

Plan Colombia: An Ineffective Policy

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Introduction

Plan Colombia, a policy that is chiefly supported as an effort to stop coca production in Colombia, has been completely ineffective. The United States government spends over \$350 million dollars each year assisting the Colombian government in this failed strategy. This is more money than the United States spends anywhere in the world other than the Middle East and Afghanistan. (*The Economist*, 2003a). The Colombian government also allocates a tremendous amount of its resources toward these unsuccessful supply side attempts to conquer the coca farmers and drug traffickers, and win the “drug war.”

In this paper I argue that Plan Colombia’s focus on the eradication and interdiction of the coca trade has not been effective at reducing the amount of coca being cultivated.¹ Moreover, aerial fumigations of the coca crop have destroyed banana fields, negatively affected human health, and polluted the environment. Human Rights violations have increased as the Colombian military and paramilitary groups continue to use Plan Colombia funding in their counter-insurgency efforts. Resentful peasants have mobilized and joined the ranks of the insurgents. All this occurs while the United States continues to support Plan Colombia’s objectives to eliminate the coca trade at its source. This paper will describe Plan Colombia, examine its implementation, and offer insights into the ineffectiveness of supply side approaches to winning the “drug war” in Colombia.

The Main Argument

The independent variable I will use in this study is the total value of money spent each year between the United States and Colombian governments for the purpose of coca interdiction and eradication. I have chosen the total value of spending as the independent variable because those who argue for the resourcefulness of Plan Colombia have asserted that funding is the most important element to the plan's efficacy (Biden, 2000; Clinton, 2000; Pastrana, 2000). Therefore, a causal relationship should exist between money spent on the eradication and interdiction of the coca trade, and the quantity of coca being grown in Colombia.

These spending indicators are valid, because of extensive documentation of the United States' Plan Colombia budget located on the US-Colombian embassy's website. I have chosen to include all US money spent on Plan Colombia's interdiction and eradication purposes, even though the Colombian government is likely not using all their funding to achieve such ends. Additionally, I will evaluate the amount of money being spent by Colombia on Plan Colombia, which is fully outlined on the Colombian government's website.

My dependent variable is the amount of land in Colombia (in hectares) under coca cultivation. This data can be found at the US-Colombian embassy website under the Andean Regional Initiative Link. The data comes from U.S. satellite technology and a variety of intelligence sources (Carpenter, 2001). Additional data can be found in various locations on the United Nation's website and is based off of the UN's survey in the Andean region regarding coca cultivation. I will also evaluate US data on coca cultivation.

Plan Colombia has a strong military focus to achieve its ends. Nevertheless, Plan Colombia as defined by the U.S. Department of State is “an integrated strategy to meet the most pressing challenges confronting Colombia today -- promoting the peace process, combating the narcotics industry, reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society” (United States, 2003c). Meanwhile, the Colombian government defines Plan Colombia as:

“una estrategia del Gobierno Nacional para la paz, la prosperidad y el fortalecimiento institucional... Busca también recuperar la confianza entre los colombianos mediante el rescate de las normas básicas de convivencia social, la promoción de la democracia, la justicia, la integridad territorial, la generación de condiciones para empleo, el respeto por los derechos humanos y la conservación del orden público entre otros” (República de Colombia 2003a).

Despite the fact that the Colombian government has not directly mentioned drug eradication and interdiction as part of Plan Colombia’s main objectives, I will be defining Plan Colombia as a strategy to eradicate and interdict drug production and trade, with a secondary purpose of strengthening democratic institutions. I place more emphasis on the interdiction and eradication of the coca trade because the majority of money spent on Plan Colombia goes towards these objectives (O’Grady, 2000). Additionally, this is how Plan Colombia was sold to the American public by the Clinton administration.

Perspectives on the Problem

The Colombian and United States’ governments are the strongest supporters of Plan Colombia and its ability to effectively eradicate and interdict the coca trade. This is most clearly stated in speeches by past and current Presidents of both countries, policy

recommendations by government officials and politicians, and information dispersed by the United States' Department of State and Colombia's Ministerio De Defensa Nacional.

President Clinton, in a January 2000 press release announced a substantial funding package to Colombia to assist in "vital counter-drug efforts aimed at keeping illegal drugs off [US] shores." (Clinton, 2000: 21). Clinton asserted that increased funding to Colombia would reduce the flow of cocaine to the United States while promoting peace, democracy, and economic growth in the region. He further argued that with Plan Colombia we could "expect to see more effective drug eradication and increased interdiction of illicit drug shipments" (Clinton, 2000: 22). On the same day, the White House released a fact sheet on the \$ 1.3 billion Colombian assistance package, listing its main five components:

- 1.) Funds to help train special "counter-narcotics battalions" and purchase over 60 helicopters.
- 2.) Funds for improved anti-narcotics intelligence gathering, and radar, aircraft, and airfield upgrades.
- 3.) \$96 million to assist in more coca and poppy field eradication.
- 4.) \$145 million to help promote alternative crops and jobs for coca growers.
- 5.) \$93 million for programs to strengthen the judiciary and stop money laundering. (United States 2000b: 22-23).

It is important to note, that the funding for Plan Colombia disproportionately goes to strengthening the Colombian military. In fact, the 60 helicopters come at a cost of over \$400 million (United States, 2000a).

While this policy was being discussed in the US Senate in the spring of 2000, Senator Joseph Biden (DE) traveled to Colombia and met with the then President Andrés Pastrana. His policy recommendations offer by far the most extensive argumentation for the effectiveness of policies that seek to eradicate and interdict the production and trade of coca. One of his main points was that the United States and Colombia needed to focus

on drug trafficking in both northern and southern Colombia, rather than solely one area. Biden asserted that this would ensure the containment of any further spread of narcotics trafficking. Also, he argued that eradication efforts had been temporarily interrupted due to the strength of guerrilla forces, and that because of this, the Colombian military needed to receive additional assistance in quelling the paramilitary and guerrilla threat. This could be done through training programs led by U.S. military forces and a grant of 30 new Blackhawk helicopters to Colombia at a cost of \$12 million a piece. Additionally, Biden argued for a larger US embassy staff, and better coordination efforts between the Colombian army and police units (Biden, 2000: 1-12).

Andrés Pastrana, Colombia's ex-President was Plan Colombia's originator.² He came up with the \$7.5 billion plan and was willing to burden Colombia with over half of its cost, while seeking additional support from the international community (Pastrana, 2000: 49). Pastrana argued for an intensification of the war against the production and distribution of drugs in Colombia. This could be accomplished if Colombia were given "the resources, the hardware and the training needed to combat the changing nature of the drug trade." (Pastrana, 2000: 48). He argued the fight would be two-fold. First, you would need to "destroy" drug traffickers. This would put an end to the violence drug traffickers had brought to Colombian and reverse the damage they had done to the economy. Pastrana argued that only then, could the second step mature, the creation of a peace agreement with the guerillas. (Pastrana, 2000: 49).

These arguments for increased funding and support for coca eradication and interdiction as part of Plan Colombia are shortsighted. This is true for a number of reasons such as the narco-traffickers' learning and adaptive abilities to escape law

enforcement, the increased value of coca cultivation as eradication and interdiction intensify, creating additional incentives for farmers to grow the crop, the “balloon” effect which explains the geographical shifting of production, a lack of economic alternatives to coca production, and the tendency for counter-narcotics assistance to be diverted to counter insurgency purposes.

In Michael C. Kenney’s dissertation “Outsmarting the State” he argues that smuggling organizations “learn” and become increasingly difficult for the state to prosecute. Criminal organizations are able to alter their behavior, store and share knowledge, and behave innovatively to maintain their success (Kenney, 2002: 16).

Another argument made against the efficacy of eradication and interdiction efforts is that such activities merely drive up the price of coca, which increases the profitability of the plant and causes production to shift elsewhere (Reuter, 1991: 11). *The Economist* defines this as the “balloon effect” in which “local squeezes simply move the industry elsewhere, spreading violence and corruption with it” (*The Economist*, 2003b). Not only has some coca production moved to Peru as a result of eradication in Colombia, but successful areas of Colombian cultivation have become more intensive, yielding 10% more coca per hectare (*The Economist*, 2003c).

Moreover, money for counter-narcotics assistance is often diverted to counter-insurgency efforts as argued by Alexander Wilde, the Executive Director of the Washington Office on Latin America. He claims that the primary mission for the armed forces in Colombia is of counter-insurgency, not counter-narcotics. Wilde states that the Colombia government has indicated that they would use counter-narcotics aid for counter-insurgency purposes (Wilde, 1991: 10). Wilde argues that as more money is

spent and the military is strengthened, rather than seeing a decrease in the cultivation of coca, more Human Rights violations will occur.

Also, many argue that economic growth should be the sole driving force behind policy implementation. Mary O'Grady of *The Wall Street Journal* has argued that eradication and interdiction efforts ignore fundamental economics, while they build a strong Colombian military that cannot be controlled in a legal manner. This only perpetuates the dire situation of the country and the cultivation of coca. O'Grady would like to see Colombia liberalize its economy, which would foster economic growth, ease social unrest, and give the Colombian government the support to make institutional reforms (O'Grady, 2000). O'Grady argues that \$1 billion would be better off spent buying off protectionist congressman and the interests they represent in both Colombia and the U.S. to foster free trade, than on 60 new helicopters (O'Grady, 2000).

Others have even advocated a complete free market approach in which coca production would be legalized. Mathea Falco, in *Foreign Policy*, argues that this would cause crime and corruption to decrease, allowing for economic growth. She notes that the power of drug traffickers directly threatens Colombian democracy (Falco, 1996: 5). She also argues that the most successful example of a large scale reduction in illicit drug cultivation in the recent years occurred in Thailand, where economic growth produced more profitable business opportunities, shifting production away from opium farming.

Arguments presented by mostly government representatives for the implementation of Plan Colombia, face much criticism from scholars, journalists, economists, and a small handful of government officials. The ideas put forth by the Clinton Administration, Andrés Pastrana, and Senator Biden are naïve and impractical.

The coca trade is far more complex than it appears, and cannot be decreased through the interdiction and eradication policies put forth in Plan Colombia. The failed supply side approach of dealing with the drug war in Colombia creates lessons the United States can use in the Americas and throughout the world.³

The Methods Section

- Case Selection Rationale

I have selected Colombia in my goal to assess the effectiveness of policies that seek to eradicate the production of coca crops for numerous reasons. Firstly, it is estimated that as much as 80 percent of the world's cocaine is produced in Colombia (United States, 2003c). Secondly, the United States spends more money on Colombia than any other country in the western hemisphere (United States, 2003c). Lastly, Colombia has the most extensive eradication program of any country in Latin America.

- Operationalization

As my independent variable I will use the dollar value being spent on coca eradication and interdiction, and see how it relates to my dependent variable, the amount of coca (in hectares) being cultivated. I have already addressed how this data has been acquired, what data I will use, and how I will measure the data, in the *Main Argument* section of this paper.

The Empirical Section

In answering the main question of this work, whether or not increased spending on the eradication and interdiction of coca has or has not had an impact on the amount of

coca being cultivated, it is most important to evaluate two variables. These are the amount of spending by the US and Colombian governments on eradication and interdiction purposes, and the total amount of land in hectares under coca cultivation. The second part of the empirical section will attempt to address some of the reasons why a strong correlation does not exist between these two variables. The following chart depicts the amount of spending by the United States and Colombian governments on Plan Colombia.

Chart 1: Amount of Money Spent on Plan Colombia and Previous Programs

Year	United States (In US \$'s)	US's \$'s Indexed for Inflation ⁴	Colombia (In Pesos) ⁵
1995	\$29.6	\$29.6	Na
1996	\$62.42	\$60.63	Na
1997	\$119.35	\$113.33	Na
1998	\$166.62	\$155.78	Na
1999	\$360.9	\$330.14	Na
2000	\$1,319.1	\$1,167.43	\$294.03 (Col\$ 643,345)
2001	\$0	\$0	0
2002	\$379.9	\$321.83	\$395.42 (Col\$ 1,115,887)
2003	\$597.3	\$492.05	Na
2004	\$688.0 ⁶	\$566.76	Na

Note: Numbers in Millions; "Plan Colombia" spending began in 2000.

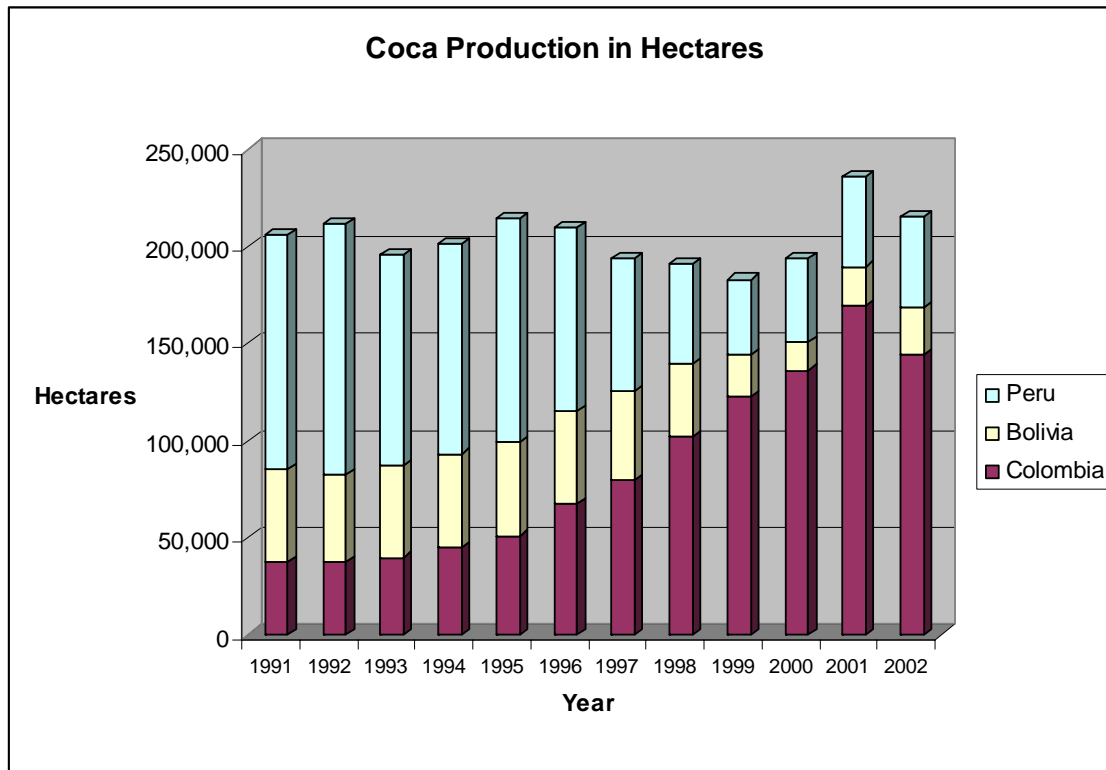
Sources: US data from 1995 to 1999 is from the Congressional Research Service, Colombia: Fact Sheet on U.S. Assistance and Legislation, RS20451 (United States, 2000a: 24); US data from 2000 to 2003 is from the United States' Embassy in Colombia's website (United States Embassy, 2003); The data on Colombia's spending is

from the Colombian Government's Plan Colombia website (República de Colombia, 2003b).

This graph shows that the money being spent on drug eradication and interdiction policies in Colombia has continued to increase over the past ten years with large deviations in 2000 and 2001. The \$1.3 billion spent in 2000 can be attributed to the US Senate's approval of Plan Colombia. According to a White House press release, zero dollars were spent in 2001, because the \$1.3 billion in 2000 was regarded as sufficient for two years (United States, 2002b). The Colombian government also combined its spending for 2000 and 2001, spending \$294.03 million dollars. In 2002 the Colombians increased their spending to (\$395.42 million dollars), while the United States decreased spending to \$379.9. Most recently George Bush has requested \$688 million for the 2003-2004 FY, while the US secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asserted that Colombia was "half-way along and making good progress" (*The Economist*, 2003a: 42). The main idea one needs to gather from this graph is that overall spending on eradication and interdiction policies has increased.

Intuitively, one might gather that as more resources have been allocated towards the eradication and interdiction of drugs in Colombia, coca cultivation has decreased. Nevertheless, this has not been the case. In fact, the overall amount of coca grown in the Andean region over the past 10 years has remained relatively constant at 200,000 hectares. The amount of coca being cultivated in each country has fluctuated while the overall amount has not. The empirical data of these findings is depicted in the following graph and charted in appendix (A).

Graph 1: Evidence of the “Balloon Effect,” Coca Production in Hectares



Sources: Data from 1991 to 1999 is from the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Department of State (United States, 2000a: 42). Data for Peru and Bolivia from 2000 to 2002 is from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (United Nations, 2003); The Data for Colombia from 2000 to 2002 and Peru and Bolivia in 2003 is from White House press releases (United States, 2002a; United States, 2003a).

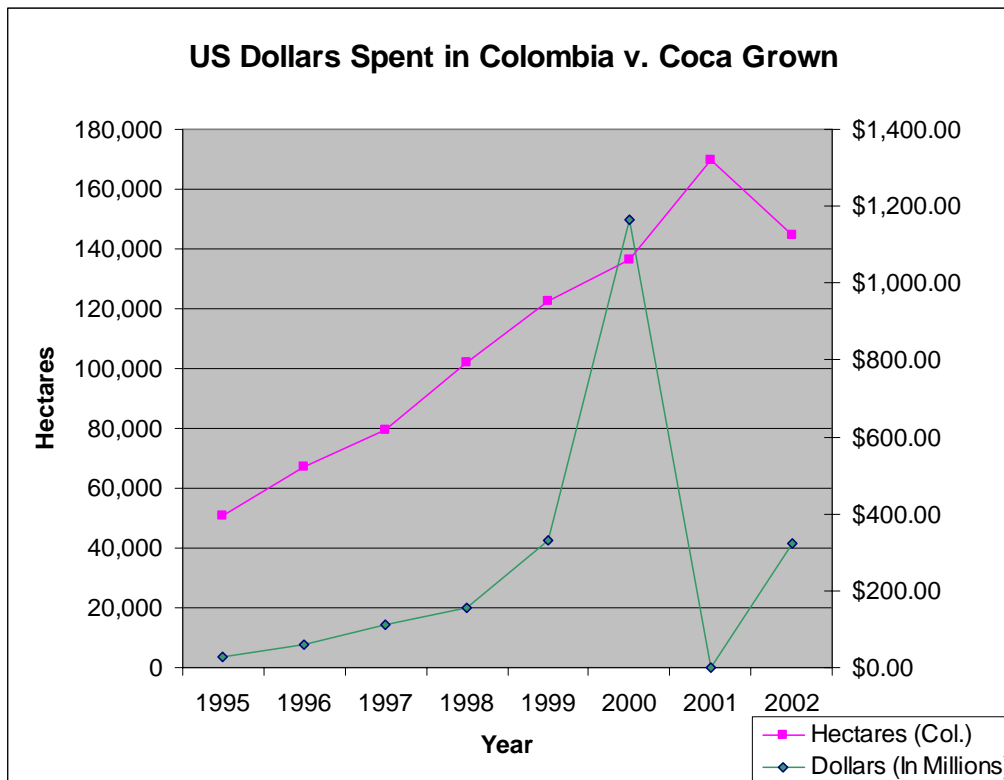
In this graph it is clear that the overall amount of coca grown in the Andean Region over the past ten years has remained relatively constant at about 200,000 hectares per year.

This has occurred despite the fact that the US has increased efforts to eradicate coca during this period. What is remarkably evident is that Colombia, a country that began its aerial spray program in 1995, has seen increases in coca production almost every year (Kirk, 2003: 266). Much of this increase may be attributed to the decrease of coca grown in Peru in the 1990's due to a fungal disease of the coca crop, and the resulting spill over or “balloon effect” into Colombia (Carpenter, 2003: 103). Moreover, the UN estimates

that more productive coca varieties are being cultivated in Peru, which has helped Peru produce 10% more coca per hectare than last year (*The Economist*, 2003c). The data, most of which comes from US government sources, is not supportive of Plan Colombia's ability to reduce the amount of coca crop being cultivated. In fact, after Plan Colombia was enacted in 2000 one can see that an all time record for coca cultivation was set the following year (235,900 hectares). This was followed by the second most productive year in 2002 (215,550 hectares). Interestingly, on November 17, 2003 the White House choose to issue a press release on the amount of coca currently being grown in Peru and Bolivia, but not in Colombia (United States, 2003a).

In proving my argument the data regarding spending on eradication and interdiction policies, and the data relating to the amount of coca being cultivated need to be compared. In doing so, one can see that little or no relationship exists between spending and the amount of coca grown. The following graph of US spending in Colombia and the amount of coca grown in Colombia highlights this point.

Graph 2: US Dollars Spent in Colombia v. Coca Grown



Sources: See *sources* from graph 1 and chart 2.

This graph shows that as spending has increased, so has the amount of coca being cultivated in Colombia. Although it appears that a positive relationship exists between these two variables, a number of confounding variables disables one's ability draw this conclusion. One is able to surmise that not much of a relationship exists between spending and coca cultivation. The decrease in coca production in 2002 is not significant because it took place after nine years of coca expansion. In other words, 2002 witnessed the second highest amount of coca ever grown in Colombia. Additionally, as coca production in Colombia decreased in 2002, it "ballooned" in to Bolivia and Peru. Lastly, the US government has stalled on providing data for 2003 which suggests a "set-back" on the war on drugs. The empirically data clearly suggests that increased funding for

eradication and interdiction policies has not reduced the amount of coca being cultivated in Colombia or the Andean region as a whole.

- *Explanations For These Findings*

Increased spending does not have a strong relationship with the amount of coca being grown. As described in the literature review, possible explanations for this are: traffickers learning capabilities, the “balloon effect,” basic economic principles, and the misuse of funds. This section will focus mostly on the economics behind the drug trade and how they perpetuate the illicit growth of coca. It will also explore how government corruption impedes successful policy implementation.⁷

Peter Reuter of the Rand Institute has performed a valuable study on the cocaine price distribution chain. The coca farmers at the bottom of the chain get paid the least amount of money. The price for one kilo of cocaine increases exponentially as the cocaine gets closer to its users. The prices are structured in this manner because (1) there is an overabundance of Colombian farmers that are desperate to make money and (2), the costs of selling drugs is much greater further in the chain where dealers face the possibility of US jail time (Reuter, 1991: 11). As a result of this price structure (Appendix B), when the government increases the cost of coca farming by 200% through interdiction and eradication policies, the cost can easily be absorbed by traffickers higher on the chain (Reuter, 1991: 11). Due to this structure, government policies which focus on the eradication of coca cultivation are futile because drug traffickers will always be able to provide coca growers with benefits that outweigh the costs imposed by the state.

This same understanding can also explain why subsidized alternative crop policies have failed. A substitute such as coffee (the most often-cited potential substitute crop for

coca) can earn about \$600 per hectare. A 1990 UN study estimated that coca growers make about \$4,000 per hectare (Tammen, 1991: 12). The United States would have to pay \$3,400 per hectare to meet this difference. Even if they did, they would enter a bidding war with drug traffickers who would be able to start paying growers double the current market price.

Moreover, the ease of growing coca provides additional incentives to farmers. Coffee and tea require three to four years from planting to first harvest and then can only be harvested once every year. Coca is ready for harvest only eight months after it is planted and can be harvested every 90 days thereafter. The coca bushes themselves do not require much care, and can be cultivated on plots of land that are much smaller than those required for substitute crops (Tammen, 1991: 6). Additionally, estimates in both Peru and Bolivia indicate that only 5 to 10 percent of major coca-growing regions would even support alternative crops (Boaz, 2003: 583).

Corruption is another flaw working against the eradication and interdiction strategy. With such high profits, there will always be law enforcement officials willing to get paid to look the other way. As one colonel from Lima put it,

“I have the opportunity while I’m here to make \$70,000 by looking the other way at certain times...my family is not protected and I don’t have the proper pension plan and I will never have the opportunity to make \$70,000 as long as I live. I am going to make it” (As quoted in Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe, and Andreas, 1996: 17).

With such high figures it would be unrealistic to assume that corruption could ever be avoided while pursuing coercive eradication and interdiction policies. In Mexico traffickers have created their own policy known as “silver or lead.” That is an enormous bribe to say yes, and an assassin’s bullet if one says no (Black, 1998: 347).

Two explanations for Plan Colombia's failure, government corruption and market forces, are not completely comprehensive of all the reasons supply side approaches involving eradication and interdiction are ineffective. Nevertheless, they create a foundation of understanding for the myriad of reasons why Plan Colombia has failed and will continue to fail.

Undesirable Externalities of Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia, has not had a major impact on the amount of coca being grown in the Andes but it has impacted many social issues in the region. In this section I will address (1) the negative influence Plan Colombia has had on the Human Rights of Colombians, (2) the negative impact that eradication has had on the environment, humans, and alternative crops, (3) the harmful impact Plan Colombia has had on Colombia's fragile democratic institutions, and (4) the strengthening of Colombia's insurgency movement due to Plan Colombia.

(1) The Exacerbation of Human Rights Violations

Colombia is one of the most dangerous places on the planet. According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists, a leading human rights group, there are an average of 19 political murders per day and up to 2 million Colombians displaced by war (*South Florida Sun – Sentinel*, 2003). Human Rights Watch has asserted that many of these displacements resulted from the United States' aerial eradication program (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Human Rights Watch would like to see US policies that are more conducive to the protection Human Rights. One of its members, Robin Kirk, has written

that US policies have “provoked Colombia’s home-grown demons” (Kirk, 2003: xix).

Amnesty International has taken a very strong stance against Plan Colombia stating:

Amnesty International opposes the military aid program for Colombia because it believes that the program will turn the human rights crisis into a human rights catastrophe. There is overwhelming documented evidence of the responsibility of illegal paramilitary organizations for widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations. There is conclusive evidence that paramilitary groups continue to operate with the tacit or active support of the Colombian armed forces. Colombian army personnel trained by US Special Forces have been implicated by action or omission in serious human rights violations, including the massacre of civilians (Amnesty International, 2001).

Amnesty International is most worried that funding will be used to support state terrorism.

They have good reason to be concerned as the Office of the People’s Advocate has stated that massacres in rural areas of Colombia have reached all time highs, while kidnappings per capita have tripled in the past ten years. Moreover, Colombia’s crime rate is 50 times greater than the average rate worldwide (Buscaglia and Ratliff, 2001). US policies lack enough emphasis on Human Rights concerns, and this apathy allows for violations to continue.

(2) The Impact on Human Health, the Environment, and Alternative Crops

Roundup, the spray used to eradicate coca is bad for the environment and harmful for human health. Polyoxyethyleneamine is known to irritate the respiratory tract, while dioxane is a suspected carcinogen. As a result, the hospital in Puerto Asis, Colombia, has treated an increasing number of cases involving poisoning, skin rashes, respirator and eye problems (*The Economist*, 2000c). Nevertheless, it is not completely clear what effects the fumigations have on human health. This uncertainty has led the newspaper *El Tiempo* to argue for an end to fumigations until it is clearer how human health is affected by sprayings (Soto, 2003). The European Commission, the executive of the European

Union, has also spoken against the fumigations in Colombia because of their impacts on the environment and human health, and hopes to completely prohibit such activities in the future (*El Tiempo*, 2003a).⁸ Most tellingly, in July 2001, a judge ruled in favor of a group of Amazonian Indians, who argued that the government had not given enough study to the impact of the weedkiller on the environment and human health (*The Economist*, 2001c).⁹

Worst of all, the fumigations have destroyed thousands of acres of legal crops along with the coca (Carpenter, 2001; Forero, 2001). Chemicals used in the eradication process have destroyed banana and yucca plants, and contaminated fish ponds. Not only is the destruction of alternative crops a setback for the drug war, but it also reduces the food supply of impoverished farmers (Buscaglia et al., 2001).

(3) The Weakening of Fragile Democratic Institutions

The eradication of coca has been a disaster for Colombia's fragile democratic institutions. The newspaper *El Tiempo* describes how the Colombian government has not been using clear accounting measures, leaving the money that Colombia receives for Plan Colombia unaccounted for (*El Tiempo*, 2003c). Because of the significant implications of these findings the head of the Colombian Defense Ministry Marta Lucía Ramírez, wrote a letter to *El Tiempo* explaining that she was working towards improving the accounting mechanisms of the country, specifically stating:

“En el Ministerio de Defensa Nacional estamos comprometidos con los principios de transparencia y rendición de cuentas. Por esta razón venimos trabajando para procurar la máxima claridad en el manejo de la cooperación internacional” (As quoted in *El Tiempo*, 2003e).

Less than one month later, Marta Lucía Ramírez was forced out of her post as the Defense Minister of Colombia. Jose Miguel Vivanco, the director of Human Rights Watch in the Americas asserts that she “[buckled] under the pressure” (Forero, 2003). This unfolding of events damaged democratic institutions and was provoked by the enormous sums of money the US is giving to the Colombian government.

Rather than being forced to resign, some people are simply killed for wanting to correct the corruption that stems from the US’s drug eradication program. For example, the company DynCorp claims that Alexander Wakefield Cáceres accidentally died from hitting his head on a moving propeller of an airplane. His mother claims that Alexander did not work anywhere near airplanes and that he was killed. *El Tiempo* admits that she is probably correct, as DynCorp, the main company that performs aerial fumigation in Colombia, has been involved in a wide variety of scandals over the years. There is some evidence that Alexander, a foreigner, had come across something he should not have soon before his death (*El Tiempo*, 2003d).

Periodically, employees of DynCorp are killed during the fumigations, as the Colombian people have responded to what they feel is an abuse of centralized power (*El Tiempo*, 2003b). In reaction to aerial spraying, several thousand Colombian coca farmers took over the town of Tibu in June of 2001. These impoverished farmers looted local businesses and set fire to tanks of weedkiller stored at the town’s airstrip (*The Economist*, 2001c). Even worse, the drug war has prompted traffickers to pay large sums of money to the insurgents in exchange for protection against government agencies (Tullis, 1995: 69).

In Putumayo, some 330,000 residents depend directly or indirectly on the coca harvest (*The Economist*, 2000d). Protestors of eradication have been spotted waving Colombian flags being subsumed by the Stars and Stripes. Other protestors have greeted presidential events with chants of “Pastrana subservient to the gringos” (Carpenter, 2001: 2). A billboard in San Vicente reads, “The gringos provide the weapons; the Colombians provide the dead” (*The Economist*, 2002c).

Not only are the citizens turning against the government and poor policy, the illegal drug trade is rocking the weak foundations of the Colombian government from within. For example, drug exporters from Cali, Colombia, donated \$6 million to former Colombian President Ernesto Samper’s 1994 presidential campaign (MacCoun and Reuter, 2001: 117). Most recently Colombia’s paramilitary group (the AUC) openly backed President Uribe’s candidacy, while it is estimated that the AUC receives 52 percent of its funding from illicit drug profits (Carpenter, 2002; Buscaglia et al., 2001). Moreover, one of President Uribe’s closest associates has already been charged with involvement in the drug trade (Carpenter, 2002).

(4) A Strengthened Insurgency Movement

In addition to weakening fragile democratic institutions, Plan Colombia has helped to strengthen the 40 year old insurgency movement in Colombia. Proponents of Plan Colombia hoped that if the FARC was denied drug income, they would be more inclined to make peace (*The Economist*, 2001e). The FARC has not been denied their drug income, because coca cultivation has not been reduced. If anything, insurgents have simply garnered more support from peasants who feel eradication programs are an infringement upon their rights by a centralized Colombian Government.¹⁰

Why do US policy makers continue to implement Failed Policies?

Drug eradication and interdiction policies in Colombia have not reduced the amount of coca being grown, but instead have augmented the number of Human Rights violations, led to environmental degradation, and provoked social and political instability. Why then, do US policy makers continue to pursue such policies? The answer is two-fold: (1) Politicians are often stuck pandering to what their constituents ask for and (2) the “narco-enforcement complex” is strongly supported by lobbyists and rent-seekers.

(1) Pleasing the Constituents

Public opinion is overwhelmingly in favor of the war on drugs. In 1969, when President Nixon was fervidly promoting a war on drugs, only 12 percent of U.S. citizens were in favor of legalizing marijuana (Gallup, 2001: 414). Despite 30 years of failure in curtailing the availability of illicit drugs, this prohibitionist attitude has remained.

A 1995 Gallup poll of U.S. citizens revealed the following:

- ▶ 88 percent of respondents were in favor of increased government efforts to reduce the supply of drugs coming into the United States
- ▶ 83 percent felt that there should be more law enforcement efforts to punish and convict people for the use and sale of illegal drugs
- ▶ 84 percent favored making criminal penalties more severe for the possession and sale of drugs
- ▶ 87 percent were in favor of increasing police funding to deal with the drug war
- ▶ 75 percent were in favor of using the military within the United States to deal with the war on drugs
- ▶ 64 percent favored the use of such power in foreign countries (Gallup 1996: 186-188).¹¹

US public opinion strongly favors policy makers who enact strong anti-drug policies at home and abroad. To do otherwise could be a form of political suicide.

Politicians are being motivated by strategies that will help them stay in power. “It’s quick-hit image over substance, and nobody cares if it’s going to work,” commented

Rep. Charles Schumer on the debate over a 1988 drug bill (Bertram et al., 1996: 137). Slogans such as, “Lock ‘em up, vote Bush,” are easy to put on bumper stickers to boost your campaign. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of drug legislation has been enacted in election years (Bertram et al., 1996: 137). Just as in the Cold War, when politicians did not want to appear “soft on communism” around election time, current politicians do not want to appear “soft on drugs” (Bertram et al., 1996: 138).¹²

(2) The “Narco-Enforcement Complex”

Many critics of U.S. policy have begun to warn of a “narco-enforcement complex.” This term is a reference to the “military-industrial complex,” which President Dwight Eisenhower warned of upon leaving office. Eisenhower theorized that continuous expenditures on strategic weapons to counter the threat from the Soviet Union would eventually require even greater amounts of spending regardless of the strategic reality (Crandall, 2002: 7).¹³

The escalation of the military in the drug war may be a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. A former Reagan official in the Pentagon has commented, “Getting help from the military on drugs used to be like pulling teeth. Now everybody’s looking around to say, ‘Hey how can we justify these forces?’ And the answer they’re coming up with is drugs.” One two-star general has been quoted as saying, “With peace breaking out all over it might give us something to do” (Bertram et al., 1996: 129).¹⁴

Conclusions and Implications

These findings clearly illustrate that the money being spent by the United States and Colombian governments on the eradication and interdiction of the coca trade has not

been able to reduce the amount of coca being cultivated. A shortcoming of these findings is that one could argue that if enormous sums of money had not been spent, even more coca would have been grown. Yet, many proponents of Plan Colombia have argued that coca cultivation would be reduced through this policy, a result that has clearly not been achieved.¹⁵

Plan Colombia has not been effective at reducing the amount of coca being grown, but instead it has exacerbated political and social tensions in war ridden Colombia. State funded terrorism and an acceptance of paramilitary Human Rights abuses continues. Aerial sprayings have negatively affected human health, the environment, and alternative crops. Massive funding that goes toward Plan Colombia has corrupted leaders of Colombia's fragile democratic institutions. All this has occurred while the price of cocaine on U.S. city streets has not increased in ten years (Youngers, 2001: 41).

The clear implications of these findings are that the United States' supply side drug eradication policies must be reconsidered. Although this is a single case study, these findings may be useful in examining other drug reduction approaches throughout the world.¹⁶ Further research needs to be done to assess how American public opinion can be changed in order to alter policy makers' decisions, and how international pressure groups and governments can assert more influence upon international policy makers in Washington.¹⁷ A supply side approach is unlikely to affect drug production in Colombia. The United States should experiment with more demand orientated policy approaches in their "war on drugs," and realize that Plan Colombia is a futile strategy that has been an utter disappointment.

Appendix (A).

Chart 2: Amount of Coca Grown in the Andean Region (In Hectares)

Year	Colombia	Bolivia	Peru	Total
1991	37,500	47,900	120,800	206,200
1992	37,100	45,500	129,100	211,700
1993	39,700	47,200	108,800	195,700
1994	45,000	48,100	108,600	201,700
1995	50,900	48,600	115,300	214,800
1996	67,200	48,100	94,400	209,700
1997	79,500	45,800	68,800	194,100
1998	101,800	38,000	51,000	190,800
1999	122,500	21,800	38,700	183,000
2000	136,200	14,600	43,400	194,200
2001	169,800	19,900	46,200	235,900
2002	144,450	24,400	46,700	215,550
2003	na	28,450	31,150	na

Sources: Data from 1991 to 1999 is from the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Department of State (United States, 2000a: 42). Data for Peru and Bolivia from 2000 to 2002 is from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (United Nations, 2003); The Data for Colombia from 2000 to 2002 and Peru and Bolivia in 2003 is from White House press releases (United States, 2002a; United States, 2003a).

Appendix (B).

Graph 3: Cocaine Prices through the Distribution Chain (Per Pure Kilogram Equivalent)

At the Farm	\$750 per kg
Export (Colombia)	\$2,000 per kg
Import (Miami)	\$15,000 per kg
Wholesale (1 kg. in Detroit)	\$23,000 per kg
Ounce Units (Detroit)	\$47,000 per kg
Retail (1 gm. Units)	\$135,000 per kg

Source: Reuter, Peter. 1991. "Statement of Peter Reuter, Co-Director, Drug Policy Research Center, Rand." In *Andean Drug Strategy*, ed. The Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office. p.11.

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¹ Interdiction is defined as “to confront and halt the activities, advance, or entry of,” while eradication will be defined as “getting rid of something by tearing up its roots”, or fumigating it with chemicals (The American Heritage College Dictionary, 2002).

² Much evidence suggests that Pastrana may have been coerced to originate this plan by the United States’ “certification” process as described here:

The Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988 (both election years) condition foreign aid and access to the U.S. market on the adoption of narcotics control initiatives (Boaz, 2003: 585). If the actions of a source country have not “resulted in the maximum [achievable] reductions in illicit production,” a country can be “decertified.” A decertified country can be subjected to any number of harsh penalties, including, but not limited to, “duty increases of up to 50 percent [of the value of] a country’s exports to the United States” (Tammen, 1991: 7).

³ Why Plan Colombia has failed will be further discussed in the second half of the empirical section and the greater implications of this failure will be briefly mentioned in the conclusion.

⁴ US dollar figures have been indexed using an inflation calculator on the BLS.gov website, holding 1995 as the base year (United States, 2003b).

⁵ Colombia pesos have been converted to US dollars using values from *The Economist* (*The Economist*, 2000a: 156; *The Economist*, 2002a: 146).

⁶ This amount (\$688) is what George W. Bush has requested to the US Congress (*The Economist*, 2003a).

⁷ This is further discussed in the following section. See *The Weakening of Fragile Democratic Institutions* in “Undesirable Externalities of Plan Colombia.”

⁸ I have personally performed all the Spanish to English translations in the paper.

⁹ This ruling only applied to Indigenous reserves.

¹⁰ See (Carpenter, 1990: 8).

¹¹ Additionally, this Gallup poll revealed that there is an indirect correlation between one’s level of education and their support for the war on drugs. That is, respondents with postgraduate degrees are the least likely to support this war. And respondents who have never attended college are its most avid supporters (Gallup, 1996: 186-188).

¹² For more on US domestic politics involving the drug war, read the following:

The electoral politics surrounding the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 gives further insight into this predicament. In the summer and fall leading up to the 1986 midterm election, Republicans and Democrats vied for the spotlight in the anti-drug crusade. The result was a sweeping anti-drug measure passed by Congress at the peak of the election campaign and signed by the president days before voters went to the polls (Bertram et al., 1996: 138). Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-Colorado) summed it up like this, “In football there’s a thing called piling on... I think we’re seeing political piling on right before the election” (Bertram et al., 1996: 139). Congressional Quarterly commented, “Republicans and Democrats all across the country are trying to outdo each other... rivals are challenging each other... to see who can propose the most stringent punishments for drug infractions” (Bertram et al., 1996: 140). Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Oklahoma) conceded that the 1986 drug bill was “out of control,” yet voted for it anyway (Bertram et al., 1996: 140).

In 1988 (another election year), Rep. Tim Valentine (D- North Carolina) voted for a drug amendment that he regarded as the “seeds of national disaster.” Valentine later admitted, “Rather than have people say, ‘Well, that guy, he’s in favor of drugs,’ I’ll hold my nose and go along with the others”

(Bertram et al., 1996: 140). That same year, the outspoken John McCain (R-Arizona) said, “This is such an emotional issue – I mean, we’re at war here— that voting ‘no’ would be too difficult to explain.” McCain added, “By voting against it, you’d be voting against the war on drugs. Nobody wants to do that” (Bertram et al., 1996: 140).

During the presidential campaign debates of 1988, Bush declared that, “We can do better on interdiction... And we have to be tougher on those who commit crimes.” Michael Dukakis, the Democratic hopeful, countered this by suggesting that he had “outlined in great detail a program for being tough on enforcement at home and abroad... doubling the number of drug enforcement agents” (Bertram et al., 1996: 144). This constant competition for who can be the “toughest on drugs” escalates the war further. Once Bush (Sr.) was elected, Senator Joseph Biden (speaking on behalf of the Democratic majority in Congress), called his strategy “not tough enough, bold enough, or imaginative enough. The President says he wants to wage a war on drugs, but if that’s true, what we need is another D-Day, not another Vietnam...” (Bertram et al., 1996: 146).

¹³ The Texas National Guard’s interdiction plan of 1990 helps corroborate this theory. Endowed with a \$2.9 million federal grant, guard members disguised themselves as cactus plants to gather intelligence on drug-trafficking routes (Carpenter, 1990: 15).

¹⁴ For examples of this “narco-enforcement complex,” read the following :

When Plan Colombia was being debated in the Senate, Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) proposed that expensive Black Hawks be included in the package, rather than the cheaper Super Hueys that were originally proposed. These Black Hawks helicopters happen to be manufactured by the Sikorsky Company in Connecticut (Crandall, 2002: 152). Ultimately, sixteen UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters were purchased at a cost of \$60 million (Buscaglia et al., 2001: 13). Even more surprising, the 1989 drug war aid package to Colombia included \$8.5 million for fixed-wing aircraft. Former drug czar William Bennett has not been able to make clear how these fighter jets could be used to thwart drug traffickers (Carpenter, 1990: 9).

¹⁵ For arguments that Plan Colombia would reduce coca cultivation see the literature review, especially pages 4-5.

¹⁶ Due to time constraints a comparative study of other supply side approach failures was not pursued. This could prove to be a fruitful area of future research.

¹⁷ Plan Colombia has not received strong international support. Plan Colombia’s original layout called for a significant portion of funding to come from Europe and Japan. This never came to fruition. Ultimately, the entire European continent was only able to muster up a meager \$321 million. Much of this money came in the form of loans (not grants), and \$200 million of it was earmarked for non-Plan Colombia programs (Crandall, 2002: 161). Former Canadian diplomat Peter Dale Scott best sums up the international attitude toward Plan Colombia by asserting that, “The opinions offered in most news stories on Plan Colombia continue to range from mild criticism to moral outrage; the plan currently seems to have no vocal defenders outside the Washington bureaucracy” (Scott, 2003: 99).

Washington has been unsuccessful in its attempt to dress up Plan Colombia as a multilateral program. In 2001 Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez reacted to Plan Colombia by warning of a “vietnamization” of the Amazon basin, but has interestingly eased his tone after receiving additional aid from the US government (Carpenter, 2001a). Additionally, Brazil has refused to allow the U.S. to build a radar station within its borders as part of Plan Colombia (*The Economist*, 2000b). An Ecuadorian mayor in reference to the “balloon effect”, has commented, “It’s a reality, the fire of Colombia is starting to burn us” (*The Economist*, 2001b). International sentiment from afar and from those countries close to Colombia has had a generally negative tone regarding coercive eradication and interdiction policies.

¹⁸ These articles can be obtained by visiting the *El Tiempo* webpage and performing an archived search. I do not have the exact URL’s for the *El Tiempo* articles because they are not permanently posted on the internet. I do not have their hard copy bibliographic information because my school, Carleton College, does not receive *El Tiempo*, nor does it have access to *El Tiempo* via a database.

