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Down the Slippery, Snowy Slopes of Colombia We Go!!

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Down the Slippery, Snowy Slopes of Colombia We Go!!

As one might expect in equatorial Colombia, it is not the cold, wet kind of snow that is scattered about the Andes Mountains – it is cocaine. But the United States could find out that the footing in Colombia is every bit as slippery. America has many important national issues with Colombia; however, the singular threat to American vital interests is the one posed by illicit drugs that originate in Colombia. The United States has crafted a new, comprehensive, and appropriate strategy to address the unique threat of illegal drugs, and this paper will examine whether that strategy is the proper one. The next few years, during which that strategy reaches full operational stride, are critical in determining whether the strategy should be continued or considered for replacement.

“Colombia matters to the United States.”¹

That statement of American interest in Colombia reflects the facts that clearly demonstrate that nation's importance: a country of more than 40 million people (the second largest in South America), Colombia and the United States conducted \$11.1 billion in trade last year, making it America's fifth largest trading partner in Latin America. Colombia sold \$3.6 billion of oil to the United States last year. As another gauge of the importance Washington places in Colombia, it is the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign assistance (behind Israel and Egypt). In September 2002, Colombia's unique importance was certified through recognition in the new U.S. National Security Strategy: "In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups."²

Colombia encompasses one of the most complex sets of issues in the Western Hemisphere. It is a country of extremes. A glance at a map of Colombia reveals the stark

contrast between the developed western half of the country, with its urban areas and well-developed infrastructure, and the low-lying, sparsely populated forests and plains in the east, where frequently the best transportation is on the rivers that feed the Amazon. The extreme social contrasts between the rich elite and the 40 percent of the populace that lives in poverty are very much apparent in Colombia. These conditions have in turn given rise to many political and socio-economic problems now facing Colombia.

How Does Colombia Impact America's National Interests?

Colombia touches upon American national interests in many places and ways. American values of freedom and democracy are challenged by human rights issues in Colombia, including terrorism and its impact on the nation and the region. American prosperity may be impacted by Colombia's stability and oil resources, and Americans' welfare is most decidedly threatened by illicit drug issues that originate in Colombia.

Human Rights. Human rights issues abound in Colombia, where the murder rate is the world's worst and 16,500 people have been kidnapped in the past three years. In large part, this situation has its roots in Colombia's socio-economic extremes and the government's difficulties in addressing them. They have been exacerbated by an ongoing nearly 40-year civil war amongst and between the government and various internal armed factions.

As of 2001, the U.S. Department of State has included all three of Colombia's non-government armed factions on its list of terrorist organizations: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Army of Liberation (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The FARC and the ELN are leftist organizations, while the AUC is a somewhat looser amalgam of rightist paramilitaries.³ All three groups have traditionally used violent tactics – kidnappings, murders, even "massacres," which have driven many Colombians

to seek safety away from their traditional homes. Colombia is estimated to have more than one and a half million displaced people, and many of the displaced persons have moved to and across Colombia's borders with Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Colombia's neighbors find themselves having to shoulder the expense of caring for these refugees. To make matters worse, the FARC has recently been reported to have conducted terrorist operations from bases in Venezuela, Peru, and Ecuador. Colombia's human rights problems are thus beginning to pose a very real threat to regional stability.

Oil. Secondly, Colombia is America's seventh largest source of petroleum (albeit only a small percentage of the total). Given America's concern about the fragility of Persian Gulf oil sources, threatened by potential war with Iraq, clearly Washington would want to secure and potentially expand that relationship. However, Colombian oil must move to Caribbean ports via a 500-mile pipeline across northeastern Colombia, and recent bombings of the pipeline by insurgents (probably the ELN) have threatened its reliability.

The oil is critical for Colombia as well. Bogotá is counting on revenue from its oil resources to help revive the nation's flagging economy.⁴ Without the oil revenue, the government likely will have to increase taxes, scale back expenses, and/or ask its creditors to restructure loans.

Drugs. Finally, Colombia is one of the world's largest sources of illicit drugs. The White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) estimates that Colombia supplies nearly 259 metric tons of cocaine each year to the United States – fully 90 percent of the nation's intake. Americans annually spend over \$45 billion per year on illegal drugs, including \$35 billion for cocaine. Colombia also is becoming a major supplier of heroin; however, this paper will focus on the older and much larger flow of Colombian cocaine to the United States.⁵

The impact on American society imposed by illegal drugs is staggering: 175,000 emergency room incidents every year are attributed to cocaine, and drug use is estimated to cost America \$160 billion a year in related health care expense, productivity losses, crime, etc.⁶ Accordingly, the U.S. government will spend over \$19 billion next year to combat illegal drugs. About \$365 million of that will be directed toward Colombia.

Threat Priorities. Clearly, drugs are foremost on the U.S. foreign policy menu for Colombia and the primary reason for our engagement there. Colombia's human rights and oil issues – while of serious concern to the United States – do not qualify as threats to American *vital* interests. Few Americans are aware of the magnitude of the area's human rights issues, and Colombia is far from America's sole or even primary source of oil. Terrorism in the post 9/11 world also is of great concern to America; however, the "terrorism" that Colombia has experienced for decades has been largely internal and has heretofore not been transnational and directed toward America.

A careful review of the budget justification for Washington's foreign and security assistance programs for Colombia reveals one common theme: counternarcotics. Washington's new National Security Strategy clearly reflects rising concern over the threat posed by "narco-terror" in Colombia; however, the common denominator remains *narcotics*. As serious as Colombia's myriad problems might be, the one looming threat from Colombia to U.S. *vital* interests is that posed by illegal drugs.

National Drug Control Strategy and Supply Reduction. America has for more than a decade fought what has been called a "war on drugs" that has had as one of its major tenets stemming the flow of illegal drugs – cocaine and heroin, mainly – from overseas. The current U.S. National Drug Control Strategy has two main thrusts: 1) demand reduction, looking inward

toward treatment and prevention "at home," and 2) supply reduction, focused on reducing the flow of drugs into the system. Supply reduction accounts for two thirds of the U.S. counterdrug budget, reflecting a hope that if drugs became more scarce (and therefore more expensive), users who cannot afford drugs will instead cease their use and/or seek treatment.

The source of most of the cocaine flowing to the United States has always been the Andean region of South America, with Colombia being at the drug trade's hub. Colombia was for years the center of cocaine production and transshipment. Now, as coca cultivation has been forced out of prime coca growing areas in Bolivia and Ecuador, Colombia has become the region's number one source of coca leaves as well. Thus, Colombia now contains within its borders three key nodes of the cocaine trade that can be addressed in America's supply-side cocaine campaign: coca growth, cocaine production, and cocaine transshipment. America is using its full range of national power – diplomatic, economic, and military -- in an integrated strategy that attacks those three nodes of the cocaine business in Colombia.

Diplomatic Means

Diplomatic measures, while limited, are not non-existent. They consist of government-to-government engagement and support, trafficker extradition protocols, and facilitation of international assistance.

First, the United States is a strong supporter of the Colombian government, strengthening its legitimacy on the international stage and thereby helping to counterbalance claims and pressure from Colombia's leftist insurgents (the FARC and the ELN), which aim to delegitimize the current government. In September of 2002, soon after taking office as Colombia's new president, Alvaro Uribe received a warm welcome in Washington, where he had lunch with President Bush and met with Cabinet officials. This closeness between governments has already

paid dividend to the United States, when Colombia – which is presently serving on the United Nations Security Council – pledged support to America on any Iraq issues in the Security Council.⁷

Additionally, the United States and Colombia have experienced dramatic expansion of a nation-to-nation campaign to extradite Colombian drug "kingpins" to the United States for prosecution. In 2001, 23 Colombians were extradited – seven times the number in the previous three years – and dozens more are under arrest and awaiting processing in Colombia. During President Uribe's September visit to Washington, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft took the opportunity to unseal drug trafficking indictments against three members of the AUC and praised Uribe's "leadership and commitment...to proceed vigorously against drug traffickers and terrorists wherever they are found."⁸

Finally, the United States could facilitate other external support for Colombia, such as from the Latin American signatories to the 1947 Inter-American Reciprocal Defense Treaty (the Rio Treaty). Recently, President Uribe has raised this possibility, pointing out the growing regional problem, as guerrillas and drug traffickers cross into and operate out of Brazil, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. Few of Colombia's neighbors have been convinced that they should assist in fighting what many view as America's drug war; however, the United States has relations with all of these countries, and few could overlook the financial and military largesse that Washington has sent to Colombia, as an opportunity for themselves as well.⁹ European assistance is another possibility, as much of Colombia's cocaine flows to Europe. In either case, however, Washington must weigh the loss of control it would experience when third parties enter the game. Further, America is politically resistant to significant European involvement in "its hemisphere."

Economic Means

Alternative economic development is a key part of Washington's assistance plan for Colombia. Alternative development has as one of its goals the sustainable reduction of drug crop production. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which administers the program, calls alternative development a "cost-effective means to permanently eliminate the production of coca,"¹⁰ and thus spent \$8.1 million in 2001, ramping to \$32 million this year¹¹ and \$75 million (proposed) in 2003. Unfortunately, the alternative development program has experienced significant startup challenges.

The initial focus of the alternative development program in 2001 was on the small farmers in Colombia's Putumayo directorate, at the country's southern border with Ecuador. Coca is grown there by farmers who, recognizing coca's high profit potential, are supplementing their incomes by planting about three hectares¹² of coca bushes, usually intermingled with three to ten hectares of legal crops.¹³

The "voluntary" alternative development program obtains agreements with farmers to eliminate, within 12 months, their coca plants in favor of licit crop alternatives such as "medicinal plants" and food crops.¹⁴ To help overcome the profitability differential between coca and licit cash crops, USAID's strategy assists farmers to expand their operations, with a goal over five years of more than doubling the acreage of legal crops that would replace illegal crop acreage.¹⁵

Also, working with individual communities, USAID is assisting with small-scale community projects such as bridges, water systems, schools, and health facilities. These community projects create near-term jobs, supplementing incomes that are reduced during the area's transition from coca production to legal cash crops. More importantly, though, the

“community-building” projects recognize a lesson learned in Peru and Bolivia: the positive effect that community cohesion has on peoples' view of the negative social impact of drug crop production.¹⁶ Six community infrastructure projects have been completed in Putumayo, and 56 others are underway.¹⁷

Given that the price of coffee has been languishing at 59 cents a pound (2/3 of its price three years ago), USAID has seized upon *heart of palm*, a crop especially well-suited for the area. However, given the remoteness of Putumayo, the program also must develop the large-scale infrastructure needed to move the product to the lucrative markets in Colombia's cities. That includes construction of processing factories and the feeder roads to connect to the country's transportation network west of the Andes.

But results have not lived up to USAID hopes, and the agency recently reviewed the alternative development program and found several constraints to its successful implementation, including: 1) security – government of Colombia presence in much of eastern Colombia is sparse to non-existent, giving illegal armed groups there free rein; and, 2) limited government implementation capacity – once again, the lack of government presence means no one to administer the program.¹⁸ The 2003 alternative development program thus will be adjusted in several areas to enhance its probability of showing success. Expanding the program to the north and west, closer to Colombia's urban areas, will allow Bogotá to more closely administer the program, and will facilitate access to the greater market potential of Colombia's cities.

Military Means

This brings us to the "military," or security assistance, aspect of U.S.-Colombia relations. The security assistance strategy that Washington has developed is designed to complement and support the USAID alternative development program, while at the same time attacking three

nodes of the cocaine trade present in Colombia: coca growing, cocaine production, and drug transshipment. Most of the resources for security assistance are contained in the U.S.

Department of Defense budget. Inter alia, the program supplies specialized training to elite counternarcotics units of the Colombian army, helicopters for use by the Colombian army and national police, support and equipment to an airborne coca eradication program, and support to the Colombian military's drug transport interdiction efforts.

Political Setting and Objectives. As discussed above, America has numerous serious issues vis-à-vis Colombia: human rights, oil, stability, terrorism, and illegal drugs. The latter is what President George W. Bush emphasized when he launched America's new National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) in February 2002, stating, "Illegal drug use threatens everything that is good about our country," and that he will be "...return[ing] the fight against drugs to the center of our national agenda."¹⁹ Colombia, as the source of 90 percent of the cocaine and much of the heroin arriving in the United States, clearly is a central player in this effort. The stated U.S. counter-narcotics goals in Colombia include: eliminating Colombia's cultivation of opium poppy and coca leaf, strengthening Colombia's capabilities to disrupt and dismantle major drug-trafficking organizations and to prevent their resurgence, and destroying the cocaine- and heroin-processing industries.²⁰

The Colombian government's objectives are embodied in Plan Colombia, a \$7.5 billion program formulated in 1999 by then Colombian President Andres Pastrana to meet some of his country's most significant challenges: combating narcotics, promoting peace, reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening democracy in Colombia. In 2000, Washington agreed to commit \$1.3 billion over three years to Plan Colombia, and America has continued to support and sustain Plan Colombia as part of its Andean Regional Initiative. Colombia's new President

Uribe campaigned on a get-tough-with-narcotraficking-and-terrorism platform, and he was elected with a strong mandate to do so.

The United States expects greatest opposition to its counterdrug campaign in Colombia to come from the country's three terrorist groups, the FARC, ELN, and AUC, which now – in loose partnership with wealthy international drug syndicates – control much of Colombia's drug production and distribution. Beginning in the mid-1990s, these groups started providing "protection" for the drug crops and were allowed to "tax" coca growers. The U.S. State Department estimates that the largest and strongest of the terrorist groups, the FARC, reaps about \$300 million a year from the drug business to buy arms and continue its anti-government insurgency. Likewise, the AUC receives 40-70 percent of its income from the drug trade.²¹ The ELN, which operates near the oil fields in northeast Colombia, may be less involved in the drug trade. The terrorist organizations have come to rely on the income they receive from the illegal drug business, and they can be expected to violently react to any effort that would reduce that income. An implied aim brought to the counterdrug fight by the leftist FARC is its political goal of further discrediting the democratically elected government in Bogotá.

Military Strategic Setting. This is most decidedly an unconventional war. Some operations will be almost law-enforcement in nature, pitting crop eradication aircraft against illegal crops and involving Colombian National Police (CNP) raids on drug processing labs. In other cases, armed government forces will directly confront small groups of armed insurgents and paramilitaries. An advantage the guerrillas have is their intimate knowledge of the territory, having operated there for years. Perhaps not too surprisingly, though, the guerrillas have not enjoyed overwhelming popular support from the local populace, since the guerrillas routinely use strong-arm extortion tactics and have harassed duly-elected local government authorities.

The United States, while obviously willing to invest heavily in the effort, must work under force caps imposed by Congress in authorizing the U.S. portion of Plan Colombia: 400 military and 400 contract civilians. For its part, Colombia is expanding its armed forces which now number about 150,000 and which have in the past labored under inadequate funding and a notorious inability to control vast regions of the country.²² Only a small portion of Colombia's uniformed services have the specialized training, equipment, and mission assignment to fight narcotics and the guerrillas that protect the trade. Colombia also is challenged by the sheer geographic size of its problem: the vast, largely undeveloped portions of the country that are home to drug growth and production. Finally, Colombia's armed forces are hamstrung by a law that prohibits high school graduates from enlisting in the armed forces. As a result, the military's ranks are disproportionately filled by the poorer, less educated sector, and the armed forces have become disconnected from the wealthier sectors of Colombian society.²³ All of that said, however, the application of force through military operations is undoubtedly appropriate to reduce the flow of drugs and to enhance the security situation in Colombia.

Military Objectives. Given the force level caps placed on its in-country forces, Washington must rely on Bogotá to do the "heavy lifting" in this campaign, supporting Colombia with training and equipment. Military objectives include the forced eradication of illicit coca crops and stemming the production and transport of cocaine. Additionally, the United States wishes to help Colombia expand government presence and authority in areas where a more secure environment will give alternative crop programs a better chance of success. Presumably, Colombia will fully support these objectives, as success may fiscally strangle guerrilla operations that feed on the drug trade, and are in consonance with President Uribe's get-tough policies.

Although the allied campaign will put pressure on three critical nodes of the cocaine trade in Colombia (growing, production, and transshipment), goals set by the U.S. government suggest a logical focus on the first step: coca cultivation. Coca leaves are the sole source for coca base, and thus are seen as the center of gravity for the campaign. The Colombians likely see an opportunity to finally confront their guerrilla adversaries. If, in the course of eliminating a major source of terrorist funding (the drug trade), Bogotá can engage and eliminate significant numbers of guerrilla combatants, the government will be able to focus more of its limited resources on the country's many other problems.

Military Capabilities and Vulnerabilities. The most formidable resistance the Colombian forces will face will be from the FARC, which is estimated to have some 15,000 combatants operating in 40 percent of the country's municipalities. Additionally, there are some 6,000 AUC combatants similarly spread about the country. These terrorist groups conduct much of their operations in the coca-growing regions; however, tactical units are relatively small. The Colombian armed forces come to the fight with significant numbers overall, but only about 40,000 are available for combat duty, as the rest are tied to desks and other security missions. Further, as noted above, only a very small portion of the army and the national police are prepared to conduct specialized counterdrug operations. The United States is working closely with the 2,500-man Colombian National Police Antinarcotics Directorate (DIRAN) and the Colombian army's elite new Counterdrug Brigade, which reached its full strength of 2,800 troops in 2001. The Colombian army plans to add a second CD brigade.

Strategic Concept. The United States hopes to enhance the Colombian security forces' readiness and technical capabilities to address cocaine: cultivation, production, and transshipment.

First, to help eliminate growing coca crops before the leaves are harvested, Washington's program for Colombia includes \$20 million to purchase agricultural spray aircraft for the Colombian National Police (CNP), which has the lead in the country's counterdrug campaign. These aircraft and additional modified Colombian OV-10 aircraft will be used in an extensive crop eradication effort that will put the "teeth" into the government's alternative development program, since "without interdiction and eradication as disincentives, growers are unlikely to abandon more lucrative ... coca crops in favor of less profitable ... licit crops...."²⁴

Although forced eradication likely is required to make the alternative crop program work, there are a few serious down-side issues associated with it. First, the airborne spray can be indiscriminate, killing the good with the bad. Most small farms in Colombia consist of only 6-13 hectares, of which less than three hectares might be planted in illicit crops, perhaps even intermingled with legal crops. Thus, even a slight over spray or inaccuracy can wipe out a small farmer, including his subsistence food crops. Additionally, questions have been raised about the safety of the U.S.-supplied herbicide, glyphosate, being used in Colombia. Although Washington officials assure the safety of glyphosate (which is the active ingredient in the commercially-sold Ortho "Kleenup" herbicide), the spraying program nonetheless raises the specter of health problems experienced after the Agent Orange defoliation campaign that America waged in Vietnam. Finally, there is concern that an airborne eradication program will only result in relocating coca production. Initial results indicate that this may be the case in South America, where a reduction in coca production in Colombia in 2001 was accompanied by a rise in coca acreage in Peru and Bolivia.²⁵ To make this situation worse, coca farmers also are moving to and destroying virgin rainforest in eastern Colombia in order to plant more coca, in the process causing irreparable environmental damage.

A second part of the strategy addresses cocaine production. Once they are harvested, the coca leaves are initially processed at small field labs to produce coca "base," which is then moved to larger labs and further processed into cocaine hydrochloride (HCl). Colombian army CD Brigade units are seeking out and destroying the more numerous and widely scattered leaf-to-base labs, while DIRAN units are attacking and destroying the larger HCl labs. Army units also provide security "top-cover" for the CNP's operations. Of particular import: given requirements for tactical speed and surprise in CD operations and the simple fact that roads are practically non-existent in the target areas in eastern Colombia, this means that air insertion of the counterdrug units is required. Thus, Washington is providing \$66 million worth of helicopters (14 UH-60 Blackhawks and UH-1 Hueys) to the CNP and \$312 million for 59 Blackhawks and Hueys to be used by the Colombian army.

Finally, the strategy addresses the transshipment of the finished cocaine HCl. The third stage of the cocaine business within Colombia is the movement of the HCl from labs in the interior to points of debarkation for North America and Europe. The Colombian Navy and Air Force will attempt to interdict this flow. Colombian intelligence officials estimate that 60-70 percent of drug material moves via the rivers in southern Colombia.²⁶ The Colombian Navy is thus receiving three riverine patrol boats for use in drug interdiction operations.

To address air transshipment of cocaine, the United States has recently announced resumption of a joint U.S.-Colombian program to track and force down illegal drug flights originating in Colombia.²⁷ American sources will provide tip-off from long-range ground-based radars and U.S. Customs and U.S. Navy airborne radar surveillance planes. The radar data will be sent to Key West, Florida, where it will be fused with additional intelligence data, to help cull "suspicious" flights from the benign. Armed with this information, the Colombian Air Force

will launch interceptors to identify the flight. Any suspicious aircraft that refuses to land, when ordered to do so, could be shot down. Although this program is designed to safely and effectively address the interdiction of airborne drug transshipment originating in Colombia, it is a high-risk component. The program was suspended in April 2001, after a (in that case Peruvian) warplane mistakenly shot down a small aircraft carrying missionaries, killing two. Although extensive precautions, which include greater U.S. involvement, have been instituted to help avoid another tragic misstep, the price to be paid in case of a recurrence will be significant for Washington.

Once all of these newly trained and equipped Colombian forces are fully operational, within the next year, they will simultaneously pursue a three-pronged attack against coca plant production (via airborne crop fumigation), coca base and cocaine HCl production (via DIRAN and CD Brigade raids on labs), and cocaine HCl movement (via river and air interdiction).

Potential Results. 2002-2004 should be a watershed timeframe for the integrated strategy, and U.S. policy makers should be able to see results (or lack thereof).

Not only should the adjusted (to more secure areas of Colombia) alternative development program show results, but, the U.S.-Colombian security/military strategy will be approaching full stride. The alternative development program can hardly help but do better than it did during its first year (beginning in May 2001): although Colombian farmers had signed agreements to eradicate 14,000 hectares of coca, only 680 hectares were actually abandoned²⁸ -- less than one percent of total coca cultivation in the country. Moving the program's focus to more secure areas may help to approach USAID's five-year goal of 30,000 hectares of coca voluntarily eradicated.

The aerial fumigation effort holds the potential to do much better. In 2001, the DIRAN sprayed 84,250 hectares of coca, nearly twice the 47,000 hectares sprayed in 2000.²⁹ And with

the arrival in 2002 of additional spray aircraft, DIRAN's goal for 2002 is the eradication of 150,000 hectares of coca. It is not insignificant that this strategy brings a "new technology" to the drug war, as this is the first large-scale use of aerial fumigation against coca. This infusion of technology makes possible eradication goals that far outstrip goals that could be attained via manual methods.

The U.S. State Department calls the DIRAN/army CD Brigade's efforts versus the cocaine production pipeline "extremely impressive": destruction of 700 coca base labs, 20 HCl labs, nearly 3,000 kilos of coca base, and 167 kilos of cocaine HCl. They also seized significant quantities of "precursor chemicals" used in the cocaine production processes. Finally, 168 FARC and AUC members were killed in action and 435 captured.³⁰ The number of labs raided is the highest in five years; however, quantities of drugs seized were less than a percent of total nation-wide HCl production.

Finally, the transit interdiction efforts of the Colombian navy and air force may begin to show meaningful results in 2002.

This strategy must account for inherent risks. The United States and Colombia must guard against and adjust to the "balloon effect" in coca cultivation: when pressure is applied at one point, we see a bulge elsewhere. There is great risk that cultivation could return in large amounts to Bolivia and Peru, from whence it came to Colombia in the mid/late 1990s, and as hinted by the 2001 cultivation figures noted above. Washington is therefore maintaining the pressure through counterdrug programs with Bogotá's neighbors as well. Another risk is that the FARC and/or the AUC will mount an all-out resistance to Colombian counterdrug efforts. Although the army CD Brigade has enjoyed some success in small engagements with the rebels, both guerrilla groups possess strength in numbers that could challenge the CD Brigades.³¹

There is a reasonable expectation that the strategy will work, though. Significantly, if the voluntary and forced coca eradication goals can be realized, their sum approaches the total Colombian cultivation of coca, which has been running at 180-190,000 hectares. Now that initial capital investment for aircraft has been made, and the airborne fumigation effort is in sustainment mode, it will (if successful) provide the best "bang-for-the-buck." This is not to suggest that other elements of the strategy are unimportant. The CNP and army operations maintain pressure on narcotrafickers and the drug infrastructure; their presence is a first step in expanding government control east of the Andes, and will allow Bogotá to address socio-economic problems there. Also, the mere presence of Colombian troops in the ground should address security issues that have hamstrung the companion alternative production program. Further, the troops' presence is credited in significantly reducing the hostile ground fire threat to spray aircraft.

History suggests that combating drugs at the source takes time. Given time to succeed, the integrated strategy in Colombia of economic incentives that are enforced and supported by limited military means, can meet U.S. counternarcotics objectives in Colombia.

What's Next?

If, however, Washington does not witness significant progress in reducing the flow of illegal drugs from Colombia within the next two or three years, then the strategy should be reviewed and possibly restructured. In that event, the review should keep several observations in mind: 1) in 2000, of 736 metric tons (MT) of coca base produced in South America, fully 440 MT (60 percent) still "got through" to world markets (including the U.S. [259 MT], Europe, and Latin America); 2) experts feel that only 14 percent of the current coca crop can fill global cocaine demand³²; 3) most of the mark up on drugs occurs after they enter the United States;³³

and 4) Washington allocates about 2/3 of its national drug control budget to stemming the “supply” of drugs coming into the U.S. market (this includes resources for domestic law enforcement).

Many (including administration and Congressional leaders) feel that America’s drug problems are *America’s* drug problems, and that this is essentially a basic supply-demand issue. Given the difficulty we are having in shutting off the *supply* of drugs, policy makers may wish to consider allocating more resources to reducing the *demand* for drugs. The specifics of how America might address its huge demand for illegal drugs is beyond the scope of this paper.

Postscript: the Masters

When one tries to examine how some of the great military strategy theorists would approach Colombia, it is difficult to identify one who applies to this highly unconventional war on drugs. This author keeps returning to Sun Tzu, though, especially to his theories of the indirect approach and how they might apply to both counternarcotics operations and the guerrilla warfare that could accompany them. Both appear to rely on avoiding decisive engagement – in fact the narcotics trafficker would like to avoid engagement at all. At the risk of parochialism, the value of good intelligence, as Sun Tzu preaches, is very much the case in counternarcotics: locating coca fields and cocaine labs, and detecting transshipment aircraft and boats all rely on timely, accurate intelligence in order to direct military force in response.

In retrospect, I also look to Clausewitz's trinity of the people, the army, and the government. In the case of America's war on drugs, the trinity had become unbalanced. As someone recently put it: the war on drugs was "last year's war," replaced by America's fixation on the war on terror. I view the administration's statement of the connection between terrorism and drug trafficking, as expressed in the National Security Strategy, as an effort to re-balance the trinity. If the public responds, Congress and dollars may follow.

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Notes

¹ Marc Grossman, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, in remarks to the press in Bogotá, Colombia, U.S. Department of State, 31 August 2001, <<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rm/2001/august/4798pf.htm>> (3 October 2002), U.S. Support for Plan Colombia.

² White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002 (Washington, DC: September 2002), 10.

³ For an excellent and more detailed study of these groups, see Cynthia A. Watson, "Civil-Military Relations in Colombia: a Workable Relationship or a Case for Fundamental Reform," Third World Quarterly 21, no.3 (2000). The FARC was founded in 1966, with Colombian Communist Party origins, as a leftist "self-defense" group. Meanwhile, the ELN was organized by "students inspired by the Cuban revolution." Both the FARC and the ELN have revolutionary, vice evolutionary goals: "The guerrillas have no interest in becoming part of an entrenched [Colombian government] system with limited opportunities; they seek to restructure Colombia to end the massive inequalities plaguing the country" (Watson, p. 532). The AUC appeared in the 1980s. These paramilitaries were initially organized by just about anyone – major drug traffickers, oil companies, even military officers – with enough money and who had become fed up with leftist guerrilla kidnappings of their relatives (for ransom money to finance further anti-government operations). Unlike the FARC and the ELN, the AUC does not aim to overthrow the Colombian government. In fact, the Colombian security forces find themselves in a delicate position vis-à-vis the AUC, attempting to distance themselves from paramilitary groups which have opposed the leftist guerrillas in areas of Colombia where government (security) presence did not exist.

⁴ Colombia's fiscal deficit may rise to 4% of Gross Domestic Product, up from 3.2% last year, and foreign debt was \$35 billion in 2000, or 44% of GDP. See "The Americas: Calling Up Reinforcements; Colombia's Conflicts," The Economist, 21 September 2002, 60; and "Colombia Overview," U.S. Agency for International Development, 29 May 2002, <<http://www.usaid.gov/country/lac/co/>> (7 October 2002), The Development Challenge.

⁵ In this regard, though, many of the counter-cocaine strategies proposed will also work against heroin.

⁶ White House, National Drug Control Strategy, 2002 (Washington, DC: February 2002), 2.

⁷ Maria Sanchez, "In Colombia's Uribe, Bush Finds a Friend in Need and Deed," Washington Post, 27 September 2002.

⁸ Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Indicts Three in Colombia Paramilitary," Washington Post, 25 September 2002, 16.

⁹ Andres Oppenheimer, "Talk of a South American Military Force Emerges," Miami Herald, 3 October 2002.

¹⁰ "Alternative Development," U.S. Agency for International Development Fact Sheet, 2 April 2001, <<http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2001/fs010402.html>> (11 October 2002).

¹¹ Eric Green, "USAID Outlines its Alternative Development Program in Colombia," U.S. Department of State International Information Programs, 15 April 2002, <<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/global/drugs/02041501.htm>> (8 October 2002).

¹² A hectare is 10,000 square meters, or about 2½ acres. By comparison, the Pentagon's "Center Court" encompasses five acres.

¹³ "Alternative Development," USAID Fact Sheet, 2 April 2001.

¹⁴ "Alternative Development," USAID Fact Sheet, 2 April 2001, & Eric Green, 15 April 2002.

¹⁵ "Program Data Sheet #514-008," Alternative Development Program for Colombia for FY 2003, U.S. Agency for International Development, <<http://www.usaid.gov/country/lac/co/514-008.html>> (7 October 2002).

¹⁶ "Alternative Development," USAID Fact Sheet, 2 April 2001.

¹⁷ "Program Data Sheet #514-008."

¹⁸ "Program Data Sheet #514-008."

¹⁹ In forwarding letter for National Drug Control Strategy, 2002.

²⁰ "State Department on U.S. Counternarcotics Goals in Colombia," U.S. Department of State International Information Program Fact Sheet, 14 August 2002, <<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/global/drugs/02081402.htm>> (8 October 2002).

²¹ U.S. Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2001 (Washington, DC: 2002).

²² Currently, there is no army or police presence in 180 of the country's 1,100 municipalities.

²³ Watson, p 545.

²⁴ U.S. GAO report on alternative development in Colombia, as quoted by Lino Gutierrez, U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, in his opening remarks to the Woodrow Wilson International Center's conference on Colombia, 20 June 2002. Available via <<http://usinfo.state.gov>> (8 October 2002).

²⁵ Eric Green, "New UN Report Shows Drop in Illegal Drug Cultivation in Colombia," U.S. Department of State International Information Programs, 28 August 2002, <<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/global/drugs/02082801.htm>> (8 October 2002).

²⁶ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2001.

²⁷ Associated Press, "U.S., Colombia to Track Drug Flights," New York Times, 2 October 2002.

²⁸ "Program Data Sheet #514-008."

²⁹ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2001.

³⁰ International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2001.

³¹ In this regard, force planners use a 10:1 "tie-down ratio," suggesting 150,000 troops would be required to conduct a successful guerrilla campaign. See Bernard B. Fall, Street Without Joy (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 172.

³² Phillip Coffin, "Coca Eradication," Foreign Policy in Focus 6, no. 7 (March 2001).

³³ See William M. LeoGrande and Kenneth E. Sharpe, "Two Wars or One? Drugs, Guerrillas, and Colombia's New Violencia," World Policy Journal XVII, no. 3 (Fall 2000). An analysis in this article shows that the coca leaves that are needed for a kilo of cocaine are worth around \$300, but that same kilo is worth \$188,000 in Chicago (1997 figures). The conclusion to be drawn is that an eradication campaign that even triples the cost of front-end coca will hardly be felt in Chicago.