WOLA

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Taking Stock: Plan Colombia's First Year

As this first issue of the Colombia Monitor went to press in late February, the Colombian government had ended peace talks with the country's largest insurgent group and was preparing to retake the "demilitarized zone" that had been established to facilitate those talks. U.S. officials were weighing proposals for an escalated counterinsurgency and counterterrorism campaign. This Monitor explains, in part, the events that led to this critical moment.

Viewed from almost any angle, 2001 was a troubled year in Colombia, scarred by escalating political violence and a faltering peace process that eventually crumbled in February 2002. Meanwhile, the United States has been raising the stakes on its major investment there. Aid to the Andean region reached an all-time peak of over $1.3 billion for 2000-2001 with President Bill Clinton's contribution to Plan Colombia. President George Bush has expanded those efforts through the Andean Counterdrug Initiative. According to U.S. policymakers, such assistance is designed to achieve a variety of goals: to reduce the amount of drugs coming into the U.S., strengthen democracy and human rights in Colombia, contribute to regional stability, and support a negotiated settlement to Colombia's 40-year-old internal conflict.

Yet, there is little indication that the mostly militarized packages advanced in Washington will achieve those objectives. U.S. counternarcotics policies have failed to reduce the amount of illicit drugs entering the country and have caused unintended damage of great consequence in Colombia. Extensive herbicide spraying, aimed to destroy coca, has ruined legal food crops and spawned concerns about environmental and health effects. Coca production, meanwhile, has moved effortlessly to new terrain. According to the world's most respected human rights groups, U.S. assistance fails to meet minimal human rights standards because it includes aid to security forces linked to rapidly-growing and brutal paramilitary groups in many areas of the country. Perhaps most alarming, the Bush administration is flirting with a counterinsurgency effort that could intensify the human rights catastrophe in Colombia and drag the U.S. into a complicated turf war with no clear mission or exit strategy.

The Troubling Numbers

From 1988 to 1997, an average of ten people were killed every day in political violence (including combat). By 2000, the average had risen to almost twenty,[1] and in 2001 the tally may have surged to 38 per day.[2] Roughly half of the world's kidnappings occur in Colombia: 3,041 were committed in 2001, 70% of them attributed to left-wing guerrillas.[3] The Colombian Commission of Jurists reported 161 massacres (three or more people killed at the same place and time) through September 2001, the resounding majority committed by right-wing paramilitaries. A record 341,000 people fled their homes because of political hostilities last year, making Colombia the world's fourth-largest host of internally displaced people, with over two million in a country of 40 million.[4] Afro-Colombians and indigenous people are disproportionately affected, in part because

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. drug control policy in the Andean region. The intent of this bi-monthly publication is to broaden and inform the public and policy debate about how to strengthen democracy, human rights, and prospects for peace. This issue provides a review of Plan Colombia a year after the beginning of its implementation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JASON HAGEN

Many Colombians survive in the informal economy, like this man selling vegetables along one of Bogotá's busiest avenues.

their lands are coveted for their natural resources and strategic location.[5] Five members of Congress were killed in 2001, as were eleven human rights defenders. Three-fifths of the assassinated trade unionists worldwide last year were Colombian, numbering 171 not including the "disappeared."[6] Ten journalists were killed, the highest number in any country.

Economic conditions were hardly more enviable. The economy has recovered only slightly from its prolonged nationwide depression and steady work is scarce: The average unemployment rate in the thirteen principal cities is 16.8%, though some post levels above 20%. By the end of 2000, annual per capita income had fallen to $2,044, $100 less than six years ago. According to the National Department of Planning, the number of people living in poverty increased by over 14% between 1997 and 1999 (from 19.7 to 22.7 million), and while in 1990 the wealthiest ten percent of Colombians earned forty times more than the poorest ten percent, by last year that proportion had risen to sixty.[7] Coffee, Colombia's largest export after oil (and historically the nation's most important product, even today providing 35% of all agricultural employment), reached an all-time low price in January, contributing to the ongoing fall in rural living standards. The poorest Colombians are the most readily drawn to the drug trade and more ominously, recruited by the illegal warring factions, from the left and the right, which now count 32,000 armed combatants in their ranks. The Colombian Armed Forces have 140,000 soldiers.

The middle class is leaving Colombia in unprecedented numbers. Few countries are confronting a brain drain of this magnitude, as the elite and the educated clamor for visas, even to accept menial labor in the United States, Spain, and Costa Rica. Some 1.3 million have left since 1996, and a record number of Colombians applied for visas to the U.S. last year. Due to such demand, aspirants for a mere tourist visa must wait some 18 months for an interview at the embassy in Bogotá. Even then, at least 20% of applicants are rejected. Because of the number of Colombians requesting political asylum in the U.S., those with layovers in U.S. airports while en route to other countries must now possess a U.S. visa. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), while only seventeen asylum cases were approved in 1993, 1,165 were approved in 2000. There were 7,280 requests for asylum in 2001, most of them pending.

Human Rights Backsliding

Human rights groups in Colombia and abroad have criticized President Andrés Pastrana's administration for its failure to reduce human rights violations and its lack of progress investigating human rights crimes. Vice President Gustavo Bell was handed the task of designing and implementing Pastrana's human rights policy. Yet, according to high-ranking officials within the administration, Bell has failed to implement the plan's basic pillars, such as follow-up commissions and the convening of the

PHOTO COURTESY OF JASON HAGEN

Colombia's internally displaced people often set up shacks on the outskirts of major cities, like this abode in southern Bogotá.

anti-paramilitary committee. Since Bell's concurrent appointment as Minister of Defense in 2001, these problems have increased. "Human rights issues don't have the high profile that we hoped," according to one government official. "There have been a lot of obstacles. Because of his position within the administration, [Vice President Bell] is really not available to deal with an issue as important and delicate as human rights."[8]

On August 13, Pastrana signed the Security and National Defense Law, which entitles the president to designate "theaters of operations" in order to control subversion. According to human rights defender Augustín Jiménez, "these theaters of operations are tantamount to establishing a state of siege in selected parts of the country…This is a very sophisticated strategy, because the situation in these special areas will be much more difficult to monitor – who will have access to these areas? – and publicize on an international level."[9] The law also grants judicial police powers to the Armed Forces, hampers the ability of the civilian judiciary to investigate human rights abuses during military operations, and limits the obligation of the Armed Forces to inform civilian judicial authorities of the detention of suspects.

There have been other disconcerting developments within the legal system. Most prominently, Attorney General Luis Camilo Osorio, appointed in July for a four-year term, has upset many observers by failing to support human rights investigations. Within hours of taking office, Osorio forced out two of the most respected prosecutors: the head of the widely praised Human Rights Unit and the leader of the Anti-Corruption Unit. In November, Osorio said the Human Rights Unit had focused excessively on the paramilitaries and he planned to redirect its investigations against guerrilla violations.[10]

Prosecutors within the Human Rights Unit have long complained of inadequate funding for their investigations, including the lack of transportation to collect evidence at massacre sites and the inability to protect witnesses. United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders, Hina Jilani, called the Attorney General's office "the weak link in the chain," during her October mission to Colombia. "I'm frankly very worried about the ability of the Human Rights Unit in the chief prosecutor's office to continue investigations of human rights violations with the independence of the previous administration."[11]

From January to September 2001, the U.N. reported that at least ten judicial officials and employees were killed, two officials were forcibly disappeared, four were kidnapped, and more than fifty were threatened. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, "these events demonstrate the existence of a systematic campaign of retaliation and intimidation, which intends, through terror, to achieve complete impunity for those responsible for the serious crimes committed in this country."[12] One example is the assassination of Yolanda Paternina Negrete, who was killed on August 29 while investigating the massacre of 27 people in Chengue (Sucre) seven months earlier. Paramilitary groups are suspected of having committed the massacre and the investigation includes allegations of participation by Navy officials.

Peace Talks Falter

Nearly every observer of Colombian politics agrees that a political settlement is the only effective way to resolve the country's strife in the long term. President Pastrana was elected on a peace platform in 1998, and in the ensuing three and a half years, he has staked his administration's legacy on a negotiated settlement to the armed conflict. His manner of reaching such a settlement, however, has been a source of controversy and constant criticism. Pastrana was chastised for ceding benefits, such as a 16,000- square-mile demilitarized zone (DMZ), to the FARC as a precondition for peace talks.

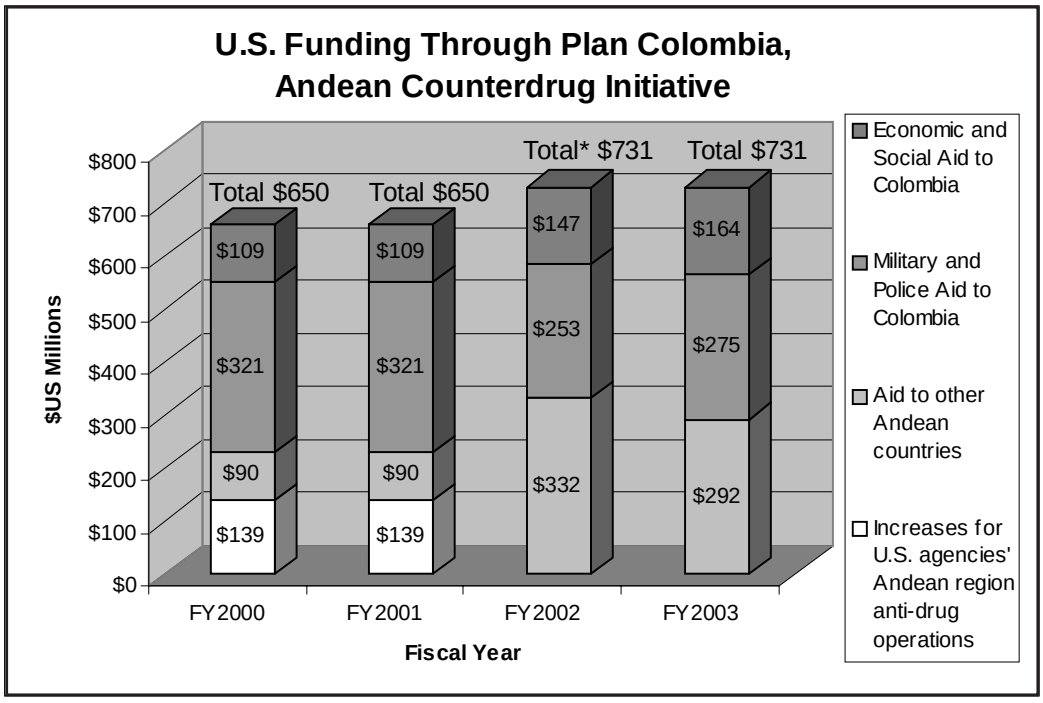
Over time, the DMZ itself became the object of negotiations, as many in Colombia and the U.S. suspected that the FARC was using the zone to prepare for war and had no intention of talking peace. Nonetheless, a hopeful Pastrana renewed the FARC's lease on the DMZ several times during his tenure. At the same time, the Colombian military expressed little interest in a peace process, and the government

failed to address matters of concern to the FARC, such as poverty, corruption, and deficient state services. Most importantly, the Armed Forces were unwilling or unable to stem the explosive growth of the paramilitaries. Until January 2002, progress in government – FARC peace efforts had been limited essentially to talks about how to structure eventual negotiations.

February 2001 provided one of the few highlights, with the Agreement of Los Pozos. It contained 13 points, including the creation of a "Commission of Notables" and a Group of Friends (the governments of Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba, Spain, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland) to facilitate dialogue and define common interests. Despite the auspicious concord, occasional meetings, and a series of public forums, the only concrete result in 2001 was a prisoner exchange in which the FARC released 364 captured military and police officers and the FARC, in return, received 14 imprisoned members.

The public became ever more skeptical of the process, as the FARC continued to grow in number and showed little willingness or ability to curb kidnappings, extortion, the sabotage of infrastructure, the use of child soldiers, and attacks on small towns. The FARC often used indiscriminate weapons, such as canister bombs, in public spaces. Several high profile cases last fall taxed the nation's patience, including the September murder of former Minister of Culture, Consuelo Araujo, while in FARC captivity. The kidnapping of foreign nationals, such as German, Japanese, Mexican, and Spanish citizens, angered governments supportive of the peace process. European Union officials threatened to suspend the visas of FARC supporters in Europe and freeze European-sponsored development projects. Colombians were particularly incensed by the FARC's refusal to release the father of a ten-year-old boy suffering from cancer; the father, a police officer, had been held by the FARC for more than three years while his son, Andrés Felipe Perez, died in December 2001.

Pastrana issued a surprise ultimatum in January 2002 that the FARC would be forced to leave the DMZ if they did not accept military presence on its perimeter. Several days of intense meetings with the new U.N. Special Envoy James Lemoyne, a representative of the Catholic Church, and the ambassadors from the Group of Friends salvaged a process on the verge of breakdown and produced a new schedule for a cease-fire agreement. The FARC's acceptance of international representatives as mediators was an apparent breakthrough, but a war-weary pub-



*This graph shows U.S. aid through Plan Colombia and the Andean Counterdrug Initiative, funded by way of foreign operations appropriations. In addition to the funds shown in the graph, during 2000 and 2001, Colombia received an average of $79.94 million per year in military aid and training through the defense appropriation. Defense figures for 2002 and 2003 are not available. Also in addition to the funding shown in the graph, the Administration has requested $98 million in foreign military financing for protection of the oil pipeline for 2003. Notes: * Figures for FY2002 are based on the $731 million Administration request. Congress approved $625 million, and it remains unclear how the funding will be redistributed. FY2000 and FY2001 funding levels are shown as the average of the two-year emergency supplemental for Plan Colombia. FY2003 numbers are based on the Administration's budget request.*

lic waited for real progress towards an April 7 ceasefire.

It never happened. After a month of vicious FARC attacks on the country's infrastructure, continued kidnappings, and the hijacking of a commercial airplane, Pastrana declared an end to peace talks on February 20 and ordered the FARC out of the DMZ. The government's plan to retake the zone is called "Operation Tanatos," in reference to the Greek word for death.

Optimists, whose numbers are quickly diminishing, point to Colombia's long history of peace negotiations, which have been conducted on and off since the early 1980s and brought five guerrilla groups into civilian life. Pessimists note that the war has escalated vividly since Pastrana came into office and all armed actors – guerrillas, the Armed Forces, and the paramilitaries – are growing in strength and are seemingly more interested in fighting than talking. Few analysts, however, believe that the FARC or the Armed Forces are capable of military victory. Rather, most expect an intensified stalemate with staggering costs for the civilian population as the war gravitates toward the cities.

Negotiations with the ELN have also proven frustrating, and have been overshadowed by the larger, stronger, and wealthier FARC. The ELN had hoped to stage a series of meetings to discuss thematic issues with the involvement of civil society leaders. However, these plans were suspended in August after the government refused to establish a demilitarized zone in the ELN's historic stronghold of the middle Magdalena valley. This region has been largely taken over by paramilitaries and their leadership was fiercely opposed to such a zone. The ELN has since offered a new proposal, in which five thematic conferences would be held in five different countries. These issues and others were discussed at a meeting in Havana at the end of January 2002. Despite the ELN's weakening over the past several years, it continues to carry out kidnappings, bombings, and other acts of sabotage. According to one high-level negotiator, President Pastrana expressed little interest in the ELN during his first years in office, but he has recently come to believe that a dialogue could yield substantial benefits — not only for his reputation as the peace president, but also for his negotiations with the FARC.[13]

PHOTO COURTESY OF WITNESS FOR PEACE

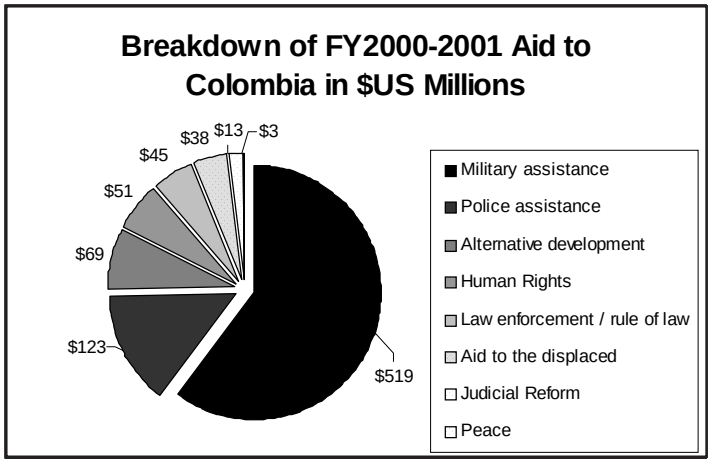
A counternarcotics helicopter circles the jungle.

U.S. Operations

While Andrés Pastrana's original 1998 Plan Colombia presented a four-pronged strategy toward peace, development, political reform, and citizen security, President Clinton's "emergency" support for Plan Colombia was skewed toward militarized counternarcotics operations. This assistance, totaling $1.3 billion for fiscal years 2000 and 2001, included the equipping and training of three Colombian Army battalions in southern Colombia to provide ground support for aerial herbicide spraying, sixty Blackhawk and Huey II helicopters, and expanded backing of Colombian military intelligence. As part of the same package, the U.S. sent $458.7 million (35% of the total) to neighboring countries, to U.S. agencies for additional Andean region antidrug operations, and to upgrades for military bases used by the U.S. in Ecuador and the Caribbean.

President Bush's Andean Counterdrug Initiative extends the support of military and police in the war on drugs throughout the Andean region. The project, funded through the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) account, still sends a majority (55%) of the aid to Colombia, but increases the amount going to Colombia's neighbors. Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama are slated to receive a total of $136.5 million in military and police aid in FY2002 through the INL account alone. Additional support will come from the Department of Defense and other agencies whose detailed funding requests have yet to be released.

The centerpiece of U.S. programs through FY2002 remains the "Push into Southern Colombia,"



which combines the military operations of the counternarcotics battalions with extensive aerial spraying of chemical herbicides. Civilian and military policy-makers alike invoke U.S. policy towards El Salvador in the 1980s as a template, in which direct military intervention is eschewed in favor of support in equipment, training, and intelligence technology to foreign militaries. A recent study for the U.S. Air Force concluded that "the U.S. program of military assistance to El Salvador during the Reagan administration could be a relevant model...there is no question that it succeeded in transforming the unprepossessing Salvadoran military into a force capable of turning back a formidable guerrilla threat."[14] Unfortunately, the argument does not take into account the tremendous human cost incurred.

The humanitarian, development, and capacity-building programs of Plan Colombia have been slow to begin, hampered by the United States Agency for International Development's lack of in-country staff and experience. The one-person office was at one point slated to close in 2000 and had to contend with a budget increase from $3.3 million in 1998 to more than $350 million in 2000. Efforts to distribute the funds have proven difficult, as many potential contractors, including human rights groups and some Catholic agencies, refuse to participate in what they view as an overall damaging military program.

Fumigation Controversies

The southern state of Putumayo is currently the site of most U.S. counternarcotics operations. Bordering the states of Nariño, Cauca, Guaviare, and Ecuador to the south, Putumayo terrain slopes from the Andes mountain chain to the Amazon basin. Coca farming began there in the late 1970s, but intensified in the 1990s as aerial spraying in Guaviare pushed coca elsewhere. Aerial fumigation campaigns sponsored by the U.S. in the mid-1990s in southern Colombia, including Putumayo, sparked one of the largest peasant protests in history in 1996. More than 300,000 coca farmers marched on state capitals and urban centers throughout the southern states, demanding an end to fumigation and the provision of more state services. The government negotiated agreements with the leaders of the strikes, pledging funds for health, education, and infrastructure. Almost six years later those oaths remain unfulfilled, leaving a profound skepticism toward the central government and the promised development assistance of Plan Colombia.

U.S. contractors and the first two U.S.-trained Colombian Army battalions began operations in December 2000. U.S. officials claim to have sprayed 212,000 hectares of coca in 2001, mostly in Putumayo, with a mixture of glyphosate (commonly known as Round-Up, manufactured by Monsanto) and added surfactants.[15] The exact formulation is not known publicly.

The governors of the six states most impacted by fumigation have objected and several have traveled to Washington to voice their concerns. The Co-

PHOTO COURTESY OF WITNESS FOR PEACE

These nests of tropical birds were sprayed in a counterdrug operation. The Amazon is a delicate and biodiverse region.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Dead banana trees indicate that spray planes passed directly overhead this shack. Farmers' food crops continue to be fumigated. Fields of farmers who signed social pacts, and even alternative development projects have been sprayed.

lombian National Human Rights Ombudsman demanded a halt to aerial fumigation, calling it "indiscriminate" in a report that documented its effects on indigenous reservations, legal food crops, alternative development projects, and peasants participating in manual eradication programs. Though no independent studies have been completed that assess the long-term impact of fumigation, environmental advocates note that the operations violate Environmental Protection Agency and Monsanto recommendations for the chemical's safe use.[16] Corpoamazonia, the governmental regional environmental authority, claims that documents by the National Police Antinarcotics Directorate include erroneous and contradictory information, such as incorrect geographic coordinates. Corpoamazonia also notes that the National Police has not carried out an environmental assessment of the fumigation as required by Colombian law.[17]

U.S. officials continue to justify the spraying, claiming that farmers in the region have persisted in planting coca. These allegations are disputed by local officials: according to the governor of Putumayo, less than 5% of farmers had reverted to growing coca after their crops were fumigated. During a December forum, he said "the national government made a serious mistake with the decision to fumigate in Putumayo…these campaigns will fail and they are going to continue to fail because what they did was discourage and punish the weakest link, and they destroyed the trust we were working to build."[18] The day after a second intensified spray campaign began in Putumayo in November 2001, the national government wrote to the Governor of Putumayo explaining that these fumigations were a "sanction."[19] Witness for Peace observers in Putumayo documented that signers of social pacts were sprayed, violating the agreement that the farmers had twelve months from receipt of assistance in which to eradicate their illicit crops.[20]

Social Pacts Stall[21]

Community leaders and researchers working in Putumayo claim that during the past five years, communities are more and more willing to give up coca, even for less profitable alternatives, because of the uncertainty and violence associated with illegal crops. One of the primary obstacles, however, has been the government's failure to supply even minimal support for alternative projects. Local authorities and community leaders have hence devised "social pacts." These pacts, signed by community members and representatives of the national government, commit coca farmers to manually eradicate their coca crops in exchange for technical assistance and development projects. From December 2000 to the present, a total of 35 social pacts have been signed between local governments and communities, incorporating some 35,000 families. The government is to provide $870 in food security aid per family for the first year, conduct market studies for alternative crops, support income generating projects, provide technical assistance, and help finance infrastructure projects. The communities promise to completely eradicate their coca within twelve months of the re-

ceipt of the first food aid, and to not replant coca.

The social pact program has three components: food security for the first year, medium and long-term infrastructure development, and training programs. The food security program provides supplies for short-term endeavors, such as the raising of cattle, swine, and chickens. Five Colombian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contracted to carry out these projects are overseen and advised by PLANTE, the Colombian government's alternative development agency. The NGOs, however, have been criticized for extensive delays in delivering food aid: None had prior experience in the region and all encountered serious problems in program design and implementation. Furthermore, many communities did not have a reliable census of population or existing crops.

Most communities have developed infrastructure requests for roads, schools, and small agricultural processing installations. Education and training is also a constant demand. Yet, according to NGO staffers in the region, the national government, which has to approve program budgets, cut funding for technical assistance. The NGOs have contracts for only one year, limiting their work to the delivery of food security without beginning the longer-term infrastructure programs required in the social pacts.

The U.S allocated $52.6 million for alternative development programs in 2001. Only $5.6 million had been spent by the end of the fiscal year.

Rather than develop long-term plans for sustainable development, local authorities have begun promoting a scheme called early eradication. According to this plan, if communities eradicate all their coca without delay, Chemonics, the U.S.-based USAID contractor, will immediately deliver money for community projects. Some mayors are promoting this plan as a means of avoiding the "excessive bureaucracy" involved with the NGOs.

Not all of the problems the NGOs confront are the result of inexperience or mismanagement. Two NGO employees, accused of conducting military intelligence operations, have been killed by the FARC. Both the FARC and the paramilitaries restrict travel, causing difficulties for NGO employees whose jobs require visiting rural areas and for peasants who need to attend meetings in urban centers.

The U.S. General Accounting Office reported that of the $52.5 million the U.S. had allocated for alternative development, only $5.6 million had been spent by September 30, the end of the fiscal year.[22] Even if the money had been delivered, however, some experts question the underlying design. Ricardo Vargas, who has studied development programs in the region for almost two decades, argues that the social pacts are setting the communities up for failure. Economically viable alternatives cannot be developed within the budget and time constraints established by the government, and communities facing starvation will return to coca cultivation.[23]

Recent U.S. Policy

On September 10, the AUC (the umbrella paramilitary organization) was added to the U.S. State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. In October, U.S. officials announced that the visas of four Colombians had been revoked because of their holders' financial support of paramilitary organizations. Forty-five more people were placed on a watch list and will be denied U.S. visas should they apply.[24] In meetings with top Colombian government officials, U.S. officials have expressed their concern about the swelling paramilitary forces.

Stern warnings are unlikely to suffice, however. On February 1, 2002, seven human rights organizations met with State Department officials and uniformly affirmed that the Colombian government had not met the human rights conditions laid out in U.S. law. The Secretary of State is required to certify that the Colombian government is meeting human rights conditions before releasing aid to the Colombian Armed Forces. Similar restrictions were placed on the 2000-2001 package. Using a provision included in the law, President Clinton waived the human rights conditions on that package, even though the State Department acknowledged that the Colombian government had not met three of the four conditions. This year, there is no waiver provision attached. A report issued jointly by Amnesty Inter-

national, Human Rights Watch, and the Washington Office on Latin America provided extensive evidence of non-compliance and concluded that the Colombian Armed Forces were therefore not eligible for U.S. assistance for FY2002.[25] The report demonstrates that members of the Armed Forces credibly alleged to have committed gross violations of human rights were not being suspended, that the Armed Forces were not cooperating with civilian judicial authorities, and that the Armed Forces continue to collaborate both by omission and commission with paramilitaries. The decision to certify Colombia was pending at the time of this writing.

Looking Ahead

Recent statements by U.S. officials suggest that the Administration wants to expand the scope of existing programs in Colombia in the name of fighting terrorism. U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Anne Patterson claimed in October that Plan Colombia is "the most effective anti-terrorist strategy we could possibly design."[26] In February 2002, the Bush administration announced its desire for a second U.S.-trained and equipped Colombian Army brigade to operate in the northeast. More surprising, it will ask Congress to finance the training of Colombian Army units to protect the 480-mile Caño-Limón oil pipeline routinely blown up by the ELN and the FARC. This plan, at $98 million, marks a clear foray from counternarcotics assistance into counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. In February, Ambassador Patterson said that the pipeline is "important for the future of…our (U.S.) petroleum supplies and the confidence of our investors."[27] Commentators from all sides have referred to a "slippery slope" of U.S. engagement and have expressed fears of "mission creep."

President Bush has made free trade the symbolic centerpiece of the special relationship he intends to develop with Latin America. Washington continues to see Colombia, however, through a national security optic that shortchanges democratic institution-building and economic development. Until now, the massive U.S. security assistance program for Colombia has been, in theory, exclusively devoted to counternarcotics operations. Such operations will undoubtedly continue with generous financing. But frustration with the FARC has reached a boiling point and the post 9-11 climate has enabled politicians in both countries to speak openly of counterinsurgency assistance as well. There are high-level debates within the Bush administration concerning which groups in Colombia are insurgents, which are terrorists, and which are mere drug traffickers. The administration is also deciding which groups most threaten U.S. interests and should be a priority in the U.S. fight against terrorism. The questions may be academic and the answers political, but the action will be mostly militarized. And its likely victims, as in recent years, will be innocent civilians caught amid the crossfire of competing factions in an increasingly debased and polarized dirty war.

For every armed combatant killed in Colombia, six unarmed civilians die. Key figures in Washington now have, more than ever, the opportunity to play a positive role in ending the brutality against civilians perpetrated by all armed actors. But if they choose not to, by sidestepping thorny peace negotiations, overlooking paramilitary atrocities, supporting a state unwilling to undertake overdue social reforms, and failing to address their country's own drug problems, we can expect bureaucratic wheels and private interests to carry the U.S. even further into the nastiest conflict in the hemisphere, and one with no end in sight.

The face of the future? Soldiers in downtown Bogotá.

NOTES

[1] Colombian Commission of Jurists. "Avance sobre los derechos humanos en Colombia, 2001," September 2001, Bogotá, Colombia.

[2] Yadira Ferrer and Néfer Muñoz. "Another Grim Year for Colombia," Inter Press Service, December 11, 2001. The statistic is taken from ongoing research by CINEP, a Jesuit research institute in Bogotá.

[3] http://www.paislibre.org.co

[4] CODHES. "Guerra contra la gente," Semana, February 19, 2002.

[5] Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento. Informe Anual, February 15, 2002. Bogotá.

[6] U.S./Labor Education in the Americas Project, Violence Against Colombian Trade Union Bulletin, Issue #2, February 2002.

[7] El Tiempo. "El costo de la guerra." February 27, 2002.

[8] WOLA interview, December 2001.

[9] WOLA interview, February 2002.

[10] Juan Forero. "Change and Fear in Colombia Rights Panel," New York Times, November 19, 2001.

[11] Reuters. "U.N. Envoy Slams Colombia's New Chief Prosecutor," October 31, 2001.

[12] "Comunicado de prensa sobre homicidio de la Fiscal Yolanda Paternina," by Anders Kompass, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia: Bogotá, Colombia, September 3, 2001.

[13] WOLA interview, January 2002.

[14] Angel Rabassa and Peter Chalk. *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and its Implications for Regional Stability*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001.

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[16] See Elsa Nivia and Luis Alberto Sánchez. "Notas aclaratorias sobre usos de Roundup en Colombia," Rapalmira, Cali, Colombia, August 27, 2001. Also see World Wildlife Fund, "Letter to Senator Russ Feingold," November 21, 2001, www.usfumigation.org.

[17] Corpoamazonia (Corporación para el desarrollo sostenible del sur de la Amazonia). "Apreciaciones sobre el documento 'Caracterización departamento del Putumayo,' elaborado por el Area de Erradicación de Cultivos Ilícitos de la Dirección de Antinarcóticos de la Policía Nacional," Mocoa, Putumayo, 2001.

[18] Speech given by Ivan Guerrero, Governor of Putumayo, December 12, 2001.

[19] El Tiempo. "Gobierno 'castiga' a Putumayo con fumigaciones aéreas." November 15, 2001.

[20] Witness for Peace. "Deadly Fumigation Returns to Putumayo." November 2001.

[21] Information in this section was gathered through interviews conducted in Puerto Asís and Mocoa, Putumayo, December 9-15, 2001. Interviewees included local government officials, individuals working with development projects for non-governmental organizations, PLANTE officials, Catholic church leaders, and community organizers, as well as farmers participating in the social pact agreements.

[22] General Accounting Office. "Drug Control Efforts to Develop Alternatives to Cultivating Illicit Crops in Colombia Have Made Little Progress and Face Serious Obstacles, GAO-02-291.

[23] WOLA interview, October 2001.

[24] El Tiempo. "E.U. cancela visas a cuatro colombianos por apoyo a 'paras'," October 31, 2001. Also see James Wilson, "U.S. Cracks down on Colombian Paramilitaries," Financial Times, October 31, 2001.

[25] Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Washington Office on Latin America. *Colombia Certification III Briefing Paper*, February 5, 2002. Available at www.hrw.org/americas.

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