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## Colombia Cracks Down

**O**n May 26, Alvaro Uribe Vélez earned the Colombian presidency in a resounding first-round victory. This edition of the *Colombia Monitor* provides background on the history of Colombian elections, a review of this year's March congressional and May presidential elections, and an assessment of the challenges awaiting, and concerns about, the Uribe administration, which assumes office on August 7. It also outlines the unfolding debate about Colombia in Washington, particularly around the emergency supplemental appropriations bill that will, among other things, alter the U.S. mission in Colombia to include involvement in counterinsurgency operations.

### Democracy and Elections in Colombian History

The Conservative and Liberal parties are pillars of Colombian political history. Their nineteenth-century origins are some of the oldest in Latin America and one scholar has called them the “functional equivalent of subcultures.”<sup>1</sup> Until the late 1950s, the parties did more than represent social cleavages in Colombia: they *were* the social cleavage. Indeed, the infamous *la violencia* (“the violence”), a civil war lasting from the 1940s until the 1960s, largely stemmed from land disputes and the “hereditary hatreds” of familial party loyalties.

In the midst of *la violencia*, Colombia's only military dictatorship of the twentieth century occurred from 1953 until 1957. This was replaced in 1958 by the National Front, an oft-heralded example of elite accommodation based on extensive mutual guarantees between the dominant Conservative and Liberal parties, employed to stem the tide of *la violencia* and to restore civilian rule. Until the mid-1980s, “alternation” and “parity” were the glue of the bipartisan coalition, as all elected and administrative posts were shared by Conservatives and Liberals.

Since the National Front, Colombia's major parties have been nonprogrammatic, machine-oriented, and elitist. Supporters are not mobilized systematically around ideological issues, but rather are tied to patrons on a hierarchical ladder, exchanging votes for material benefits. The most important bosses control millions of votes and distribute massive amounts of state patronage (“pork”) in return. *Roscas* (family, kinship, and friendship cliques) form the basis of patronage networks, originating in Bogotá and extending to the smallest of towns through regional bosses called *gamonales* and *caciques*.

The two traditional parties not only alternated elected offices under the National Front, but most political offices were appointed. For example, governors were appointed by the president, and they in turn appointed all the mayors in the departments they governed. This closed political system firmly entrenched, and made official, Colombia's long history of “conversations among gentlemen,” or its tradition of elitist rule and the exclusion of “popular” actors from policymaking. Because all elected and administrative posts were divided evenly between Liberals and Conservatives, and because other

Produced by the Washington Office on Latin America, the Colombia Monitor combines timely analysis of policy dynamics in Washington with on-the-ground monitoring of the impact of U.S. policy in the Andean region. The intent of this briefing series is to broaden and inform the public and policy debates about how to strengthen democracy, human rights, and prospects for peace.

This issue provides an analysis of the Colombian presidential election and the shifting debate in Washington over U.S. policy toward Colombia.





parties were excluded from participating in the government, the country's democratic credentials were rightly viewed with skepticism by some observers. The symbolic use of pluralism masked the highly concentrated power of a small, relatively cohesive ruling class. Scholars have qualified Colombian democracy as examples of a "weakly institutionalized brand of inclusionary authoritarianism," "elitist pluralism," "exclusionary democracy,"<sup>4</sup> "*democradura*,"<sup>5</sup> and a "limited democratic consociational" arrangement.<sup>6</sup> These terms, in one way or another, attempt to convey the dominance of an exclusive oligarchy in the highest spheres of Colombian politics.

Nonetheless, Colombia is widely cited as South America's oldest democracy. It has held regular presidential elections throughout the twentieth century with the exception of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla's dictatorship (1953-1957). A series of political reforms in the late 1980s, culminating with the Constitution of 1991 (the first in 105 years), attempted to open the political process to greater citizen participation, enhance transparency, and make more positions directly elected. These reforms emerged from the conviction that the fundamental flaw in Colombian democracy was mechanical, that it lacked mechanisms for participation. These reforms have often been frustrated, however, by factors that are deeply embedded in Colombian political culture and the political system, such as clientelism, corruption, and violence.

Displaced children in Sincelejo, Sucre.

## Violence and Corruption Today

Political violence takes many forms and occurs in all of rural Colombia. The systematic persecution of the Patriotic Union, a leftist party born of frustrated peace talks with the guerrillas known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), is the best-known case. From the party's inception in 1984 until its virtual extermination in the early 1990s, some 3,500 party activists and elected officials were killed, disappeared, and kidnapped by paramilitary groups working with support of members of the Colombian armed forces.

This March, the spokesperson for the paramilitary organization, the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC), Salvatore Mancuso, announced that its supporters now control more than thirty-five percent of the Congress. The government has confirmed that many paramilitary sympathizers earned seats. Liberal senator Piedad Córdoba, an Afro-Colombian, reported on television news that in rural areas where she had traditionally campaigned, paramilitaries were threatening voters. She subsequently lost her senate seat.

Presidential candidates were also threatened by the FARC. Following the February kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt, other candidates announced that they would not campaign in rural areas. In April, a bomb intended for Alvaro Uribe in Barranquilla killed four bystanders, though Uribe himself was unharmed. Thereafter, he campaigned via television, radio, and satellite, and the government provided more air time to all candidates.

Violence even prevents those who flee it from participating in political life: As many as ten percent of eligible voters who are internally displaced cannot vote because they lack the

proper documents. Colombians who can afford to emigrate, however, can vote via absentee ballot and even enjoy a congressional slot reserved to represent Colombians living abroad.

Congressional elections, held March 10, were in some sense a referendum on the Pastrana administration's peace efforts, which ended suddenly on February 20. The elections were conducted with few violent incidents, but widespread irregularities and cases of fraud have received scant media attention: four million dead people were eligible to vote, several officials have been jailed for fraud, and as many as 4,000 voting tables were affected by ballot irregularities (of 60,000 nationwide).<sup>7</sup> Only thirty-eight percent of eligible voters cast ballots, but analysts point to increased "opinion voting," choosing candidates based on platform and personality rather than party loyalty.<sup>8</sup> The two highest vote earners for the lower house reflected the nation's eagerness for an aggressive response to the insurgency, but also frustration with the status quo. First place winner General Jaime Ernesto Canal was the commander of the third brigade in Cali until he resigned two years ago in protest over the government's negotiation with guerrillas from the National Liberation Army (ELN) following a massive kidnapping from a church conducted by the ELN. Coming in second, Gustavo Petro is a former M-19 guerrilla who accepted a government amnesty and has become a vocal opponent of political corruption. In June, he was forced to leave the country because of death threats.

While the official Liberal party obtained the highest number of seats (28 of 102 in the Senate and 30 of 166 in the House), the official Conservative party announced immediately after the elections that many elected under its banner (13 in the Senate and 13 in the House) planned to support dissident Liberal, Alvaro Uribe. Apparently, a unique coalition of Uribe supporters will control both the House and the Senate.<sup>9</sup>

## President Uribe: A New, Improved War?

In 1998, Colombians elected a presidential candidate who promised them peace.<sup>10</sup> On May 26, 2002, they chose one who promised them security: Alvaro Uribe Vélez. In both cases, the FARC had a preponderant role in determining those choices. In 1998, the reclusive FARC leader Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda appeared in a photograph with candidate Andrés Pastrana days before the election, signaling that the FARC was willing to take part in peace talks with a Pastrana government. In 2002, the FARC helped elect the president by waging an intense bombing campaign and kidnapping spree. Such actions tried public patience and made Uribe's hardline rhetoric resonate with an impressive range of voters, garnering him fifty-three percent of the vote in a field dominated by four candidates. It was a stunning mandate, considering that second place Horacio Serpa, a traditional populist and official candidate of the Liberal party, earned only 31.7 percent of the vote.

Uribe ascended quickly in the polls, rising from third place in January, as the peace talks between the government and the FARC strained and then broke down definitively on February 20.<sup>12</sup> Uribe's popularity continued to increase as the FARC conducted a massive sabotage campaign against energy and transportation infrastructure, and violence escalated throughout the country. In the bloodiest incident, the FARC admitted to inadvertently killing 119 civilians when it launched a canister bomb and destroyed a church where townspeople had sought shelter while the FARC battled paramilitaries in the village of Bojayá, in the department of Chocó.

Uribe's movement was called "Colombia First" and its slogan was "firm hand, big heart." Uribe has long spoken of getting tough on crime and subversion, but takes issue with the far-right image the foreign media and other observers paint of him; he fancies

"It has really amazed me, the way in which candidates talk openly about buying votes for \$15," said Daniel García-Peña, recent congressional candidate and campaign manager for presidential candidate Luis (Lucho) Garzón. "And the number of people saying, how much are you going to give me, offering to sell their vote for anything—a bottle of liquor, building materials for their house, a place in school for their children."<sup>11</sup>

By Uribe's own admission, several of the Convivir in Antioquia were infiltrated by paramilitaries while he was governor. It would be an extraordinary challenge to avoid replaying that scenario today at the national level, with the AUC's explosive growth, budding sympathies from the middle class, and well-documented links with elements of the Colombian military.

himself a law-and-order man with innovative social policies.<sup>13</sup> People close to him cite his abilities as a public administrator and his university coursework in the United States and Europe as important assets, perhaps even his defining qualities. He promises to attack corruption and would like to reduce the 268-member two-house Congress to a unicameral body of 150 members while eliminating many of their privileges. He also intends to close little-used consulates and embassies overseas.<sup>14</sup>

Uribe built his career in Antioquia, one of Colombia's most populous, prosperous and violent departments. He was appointed mayor of Antioquia's capital, Medellín, in 1982 and then served on the city council and in the national Senate from 1986 to 1994. He is most famous, however, for serving as governor of Antioquia from 1995 to 1997. During his tenure, he claims to have reduced the government payroll by thirty-four percent and dramatically increased the number of children attending school, as well as expanding health care coverage.

Despite his history in the public spotlight, Uribe has been remarkably sensitive to probing questions and has often lost his temper with journalists.<sup>15</sup> He abruptly ended a March interview with *Newsweek* and accused the reporter of having ulterior motives for his visit and wanting to smear his candidacy. Perhaps most troubling, Fernando Garavito, a columnist for the Bogotá newspaper *El Espectador*, cited a book from the early 1990s that named Uribe's father as a drug trafficker awaiting extradition to the United States. Heated words were exchanged in print among Uribe loyalists and critics, and after receiving death threats, Garavito fled the country and is currently in exile.

Indeed, Uribe himself has been dogged by a series of reports that link him to drug traffickers and paramilitaries.<sup>16</sup> He maintains that his connections to the Ochoa drug cartel family were limited to thoroughbred horse shows, a popular upper-class sport in Antioquia for which the Ochoas were famous. He also denies allegations that part of his campaign funds originated in Pablo Escobar's neighborhood development project, Medellín Without Slums. He has not, however, hidden his support of Rito Alejo del Río and Fernando Millán, two generals who were dismissed by President Pastrana for human rights abuses: Uribe even used del Río as an advisor on military matters during his campaign, though his visa to the United States had been canceled and he is currently under investigation in Colombia for links to paramilitaries.<sup>17</sup>

Although the AUC did not officially endorse any candidates, a communiqué on its website noted that "[should] the Alvaro Uribe administration arrive at the presidency, [it] would benefit the great majority of Colombians."<sup>18</sup> There were many reports of "armed campaigning," in which paramilitaries informed large groups, often internally displaced people, that they must vote for Uribe.<sup>19</sup> Upon Uribe's victory, the AUC's Salvatore Mancuso highlighted the "emphatic" expression of popular support for Uribe and said "now is the time to win the war being waged against the Colombian state."<sup>20</sup>

The centerpiece of Uribe's campaign platform, and what drew voters, was his call to battle the illegal armed groups, particularly the FARC and the ELN. The aim, if not to defeat them outright, is to at least weaken them enough to force them to the table on his own stringent terms. Those terms may be unrealistic, for they include a cease-fire and a halt to all kidnappings and bombings before dialogue is to resume. Uribe was a persistent critic of Pastrana's peace efforts and he evidently harbors a deep personal mistrust of the FARC: His father, a prominent landowner, was killed by that group in a botched kidnapping attempt in 1983.

The Colombian conflict pits the ELN and FARC guerrillas against the paramilitary AUC and the Colombian armed forces. The ELN, FARC, and AUC are designated as foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department. Uribe and others in his future cabinet have refused to call the hostilities in Colombia a “civil war” or even a “war.” Uribe has said “the international community must know that there is no war. Here, we have terrorism by armed groups against the rest of Colombia, and this must be resolved quickly.”<sup>21</sup> He has called for an increase in the number of professional, combat-ready soldiers from 55,000 to 100,000 and a doubling of the number of police to 200,000. Though such proposals were central to his platform, he has been remarkably short on details. Nobody knows what reforms, if any, he will demand of a military that has a worrisome human rights record. Nor has he explained who, exactly, will be expected to serve in the military. Although military service is required of all young men, the Colombian elite has historically relied on a variety of legal and illegal means to avoid doing so.<sup>22</sup>



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Perhaps most troubling for the human rights community and other observers is Uribe’s proposal to invite one million civilians to participate in citizen militias, along the lines of the Convivir civilian security cooperatives he enthusiastically supported in Antioquia in the mid-1990s. The Convivir allowed armed civilians to patrol and gather intelligence under the control of military commanders, and, due in part to Uribe’s support, nearly seventy were established in Antioquia, as were some four hundred nationally. Uribe has waffled on the details of his current plans, but through such an arrangement civilians would almost certainly be provided radios to act as informants for the police and the military. Uribe has mentioned that already-armed private security guards would play a special role in the militias, and perhaps new arms would be distributed. Human rights groups point out that doing so would blur the distinction between civilian and combatant, and would likely violate international humanitarian law.

Witness for Peace volunteers with residents of Sincelejo, Sucre, one of the many rural areas affected by the armed conflict.

Uribe says, “No state can provide an acceptable level of security unless the citizens cooperate. One thing is arming one million bandits. But it’s another thing entirely to arm ordinary citizens, private security firms, neighborhood security groups, and civil defense organizations so they can support the military.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, by Uribe’s own admission, several of the Convivir in Antioquia were infiltrated by paramilitaries while he was governor. It would be an extraordinary challenge to avoid replaying that scenario today at the national level, with the AUC’s explosive growth, budding sympathies from the middle class, and well-documented links with elements of the Colombian military.<sup>24</sup> It is all the more alarming, perhaps, given Colombia’s countless outstanding vendettas and history of private retribution, which may be folded by local-level opportunists into Uribe’s state-sanctioned model of “democratic security.”

## The Costs of War and Caudillismo

But if Uribe emphasizes security and public order above all, he argues that on that base his administration will erect other important changes, such as economic and social reform. Yet many are wondering how the government will first pay for the war effort. It will cost some \$4 billion over four years, though the country’s annual budget is only \$27 billion. Moreover, the country’s economy is at its most troubled point since the 1930s: Unemployment now hovers at eighteen percent nationally, sixty-eight percent of Colombians



Soacha, a shantytown on the outskirts of Bogotá where many displaced persons live and armed groups are known to recruit.

For all of Uribe's modern, technocratic trappings, his straight-talking, studious demeanor, and his can-do attitude often ascribed to the people of Antioquia, he also represents an enduring feature of Latin American political culture: the *caudillo*, or strongman, summoned to save the nation with a top-down political project based on the promise of order.

live in poverty (earning less than two dollars per day), and the gap between rich and poor is widening.<sup>25</sup> To address these problems, Uribe has drawn from Colombia's vaunted economic technocracy and assembled a formidable team of advisors and ministers. Their priorities will be to renegotiate the external debt and implement tax reforms—both to pay for the expanded war effort—overhaul a wasteful pension system, and create jobs. All are known for orthodox tendencies and close relationships with the international financial institutions, but the demanding context will require creative solutions, a combination of social investment and belt-tightening.<sup>26</sup>

For all of Uribe's modern, technocratic trappings, his straight-talking, studious demeanor, and his can-do attitude often ascribed to the people of Antioquia, he also represents an enduring feature of Latin American political culture: the *caudillo*, or strongman, summoned to save the nation with a top-down political project based on the promise of order. Though he did not exactly ask for the role, the public readily assigned him the position: The entire power of state, it seems, has been invested in the symbolic figure of Uribe. Even by Latin American standards, where the executive branch dominates the political landscape, the Colombian president is particularly powerful. But that fact is unlikely to extend Uribe's honeymoon. The public is clamoring for an impossibly quick fix to intractable problems, and its high expectations could be rapidly deflated as the new president, the most resolute of recent rulers, tackles issues that are probably beyond the capacity of any administration to resolve in four years.

Uribe's support has come from odd quarters, as an expression of elite exasperation with the four-decade conflict as well as lower- and middle-class faith in the contemporary *caudillo*. A Bogotá architecture student encapsulated many Colombians' feelings: "Uribe will mean more war at first, but so be it if that gets rid of the violent ones and lets us start to make something of Colombia."<sup>27</sup> Even some academic leftists and human rights activists have discreetly backed him because of their commitment to the rule of law, which Uribe promises to strengthen. A Bogotá lawyer said, "Colombia needs strong institutions and respect for the law. Uribe is the only candidate who seems truly committed to that agenda."<sup>28</sup> At the same time, they are crossing their fingers and hoping that human rights are not further trampled in the name of establishing that very rule of law.

The rule of law is indeed critical to any long-term solution, because Colombia's conflict is, at its heart, a turf war driven by material motives with ideological and class-based undercurrents, in large part fueled by the drug trade that services a voracious U.S. market.

The FARC, like the AUC, is recruiting young people from shantytowns on the outskirts of major cities such as Medellín and Bogotá.<sup>29</sup> It is, at the same time, attempting to expand its control of the isolated and sparsely inhabited southern provinces of

Putumayo and Caquetá, where most of Colombia's coca is grown and processed into cocaine. Alfonso Cano of the FARC claims that a new demilitarized zone in that area will be a condition for any eventual peace talks.<sup>30</sup> In July, the FARC declared all of Colombia's 1,098 mayors and other municipal officials as military targets if they do not renounce their positions; hundreds have already quit, and the United States has offered to help Pastrana give additional protection to local governments.<sup>31</sup> The FARC is also accumulating hostages for what it hopes will be a massive prisoner exchange with the government, something it did successfully in 2001.

The burgeoning right-wing paramilitaries, under the banner of the AUC, have tripled in size since 1998 and now count about 15,000 members in their ranks. Bankrolled by the drug trade as well as wealthy and middle-class Colombians who lack confidence in the state's security forces and the legal system to protect their interests, the AUC poses as serious a threat to Colombian civilians and their tenuous democracy as the

## Uribe's Challengers

**Horacio Serpa:** The official candidate of the Liberal party, Serpa led in the polls until Uribe's rise. He has served in many public offices, including prosecutor general, senator, peace negotiator and Minister of Government during the Gaviria government (1990-1994), and Minister of the Interior during the Samper administration (1994-1998). He was also a co-chair of the special assembly that wrote the Constitution of 1991. Serpa faced accusations of corruption for his loyalty to President Samper, suspected of accepting \$6 million in campaign contributions from the Cali drug cartel in 1994. This was probably the biggest factor in Serpa's narrow loss to Andrés Pastrana in the 1998 elections. In the latter stages of the 2002 campaign, Serpa moved his security rhetoric rightward in an effort to win supporters from Uribe. He had been attentive to security issues before Uribe's rise, but more often folded them into deeper social questions, such as poverty and unemployment. Until the end, he encouraged dialogue with the FARC, but emphatically favored a military, rather than a paramilitary, solution—barbs clearly directed against Uribe.

**Luis (Lucho) Garzón:** Running under the banner of the newly created Social and Political Front (FSP), Garzón left the presidency of the CUT, Colombia's largest labor union federation, to campaign full time. The FSP invigorated dormant and disorganized progressive sectors, pulling voters from the traditional Liberal ranks as well as labor activists. His running mate, Vera Grabe, was a former M-19 guerrilla. While critical of the guerrillas, Garzón favored a peace process and structural economic reform. His bid was widely touted as a success irrespective of his vote total (he earned 6.1 percent), but it is unclear whether his cause can be sustained beyond his candidacy or until the next election.

**Noemi Sanín Posada:** Sanín reached twenty-five percent popular support in November 2001, but received only 5.8 percent of the votes on election day. Following a long career in public administration and diplomacy (including serving as ambassador to Great Britain and Venezuela, Minister of Communications, and Latin America's first female foreign minister), she founded the Sí Colombia! political organization in 1998. In the 1998 presidential elections, she received 2.8 million votes, the most of any independent candidate prior to Uribe. As her popularity declined this year, many of her close advisors and allies pledged their allegiance to Uribe.

**Ingrid Betancourt:** Kidnapped by the FARC on February 23 along with her campaign manager, Clara Rojas (who her staff subsequently named as her running mate), Betancourt received only 0.4 percent of the vote. Following her election to the Senate with the highest number of votes nationally in 1994, she gained fame as an outspoken opponent of corruption and critic of the Samper government. Supportive of peace while critical of the guerrillas and paramilitaries, she created her own political organization, Oxígeno Verde (Green Oxygen) to launch her presidential campaign. Her public relations savvy, including a best-selling memoir published in French, English, and Spanish, was not enough to legitimate her campaign. She is still being held by the FARC, as it accumulates powerful Colombians (among hundreds of other hostages) for an intended prisoner swap with the government.

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A military base in Sucre province.

FARC does. The AUC is responsible for the majority of noncombatant killings in Colombia and is increasingly taking on the FARC directly in battle. With or without military endorsement, the AUC is poised to wage a scorched-earth policy against perceived guerrilla sympathizers, though it has recently tried to soften its tone for the sake of political credibility. For example, it has mostly held to its promise to not kill more than three civilians at a time.<sup>32</sup>

Military and paramilitary attacks have weakened the 4000-member ELN. Like the FARC, the ELN is involved in kidnapping, extortion, and sabotage.

However, it has been engaged in more

fruitful dialogue with the government than has the FARC. The European Union, for example, does not regard the ELN as a terrorist organization. Nonetheless, only days after Uribe's victory, the Pastrana government unilaterally and surprisingly declared peace talks with the ELN over. Uribe has since indicated that those talks will resume in Cuba once he assumes power.<sup>33</sup>

The position of the Uribe administration towards the ELN may indicate its policies towards the FARC. Will the government make extravagant demands of the ELN before such talks get underway? Does Uribe regard the ELN as a political movement of any form? There are indications that without a peace process, the ELN could even join hands with the FARC.<sup>34</sup> If that were to happen, Uribe's international credibility would suffer and his war would be even more difficult to wage.

## Calling on Washington

Uribe will encourage other countries, especially the United States, to join him in his crusade against the insurgents, particularly with assistance in information gathering, equipment, and training. Colombia is currently the third-largest recipient of U.S. military aid, and has received some \$1.7 billion in assistance since 2000. Washington is now primed to change its mission in Colombia from one devoted exclusively to counternarcotics to include counterinsurgency operations, the first time it has done so in Latin America in a decade. In military circles in the United States and Colombia, the overwhelming emphasis is on fighting the FARC rather than the AUC; not because the FARC better fits a terrorist profile, but because it is seen as more threatening to a sovereign allied democracy.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, Uribe fulfills Washington's desire for a firm hand, one that will not be hindered by peace gestures or mistake the FARC for a dialogue partner. U.S. ambassador to Colombia Anne Patterson met privately with Uribe in late 2001 at his home in Antioquia, a visit kept secret until revealed by a journalist in February 2002.<sup>36</sup> She was also the first to congratulate him on the night of the elections, well before Uribe had acknowledged victory and before second-place Horacio Serpa had conceded defeat.<sup>37</sup> Hours after his victory, Uribe reappointed Luis Alberto Moreno as Colombian ambassador to the United States. Moreno is one of the best-known ambassadors in Washington and has been particularly effective in recruiting congressional supporters for Plan



Colombia and the Andean Counterdrug Initiative. Days later, the acting commander of U.S. Southern Command, Army Major General Gary Speer, met with General Fernando Tapias, commander of the Colombian Armed Forces, while Assistant Secretary of State Otto Reich visited Uribe in Bogotá.<sup>38</sup>

Uribe quietly and perhaps inadvertently acknowledges the depth of the past he pledges to overcome. “What we have to do here is recuperate peace, to somehow have the peace that we have not had in our 200-year-history.”<sup>39</sup> Most analysts agree that a negotiated political settlement is the only way out of Colombia’s conflict. Uribe has already met with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to discuss the Colombian situation. It is still unclear whether such gestures are merely symbolic or truly heartfelt, but they do suggest that Uribe is capable of surprises. His appointment of former Minister of Foreign Trade, Marta Lucía Ramírez, as the first-ever female Minister of Defense, was a daring move.

He could go much further with no risk to his hawkish image. For example, he has an opportunity to attract the FARC and the ELN to the table by designing a reinsertion plan now. With or without a peace process in the foreseeable future, there will need to be one eventually, and the reinsertion of irregular combatants will be critical to any successful negotiation given their sheer numbers, now over 35,000. It is particularly important in Colombia, because few have forgotten the systematic extermination campaigns waged against ex-guerrillas by state and paramilitary forces in the 1980s and 1990s. Without guarantees, transparency, and a well-crafted process, few combatants will be willing to lay down their arms and rejoin civil society, even after four years of toughing out Uribe’s new, improved war.

## The White House Puts Colombia in its Place

Since the collapse of the peace talks between the FARC and the Colombian government, some in Washington have been animated by the possibility of including Colombia in the U.S. campaign against terrorism. Administration officials, in particular, have depicted the Colombian conflict as a matter of state survival, of a democratic government in a strategic, oil-producing region besieged by terrorists and drug traffickers who threaten to spread throughout the Andes and beyond. Such rhetoric served as a means of testing the congressional waters for an expanded Colombia policy, to move beyond counternarcotics operations and potentially battle irregular armies and protect oil infrastructure.

In early March, the House of Representatives, led by Cass Ballenger (R-NC) and Tom Lantos (D-CA), passed a non-binding resolution (which gives a “sense of the House”) in support of Colombia’s “unified campaign against narcotics trafficking, terrorist activities, and other threats to its national security.” The resolution explicitly requested that the Bush administration send a bill to Congress in order to address those concerns, rather than opt for a presidential directive, which it may have had the legal authority to enact. The administration replied on March 21 by including important Colombia-specific language in an emergency supplemental appropriations request to finance an expanding counter-terror mission worldwide, as well as bolster homeland security. Tucked into that \$27.1 billion request was \$35 million targeted for Colombia and language that would allow the United States to shift its mission there from one of fighting the drug trade exclusively to include directly helping the Colombian government take on the FARC, the ELN, and in theory, the AUC.

Administration officials have often linked terrorism and drug trafficking in their speeches, pointing to the FARC as an example. In March, U.S. Attorney General

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Thousands gathered April 19–21 in Washington to protest U.S. policy in Colombia.

Washington is clearly committed to a Colombia policy of some kind and many members of Congress are engaged in the issues, but there is growing skepticism of the current policy, let alone its expansion.

John Ashcroft announced that a federal grand jury had indicted several members of the FARC on drug trafficking charges. He said, “Terrorism and drugs go together like rats and the bubonic plague—they thrive in the same conditions, support each other, and feed off each other.”<sup>40</sup> He added, “When a dollar is spent on drugs in America, a dollar is made by America’s enemies.”<sup>41</sup> Ashcroft followed in early May with carefully timed indictments against the FARC and six of its members for the murder of three U.S. citizens in 1999. He stated, “Today, the United States strikes back at FARC’s reign of terror against the United States and its

citizens. Just as we fight terrorism in the mountains of South Asia, we will fight terrorism in our own hemisphere.”<sup>42</sup>

With less hyperbole, Drug Enforcement Administration chief Asa Hutchinson also attempted to link terrorism, drugs, and the Colombian insurgency. In March, he said, “There used to be a distinction between the drug traffickers and the insurgency groups,” but now “it is clear that there is not really a distinction between the drug traffickers and many of the terrorist organizations...in many instances they are one and the same.”<sup>43</sup> He later claimed, “There’s no distinction between terrorists who kidnap presidential candidates and traffickers who operate the labs.”<sup>44</sup>

Other officials have emphasized matters of regional security. According to Assistant Secretary of State Otto Reich, “The threat to Colombia’s democracy is...a threat to the whole hemisphere. If these people [the FARC, ELN, and AUC] were to ever gain control over larger parts of Colombian territories, I think there is no doubt they will take their business, which is narcotics and terrorism, to other countries.”<sup>45</sup> Former U.S. ambassador to Colombia Curtis Kamman said, “The terrorists who operate in Colombia have not explicitly declared the United States to be their target. But their political and economic objectives are incompatible with our values, and they could ultimately represent a force for evil no less troublesome than Al Qaeda or irresponsible forces possessing weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>46</sup>

### Congress Takes a Different Angle

Some members of Congress have echoed the administration. A report prepared for the House International Relations Committee chaired by Henry Hyde (R-IL) warned that “three hours by plane from Miami, we face a potential breeding ground for international terror equaled perhaps only by Afghanistan. The threat to American national interest is both imminent and clear.”<sup>47</sup> The report was part of the most anticipated and publicized hearing on Colombia thus far in 2002, an April 24 investigation into suspected links between the FARC, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and perhaps Iran, Cuba, and Spain’s ETA. The hearing backfired on Hyde and other advocates of an expanded mission: Neither the administration nor the

Colombian government could provide sufficient evidence of such links, and some Republicans joined Democratic committee members in attacking the hearing. Peter King (R-NY) called it “misleading” and “irresponsible,” while William Delahunt (D-MA) said, “We have been presented with a report short on facts and replete with surmise and opinion.”<sup>48</sup>

On other occasions, different members expressed reservations about escalating the U.S. role in Colombia’s complex conflict. Nita Lowey (D-NY) said, “The fundamental shift in policy that Congress has been asked to approve... is likely to lead to huge expenditures and expanded U.S. military deployments to Colombia.... Without comprehensive policy changes, we will merely be putting a band-aid on a hemorrhaging wound.”<sup>49</sup> Ron Paul (R-TX) worried that “We are going to get ourselves involved in a civil war. Painting this as something dealing with September 11 is really, really a stretch. Worse than a slippery slope... I think we’re approaching a cliff.”<sup>50</sup> José Serrano (D-NY) argued, “This has all the makings of another Vietnam.”<sup>51</sup> Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT), one of the architects of Plan Colombia, told senior administration officials, “I have this eerie feeling you’ll be back at this table next year, and the situation will not have gotten better, but worse.”<sup>52</sup>

An amendment to the supplemental aid package offered in the House by Jim McGovern (D-MA) and Ike Skelton (D-MO) would have prevented the mission change, but it lost 192-225 after a spirited debate on May 23. Critics of U.S. policy toward Colombia were heartened by the vote, however, because the margin was closer than past amendments on Colombia-related legislation, and it was the most contested element of the supplemental request. Many members of Congress voted in surprising ways, with twenty Republicans crossing party lines despite pressure from the Speaker, the White House, the Pentagon, and defense contractors to vote against the amendment. It suggests that many remain undecided as to what U.S. policy toward Colombia should be. Washington is clearly committed to a Colombia policy of some kind and many members of Congress are engaged in the issues, but there is growing skepticism of the current policy, let alone its expansion.

Most everyone in Washington does agree, however, that Colombia must shoulder the burden of resolving its security problems. The director of the Office on National Drug Control Policy, John Walters (the “Drug Czar”), and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Marc Grossman, as well as several members of Congress made it clear that they expected Colombia to spend more of its own money on the war before they would be willing to further loosen U.S. purse strings.<sup>53</sup> Representative Gene Taylor (D-MS) said, “I have this gut-wrenching feeling that the Colombian politicians are trying to maneuver us into fighting the war for them.”<sup>54</sup>

The House and Senate versions of the supplemental, passed on May 24 and June 7 respectively, were ultimately reconciled in conference committee on July 22. As the administration requested, \$25 million will go toward anti-kidnapping units, \$4 million will strengthen rural police stations, and \$6 million are for training units to protect the Caño Limón-Coveñas oil pipeline used by Los Angeles based Occidental Petroleum. The final bill permits U.S. assistance through 2002 to be used “to support a unified campaign against narcotics trafficking, against activities by organizations designated as terrorist organizations... and to take actions to protect human health and welfare in emergency circumstances.” The bill also calls on the State Department to use an undetermined amount of funds “to train and equip a Colombian Armed Forces unit dedicated to apprehending the leaders of paramilitary organizations.”<sup>55</sup>

The bill requires the incoming Colombian president to commit, in writing, to combat drug trafficking, and restore government authority and respect for human



Representative McGovern (D-MA)

“The majority of U.S. aid to Colombia goes to the Colombian military, a military with an abysmal human rights record, a military that continues to maintain ties to paramilitary groups that are listed on the State Department terrorist list. I do not believe that American taxpayer dollars should be used to fund an institution like that, and I certainly do not believe that we should expand American resources beyond fighting drugs and into fighting guerrillas.”

—Rep. James McGovern  
May 23, 2002.

Human rights organizations were particularly disturbed by the State Department's attempt to display General Rodrigo Quiñones' appointment as military attaché to Israel as an example of "progress." The Colombian *Procuraduría* (Internal Affairs Agency) has linked Quiñones to two major massacres and the targeted killing of fifty-seven civilians.

rights in areas under the control of irregular armies; implement budgetary and personnel reforms within the military; and assign more resources to the commitments made under Plan Colombia. Before the pipeline funds are to be spent, Congress asks that the State Department provide details about oil revenues and how they are being distributed for social programs in Arauca province, where the U.S.-trained troops will operate. Through the bill, Congress also asks the State and Defense Departments to articulate the president's policy toward Colombia, its objectives, its expected costs, and its timeline. It also requests information about benchmarks to determine progress, and the expected impact of the Andean Counterdrug Initiative on cocaine production.

As of this writing, neither the House nor the Senate had addressed the FY2003 Foreign Operations appropriation request, which would assign \$374 million in military aid (including \$98 million for the Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline) and \$164 million in social and economic aid to Colombia. The two most controversial elements of the request will likely be the pipeline protection and, once again, the change in mission. Figures are not available for the defense budget appropriation, though in 2001 Colombia's military and police received an additional \$154 million through that budget.<sup>56</sup>

## Human Rights On Hold

Before most of the U.S. military aid to Colombia can be released, the State Department must certify that Colombia is making progress on human rights conditions—specifically, that the Colombian military is suspending personnel credibly alleged to have committed serious human rights violations; that it is cooperating with civilian judicial investigations; and that it is taking effective measures to sever links with paramilitary groups. In its efforts to ensure compliance, the State Department sent high-level representatives to consult with the Pastrana government in Bogotá between February and April. In March, Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) discreetly sent a list of requests to the Colombian government in what they regarded as minimal gestures of respect for U.S. law. Among other things, they asked that three particular generals be suspended from active duty for their suspected collusion with paramilitaries.<sup>57</sup>

In part due to such pressure, the State Department put off certification until May 1, nearly three months after it was at liberty to do so, in the hopes of extracting some cooperation from Bogotá. Little was forthcoming. Insiders say that Bogotá was adamant in its resistance to reforms, and that the process was frustrating for U.S. officials. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and WOLA objected to the certification decision. They were particularly disturbed by the State Department's attempt to display General Rodrigo Quiñones' appointment as military attaché to Israel as an example of "progress." The Colombian *Procuraduría* (Internal Affairs Agency) has linked Quiñones to two major massacres and the targeted killing of fifty-seven civilians.<sup>58</sup>

Days after the certification, in an opinion for the *Los Angeles Times*, Senator Leahy wrote, "Continued U.S. aid to the Colombian military must be tied to accountability for abuses and to aggressively fighting the paramilitaries....The certification had more to do with the fact that U.S. aid was running out than with Colombia's actually making sufficient progress on human rights."<sup>59</sup>

In July, forty-five representatives signed a "Dear Colleague" letter initiated by Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and addressed to Secretary of State Colin Powell, questioning the

certification and demanding more action in breaking military-paramilitary ties. They said the lack of improvement “bodes ill for the future of U.S.-Colombian military cooperation and for the protection of human rights in Colombia. Moreover, we have been assured that U.S. assistance and training would promote the professionalism of the Colombian military and improve the human rights record of the Colombian military. To date, we believe there has been little progress.”

State department officials openly concede that much more needs to be done on military-paramilitary bonds.<sup>60</sup> In September, most likely, the State Department will again decide whether Colombia is meeting human rights standards. If its decision is affirmative, the remaining forty percent of military aid assigned through the State Department for FY2002, some \$40 million, will make its way to Bogotá.

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## WOLA's "Drugs, Democracy and Human Rights" project

The *Colombia Monitor* is part of WOLA's "Drugs, Democracy and Human Rights" project, which began in 2001. The project examines the impact of the drug trade and U.S. international counter-narcotics policy on human rights and the consolidation of democracy throughout Latin American and the Caribbean. Looking at both producer and transit countries, researchers from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico and Central America will document and analyze a number of themes, including:

- ▶ whether security forces receiving U.S. funding and/or training for counternarcotics activities are committing human rights abuses, and if so, how the perpetrators are called to account;
- ▶ whether the judiciary is effectively pursuing such cases, or whether they are handled by military courts;
- ▶ the definition of the military's mandate, the relationship between military and police forces, and whether antidrug funding is empowering the military to expand into activities normally reserved for the police;
- ▶ the functioning of civilian institutions, including mechanisms for oversight of counternarcotics activities through legislation and congressional committees.

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