



Colombia's War: Toward a New Strategy

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Key Points

American policy toward Colombia is being challenged by an altered political and security atmosphere inside each country. Colombia's new president, Alvaro Uribe, is confronting the growing threat to his administration's ability to govern and control national territory. A protracted internal war that involves a complex assortment of illegal armies, paramilitary forces, and symbiotic narcotics traffickers poses a significant threat to Colombian democracy.

The Colombian crisis has long-term implications for U.S. and hemispheric security as a test of American resolve to help restore stability and establish legitimate authority over large areas of the Andean region where criminal and terrorist networks have deep roots. Washington can no longer deal only with the symptoms of Colombia's problem and seems to be signaling deeper involvement.

The U.S.-Colombian partnership needs a shared, overarching, and cohesive purpose that does not view Colombia's war primarily through the prism of suppressing drug trafficking and terrorism. A new, integrated U.S.-Colombian campaign plan that seeks to enhance public security, governance, defense relations, and community development, as well as bring about a political settlement, could best advance the interests of both countries and would mark an important turning point in strengthening both Colombian and regional security.

Colombia's new president, Alvaro Uribe, is confronting a protracted internal war and moving to assert national political authority. Hopes are being pinned on Uribe, the new "law and order" president who took office on August 7, 2002, with an overwhelming mandate to end violence, narcotics, and official corruption.

The violence that dominates the Colombian political and security atmosphere has

intensified since former President Andres Pastrana's high-profile but unsuccessful effort to negotiate an end to the country's decades-long internal war. The strains on daily life have increased as the nation's ability to manage insecurity disappears. Economic growth has slowed, public debt mounts, and poverty deepens. A new upsurge in violence nationwide greeted Uribe, who declared a limited state of emergency and used this power to impose a special tax to yield an additional \$778.5 million--mostly for the Ministry of Defense, whose annual budget only recently exceeded \$2 billion.

The new administration in Bogotá is intent upon reshaping Colombian reality. Unlike his predecessor, who emphasized the pursuit of peace, President Uribe's focus is on improving governance. To do so, he is committed to reform bureaucratic inefficiency, restore state authority, and increase the central government's presence in the war-torn countryside in order to provide public security and, ultimately, peace. Negotiations with illegal armed groups are possible but would have to be on Uribe's terms. Success (and U.S. support) will depend on his ability to sustain a higher level of national sacrifice for and participation in the country's internal war.

The United States and Colombia have reached a critical juncture in their relationship. The United States is eager to work with the new president, but major policy shifts in Washington remain uncertain due to domestic political stakes and apprehension about where change could lead. From the U.S. standpoint, events since September 11, 2001, have heightened sensitivity to the dangers of global terrorism, coupled with growing concerns about the propensity for international criminal and terrorist networks to exploit ungovernable spaces for operations, training, or revenue-generating purposes. Colombia presents such a case involving a complex assortment of national illegal armies, paramilitary forces, and symbiotic narcotics trafficking organizations. U.S. policy for Colombia recently has entered a new phase with the granting of legal authority allowing the use of counterdrug aid to support Bogotá's unified campaign against narcotics trafficking and terrorist organizations, as well as in emergency circumstances to protect human health and welfare, if congressional conditions and administration guidelines are met.¹

Since the late 1980s, the United States has seen bilateral relations through a counternarcotics lens. This has been the element of the Colombian crisis most germane to U.S. interests and the approach with the best chance of garnering bipartisan congressional support. The intent has been to keep Americans out of Colombia's internal war. To achieve counterdrug goals as circumstances change, leaders have broadened the policy toward Colombia. Programs ranging from promoting human rights and the rule of law, to the Andean Trade Preference Act, to supporting peace processes and encouraging economic and social alternatives to illegal crops have been folded piecemeal into U.S. policy, each carefully formulated to satisfy congressional interests and funding stipulations. Inclusion of counterterrorist support is the most recent step toward improving the results of drug-centric policy, which congressional critics assail for falling far short of expectations.²

This juncture can become a turning point if leaders in both capitals are willing to look at Colombia's war through the same lens and integrate their policies. Until the Uribe administration, Colombian society had denied the seriousness of the political challenge and tried to manage insecurity. By viewing all bilateral issues through a

counternarcotics lens and avoiding greater involvement in Colombia, U.S. policy also has been in denial. The relationship is too important to continue in this way. President Uribe's recent emergency actions demonstrate his recognition of the urgent need to change course to restore "democratic security." The United States seems to be signaling deeper involvement, and in doing so must decide what constitutes success for its policy.

President Uribe is determined to confront the political and psychological challenge to the Colombian state's ability to govern and control territory. These two tasks are at the heart of the country's undeclared internal war--in which the United States has become an important actor. Washington can no longer limit its focus to the symptoms of Colombia's problems of narcotics trafficking and terrorist violence. Policymakers can no longer satisfactorily explain U.S. policy solely in terms of counterdrugs, and counterterror lacks clarity given the vagueness of its definition. The cumulative effect of broadening the policy over the last decade suggests a new direction that emphasizes governance, a premise that is shared with the Uribe administration. This approach is consistent with U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere that stresses the importance of "responsible government stewardship."³ It also recognizes that the crisis in Colombia has long-term implications for U.S. and hemispheric security and is a test for American policy in support of national efforts to control ungoverned space as well as for the interconnected wars on drugs and terrorism.

The proposed way forward begins with understanding the nature of Colombia's war and recognizing past U.S. policy limitations. From such a starting point, we can clarify plausible U.S. objectives in Colombia and devise a national integrated campaign plan to achieve U.S., Colombian, and regional interests that the White House and Congress can support.

Understanding the War

As President Uribe took office on August 7 amid violent attacks around the capital, his effective writ encompassed roughly half the country. Forces on the extreme political left, as well as anti-insurgent paramilitary groups, have been engaging each other and the state for control of territory and population in much of the countryside and poor barrios in many cities. The conflict involves approximately 35,000 members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Army of Liberation (ELN), as well as illegal paramilitary groups, many of which are linked loosely to the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), and finally, over 150 narcotics organizations.⁴ A relatively limited assault on this criminal industry, largely funded and carried out by the United States, adds another dimension. Last year, roughly 3,500 Colombians (civilians and military) died in the war, and an estimated 350,000 were displaced within the country. About a fifth of the country's 1,200 municipalities lack government presence. Neither the state nor any of the illegal armed factions, however, has the military capacity to deliver a knockout blow. Despite this inability, the impressive strength and capability of FARC fronts and paramilitary groups continue to increase.⁵

Colombia's new political leader confronts the challenge of restoring the authority of

the state and bringing security to the country. The Uribe administration assumes three fundamental tasks. The state has to

- reacquire national territory
- establish permanent government presence (for example, police, judges, representatives from departmental and national agencies) to provide law and order, development opportunities, and other services
- negotiate with three illegal armed groups to end the fighting.

Formulating a national campaign plan to change Colombia's reality demands a clear understanding of the war's dynamic interplay of political aims, psychological pressures, competing wills, and violence. The Bush administration and Congress face an equally decisive act of judgment in designing a policy approach that meshes with President Uribe's efforts to achieve responsible governance while continuing to pursue U.S. antinarcotics interests.

The past 12 years have seen a subtle trend in both countries toward depoliticizing the crisis. The narrow U.S. focus on narcotics perhaps has encouraged this depoliticization to some degree. The trend is apparent when policymakers minimize the seriousness of the 38-year FARC quest for political power, citing as proof an inability to attract a mass following for its goal of reshaping an admittedly flawed democratic society. Respected polls indicate consistently that less than two percent of society supports FARC and ELN. Mainstream leaders often characterize rural and urban violence as a persistent national infection in need of the right remedy or as competition for territory between FARC and AUC narcotics cartels.

Policymakers who minimize the *political* nature of the war fail to appreciate FARC strategy. In the 1980s, its leadership decided to exploit narcotics and other illegal activities to create and sustain a liberation army, recruited from marginalized parts of society and equipped to be capable of defeating security forces, controlling territory in order to isolate cities, undermining legitimacy of government at all levels, weakening societal will to resist, and ultimately winning the revolutionary struggle. The strategy has been very successful, and this illegal army regularly challenges state legitimacy. For example, FARC forced the mandate for a peace process on its own terms into the 1998 election, and there have been high-profile assassinations, kidnappings of political and religious leaders, and videotaped exploitations of famous political prisoners to suggest that Bogotá can't even protect the elite.

Since Uribe's election in May, FARC has demanded the resignation of all departmental, municipal, and village officials because of what they represent to the state. Faced by the government's powerlessness to react, over 200 mayors and municipal officials have heeded its threats to resign or die, effectively destabilizing many local governments.⁶ The FARC upsurge of violence since the inauguration appears designed specifically to embarrass the new president and his defense and military leaders.

Bogotá's frequent inability to respond to FARC (and ELN) challenges has facilitated

the unchecked growth, aggressiveness, and popularity of paramilitary organizations, but these *autodefensas* do not seek to overthrow the government. Emerging in areas where the state is unable to guarantee lives, property, and honor,⁷ these rural vigilante groups use terror against actual and suspected insurgents and their supporters to control territory. Many Colombians see these organizations as the only means to defeat FARC and ELN and to restore order. Many also see them as the defenders of the local status quo. With weak national security forces dispersed and often isolated, collusion undoubtedly occurs at the local level. As a result, forces affiliated with AUC and those that follow the Peasant Self-Defense Groups of Cordoba and Uraba (ACCU) and others represent a serious, long-term threat to the legitimacy and authority of the

Washington's intensified interest in terrorism places a spotlight on an old dimension of Colombia's war, a dimension that U.S. executive and legislative branches chose to avoid. The FARC and ELN have been on the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations since 1997. The Bush administration added AUC before September 11. It is important that the United States and Colombia understand terrorism in the same way. The term *terrorism* has long been used to describe a large and diverse category of political violence, ranging from the international jihad of Islamist extremists against the United States to national resistance campaigns waged by illegal armed groups within and outside state boundaries.

The FARC, ELN, and AUC are in the national resistance category. The terrorist activities of these groups have a message: the act of violence is intended to make a political rather than a military point. Like insurgency, cumulative violent acts are intended to undermine another's political legitimacy and power. Unlike insurgency, a political ideology is less prevalent in Colombia. When terrorism and narco-trafficking are presented as equal threats to stability, as has occurred in U.S. policy, the political aim of terrorist violence is minimized and the financial and logistical nature of the trafficking is accentuated. This distorts the true nature of the war.



Map of United States with Colombia

Terrorism needs support. While its agenda is different, the illegal narcotics industry in Colombia fuels and invigorates all three terrorist organizations, generating most of the wealth needed to finance logistical and personnel requirements and thus minimizing the need for widespread popular support. Colombian analysts estimate that FARC and AUC receive respectively over \$300 million and \$200 million annually from narcotics trafficking. Within loose FARC and AUC structures, there often is no distinction between people who push drugs and rebels who practice terrorism. Kidnapping and extortion also are very lucrative sources of support for FARC and ELN, and paramilitary groups augment their finances with voluntary and forced contributions from commercial interests eager to protect holdings. No illegal armed group is totally dependent on drug trafficking.

Seizing the Moment?

Both Colombia and the United States have a great deal at stake at this juncture, but progress requires that Bogotá and Washington confront political conundrums at the core of their security relationship. These hard questions, illuminated by recent events, have been difficult to address in each government's approach to the other-- and answering these questions will require that both administrations make hard decisions about redefining the nature and scope of the relationship.

Colombia. By most measures, the country is fed up with living in a chronic, dangerous, psychologically debilitating environment in which the absence of peace and security has seriously hurt the national economy and international trade. While Colombia is not teetering on the verge of collapse, daily life has taken a decided turn for the worse. Frustrated citizens, attracted to Uribe's proactive "change" agenda to restore the authority of the state and to bring security to the country, elected this independent politician on the first ballot, both unprecedented events.

President Uribe has promised his constituents, as well as the United States, that he will address the nation's central conundrum. Can he dispel any doubt that a weak state with a relatively modest economy and a heretofore largely unengaged society can change course, demonstrate a united, patriotic, and fighting spirit, and make the resource and manpower sacrifices required to end the national crisis? He has committed his administration to move in this direction.

The test of Uribe's leadership will be twofold. On the defense side, he must set a high standard for military and national police readiness, professionalism, and human rights awareness in the conduct of operations; demand close cooperation between civil and military sectors of government; and develop a mindset in the armed forces that seeks to build long-term national self-sufficiency in matters of defense and security. On the civilian side, he must convince Colombians to make the sacrifices required to support his drive to realize "homeland security," social progress, and economic growth. President Uribe must convince the people that all Colombians are responsible for security.

The United States. Congress continues to ask the hard question: Where is the administration going with Colombia policy? A counterdrug explanation is no longer adequate; the recent inclusion of counterterrorism adds a new dimension to a series of steps rooted in counternarcotics that have broadened policy to improve effectiveness and return on investment, steps such as the Andean Trade Preference Act, promotion of the rule of law, and alternative development. But a holistic and cohesive purpose and long-term commitment are missing.

U.S. policymakers have recognized the weakness in Colombian governance and the country's deteriorating internal stability, but there has been a determined reluctance to get involved with the political and military aspects of its long-simmering internal war. By 1990, U.S.-Colombian relations were narcotized; all bilateral interaction had become dependent on the drug issue.⁸ Explicit legislation and President William Clinton's policy at the end of the decade limited military assistance to antinarcotics efforts and specifically barred its use in Colombia's fight against armed movements. The Bush administration carried forward Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 73, "The Colombia Initiative," which remains in effect.

Washington has seen the association with Bogotá as of secondary rather than strategic importance, which is at the heart of the U.S. conundrum. Is the extent and scope of U.S. involvement in Colombia commensurate with its importance? This beleaguered friend is the political, economic, and security linchpin in an alarmingly unstable Andean region as well as the anchor for related solutions.⁹ In terms of international crime, Colombia is the source of over 80 percent of the cocaine and 50 percent of the heroin entering the United States. Over 80 percent of the cocaine consumed in Europe originates here as well. Colombia also is the showcase for constitutional civilian rule and economic liberalization, as well as an ally with roots reaching back to the Korean War. Maintaining access to its oil and gas and expanding trade are extremely important. The manner in which the United States deals with Colombia is the test for its commitment to hemispheric security and the global wars on drugs and terrorism.

In sum, Colombia has strategic importance, but will Washington define a policy purpose and establish measurements of success in a way that is consistent with

Colombia's importance and help President Uribe establish control over ungoverned spaces, pressure the illegal armies to seek peace, and prevent the spillover of Colombia's problems into vulnerable neighboring countries?

Legacy of the Past

The longstanding logic governing U.S.-Colombian policy stipulates that an end to drug production and trafficking achieves an American national security goal. In the late 1990s, an expanded logic added that undermining funding of illegal groups would help Colombia achieve peace, prosperity, and security. Implementation of the policy has evolved through two distinct phases. The first phase (1990-1998) focused on eliminating the Medellin, Cali, and Atlantic Coast cartel leadership. The second phase (1998-2001) covered the initiation of President Pastrana's so-called Plan Colombia.

During these phases, U.S. knowledge about the organization and dynamics of the criminal narcotics industry steadily improved, as did the U.S. perception of the Colombian Army. An initial low opinion of the army's professionalism and human rights record led the United States to assist the Colombian National Police. Washington minimized its association with the Colombian Army until 1999. By then, national military leaders had instituted organizational and professional reforms, many focused on human rights awareness, officer development, and tactical training. Improved combat results led to national trust and growing popularity. Reforms enabled an expansion of U.S. military contact for counterdrug operations and antiterrorism training and support.

Policy implementation began with relatively small budgets that emphasized resources of the Drug Enforcement Agency and U.S. supporting agencies as well as modest aid to the Colombian National Police. The "kingpin strategy" decapitated cartel leadership but did little to reduce the drug trade. In the aftermath, the FARC, ELN, and ultimately AUC became more aggressively involved with drug trafficking, which led to an explosion in coca cultivation and drug production. In the shorter second phase, marked by support to Plan Colombia, the United States confronted the narcotics crisis. In a successful move to defuse allegations that the Clinton administration had not done enough to fight the drug war, the United States expanded the scope of its policy to incorporate Colombian military units that had been evaluated for human rights violations and trained for tactical operations in support of coca and poppy eradication and cocaine and heroin interdiction. The United States also expanded alternative development and institutional reform programs and added programs intended to foil kidnappings and other acts of terror.

Policy implementation hit a peak with congressional bipartisan support for Plan Colombia in 2000. The Colombian plan, developed with American assistance, envisioned amassing \$7.5 billion over 3 years, including \$4 billion from Colombia that was never achieved completely. The effort supported social programs, judicial and fiscal reform, economic recovery, increasing military strength, counterdrug-related programs, and the peace process. President Pastrana's negotiations with FARC precluded addressing local security. Washington provided \$1.3 billion over 2 years, over \$700 million of which was earmarked for counterdrug-related military

activities, the highlight of which was the creation of a Colombian Army Counter Narcotics Brigade. Other international actors contributed only \$500 million for counterdrug programs.

Again, the suppression of drug production and trafficking was the centerpiece of U.S. policy in this Plan Colombia phase. The dominant perspective held that aerial eradication (starting in southern Colombia, where 40 percent of coca is grown) and interdiction of air and river transit systems nationwide are keys to a counternarcotic-based victory in Colombia. If these actions succeed and there are parallel efforts to strengthen national institutions, drug production will decrease (so the theory went). This, in turn, will cut the wealth of FARC, ELN, and paramilitary groups. A reduction in money will diminish their ability to purchase weapons, ammunition, and technical expertise, to pay personnel, and otherwise to sustain their armed agenda against the pressure of the Colombian Armed Forces. Reduced wealth also will undermine their legitimacy in the countryside. A depletion of funds ultimately will hasten their pursuit of a political solution. In the end, the state will regain its authority. In practice, however, reality has not conformed to theory.

Congressional and other critics have found Plan Colombia performance to date discouraging. Coca and poppy cultivation has increased; alternative economic development programs have produced few tangible results; peace negotiations have collapsed; and the armed conflict has intensified with attacks on infrastructure and municipalities. Bogotá's inability to sustain local security and control territory for extended periods has been a glaring weakness. Colombia's small police and military forces are dispersed for more immediate priorities.

American officials have come to realize that in order for Colombia policy to be effective, Washington has to broaden its focus to confront the three illegal armed groups that dominate over 40 percent of the countryside and operate easily in another 30 percent. The United States must help security forces gain control of municipalities stripped of government presence and the lawless urban barrios, as well as continue to eradicate coca and poppy plants and interdict trafficking.¹⁰ This shift in thinking changes the logic that guided the second phase of implementation. Termination of President Pastrana's peace negotiations with FARC opened the door for greater attention to national terrorism, a Bush administration request to Congress for expanded legal authority to address the problem, and the beginning of the Colombia policy's third phase.

The Bush administration successfully urged Congress to let Colombia openly use the units from the American-trained counternarcotics brigade under Plan Colombia and the brigade's U.S.-provided helicopters to fight terrorism when specific conditions are met. The new legal authorities do not modify existing congressional requirements, such as human rights vetting of all Colombian military units receiving assistance and the personnel caps for U.S. personnel (400 military, 400 civilian contractors). Congress granted expanded authority for the duration of the fiscal year with the expectation that it will be continued in fiscal year 2003.

The Uribe government, however, must first commit itself in writing to pursuing the counterdrug policies of the Pastrana administration, implementing significant national budgetary and personnel reforms of the armed forces and providing substantial additional financial and other resource support to Plan Colombia.¹¹ This

is a positive, if limited and conditioned, step forward that suggests congressional reluctance to make a serious change in the original Colombia policy. The White House now must replace PDD 73 with its own national security policy decision. The administration is expected to add guidelines, such as that only vetted units that have received U.S. training on helicopter operations can use the aircraft and that the United States must agree before counterdrug assets are employed.¹²

Missing Ingredients

A reexamination of U.S. policy reveals several elements that are either missing from Washington's drug-centric approach, or until recently, have been given scant attention. The focus here is on four missing elements that require further development in the current phase of U.S. policy:

An overarching strategic purpose. In his National Security Strategy, President Bush stated that our fundamental purpose in Colombia is to help that country "defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups...by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian people."¹³ As yet, however, the administration has not tied together the various tasks implied in that vision--suppressing terrorists and drug trafficking and promoting rule of law and respect for human rights--in a fashion that establishes priorities or clarifies realistic measures of success.

Unity of effort. The U.S. approach to the Colombian Armed Forces in the 1990s casts a shadow over a previously warm military-to-military relationship. The lifting of restrictions after 1999 for the counterdrug mission introduced new tensions. The armed forces, for example, had to accept the creation of a counternarcotics joint task force that the Colombian high command could not employ. Aviation resources were divided among five competing elements (army, navy, air force, police, and Joint Task Force South). Intelligence sharing was limited to narcotics trafficking. Until March 2002, the Colombian priority for spare parts in the U.S. Department of Defense system was routine. U.S. policy often exacerbated a split within the Colombian government between civilian officials who are willing to work with American conditions and military leaders who believe that their institution is being demeaned. Rebuilding senior Colombian military confidence in U.S. counterparts is an important challenge for the success of the third phase of U.S. policy.

Measures to generate greater Colombian ownership of their conflict. For the majority of Colombians who live in urban areas, the war in the countryside and the barrios is an event seen on the nightly news. Under Colombian law, the illegal armed groups are not considered hostile. Their members are suspected criminals, not combatants. The detached mindset has been reflected in a low level of national spending in wartime (3.5 percent of gross domestic product for both the military and national police in early 2002). While President Uribe's special 1.2 percent tax on estates (personal and business) over \$57,000 is a welcome sign of heightened commitment, the public response to his move has yet to be seen.

Security cooperation among Colombia's neighbors. The United States provides counterdrug funding for neighboring Andean countries but has not tried to develop

cooperation among military institutions or between Colombia and its neighbors. The illegal logistical systems, military and narcotics, are vulnerable in adjacent countries. The importance of cooperation will increase as the capacity and activity of the Colombian Armed Forces increase in the months ahead and the war intensifies. There will be a tendency for the war to spill over borders. This underscores the need for an initiative to engage Latin states in a cohesive regional effort to minimize the impact.

A Way Forward

At his inauguration, President Uribe promised to spare no effort in confronting bureaucratic inefficiency and committed to promote development, guarantee social equity, and provide public order.¹⁴ He focused on national unity and effective governance on all fronts: foreign investment, health and education, transportation and communications infrastructure, underdevelopment and poverty, the system of justice, and defense of the state. The new administration is eager to show success in changing Colombian reality. In the security realm, the president plans to double the army's combat force of 100,000 soldiers and the national police to 200,000, organize a nationwide force of civilian informers, and perhaps create some type of local security structure.

The United States plays a role on both sides of Colombia's internal war. On the one hand, regrettably, narcotics consumption helps to finance three illegal armies and their operations. On the other hand, with support for Plan Colombia, the United States is an important player on the side of the state. At this point, U.S. policy is moving from the "narcotized" approach of the last decade toward President Uribe's efforts to govern responsibly and take control of territory and population from FARC, ELN, AUC, and other paramilitary groups. Congressionally supported programs such as crop eradication and drug interdiction, alternative development, and institutional reform overlap with Bogotá's initiatives to bring security and peace to the countryside and poor barrios. To expedite progress in Colombia, both national approaches must intersect.

Integrated Campaign Plan

This critical juncture can become a turning point if both governments view Colombia's turmoil through the prism of governance and commit to conjoin national policies using the vehicle of an *integrated U.S.-Colombian campaign plan*. Such a plan would establish a shared long-range purpose. The goal of the strategic partnership is an end-state in which the Colombian state has established its ability to defend its democratic institutions, control national territory, and provide security to its citizens in a fashion that ultimately leaves illegal forces no viable choice than to end the violence in favor of participating in the democratic process. Bogotá's efforts to reform and modernize the institutions of governance would continue. Washington brings to the partnership value-added contributions of training and assistance beyond the counternarcotics focus of Plan Colombia but short of involvement in combat operations. Bogotá brings national leadership that realizes the war's outcome rests on Colombian society, not just the military and national police, and is committed to

increase its participation. An integrated campaign plan would include public security as well as political, social, and economic components and foreign policy support. Adopting this approach keeps values associated with democracy visible and presses Colombians to advance them. In a similar way, the integrated campaign plan concept helps to shape conditions in Colombia (and the international arena) so that Bogotá can attain the shared purpose.

An integral part of the concept is the adoption of shared standards for measuring success in a number of important objective and subjective areas. Standards in eight areas common to any integrated campaign plan are discussed below. Success in each will require time. Before an integrated campaign plan can achieve positive results, there must be a building period for the Colombian armed forces and national police during which it might appear that the fortunes of the illegal forces are ascendant. With clear vision and determination to achieve it, this situation should change as military and police capabilities improve. The eight standards for measuring success include:

Drug trafficking. The ongoing campaign of eradication and interdiction must be assimilated into Colombian military strategy to ensure that counterdrug and combat operations are mutually reinforcing. This will require close operational coordination between Colombian and U.S. counternarcotics planning elements.

Armed forces and national police. The public forces must overcome an operational mindset developed over years of having insufficient capability. Success in this category will come in four parts:

- development of a modern training base able to accomplish in 3 years or less, to high standards, the force structure growth required by President Uribe's intention to double the size of the army and the national police
- production of a doctrine for combined counternarcotics, counterterror, and area-control operations in an environment marked by improved strategic agility and greater military capability
- creation of modern command and control, logistical, and medical structures and associated doctrines designed to meet the requirements of highly mobile public forces
- institutionalization of professional channels of communication between senior Colombian military leaders and their staffs and U.S. counterparts.

Local control. A national ancillary security force under Ministry of Defense control must be created and trained to supplement public forces in rural municipalities and urban barrios. It would help to provide order and gather information. The structure should include a national oversight mechanism to counter attempts to politicize the force, reinforce human rights awareness, and investigate allegations of human rights violations. This organization must offer a credible, transparent alternative to the appeal of the paramilitary groups.

Colombian defense relations. Success requires a leadership approach rather than a

managerial one to national defense and security and has two dimensions:

- development of a government-wide working environment that welcomes the inclusion of military expertise in planning and decisionmaking processes and minimizes past differences in culture
- institutionalization of reforms within the Ministry of Defense that will realize joint cooperation among the services and with the police and centralize control of strategic and operational air mobility assets. The United States must continue to provide a positive example.

Institutional reform and community development. A comprehensive strategy based on Plan Colombia must be formulated and consistently implemented to strengthen local political institutions, economic development, and rule of law and civil society. This strategy must be implemented within the areas that the government controls in marginalized areas of the countryside. This effort initially will require establishing military-civilian entities at the department level to plan, coordinate, and execute civic programs behind a security screen.

Level of effort. Success in this category has two dimensions:

- positive steps taken by the Colombian government to increase national participation in defending the state and establishing law and order nationwide. Examples include mobilization of reserve forces and additional military manpower, sustained increases in defense spending, and the end of artificial legal restrictions that have hampered military operations.
- institutionalizing a professional political-military mindset within the Ministry of Defense that demands high standards for military and police preparedness and pursues the future development of self-sufficient public forces.

Regional cross-border cooperation. Cooperation means creating a coalition for greater regional security involving Colombia and its neighboring states. The United States would not have to be a member. While respecting national sovereignty, as a minimum, the coalition would share intelligence on military, narcotics, and interstate criminal issues and interdict FARC, ELN, AUC, and other paramilitary logistical and drug-trafficking routes that cross national territory.

Political settlement. Over the long term and in tandem with the above elements, the government should develop a broad outline of a political settlement that includes, inter alia, the demobilization, disarmament, and reincorporation of the illegal forces and their militias and noncombatant supporters into society.

The integrated U.S.-Colombian campaign plan proposed here differs from Plan Colombia, which has focused on cutting the drug supply and reducing the income flow to the illegal armed groups. The campaign plan's logic argues that substantially greater Colombian military pressure on illegal forces--when combined with the growing presence of state-controlled local security forces in contested areas and more responsive government institutions--will undermine FARC, ELN, and paramilitary domination, weakening their capability and resolve to fight and thereby

hastening a political solution. The logic envisions aggressive military and police operations against the illegal forces, their logistical infrastructures, and narcotics associations (by eradication and interdiction).

From a U.S. perspective, the new logic has three sets of assumptions. First, U.S. conditions on human rights awareness and support for non-counterdrug aspects of Plan Colombia will continue for the long term. Second, Colombia can mobilize greater resources to face its own national challenge. And finally, a new U.S. executive-legislative policy consensus along the lines of this approach can be achieved to ensure uninterrupted U.S. assistance. The integrated U.S.-Colombian campaign plan approach defines a clear purpose (and thus answers a question frequently asked by Congress) for U.S. assistance to Colombia in that country's complex security environment.

To implement an integrated U.S.-Colombian campaign plan, the U.S. Government should lead by example, providing a model for effective intergovernmental relations. The magnitude of the foreign policy challenge calls for a dedicated senior-level policy director with a small staff. This individual would interact with a core group of Washington's interagency actors for coordinating and managing implementation of the new approach and, ideally, would have the ability to make resource decisions within the context of approved budgets. Of equal importance, the policy director would be a member of an integrated planning commission with Colombian leaders that meets at least quarterly. The U.S. side also would include the ambassador, a senior official of the Department of Defense, and the commander of U.S. Southern Command. The commission would manage the many offers of assistance from U.S. Government agencies and commercial companies and coordinate U.S. support of President Uribe's national security strategy.

What are the consequences if change does not occur? If the United States follows a business-as-usual approach with its focus still riveted fundamentally on the drug war, U.S. assistance will remain under the cloud of legal and policy uncertainty that ultimately will affect the ability of the Colombian government to develop its own multiyear plans with any assurance that U.S.-funded counterdrug and possibly other resources would be available to help Bogotá improve its capacity to assert state authority nationwide. In the end, FARC and paramilitaries continue to grow in size and sophistication, leading to higher civilian casualties and more internal displacements from the conflict. A second flawed peace process on terms other than the government's could be the result.

Strengthening Security

Washington's policy choices at this critical juncture are being shaped in part by a changed political and security atmosphere inside each country. The element of Colombia's war most germane to U.S. interests is no longer merely narcotics. Today, the United States is concerned about the propensity for international criminal and terrorist networks to exploit ungovernable spaces in the Andean region. Washington, therefore, is becoming directly involved in the crisis and must work more closely with its partner to address the core issue of governance while focusing on the

criminal drug trafficking and national terrorism that are manifestations of that weakness. In practical terms, the Bush administration should find a way to support the Uribe government in reacquiring national territory, establishing permanent government presence to provide law and order, developing opportunities and other services, and, at some point, negotiating with illegal armed groups to end the fighting. By adopting a policy in which both governments view Colombia's turmoil through the prism of governance and commit to conjoin national policies using the vehicle of an integrated U.S.-Colombian campaign plan, this juncture becomes an important turning point in strengthening not only Colombian but also regional security.

Notes

¹The Bush administration received the new authority in late July for the remainder of the fiscal year (FY). The authority must be negotiated again for FY03. See U.S. House of Representatives, House Rpt. 107-593, "Making Supplemental Appropriations for Further Recovery from and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2002, and for Other Purposes," accessed at [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/R?cp107:FLD010:@1\(hr593\)](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/R?cp107:FLD010:@1(hr593)). [BACK]

²See "Relevant text of S.2779 and Senate Appropriations Committee Report 107-219, the Foreign Appropriations Act, July 24, 2002," accessed at <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/03forops.htm>. [BACK]

³"Our policy is based on the four pillars of democracy, development, governmental integrity, and security. . . . Responsible government stewardship is essential to achieving each of these goals." See Otto Reich, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, "U.S. Foreign Policy in the Western Hemisphere," Remarks to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, March 12, 2002, accessed at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/8751.htm>. [BACK]

⁴The Colombian government has confirmed an estimated 162 drug-trafficking organizations with over 4,000 members and ties to more than 40 international criminal syndicates. See "New Drug Gangs Spreading in Colombia," *STRATFOR*, April 3, 2002, accessed at http://www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_view.php?ID=203754. [BACK]

⁵The Colombian Ministry of Defense estimates that the strength of FARC grew from 5,800 in 1990 to 11,930 in 1998 to 16,980 in 2002. The paramilitary grew during the same period from 4,500 to 6,400 to 13,200. For information on casualties and displaced persons, see "Colombia: State Department Human Rights Report for 2001, March 4, 2002," accessed at <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/02030401.htm>. [BACK]

⁶Colombia: FARC Order Capture, Execution of Departmental Officials Who Do Not Quit," *Stockholm New Colombia News Agency*, July 18, 2002, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (henceforth FBIS-Colombia), July 18, 2002; and "Colombia: FARC Threats Have Been Effective Strategy," *El Tiempo*, July 13, 2002, in FBIS-Colombia, July 14, 2002. [BACK]

⁷"Colombia: Drugs, War and Democracy," *The Economist*, April 21, 2001, 1-16. [BACK]

⁸Major General Gary Speer, Acting Combatant Commander of U.S. Southern Command, Hearing of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee, House Appropriations Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, Federal News Service, April 10, 2002, accessed at www.lexis-nexis.com. [BACK]

⁹Russell Crandell, *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy Towards Colombia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 30. [BACK]

¹⁰Colombia's important commercial natural resources--such as oil, natural gas, coal, and coffee--are also found in the areas where coca and poppies are grown. The export of these commodities is crucial for Bogotá's ability to finance its war. [BACK]

¹¹House Rpt. 107-593, "Making Supplemental Appropriations for Further Recovery from and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2002, and for Other Purposes," accessed at [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/R?cp107:FLD010:@1\(hr593\)](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/R?cp107:FLD010:@1(hr593)). [BACK]

¹²Marc Grossman, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Department of State, Hearing of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee, House Appropriations Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, Federal News Service, April 10, 2002, accessed at <<http://www.lexis-nexis.com>>. [[BACK](#)]

¹³*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (The White House, September 17, 2002), p. 10, accessed at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>> [[BACK](#)]

¹⁴"Inaugural Address by Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez at Congress' Elliptic Room in Bogota," *Santa Fe de Bogota Office of the President*, August 7, 2002, in FBIS-Colombia, August 7, 2002. [[BACK](#)]



 About

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