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THE RELUCTANT HEGEMON

COUNTERDRUG EFFORTS IN COLOMBIA

by

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This paper examines the supply side of the United States counterdrug strategy. The spotlight is on Colombia since the success of the US counternarcotics effort is inextricably linked to the goings on in that state ? a country in disrepair beleaguered by years of revolution, human rights abuses, failing economy, and widespread crime and corruption. Drug traffickers have found a sanctuary and thrive in the disorder that is partially of their own making, and partially the product of two other non-state actors: guerrillas and paramilitaries who benefit from and perpetuate the chaos for their own ends. This paper looks at the challenge these actors pose on the Colombian and US governments and how each country characterizes and prioritizes the associated threats. In short, there is a significant difference in each country?s national objectives since Colombia is fighting a war for its survival while the US is fighting a political war on drugs. With a myopic eye on drug traffickers, the US has undertaken a number of hit-and-miss economic, diplomatic and military counterdrug strategies. This paper delves into the latter ? how the US has employed the military instruments of power in a peacetime supporting role. It also analyzes the National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy to reveal the factors the US must consider before engaging drug traffickers more directly with its full military strength.

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Preface

I was extremely fortunate to have the former Air Attaché to Colombia, Colonel David Vogelgesang of the Air War College faculty, as my research advisor. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for all his assistance and expertise. I would also like to thank Wing Commander James Klein who taught the National and International Security Studies block of the ACSC curriculum. His superb instruction helped me to frame this research paper. A special thanks to Major Donald Heilig, USA, a fellow ACSC student and friend who spent countless hours transferring the text and tables into the ACSC template... Finally a heartfelt thanks goes to the professional staff of the Air University Fairchild Library.

Abstract

This paper examines the supply side of the United States counterdrug strategy. The spotlight is on Colombia since the success of the US counternarcotics effort is inextricably linked to the goings on in that state – a country in disrepair beleaguered by years of revolution, human rights abuses, failing economy, and widespread crime and corruption. Drug traffickers have found a sanctuary and thrive in the disorder that is partially of their own making, and partially the product of two other non-state actors: guerrillas and paramilitaries who benefit from and perpetuate the chaos for their own ends. This paper looks at the challenge these actors pose on the Colombian and US governments and how each country characterizes and prioritizes the associated threats. In short, there is a significant difference in each country's national objectives since Colombia is fighting a war for its survival while the US is fighting a political war on drugs. With a myopic eye on drug traffickers, the US has undertaken a number of hit-and-miss economic, diplomatic and military counterdrug strategies. This paper delves into the latter – how the US has employed the military instruments of power in a peacetime supporting role. It also analyzes the National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy to reveal the factors the US must consider before engaging drug traffickers more directly with its full military strength.

Part 1

Introduction

From a seemingly innocuous form of relaxation, the practice of chewing coca leaves has transitioned into a dangerous $500 billion annual industry run by powerful indigenous organizations. The illegal drug trade has spawned an alarming percentage of crime-related activities, deaths, murders, kidnappings, ruined lives and families. At the macro level, proceeds from illegal drugs are larger than the worldwide oil and gas industries, twice as big as the motor vehicle industry, and surpass the gross national product (GNP) of most countries.[1] The colossal magnitude of this underground activity endangers populations throughout the world and threatens the sovereignty of many nations.

Some countries, like Colombia, are impacted so severely that their governments are literally fighting for national survival. Other countries, like the United States, consider drug abuse alarming, and are expending a significant portion of their government resources to fight the problem. Others still, like Switzerland and the Netherlands, are equally concerned but have acquiesced, and are experimenting with legalization or decriminalization to minimize the impact of this element on their societies.

The degree by which a country interprets the drug threat on the pendulum of right and wrong will determine its drug policy, its strategy, and how it prioritizes and employs its instruments of power (IOPs) against it. Demand for drugs has provoked alarming increases in

health problems, social costs, crime, violence, corruption and prostitution. For the United States, the cumulative effect of the illegal drug trade is considered a threat to its national security. The United States drug strategy recognizes the importance of reducing both the demand and the supply sides associated with the drug trade. On the demand side, the internal focus is on drug prevention, drug treatment and law enforcement. On the supply side, the external focus is on Colombia – the world's leading producer of cocaine.

The emphasis of this paper is on the supply (not the demand) side of the US counterdrug strategy. The spotlight is on Colombia since the success of the United States counternarcotics effort is inextricably linked to the goings on in that state – a country in disrepair beleaguered by years of revolution, human rights abuses, failing economy, and widespread crime and corruption. Drug traffickers have found a sanctuary and thrive in the disorder that is partially of their own making, and partially the product of two other non-state actors: guerrillas and paramilitaries who benefit from and perpetuate the chaos for their own ends. This paper examines the challenge these actors pose on the Colombian and US governments and how each country characterizes and prioritizes the associated threats. In short, there is a significant difference in each country's national objectives since Colombia is fighting a war for its survival while the US is fighting a political war on drugs. This divergence creates incongruent strategies that have resulted in significant tension and frustration in the part of both countries. For the United States, the difference in scope is profound, manifesting itself in its reflection and how it construes its leadership role following the end of the Cold War.

Today, the United States defends its borders from transnational threats like drug trafficking and terrorism. Without compelling reasons, it is more reluctant nowadays than during the Cold War to engage in the internal struggles and political machinations of friendly and non-friendly

countries. In Colombia, the US is disinclined to assume the policing duties of mopping up paramilitaries and revolutionaries that do not directly threaten its national security. With a myopic microscope focused exclusively on drug traffickers, the US has undertaken a number of hit-and-miss economic, diplomatic and military counterdrug strategies. This paper delves into the latter – how the US has employed the military IOP in a peacetime supporting role. It also analyzes the National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy to reveal the factors the US must consider before engaging drug traffickers more directly with its full military strength.

Notes

[1] Barry R. McCaffrey, *Remarks to the Foreign Press Center* (National Press Building, Washington, D.C., (29 May 1999).

Part 2

Colombia – How to Fail as a State

Multiply the drug-associated crime, violence, corruption and social decay of the United States by ten or more to better understand the impact of the drug trade on Colombia. Ironically, while the drug trade permeates every corner of society, it is only one of three forces that threaten Colombia. Respect for the law, regard for human rights, and support for democratic rule are also under attack from left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries. This section covers the peril to the Colombian government posed by the three horsemen of their apocalypse: the guerrillas, the paramilitaries and the drug traffickers. US efforts are aimed at destroying the last since it respects no borders and wields its sword mercilessly against its citizens. But the mythological three-headed cerbarus who guards the entrance of the infernal regions may be a better characterization of the unholy trinity representing Colombia's enemies. The threat is difficult to split since each entity is inextricably linked to another.

Guerrillas: Emissaries to the Peasants – Guardians of the Drug Trade

There are two Marxists rebel groups in Colombia: the National Liberation Army (Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional, ELN) and the larger of the two, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC). Together they comprise a force of 25,000 armed insurgents and control 40 percent of Colombia,[1] mostly in the sparsely populated rural areas.

The jungles and countryside of Colombia may be the last to bare casualties in the wars of ideology. However, the Cold War defeat of the Soviet patrons has not impaired the ability of the Colombian Marxists to finance their movement. In truth, they have not only endured, but have actually prospered through crime and extortion. As an example, the ELN extorts large sums of money from oil companies who pay them not to blow up their pipelines. Similarly, the FARC tax cocaine traffickers in return for freedom of movement and protection from government forces in guerrilla controlled areas. Kidnapping is another lucrative means guerrillas use to finance the war. Reportedly, it is so widespread that it is dangerous for anyone of means to leave the city by land. Having blue eyes alone is enough to mark someone a target since this feature is frequently associated with members of the Colombian elite or rich foreigners. The middle and upper classes are basically trapped since guerrillas hold the countryside, and none of the major cities is securely accessible from any other by road. One author notes that a more accurate title for the President of Colombia is Mayor of Bogota.[2]

Leftist guerrillas are deeply involved in the drug trade. Regrettably, revolution and illegal drug cultivation fit hand in glove in Colombia. Together they are choking the life out of this hemisphere's second oldest democracy. Revolutionary groups control the territory where drugs are grown and manufactured; tax and protect the growing, production, and drug-trafficking infrastructure; and benefit greatly from the export of these deadly substances.[3] In fact, narcotics trafficking finances Colombia's guerrilla war almost entirely.[4]

What do the guerrillas want? One of the FARC commanders told it simply to the Spanish newspaper "El Pais"… to rule Colombia.[5] Maybe so, but "Drug Czar" General McCaffrey doesn't think it is so simple. In a press release he declared that guerrilla involvement in the drug trade has made counterinsurgency and counterdrug measures "two sides of the same coin."[6]

Paramilitaries: Defenders of the Oligarchy – Protectors of the Drug Trade

Much of the killing in Colombia is committed by private paramilitary groups – armed civilians or retired military personnel who are paid to protect the interests of large landowners, including drug lords, and foreign-owned corporations. Paramilitary groups violently oppose and target communist insurgents who extort money from their benefactors. Their modus operandi is to answer revolutionary violence with even greater counter-revolutionary violence.

By bringing about heinous acts of terror against peasants, paramilitaries undermine the revolutionary movement by contradicting guerrilla claims that guerrillas look after the peasants in the war against capitalist oppression. After all, who protects the peasants against the paramilitaries? In a bizarre twist of irony in the war of ideologies, "better alive than red" appears to have significantly more appeal than the "better dead than red" Cold War aphorism, as peasants flee the countryside, every day by the thousands, to avoid the guerrilla-paramilitary crossfire.

By some accounts, there are over 1.5 million internal refugees in Colombia, generally from the besieged countryside. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) report that Colombia has the fourth largest population of displaced persons in the world. In 1998 alone, there were as many as 300,000 persons driven from their home by the vicious conflict between right-wing militias and left-wing guerrillas.[7]

Reports also show that much of the countryside in north central Colombia is now ruled by right-wing military groups who have driven out the guerrillas by subjecting the civilian population to terror.[8] On 2 Jun 99, as an example, paramilitaries killed 11 people in the river port city of Barrancabermeja. The victims were rounded up in several working class neighborhoods by assailants who had a list of people they claimed were guerrilla sympathizers.[9]

Not an isolated incidence, paramilitaries also target judges, clergy, journalists, students, union leaders, politicians, and human rights activists – anyone they perceive as an adversary.

The partnership between right-wing paramilitaries and drug cartels is an old story, but one that is worth mentioning. Unlike left-wing guerrillas whose revolutionary activities have always been regarded against the law, paramilitaries operated legally until they were outlawed in 1989 because their movement had been taken over by Pablo Escobar, the notorious late drug lord of the ruthless Medellin Cartel. Carlos Castano, today's top commander of the rightist military group – the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) – is closely linked to the Henao Montoya organization, which according to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), is the most powerful drug trafficking group to emerge since the demise of the Cali cartel. For all intents and purposes, the paramilitaries have become the armed wing of the drug lords,[10] an association that exists to this day.

All's fair in love and war, and in Colombia there are strange bedfellows. To complicate matters, countless allegations from many sources, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have established the close connection between paramilitary forces and the Colombian military.[11] Despite the atrocious crime perpetrated by right-wing paramilitaries against many elements of society, the Army does not actively engage the paramilitaries since they share a common enemy – leftist guerrillas, the army's number one priority. Undoubtedly, the Army is reluctant (perhaps unable) to fight two opponents simultaneously. This unholy relationship, consummated by the government's direct support or by their sheer apathy on the subject of paramilitary violence, has been a growing concern and focus of US policy.

Drug Traffickers: Financiers of the Paramilitaries and Guerrillas

Until recently, Colombian drug dealers imported coca from Peru and Bolivia for processing and shipment to US markets. With the implementation of more effective counterdrug measures by Peru and Bolivia, coca and poppy growers moved their operations to Colombia where the government has less control of its remote territory. Peru is no longer the leading cultivator of coca. According to General McCaffrey, that dubious distinction now belongs to Colombia.[12]

Coca cultivation has risen 100 percent in Colombia over the last three years in a concentrated area controlled by guerrillas. Here, powerful trafficking groups act with near impunity, seizing and maintaining their power through threats, intimidation, and murder directed against journalists, law enforcement officials, politicians and members of the judicial system.[13]

The large international cocaine syndicates of yesteryear, such as the Medellin and Cali cartels, have been basically destroyed. Today, the operations are mostly fragmented into a looser association of smaller, more specialized trafficking groups which rarely number over 20. The traffickers, according to General Serrano, Colombia's national police chief, are not the flashy criminals with Rolex watches and gold chains that people have come to expect. They are mostly between 25-40 years in age, seldom have criminal records, and work through legitimate small businesses.[14] In short, they are much more difficult to catch.

Moreover, drug traffickers are extremely adaptable, reacting to interdiction successes by shifting routes and changing modes of transportation. They have access to sophisticated technology and resources to support their illegal operations.[15] Likewise, smuggling methods continue to develop and improve. One way recently discovered is termed "black cocaine" – a mixture of iron dust and charcoal that fools both the sniffer dogs and chemical detection tests.[16] Besides more acreage, officials have also found a more potent coca variety being grown in parts

of Colombia. This variety produces greater quantity of alkaloids, which means it can produce more cocaine.[17] Colombian drug traffickers are also diversifying and are becoming a main source of heroin for Eastern United States. Reportedly, many drug abusers prefer Colombian heroin since it is especially pure, and can be snorted or smoked rather than injected.[18]

The Besieged Colombian Government – A Year in the Life

Andres Pastrana won the 1998 Colombian Presidential election with promises of a new peace settlement, an end to corruption, and economic recovery. Shortly after, President Pastrana met with the FARC leader, Manuel Marulanda Velez ("Tirofijo"), and agreed to demilitarize five southern municipalities consisting of 16,000 square miles (about the size of Switzerland) to make the peace with the guerrillas.[19]

It worked temporarily, but in January 1999 the FARC suspended talks with the government until authorities proved they were taking action against paramilitary groups, which claimed responsibility for a massacre of 150 civilians earlier that month. In one horrifying incident, 70 armed militia swept into a small village while many residents attended church. With a list of intended victims, they dragged and shot 27 members of the congregation while other villagers watched. The death squads defended their actions claiming the civilians they killed were leftist rebels. Analysts believed the massacres were perpetrated for one or two reasons: to undermine the peace talks, or to ensure they had a seat at the peace table – a demand the FARC rejected.[20]

"We have not rested on rhetoric," wrote Victor Ricardo, the key government peace emissary, in a letter to the FARC. He added there were over 370 paramilitary fighters under arrest. On 11 January 99, Defense Minister Rodrigo Lloreda also promised to "silence paramilitary rifles" and announced new military measures to stop the killings. The following day, Pastrana warned that the government would go after them with all its resources if they

refused to participate in the peace process. He added that the peace talks with paramilitary groups would be carried out separately from the talks with the guerrillas.[21] The government put more words to action and arrested Lieutenant Colonel Lino Sanchez on 31 Mar 99 for his alleged involvement in the massacre of 30 people who were beheaded or tortured by the AUC in 1997. On 9 April 99, Pastrana ordered the dismissal of two more senior army officers, General Fernando Perez and General Rito Alejo.[22]

On 2 May 99, government talks with the FARC resumed, and Pastrana and Marulanda met again, the second time in a year, to finalize an agenda and push forward the stalled negotiations. The agenda included human rights, agrarian reform, free-market economic policies, reform of the armed forces, and a crop substitution project for campesinos growing coca and poppies for use in manufacturing illegal drugs.[23] Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the hurdles facing Pastrana and Marulanda are disagreements vis-à-vis expectations within their own camps.

Leonel Narvarez, a Catholic priest who has met frequently with FARC commanders, believes that "two tendencies have appeared in the guerrillas – those who want war and those who want peace… It is a fight between generations."[24] FARC leaders are willing to negotiate, according to Alejo Vargas, vice rector at the National University, but they want pervasive reforms to the political and social system. Francisco Leal, a political analyst at the University of the Andes, agrees but believes this is problematic since the ruling elite – politicians and businessmen – merely want to buy off the guerrillas, and do not want to cede real political or economic power.[25] The most thought provoking statements, many of which are contradictions and some of which are undoubtedly rhetoric (but perhaps not), come from the guerrillas themselves. In one instance, Raul Reyes, a leading spokesman for the FARC, commented that the key aim of the FARC was to take power by peaceful or violent means and set up a socialist

regime of workers, campesinos, and Indians. "The government must negotiate to hand back part of what it has taken away from the people," he added.[26]

Likewise, disagreements inside the government camp are difficult to overcome. For example, President Pastrana has been severely criticized by all sides for his decision to withdraw the army from an area about the size of Switzerland. This, they argue, has created a vacuum that the FARC has not only filled, but has used as a secure environment to hide kidnapped victims, forcibly recruit schoolchildren, and create a safe haven from which to launch large-scale offensives. In a twisted form of revolutionary justice, the FARC has its own "Office of Complaints and Claims" presided by a FARC commander who judges up to 200 cases a month involving everything from land disputes and debts to cases of marital infidelity.[27] Asked to account for thirty-four people who disappeared in the zone, FARC spokesman Raul Reyes declared that eleven had been executed as army spies.[28] Ironically, Pastrana supporters note that although a large population (roughly 100,000) have been left under guerrilla rule this strategy favors the government since the FARC leaders and some 5,000 troops are now holed up in an area where there is no fighting, while the army is able to send its men elsewhere.[29] Noteworthy, Reyes does not think much Pastrana's concession: "It's no gift. We've always had units there."[30]

Much of the criticism against Pastrana entails the widespread speculation that rebels have no real desire for peace, but are stalling for time and concessions to gain a military advantage. Others consider these compromises to be a humiliating capitulation to pressures by the rebels and to the US. According to Alvaro Uribe, a key opposition leader, it is "counterproductive to make concessions to the insurgency without a single act of reciprocity." Naturally, much of the condemnation is from the far right, including claims from General Harold Bedoya, former commander of Colombian armed forces, that the government has created a permanent FARC

liberated zone or "independent republic" inside Colombia. The moderates and the left also question Pastrana's negotiation tactics and agenda. Many feel that Pastrana has given the guerrillas an opportunity to shape politics and economics.[31] Political commentator, Eduardo Pizarro, put it best:

> "For argument's sake, let's say that the FARC still represents a sector of the peasantry. Is that enough to give it the chance, served up on a silver platter, to make decisions for all Colombians? This type of offer sends a deeply harmful message – in Colombia violence continues to be profitable… While the majority of Colombians work quietly and peacefully for a better country, the future is negotiated with those who demand what's theirs with the barrel of a gun."[32]

Indeed. On 12 Apr 99, the ELN imitated these intimidation tactics and hijacked a plane with 41 passengers and crewmembers. Later, on 30 May 99, they entered a church in a well-to-do suburb of Cali and took hostage nearly 150 parishioners. ELN demands included a settlement for a militarized territory similar to what the FARC had attained. The president declared in frustration "we are talking about a terrorist group… a policy of peace loses all meaning if, in the absence of agreements, that policy is met with barbarous acts such as kidnapping airline passengers and churchgoers."[33] After repeated claims that the ELN would not be given a demilitarized zone, the government capitulated on 4 May 99 and agreed to withdraw troops from some sectors in exchange for the captives.[34]

On 26 May 99, Colombian Defense Minister, Rodrigo Lloreda, resigned over the President's handling of the peace process. Lloreda, a former presidential candidate, senate member, US ambassador, and respected newspaper publisher, was the backbone of Pastrana's cabinet. For many in the ruling elite, Lloreda represented a guarantee that Pastrana would not sell out their interests. Likewise, he had begun a program to strengthen the military, which won the loyalty of top officers. Reportedly, 20 generals tendered their resignations following Lloreda's announcement, which set off talks of a military coup. The president rejected the resignations,

and the armed forces commander, General Fernando Tapias, assured the nation that its 58 military commanders had "reiterated their loyalty to the president, their absolute respect for the constitution, and their respect for the peace process."[35] Still, most analysts, including the daily "El Tiempo" and the opposition party, considered the resignation to be a significant political crisis noting that it had caused "dangerous cracks" in the military.[36]

On 8 Jul 99, the FARC staged a major offensive that penetrated within 25 miles of the capital.[37] According to one account, the assault "made it appear that the capital of the nation was under siege."[38] Reportedly, the FARC attacked 40 targets all over the country in a coordinated assault that was labeled the biggest FARC offensive of its 34-year war against the government."[39] This wave of assaults/terrorism on military and civilian targets killed nearly 300 people, and represented a blatant attempt to strengthen its position on the eve of the peace talks. In exploiting the demilitarized zone, which served as a staging ground for the offensive, the guerrillas displayed acts of "deception and violence that is closing the window of opportunity for the goal of reconciliation."[40] In November the FARC conducted the biggest offensive since July, staging attacks in 14 towns, and killing eight policemen and a navy marine. Such has been the pattern of this year's fighting and the challenge facing Colombia's new President.[41] But Pastrana faces another major problem beside the runaway peace – a failing economy.

Colombia is suffering from the worst economic crisis in 60 years according to Jaime Ruiz, director of the government's National Planning Department. Pastrana blames the economic problems on his predecessor, Ernesto Samper, who spent freely to boost political support amid corruption scandals. Budget cuts and tight monetary policies, without precedent in Colombia, are necessary to repair the damage said Pastrana. He added that strict measures and efforts to reduce the fiscal deficit are necessary to secure international help, including a 3 billion dollar

loan requested from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in July 1999. The combination of violence, corruption and the sagging economy has made foreign investors nervous. A poll of foreign companies taken in April 1999 named political and guerrilla instability as the two main factors discouraging more investment.[42] Today, approximately 50 percent of Colombia's 40 million people live in poverty, and 20 percent of the workforce is unemployed.[43]

Despite or because of the turmoil, President Pastrana has aligned Colombia more closely with the US' war on drugs. For nearly a decade, Colombia refused to hand over suspected drug traffickers to the US, but in November 1999 two major narcotics traffickers were extradited and now face trial in the US.[44] While this pleased US policy makers, it undoubtedly distressed many Colombians who fear the terrorist backlash. A decade ago, car bombs and the murders of senior officials by drug traffickers forced a halt to extraditions.[45] General McCaffrey commended President Pastrana for his "courage and dedication" in standing up to the traffickers and rebels. As one columnist observed, however, "if they step up their attacks, Pastrana will need those qualities – and much more."[46]

With this quagmire of convoluted agendas, competing interests, and disingenuous dialogue, the peace process has been nothing less than tortuous for President Pastrana who stands ready to put behind years of violence and corruption. The challenge is compounded since peace is not high in the priority of paramilitary groups and drug traffickers who perpetuate anarchy through corruption and intimidation, and thrive in the Colombian chaos.

In a hearing of the US Senate Caucus and International Narcotics Control, Senator Charles Grassley recently summarized the crisis in Colombia in a segment of his statement:

> "The insurgents, while not in a position to seize power, are growing in strength and profiting from drug smuggling. In some cases, they are better trained than the military. The military, conversely, suffers from a variety of systemic and institutional problems of long standing. It lacks equipment, training, resources,

> and appropriate manpower. Paramilitary groups, with possible links to the military, are waging their own war against the state. The peace process appears stalled. Violence is escalating. The judiciary system appears unable to cope. Colombia is in the midst of a major financial recession."[47]

Regarding the threat of illegal drugs to the United States, he commented that:

> "It is not remote. It is not abstract. It is not obscure. Yet we seem to find ourselves in the midst of a muddle. Our policy appears adrift and our focus blurred."[48]

Senator Grassley's comments help to frame the rest of this paper – the affect of illegal drugs to US interests, its impact on the lives of US citizens and concerns over US counterdrug strategies.

Notes

[1] Barry R. McCaffrey, Interview. CNN Both Sides with Jesse Jackson (5 September 99).

[2] Anthony Daniels, "Colombia's Hell," *National Review* 51, no. 23 (6 December 1999): 46.

[3] Thomas I. Umberg, Deputy Director for Supply Reduction, Office of National Drug Control Policy. Testimony before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Washington D.C., (3 March 1999)

[4] John L. Mica, prepared testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources (6 August 1999)

[5] Daniels, 46.

[6] Frank Smyth, "U.S. Colombia Policy: A Willful Myopia," *North American Congress on Latin America* 33, no. 3 (Nov/Dec 1999): 4.

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[8] "Pastrana's Many Battles," *Economist* Vol 353, no. 8147 (27 November 1999): 31.

[9] "Colombia: Defense Minister Quits in Dispute Regarding Concessions to Guerrillas." *NotiSur* (4 June 1999): np.

[10] Smyth, 4.

[11] Mathew Knoester, "The Colombian Money Pit," *Dollars & Sense* 226 (Nov/Dec 1999): 8.

[12] McCaffrey, remarks to University of Miami (11 Feb 1999) and the Foreign Press Center (29 May 1998).

[13] Umberg, Testimony (3 March 1999).

[14] "A New Class of Trafficker," *The Economist* 352, no. 8136 (9 November 1999): 38.

[15] Umberg, Testimony (3 March 1999).

[16] "A New Class of Trafficker," 38.

[17] Juanita Darling, "U.S. is Losing War on Drugs in Colombia," *Los Angeles Times* 8 August 1999.

[18] "A New Class of Trafficker," 38.

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[19] "Guerrilla Law," *The Economist* 353, no. 8150 (18 Dec 1999): 31.

[20] “Colombia: Guerrillas Call Off Peace Talks Following String of Paramilitary Massacres,” *NotiSur* (22 Januar*y* 1999): np.

[21] Ibid, np.

[22] “Colombia: War Continues Despite Calls for Peace,” *NotiSur* (16 April 1999): np.

[23] “Colombia: Talks Between Government and Rebels Resume,” *NotiSur* (14 May 99): np.

[24] Ibid, np.

[25] “Colombia: Guerrillas Call Off Peace Talks Following String of Paramilitary Massacres,” np.

[26] “Colombia: Talks Between Government and Rebels Resume,” np.

[27] "Guerrilla Law,” 31.

[28] Ana Carigan, "Colombia's Best Hope," *Nation* 269, no. 7 (6-13 September 1999): 5.

[29] “Pastrana’s Many Battles,” 31

[30] Linda Robinson, "Guerrillas in the Mist," *New Republic* 221, no. 10 (6 September 1999): 21.

[31] “Colombia: Talks Between Government and Rebels Resume,” np.

[32] Ibid, np.

[33] “Colombia: Defense Minister Quits in Dispute Regarding Concessions to Guerrillas,” np.

[34] Ibid, np.

[35] Ibid, np.

[36] Ibid, np.

[37] Larry Rohter and Christopher Wren, "U.S. Official Proposes $1 Billion for Colombia Drug War," *New York Times* (17 June 1999).

[38] Robert Taylor, "Bogota Under Siege?" *World Press Review* Vol 49, no. 9 (September 1999): 21.

[39] Robinson, 21

[40] Taylor, 21

[41] “Pastrana’s Many Battles,” 31

[42] “Colombia: Country in Worst Recession in Decades,” *NotiSur* (23 July 1999): np.

[43] Knoester, 8.

[44] Thomas Omestad, "Leaving on a Jet Plane: Bye-Bye Drug Lords," *U.S. News and World Report* 127, no. 22 (6 December 1999): 59.

[45] Ibid, 59.

[46] Ibid, 59.

[47] Charles Grassley, *Hearing of the U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control* (21 Sep 1999).

[48] Ibid.

Part 3

The US Drug Problem – How Drugs Affect US National Security

As fortune would have it, domestic problems in the US today are not nearly as ominous as the dark clouds that hang above Colombia. In the past, politicians have successfully navigated the US through the trouble waters of the Civil War, the Great Depression, and the violence of the civil rights and peace movements. The forecast for tomorrow is partly sunny, with a chance of thunderstorms – not of the same magnitude as Colombia, but potentially menacing nonetheless.

Illegal drugs inflict a great deal of damage on the US. The impact is staggering when viewed in its entirety. Illegal drugs kill and sicken the population. They propagate crime and corruption. They reduce productivity in the workplace and deplete the nation's wealth. In sum, drug abuse results in a significant waste of human and economic potential. Looking at the problem as a political realist, the drug trade represents an opportunity loss in productivity, infrastructure and social services since this money could be invested better in legitimate businesses or government activities. Furthermore, not only are most dangerous drugs produced abroad, but the criminal elements that traffic them to the US live, manage, launder, invest and enjoy their ill-gotten profits in other countries at the expense of the US.[1]

The statistics paint a gloomy picture. The cost of drug abuse to the US is estimated to be over $110 billion a year. It causes approximately a third of all crime, and results in 1.5 million arrests a year.[2] There are over 1.6 million people behind bars. Approximately 60 percent of the

federal and 22 percent of state prisoners are drug offenders. Shockingly, every inmate sentenced to a five-year prison term costs taxpayers about $100,000 dollars.[3] Today 6.4 percent of Americans use illegal drugs, and of those, 73 percent are employed.[4] Drug abusers in the workplace account for 66 percent higher absentee rate, 90 percent more disciplinary actions, and 85 percent greater health benefit consumption. Around 5 percent of pregnant women use illegal drugs, putting their unborn children at risk to chemical dependency or worse.[5] Each year, illegal drugs send 500,000 Americans to emergency rooms and cause 14,000 drug-related deaths.[6]

The drug threat is real, and as they say, represents clear and present danger. If it goes untreated today illegal drug use could erode the vital underpinnings of tomorrow's future.

Notes

[1] Robert S. Gelbard, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. *Statement to the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control and the House Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee,* (12 September 1996).

[2] McCaffrey, *Remarks to the Foreign Press Center*, (29 May 1999).

[3] Barry R. McCaffrey, *Remarks to Town Hall* (Los Angeles, CA, 5 August 1998).

[4] Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), "National Drug Control Strategy," (1999), Introduction. <http://www.whitehousepolicy.gov>, 1999.

[5] McCaffrey, 5 August 1998.

[6] Umberg, 3 March 1999.

Part 4

National Security Strategy

The President is our Commander in Chief and our principal statesman in the international arena. To understand the potential for intensifying military involvement in the war on drugs, it is important to crack open the National Security Strategy, which represents the focus of his administration. It is in this document where we find the unequivocal stance that the US must be able to deter and defeat large-scale aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping time frames. Peppered throughout, there are significant remarks about probable military involvement in small-scale contingencies that encompass a full range of operations short of major theater warfare. These include, but are not limited to, humanitarian assistance, peace operations, enforcing embargoes and no fly zones, evacuating US citizens, reinforcing key allies, and limited strikes and intervention.[1] Reference to US military involvement in drug trafficking in this document is minimal, but can be inferred by key passages, starting from the three goals and objectives:[2]

GOALS	OBJECTIVES
Protect lives and safety of US Citizens	Enhance US Security
Maintain Sovereignty of US Territory	Bolster US Economic Prosperity
Promote Prosperity of the US and its Citizens	Promote Democracy Abroad

Figure 1 National Security Goals and Objectives

Clearly, it does not take a mental leap to see that every goal and objective justifies US military involvement in the Colombian drug wars. Still, when faced with a crisis, the US enjoys a wide range of options (not just military intervention) with which to effect a favorable outcome. To curb illegal drug trafficking in Colombia, the US has integrated various approaches linked with the diplomatic, economic and the military instruments of power (IOPs). The extent to which these IOPs are used is determined by the priority of the national interest. Because there are many demands for US action, national interests are prioritized by three categories.[3]

Vital Interests: These interests are of broad, overriding importance to the survival, safety and vitality of the US. They include the physical security of the US territory and that of US allies, the safety of US citizens, US economic well being and the protection of US critical infrastructures. The US will do what is necessary to defend these vital interests. Will it use the military instrument of power? Definitely…unilaterally and decisively.

Important National Interests: These interests do not affect US national survival, but they do affect the US national well-being and character of the world in which we live. Will it use the military instrument of power? Yes…insofar as costs and risks are commensurate with the interests at stake.

Humanitarian and Other Interests: These interests involve circumstances where the US may act because its social/moral values demand it. Will it use the military instrument of power? Maybe…but probably in a secondary or tertiary role supporting other more pertinent diplomatic or economic interests.

Figure 2 National Security Interests

Although debated, most would consent that the threat from narco trafficking is considered an "important" national interest. As stipulated in the National Security Strategy, the use of the military IOP is therefore determined by a cost/risk assessment. Based on commitment of US resources towards this effort, one can interpret that we have the Colombian drug wars in scope and are (slightly to moderately) engaged militarily – from a support role, not as an operational fighting force. The latter requires much more presidential resolve since it is subject to extensive scrutiny from Congress, the media, the public, our military leaders and our allies.

The decision to commit US forces is more complicated today given a growing trend toward international globalization – the worldwide integration of economic, technological, cultural and political factors. This infers that the US will be affected, now more then ever, by events beyond its borders. As an example, drug trafficking in the National Security Strategy is identified as a transnational threat – a threat typically caused by non-state actors that transcend international borders. Other examples of transnational threats include terrorism, international crime, arms smuggling, environmental damage, and refugee migration.[4] Through corruption and coercion, drug traffickers have significantly affected the ability of Colombia to provide basic governance and security to its people. Whether Bogota effectively functions as a government is open to debate, but many argue that Colombia has reached a crisis, and could be on the verge of becoming a "failed state" – a second type of threat identified in the National Security Strategy. In political jargon, a "failed state" results when a government loses its ability to provide for the welfare of its citizens. Possible consequences of a failed state include mass migration, civil unrest, mass killings and spillover into neighboring states.[5] In our President's words:

> "More and more, problems that start beyond our border can become problems within our borders. No one is immune to the threats posed by rogue states, by the spread of weapons of mass destruction, by terrorism, crime and drug trafficking, by environmental decay and economic dislocation."[6]

The murky forecast of the National Security Strategy calls for an increase in small-scale contingencies, and to resolve these emergencies, a commensurate increase in commitment from US military forces. It further stipulates that to be successful in contingency operations the military will have to work more closely and effectively with other US government agencies, non-governmental organizations, regional and international security organizations and coalition partners. This is certainly true for counterdrug efforts. It also recognizes that under some

circumstances the US military has a "unique" ability to respond quickly and with "minimal risk" to American lives.[7] In these cases the National Security Strategy claims that:[8]

The US military may intervene when:

a) Costs and risks are equal with the stakes involved, and
b) When there is reason to believe that military action can make a difference.

These Operations will be:

a) Limited in duration,
b) Have a clearly defined end state, and
c) Designed to give the affected country the opportunity to restore its own basic services.

This policy recognizes that the US military is:

a) Ultimately not the best tool for addressing long-term concerns (humanitarian, but also drug trafficking) and that,
b) Ultimately, the responsibility for the fate of a nation rests with its own people.

US forces must also be:

a) Prepared to withdraw from contingency operations if needed to deploy to a major theater of war.
b) Kept at a high level of readiness and will be trained, equipped and organized to be multi-mission capable.

Figure 3 Military Employment in Crisis

The conditions above illustrate the president's view on "when, why and for how long" the military will be employed in a crisis. The principle of e*ngagement* helps to answer the "how often" question. Accordingly, the National Security Strategy considers it imperative that the US be prepared and willing to use all IOPs to influence other states and non-state actors. To this end, *engagement* means that the US will be proactive in its effort to: (a) *shape* the international environment, (b) *respond* to threats and crisis, and (c) *prepare* for an uncertain future. The message of *engagement* is clear. The US will not become isolationist following the victory in the Cold War, especially since its ability to influence the world is greater today than ever.[9] In our President's words, "At this moment in history, the United States is called upon to lead."[10]

Good words… significant consequences. Policy makers must be prudent, and the military vigilant, that we don't rush from the Cold War to a war hot as an oven.

Notes

[1] The White House, "*A National Security Strategy for a New Century,"* (1998), 21-22.
[2] Ibid, pages iii and 5.
[3] Ibid, 5-6.
[4] Ibid, 6.
[5] Ibid, 6-7.
[6] Gelbard, 12 September 1996.
[7] The White House, "*A National Security Strategy for a New Century*," (1998), 21.
[8] Ibid, 21
[9] Ibid, 1-24.
[10] Ibid, iv.

Part 5

National Military Strategy

"It is important to emphasize the Armed Forces' core competence: we fight."

— General John M. Shalikasvili, CJCS

A stance or an omen… maybe both.

The National Military Strategy is signed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It provides the strategic direction for the armed forces, and expounds on the role the military plays in implementing the President's strategy of engagement. Like the National Security Strategy, this is a broad-spectrum document intended to provide a strategic focus, so specific issues are not addressed in solid terms. However, one theme is clear and engraved in concrete. While it acknowledges the important contribution the military plays in engagement, more specifically in shaping the environment, it is unambiguous in asserting that the purpose of the armed forces is to deter and defeat threats of organized violence to the US and its interests. Fighting and winning two nearly simultaneous wars is the primary task.[1] Responding to a wide variety of other crises (read humanitarian, drug trafficking, etc) is secondary.

US national military objectives are to *promote peace and stability,* and when necessary, to *defeat adversaries.*[2] Without question, military power can be applied indirectly or directly to accomplish the President's principle of engagement – shaping the international environment, responding to a full spectrum of crisis, and preparing for an uncertain future. Regarding

Colombia's drug trafficking problems, the US military is working to achieve its first objective of promoting peace and stability. In National Security Strategy vernacular, the military is engaged in shaping the environment in ways favorable to US interests. The US military is not, at this time, engaged in the responding mode. In military terms, it is not defeating (fighting) an adversary in Colombia.

Promoting Peace and Stability – Shaping the Environment

The Department of Defense trains and equips soldiers to fight and win the nation's wars. Once peace is achieved through victory, other departments take on the primary responsibility to train and equip their staffs to promote peace and stability. For many warriors, it is difficult to shift from military doctrine to diplomatic doctrine, assuming the latter is available. Peacetime military engagement is, after all, an oxymoron. Still, the US military has saluted sharply and is actively engaged in helping shape Colombia. For example, it is involved in a number of host-nation initiatives for security assistance and is helping build coalitions and partnerships in Colombia and throughout the region via information sharing and contacts with other militaries. Sponsoring training or participating in riverine exercises also helps to improve interoperability/readiness, provides geographic/cultural familiarity, and builds trust between the two countries.

The root of conflict in Colombia is complex and takes on political, military, criminal and economic characteristics. The threat to the US is drug trafficking and the results that drug abuse has on our society. Again the military is not the best IOP to address the root cause of conflict or the threat it poses on the domestic home front. Nevertheless, the President does have some unique military capabilities at his disposal that he can use in peacetime to help reduce the

conflict and threat. Using military Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets to detect and monitor illegal drug transshipments is one such example.

Ironically, the most traditional and effective peacetime contribution the military makes in shaping the environment – deterrence – has not been helpful in deterring the drug wars. The answer, of course, is simple. To successfully deter against Colombia's narco-traffickers and/or guerrillas, the US must demonstrate its military capability and its willingness to use it. Deterrence breaks down here since the US is reluctant to employ in combat its military hegemon. In short, the US has demonstrated a willingness not to use its military in Colombia.

Defeating Adversaries – Responding to a Full Spectrum of Crisis

Defeating adversaries is the second military objective, and the military's answer to the President's second principle of engagement – responding to a full spectrum of crisis. It is applied when US strategy is unsuccessful in shaping the environment or the use of the military (among other IOPs) fails to promote peace and stability.

In the event of armed conflict, the purpose of the military is to defeat the enemy.[3] The focus of the JCS is to ensure there is a military capability to fight and win two Major Theater Wars (MTWs) in two distant theaters, in overlapping time frames. According to the National Military Strategy, the US faces this challenge in the Arabian Gulf region and in Northeast Asia. More likely are challenges that will require military intervention in smaller-scale contingency operations short of an MTW. This includes using military force to execute limited strikes, enforce no-fly zones, and conduct humanitarian assistance and peace operations.[4] Using complementary verbiage from the National Security Strategy, the National Military Strategy concedes that in these instances:

> "Swift action by military forces may sometimes be the best way to prevent, contain, or resolve conflict, thereby precluding greater effort and increased risk later."[5]

How the military challenges drug trafficking, however, is not clearly articulated. In fact, the only reference on the topic of applying military force against this threat is fairly ambiguous, perhaps a happenstance.

> "Unique military capabilities can also support domestic authorities in combating direct and indirect threats to the US homeland, such as illegal drug trade, especially when the potential for violence exceeds the capability of domestic agencies."[6]

The question, of course, is whether this snippet implies a US military role in direct combat or simply suggests supporting a combat effort through other venues, like intelligence sharing.

Notes

[1] *National Military Strategy of the United States of America: Shape, Respond, Prepare Now: A Military Strategy for a New Era* (1997), Cover Letter.
[2] Ibid, 11.
[3] Ibid, 5.
[4] Ibid, 15-16.
[5] Ibid,16.
[6] Ibid, 17.

Part 6

DoD Counterdrug Military Roles and Responsibilities

In 1989 President Bush announced that "the rules have changed"[1] marking a renewed emphasis on the War on Drugs and signaling new, more expansive military responsibilities in the counterdrug effort. Prior to 1989, DoD counterdrug activities were very limited (training, equipment loans and transfers, etc), conducted largely in support of other federal agencies. The FY 1989 National Defense Authorization Act established congressional accord for using the military in counterdrug operations, and amidst much fanfare, imposed specific responsibilities on the military. Most significantly, it tasked the DoD to be the single lead agency in the federal government for detecting and monitoring illegal drug shipments.[2] The same year, responding to the National Defense Authorization Act and the first National Drug Control Strategy, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney directed the DoD to aggressively support the counterdrug effort making it clear it was a high-priority mission for the military.[3]

Including the DoD, there are seven federal departments with overlapping responsibilities mixed up in the counterdrug effort. These include: Justice, State, Transportation, Interior, Treasury, Agriculture, and Defense. Provided below are the lead counterdrug departments or agencies and their primary responsibilities.[4]

Lead or Primary Agency	Responsibilities
Department of Defense	Detects and monitors aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States
Department of State	Coordinates US international supply reduction strategies
Drug Enforcement Agency	Enforces laws and regulations on drugs and controlled substances
Federal Beareau of Investigation	Investigates violations of criminal laws - concurrent with DEA
US Attorneys Office	Prosecutes criminals
US Border Control	Primary agency - land interdiction between US ports of entry
US Customs Service	Lead - Interdiction at land and sea ports of entry (with US Border Patrol the primary agency) and US territorial waters
US Coast Guard	Lead - martime interdiction Co-lead (with Customs Service) - air interdiction

Figure 4 Lead Counterdrug Departments and Agencies

According to Joint Pub 3-07.04, the primary DoD counterdrug missions are: detection and monitoring; host-nation support; command, control, communication and computer (C4) support; intelligence support; planning support; logistics support; training support; manpower support; and research, development and acquisition (RDA) support. The operative word is support.

In Colombia, the DoD has developed a four-prong integrated strategy to attack the cocaine threat emanating from this country. The focus of the first, air interdiction, is to deny drug traffickers air transportation. Although there are many elements to the aerial interdiction program, there are two key new developments that began in 1999: the installation of a new Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar (ROTHR) in Puerto Rico, and the modernization of Colombia's A-37s and training of its pilots. Other counterdrug systems/aircraft used in air interdiction include the P-3 Orion, the Caribbean Radar Network with sites in various nations, the E-3 Sentry (AWACS), the E-2 Hawkeye, and the Army's Airborne Reconnaissance Low (ARL). The second effort, riverine interdiction, is necessary since smugglers routinely use the vast Amazon River network to move drugs and essential processing chemicals. Currently, Colombia has 18 counterdrug Riverine Combat Elements (RCEs) made up of 4 boats each. The

goal is to deploy/maintain a total of 45 RCEs. Support by USSOUTHCOM in forming and training a Colombian counterdrug battalion constitutes the third effort – ground interdiction. The training, which began in April 1999, emphasizes human rights compliance. This battalion will participate in joint military/Colombian National Police (CNP) counterdrug interdiction and end-game operations in the drug producing regions in Colombia. The DoD is also supporting an interagency endeavor to establish a Colombian Joint Intelligence Center (JIC) which will be collocated with the counterdrug battalion at Tres Esquinas, Colombia. Maritime interdiction, the fourth effort, supports Colombian maritime forces that combat traffickers who move their drugs via boats and fishing vessels. US military ships and aircraft, in conjunction with the US Coast Guard and US Customs Service, patrol the region and pass information to Colombian end-game forces positioned along the coast. These efforts are coordinated through the Joint Interagency Task Force in Key West, Florida.[5] But coordination is difficult at best.

In the war against drugs, unity of command, a coveted military principle of war, is impossible to achieve since no one is in charge at either the micro or macro level, and no one, short of the President, is responsible or accountable for its success or failure. Sheer numbers and overlapping responsibilities make it difficult to plan and execute counterdrug activities. For example, drug interdiction is conducted in five phases: First – detecting and monitoring the target; second – sorting legitimate from illegal traffic; third – intercepting potential smugglers; fourth – searching potential smugglers; and fifth – arresting the smugglers. For a successful interdiction mission, each phase must be carefully coordinated by the various lead agencies. Inconsistencies in interoperability, training, competing interests, and agency priorities complicate the equation. The problem is compounded exponentially given the growing number of foreign countries involved in the drug trade.

US law limits military involvement in counterdrug operations. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to note the major legal and regulatory restrictions imposed by the President, Congress and the Secretary of Defense:[6]

US Code (USC) Title 10 (Armed Forces)	* Prohibits the military from directly participating in arrests, searches, seizures unless authorized by law (arrests on military property). * 1989 National Defense Authorization Act lifted some restrictions.
USC Title 18 "Posse Comitatus"	* Makes it a crime to use the military to enforce law. * Foundation document that emphasizes the distinction between military missions and civilian law enforcement.
USC Title 32 (National Guard)	* Posse Comitatus Act does not apply to troops when not in federal service (NG). * National Guard may conduct limited law enforcement activities such as search for illegal drugs if their state law authorizes it.
Foreign Assistance Act	* Prohibits US personnel from performing law enforcement activities overseas. * Prohibits foreign governments with a record of gross human rights violations from receiving security assistance funds.
Economy Act	* Requires other federal agencies to reimburse the DoD for support provided.
Executive Order (EO)12333	* Regulates the use of national intelligence assets. * DoD Reg 5240.1-R implements EO 12333. Establishes the conditions under which the DoD can collect information on US citizens.
National Defense Authorization and Appropriation Acts	**FY 1989:** Tasked the DoD to be the single lead agency of the Federal Government for the detection and monitoring illegal drug shipments into the US **FY 1990:** Tasked the DoD to creaet an integrated command, control, communications, and technical intelligence network linking the military and various civilian law enforcement agencies.

Figure 5 US Law in Military Counterdrug Operations

Notes

[1] T. Lippin, "Drug Wars Versus Development," *Technology Review* 94, no. 1 (January 1991): 17.

[2] *Joint Staff, Joint Pub 3-07.04: Joint Counterdrug Operations* (17 February 1998), Section: I-2 through I-10

[3] Dick Cheney, *Department of Defense Guidance for Implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy: Memorandum for the Commanders of the Unified and Specified Combatant Command* (Washington, D.C.), 18 September 1989.

[4] *Joint Pub 3-07.04,* Section: I-8.

[5] Brian F. Sheridan, *Prepared Testimony Before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control* (21 September 1999)

[6] *Joint Pub 3-07.04,* Section: I-4 through I-10.

Part 7

Conclusion

Promoting Peace and Stability – Shaping Colombia

The US endeavors to shape the environment so as to promote peace and stability. To this end, it is important to form partnerships against common threats. It is equally important to put things in their proper perspective. In other words, if peace and prosperity are the desired affects, it is important to describe policies and strategies in less hawkish terms. Today, we are no longer fighting a boxing match, playing a chess game or contemplating a domino theory. These clever euphemisms paint vivid images in our mind, and accurately reflect the "realist" international fervor of Cold War politics and its associated underhanded strategies. In the same manner, it is important to note that the US is not fighting a war on drugs, just as it is not fighting a war against inflation, illiteracy, or rising oil prices. In each case, the federal and state governments develop and implement strategies to contain that which is undesirable in society or in the economy.

In an unpolluted open economy, the invisible hand of the market and the iron laws of supply and demand settle the price of commodities such as oil, gold, etc. Governments do impose foreign quotas or subsidize businesses to maintain a competitive advantage or to fix the price of an important industry. These actions frequently create equal and opposite reaction from rivaling countries. But this is not war. Peculiarly, there is also a supply and demand for drugs, but as an illicit substance, the drug trade is driven underground, and so the price of drugs is settled

artificially. Moreover, just as the US government influences interest rates to steer inflation to an acceptable figure, it is attempting to reduce illegal drug use and drug availability to more tolerable levels. The goal is to decrease each by 50 percent. But this is not war either. Militaries fight "real" wars, but the so called "drug war" is a melodramatic play on words that puts the spotlight not on the root cause of the problem (US demand for drugs) but on a far away supplier: Colombian drug lords.

In their war on drugs, politicians are bogged down in a quagmire resembling a political Vietnam. Today's measurements of effectiveness are different yet equally ineffective. Tracking the number of destroyed cocaine processing labs or hectares of fumigated coca leaves, for example, has replaced the body count statistics monitored during Vietnam. Pinpointing the bona fide "enemy" is equally problematic. One cannot assert, for example, that the center of gravity is the peasant who cultivates the plants yet scrapes by day-to-day to make a not-so-decent living. Yet anti-drug policies adversely affect peasants perhaps more than anyone. Under these circumstances, will the Colombian government truly win the heart of the peasant population or will it suffer the fate of Vietnam? For the part the US plays, it cannot argue from the moral highground and insist that the Colombian peasant give up his meager livelihood when it is the demand of a not-so-innocent segment of the US population that fuels that very market.

Statistics on drug arrests, drug seizures and crop eradication are available, but no one knows for sure the quantity of illegal drugs that pass through the porous net of US surveillance and interdiction efforts. Thus, although the military plays an important role in the counterdrug mission, its effectiveness in this game of hide and seek is difficult to evaluate. It is also difficult to gauge political resolve and sort through the piles of political rhetoric and disingenuous bipartisan agendas. Measuring public opinion is equally problematic. While the scourge of

illegal drugs may be a concern for many Americans, it is unlikely that the US population would concede direct military intervention in Colombia without more compelling reasons.

Other paradoxes further complicate the situation in Colombia. For example, US demands for drugs finance guerrillas and affects Colombia's ability to protect its population. Likewise, much to the chagrin of the Colombian government, the huge US spraying program against coca and poppies has motivated many irate farmers to support the Colombian guerrillas. Ironically, it has also insurrected an army of concerned human rights activists and environmentalists who draw attention to the toxic herbicides, which pose a hazard to peasants, their livestock and the fragile South American ecology. Moreover, some US politicians want to distance themselves from a government that has formerly condoned human rights atrocities by right-wing paramilitary groups, while others do not want to become embroiled in an eternal war on drugs.

Defeating Adversaries – Responding to the Drug Threat

The jury is still out on whether the US is more willing to commit military forces to extinguish hot spots following the end of the Cold War. The nasty little proxy wars, Machiavellian to the extreme, were fought between two great military powers over countries like Vietnam, Angola, Nicaragua and Afghanistan. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, politicians can now base their reasoning for using military forces not on the ideological urgency but on the moral imperative. Today, we need not be color-blind and see only red or blue, or take sides – left or right. We need to talk about right and wrong. In Colombia we must do the right thing… help the Colombian government restore order and strengthen its democracy.

To this end, the United States must be mindful that Colombia is fighting a war… a real war, not a drug war, but a war for its survival – a war where Colombia's enemies use drug money as both a means to and end, and an end of itself. In Colombia drugs mean money, money means

power, and power corrupts absolutely. The anarchy that has resulted in Colombia jeopardizes its democracy and its ability to manage the state. The upshot of this failing state has profoundly affected its society… and ours. Daily waves of drugs wash upon our shores and ripple through US society to put many US citizens at risk. Whether the US government is treating this wave as a ripple or a tsunami is open to interpretation. However, two things are clear: (1) the US is definitely engaged, and (2) the US has definitely upped the ante. The question, of course, is how far the US is willing to go to defeat an adversary using a military solution.

Looking at the criterion outlined in the National Security Strategy, it may be surprising that the US has not used military forces in Colombia, after all every element has been checked when compared to other crises/wars for which the US military has been involved this past decade.

	Panama	**Iraq**	**Haiti**	**Somalia**	**Balkans**	**Colombia**
GOALS						
Protect Lives & Safety of US Citizens	YES(1)	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Maintain Sovereignty of US Territory	NO	NO	YES(3)	NO	NO	YES
Promote Prosperity of US & its Citizens	NO	YES(2)	MAYBE(3)	NO	NO	YES
OBJECTIVES						
Enhance US Security	MAYBE (1)	YES(2)	MAYBE(3)	NO	NO	YES
Bolster US Economic Prosperity	MAYBE(1)	YES(2)	MAYBE(3)	NO	NO	YES
Promote Democracy Abroad	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
CATEGORY	Important	Vital	Important	Humanitarian	Humanitarian	Vital
OTHER US CONCERNS	Corruption Drugs Drugs	Invasion Rouge State WMD Ethnic Cleansing	Military Coup Refugees Failed State Human Rights	Failed State Refugees Human Rights	Rouge States Refugees Ethnic Cleansing	Drugs Revolution Failed State Refugees Human Rights
USE OF MILITARY IOP Direct = Military Combat	YES- Direct	YES- Direct	YES- Direct	YES- Direct	YES- Direct	YES- Support

NOTES:

(1) Possible denial of the Panama Canal to US security and economy was not the focus, but was a major concern.
The threat was to US military/civilian personnel stationed or living in Panama.
(2) The impact of oil scarcity would certainly affect US goals and objectives, but the impact would be more severe for our allies.
(3) Haitian refugees directly affected US sovereignty (control of our borders). Unconstrained, it would affect US security/economy.

Figure 6 US Military Involvement in the 1990s

With such apparent inconsistencies, it is understandable how the world might consider US strategy schizophrenic vis-à-vis its use of the military in response to a national security crisis.

But in comparing each case, there are several key elements missing from the equation. For example, the absence of the "CNN factor" in Colombia has not yet generated a "do something" syndrome, surprisingly enough despite the many documented human rights abuses and the magnitude of the displaced population.

Arguably, one can also attach US inconsistencies in employing the military to the relative immaturity of its new international strategy following the end of the Cold War. The uneventful but sudden fizzle that terminated the Cold War was certainly surprising, and not only caught US strategy makers by surprise, but also put them in a dilemma. As the remaining actor and uncontested military superpower, the US is in a spotlight, center-stage, by itself. The US has now taken off its red and blue bifocals, and is feeling its way through the international arena, struggling in the dark or like a deer in headlights, to redefine its role in the absence of a familiar bipolar world. Today, the circumstances and consequences of sheathing or wielding the military sword are fundamentally different and must be done responsibly since the audience and critics are watching attentively and anxiously to see how the US conducts itself in its leadership role.

The "Reluctant Hegemon" may be the title of a chapter in tomorrow's history books regarding US politics following the Cold War. The term may explain in the future why the US did not engage or delayed engaging our military in Colombia beyond a supporting role. Political scientists might illustrate how the great nation groped with the paradox of finding a military strategy to combat transnational threats as written in its National Security Strategy yet avoided being labeled the world's policeman, which nonetheless painted the most accurate caricature given the policing-type duties associated these new types of threats. Still, some countries do present a real threat to US interests. These include Iraq and North Korea. Against these adversaries, the US has formed lasting allies and commitments; it knows how to deal

militarily with these threats; and it can articulate clearly its peacetime and wartime posture. It stutters, however, as it translates the "newer" buzz words in the National Security Strategy – transnational threats – into military action. In Colombia, the transnational threat is easy to label, but tricky to cope with. We call them drug-traffickers, narco-terrorists or just plain criminals, and normally let the police not the military deal with them. But times are changing.

The US military has had some practice in recent years reacting to international crises as the world's chief of police. Although the US may act bilaterally in Colombia, policy makers will want to avoid the risk of added US condemnation to the stigma it now suffers in the region. Unfortunately, the US is reaping today the distasteful fruit of Latin American sentiment from the self-serving strategies it sowed in the region years ago. Many critics will declare US military involvement an infringement on Colombia's sovereignty and will underscore past examples of how the US exploited Latin America Banana Republics and how the CIA instigated/supported overthrows. For this reason, US military intervention in Colombia is likely to be preceded by a US-lead diplomatic effort to form a Latin America coalition against Colombia's enemies. If recent history is to be repeated, the US military might be drawn into Colombia by one or more of these catalysts: a new corrupt government that condones or participates in drug trafficking (like Noriega in Panama); a military coup (such as Haiti, for example); a failed state that advances to anarchy, widespread crime, or the exodus of a population (spillover affects) into neighboring states (like in the Balkans or Rwanda); and finally, the personal invitation by the legitimate Colombian government for assistance in resolving any of these problems, or for helping to stop the unremitting terrorist attacks by the insurgents against the innocent population.

The DoD continues to emphasize that it is assisting the Government of Colombia in a supporting role only. Testifying before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control,

the Honorable Brian E. Sheridan, DoD Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support, articulated this clearly in several statements. Specifically, he remarked that:

> "The DoD will maintain its sole focus on counterdrug support… US military personnel will continue to serve as trainers in Colombia… Under no circumstances will US military personnel participate or accompany Colombian forces engaged in operations of any sort."[1]

Only the passing of time will tell.

Notes

[1] Sheridan, 21 September 1999.

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