strengthening the Colombian army and cutting into the FARC's coca revenues, they say, Plan Colombia will create a military stalemate. Realizing it has no chance of victory, the FARC will then settle for negotiated peace. This argument has several flaws. First, the war in Colombia has been a stalemate for over 30 years. The problem has not been getting the guerrillas to the bargaining table—they have been negotiating on and off with the government for almost two decades. Historically, the problem has been the Colombian armed forces, which have resisted and subverted the peace process at every turn—ignoring Betancur's 1984 cease-fire, cooperating with the paramilitary right to murder activists of the Patriotic Union party, and opposing both Samper's and Pastrana's proposed demilitarized zones.

The military in El Salvador represented an analogous obstacle to peace. A billion dollars of U.S. aid turned that army into a large, well-equipped, politically powerful force that murdered noncombatant civilians with impunity for over a decade—more than 60,000 of them in all. The war in El Salvador did not end because of a change in

the guerrillas' attitude toward the government (the 1992 peace accord they signed was very similar to one they proposed in 1980). The war ended when the army finally recognized that it was unwinnable—a conclusion it reached when the United States cut military assistance by 50 percent, threatened to end it entirely, and threw its full diplomatic weight behind the peace process.

Thus, the message that nearly a billion dollars in U.S. military aid sends to the Colombian armed forces is precisely the wrong one. Some Colombian officers will conclude (probably mistakenly) that Washington is prepared to invest whatever resources are necessary to secure their victory over the guerrillas. None will take it as a signal that Washington has faith in the peace process or that the army should stop opposing it.

Nor is this aid package likely to have any material effect on the military balance. If the new U.S.-trained battalions do in fact target coca fields rather than guerrilla columns, the guerrillas will be able to avoid them, just as the Salvadoran guerrillas avoided U.S.-trained battalions. Late in that war, the Salvadoran guerrillas countered the military's helicopters with shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, which had such devastating effect that helicopter pilots refused to fly in daylight. The FARC has threatened to buy such weapons on the international arms market. Finally, if crop eradication operations succeed, they will deprive tens of thousands of peasants of their livelihood, creating a whole new pool of potential guerrilla recruits.

The most disturbing aspect of the U.S. aid package is its silence on the problem of the paramilitary right. The paramilitaries are mentioned only in passing, although they are at least as deeply implicated in drug trafficking as the guerrillas. Up to now, both the Clinton and Pastrana administrations have worked hard to control the paramilitaries and sever their links to the armed forces. But with the United States on the verge of joining the

Colombian military's war against the guerrillas, will Washington now turn a blind eye to depredations by the army's other partner in this dirty war? In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration tolerated the death squads in El Salvador because they were inextricably linked to the military, on which Washington's counterinsurgency strategy depended.

The paramilitary right is a critical obstacle to a negotiated settlement of the Colombian conflict. Pastrana cannot guarantee the personal security of the guerrillas if they lay down their arms—just as the Christian Democrats could not guarantee the security of the Salvadoran guerrillas in the early 1980s. As long as the Colombian government is unwilling or unable to control the violent right, the guerrillas dare not agree to peace. In El Salvador, the army had no interest in reining in the death squads because they were an essential weapon in its war against the left. The Colombian situation is similar; by leaving the dirtiest work in this dirty war to the paramilitaries, the regular army can claim a clean human rights record as it seeks more military aid from Washington. The story of the paramilitary massacre of dozens of peasants labeled as guerrillas or guerrilla supporters in the village of El Salado this past summer reads like a page from Salvadoran history. Hundreds of heavily armed men occupied the village and, over the course of two days, held a kangaroo court and executed whomever they pleased, while the Colombian armed forces not only refused to intervene but blocked access to the village by outsiders.

Disentangling the Two Wars

Despite fits and starts, the peace process in Colombia is not nearly as moribund as some U.S. officials imply. Talks are under way, and there are new factors, both domestic and international, that give them impetus. Within Colombia, the rise of a powerful peace movement rooted in civil society is proof of the public's war weariness. In 1997,

10 million Colombians, half of the country's registered voters, voted for a peace referendum, and in October 1999, several million took to the streets to demonstrate their desire for an end to the violence. Running on a peace platform, Pastrana won the presidency with more votes than any Colombian candidate before him. Neither the guerrillas nor the traditional political parties can afford to ignore this popular demand for peace. The peace process, once in gear, will likely develop its own momentum, as neither side will want to shoulder the blame for its collapse. A similar public yearning for peace impelled the Salvadoran negotiations forward in the 1990s.

The international community has begun actively to assist the Colombian process, a development that Colombians resisted until recently. International interlocutors can play a pivotal role in overcoming the decades of distrust between the warring parties—as the United Nations did in Central America in the 1990s. U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan has appointed Norwegian diplomat Jan Egeland as his special adviser on the Colombian conflict, and in February Egeland organized a tour of Spain, Norway, Switzerland, and France for a joint delegation of FARC commanders and Colombian government officials, a trip intended to educate the insular guerrillas about post-Cold War realities. In June, more than 20 diplomats from Europe, Canada, Japan, and the United Nations met in Colombia with officials and guerrilla leaders to talk about economic alternatives to drug production. In July, representatives of Norway, Spain, France, Switzerland, and Cuba agreed to assist in the peace process and attended talks held in Switzerland between the government and ELN guerrilla commanders.

Do the guerrillas want a peace agreement? Or are they content to remain in their zones of control, making money from extortion and drug trafficking? The FARC's initial response to Pastrana's peace initiative was a not a good omen; it offered nothing in

return for his concessions, instead exploiting the peace process for tactical advantage. They stepped up attacks on the army, thereby undercutting political support for the peace process, both in Colombia and in Washington. Still, most observers who have followed the FARC closely believe it remains fundamentally a political movement committed to an agenda of political and social reform. No doubt there are hard-line guerrilla commanders who are skeptical of peace, just as there are hard-line military officers. But negotiations have now moved farther ahead than at any time in the past decade and a half. The FARC could regain considerable credibility if it were quickly to agree to measures meant, in the language of human rights groups and negotiators, to “humanize the war,” first and foremost by putting an end to kidnapping.

President Pastrana’s commitment to peace and human rights is not in question. As the democratically elected president, he deserves the support of the United States. The issue is not whether to help, but how. Some Clinton administration officials argue that the United States should boost military aid because Pastrana asked for it and should not be second-guessed. These same officials had not the slightest reluctance to lambast Pastrana publicly and privately when they thought his pursuit of peace was too vigorous.

The parentage of Plan Colombia is mixed at best. It focuses on military solutions because U.S. policymakers decided last summer that they had to expand the war against the FARC if they were to have any hope of stemming the growth of coca production in Colombia. That decision was clearly communicated to the Colombians, and it shaped the aid package they requested. Pastrana complains that the United States is unwilling to make an adequate commitment to the social and economic reconstruction of his country. He comes to Washington for military aid, but he must go to Europe for economic assistance.

The United States has the ability to improve the prospects for peace in Colombia, but only if it disentangles its drug policy from the guerrilla war and acknowledges that neither problem is amenable to military solution. Washington should abandon plans to “push into southern Colombia” and instead focus its counterdrug resources on intercepting drugs in transit or on money laundering, actions that will not escalate the guerrilla war or displace tens of thousands of small peasants. Such programs may help Colombian drug enforcement, but we should not fool ourselves into thinking this will significantly reduce the supply of drugs entering the United States.

In approving Clinton’s aid package, Congress added a requirement that the secretary of state must certify that the Colombian armed forces are acting affirmatively to punish human rights violators in their ranks and to sever their ties to the paramilitaries. Similar conditions were imposed on military aid to El Salvador in 1981, but President Ronald Reagan routinely ignored them, certifying human rights progress even when there was none. This time around, Congress gave President Clinton the option to waive the human rights conditions on “national security” grounds, and on August 22, a week before his scheduled trip to Colombia to show support for Pastrana, Clinton exercised the waiver. Thus the president did not flout the letter of the law, but in exercising the waiver he was forced to concede that Colombia’s military does not meet even the most basic human rights requirements—requirements that must be met if there is to be a negotiated settlement of the war.

If the United States is truly interested in reducing human rights violations and taming the paramilitaries, the human rights provisions in the law provide a potent policy instrument. If, on the other hand, Washington treats the conditions as merely an obstacle to be circumvented, the Colombian military, like its Salvadoran brethren, will quickly recognize that Washington’s

concern for human rights is nothing but window dressing to sell the policy domestically. Now that a waiver has been granted, it is all the more important for Washington to demand that Colombia take effective steps to control military and paramilitary violence.

In his speech broadcast to the Colombian people on the eve of his August 30 visit, President Clinton insisted that his commitment to human rights was undiminished. "There is no such thing as democracy without respect for human rights," he declared. In six months, the secretary of state must report to Congress on what progress Colombia has made toward meeting the human rights conditions in the aid legislation. That will be a good opportunity for Congress and the American people to assess whether or not the White House's professed commitment to human rights is real. If Colombia's progress is no better than it has been so far, the president should rescind the waiver and halt the distribution of military aid.

Not only should the United States hold the Colombian armed forces accountable for human rights abuses, it should also put its full diplomatic weight behind the peace process, as it did eventually in El Salvador. This means encouraging the efforts of the United Nations and the European Union, urging the Colombians to remain open to international involvement, and using U.S. influence with the Colombian military to prevent it from obstructing peace.

The United States should devote the lion's share of new aid to economic assistance in order to help Colombia pull its faltering economy out of recession, and it should offer a "peace bonus"—aid earmarked for the conflict zones once a settlement has been reached. Postwar reconstruction programs might include a crop substitution plan to help small farmers kick the coca-growing habit.

For now, however, Washington is going down a different road. In pursuit of the ephemeral goal of coca eradication, the United States is about to put Colombia's

fragile democracy at greater risk by escalating the new *Violencia*. The powerful talisman of "fighting drugs" has led sensible policymakers to endorse a futile and bloody war they would otherwise never countenance. Pouring military aid into Colombia will not reduce the availability of drugs in the United States, and it will not enable the army to win its war against the guerrillas. Instead, it will expand the war, leading to more casualties and the displacement of more civilians, harden animosities on all sides, and prolong a conflict that must ultimately be settled at the bargaining table.

The way out of Colombia's agony is a policy focused on encouraging negotiations, which alone hold the promise of finally resolving this decades-long social and political conflict. Despite being complicated by the cocaine trade, the civil conflict in Colombia is amenable to a negotiated peace. The war on drugs is not. If Washington makes these two wars one war, it will condemn Colombia to a future of endless violence and suffering. And it will do so in vain. America's war on drugs cannot be won in the Colombian rain forest. Even if the United States defoliates every acre given over to growing coca, burns every laboratory, and destroys every last gram of Colombian cocaine, it will have won a hollow victory. The drug business will simply move elsewhere, as it always does. But it is the people of Colombia who will pay the price for the inability of the United States to face the fact that its "war" on drugs can only be won at home. ●

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For Further Reading—

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