

Colombia's Troubled Past

by Troy J. Sacquety

NAMED for Christopher Columbus, though he never set foot there, Colombia is a land long wracked by internal conflict, banditry, and insurgent warfare. It has been called a “nation in spite of itself.”¹ The United States has been involved in Colombian affairs since the turn of the last century. The relationship morphed from being an obstacle to U.S. government policy—when the government thwarted U.S. plans to build a canal through the Colombian province of Panama—to becoming an asset during the Korean War. The Colombia of today is an important American partner in the Global War on Terror and in its war on drugs. To understand Colombia, and U.S. policy involved, one must know a little about its history. Then, the current situation can be placed in context. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief historical overview.

Although long inhabited by native groups, the first permanent European settlement in Colombia was in 1525. To put this into perspective, Jamestown, Virginia—the first permanent English settlement in what is now the United States—was founded eighty-two years later in 1607. Colombia's capital city of Bogotá was founded in 1538. Independence from Spain was proclaimed in 1813, although it took several years of bitter fighting for this to become reality. In 1822, the United States was one of the first nations to recognize the new state of “Gran Colombia,” made up of the modern countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela, and parts of neighboring Brazil, Guyana, and Peru. Eight years later, the

territories that make up the modern day states of Venezuela and Ecuador broke away from Gran Colombia.

After a series of minor internal clashes in the nineteenth century, the country underwent two major civil wars in the twentieth. Both were caused by differences between the two primary political factions, the Liberals and the Conservatives. These wars were the War of a Thousand Days and *La Violencia* (The Violence).

La Violencia (1948–1966) claimed somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 lives and ranks as one of the bloodiest wars in the Western Hemisphere.² This period of domestic turmoil set the tone for Colombia for the remainder of the twentieth century and has carried forward into the new century. Prior to *La Violencia*, there were underlying political and economic tensions between all classes of Colombian society, but especially so with the peasants. Between 1946 and 1947, the working class staged more than 600 demonstrations and organized strikes.³ In May 1947, violence broke out when some 1,500 striking workers were arrested. When government troops moved in to repress the agitators, 14,000 were killed in the subsequent confrontation.⁴

However, the main escalation in *La Violencia* occurred after Liberal leader Jorgé Eliecer Gaitan was assassinated on 7 February 1948. Gaitan was a populist with strong support among union members and the lower classes. After his murder, large segments of the urban population filled the streets in protest. A massive rebellion, referred to as the *Bogotazo*, broke out in the capital. Then it spread into the provinc-



The 7 February 1948 assassination of popular Liberal leader Jorgé Eliecer Gaitan prompted the Bogotazo, two-days of riots in Bogotá. His assassination also signaled the start of La Violencia, Colombia's bloody eighteen-year civil war.



Simón Bolívar, “The Liberator,” led the army that wrested Colombia from Spanish control. He was also the first president of the Republic of Gran Colombia, made up of modern-day Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela.

es, where the Conservatives had already formed armed groups to handle the insurrectionists. The Conservative-led government action forced much of the rural opposition to flee their homes. Many armed themselves and formed bands for self-defense. Several of these early bands adopted tenets of communist and socialist philosophy. They became the basis for some of today's insurgent groups.⁵

In 1957, former President Alberto Lleras Camargo effected a power-sharing agreement between the Liberals and the Conservatives. This arrangement, called the National Front, alternated the presidency between the two leading parties every four-years for the next sixteen years. The National Front also dramatically changed how the armed forces in Colombia operated. For the first time, the police, who had largely been responsible for fighting the insurgent groups, were placed under the control of the Ministry of Defense. This meant that the Army, that had the mission of territorial defense, and which had managed to stay out of internal conflicts, was given the authority and mission to pacify the troubled areas.⁶

However, the National Front was a pact only between mainstream Liberals and Conservatives. Communist and socialist groups and radical Liberals had no representation in government. This condition provoked a return to violence. The civil war moved into an "unofficial" second phase that continued until 1966. Another 18,000 people were killed during this period.⁷

American military assistance to Colombia started during *La Violencia*. In 1948, the United States, Colombia, and the majority of Latin American states signed the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS).⁸ The OAS charter included a mutual defense–assistance protocol. It would be the Korean War that prompted Bogotá to request training for Colombian military officers in the United States, and material assistance. Colombia was the only Latin American country to offer armed forces to the UN after the North Koreans invaded the South. In Korea, Colombian Army officers gained valuable experience that they later applied in counter-insurgency operations. By 1955, the first Colombian officers had graduated from the U.S. Army Parachute and Ranger Schools at Fort Benning, Georgia. In 1962, a U.S. Army Special Forces contingent led by Brigadier General William Yarborough came to Colombia on the invitation of President Camargo to make recommendations on how to fight the insurgency.⁹ Many of these ideas were adopted by the Colombian military and incorporated in *Plan Lazo*, the first national strategy to restore law and order to the countryside.¹⁰

In 1964, the Colombian Army attacked the

1899–1903: The War of a Thousand Days and the Panama Canal

COLOMBIA'S first twentieth century civil war was fought between the Conservatives and the Liberals. Both parties represented the interests of elites and had only minor differences. The Liberal Party was composed primarily of small coffee plantation owners and merchants of the upper middle class who favored decreased government control over the economy and greater decentralization of government. The Conservatives, led by large landowners, advocated a strong central government. The Conservatives were heavily influenced by the Catholic Church which, in addition to its religious nature, was also a powerful financial institution. The Conservatives had gained power and excluded the Liberals from government. Their poor fiscal policies caused high inflation and a destabilized economy. Compounded with low coffee prices, the Liberals resorted to arms to overthrow the government. After suffering setbacks fighting conventionally, the Liberals changed tactics. Establishing the *modus operandi* still prevalent in Colombia today, the Liberals waged a highly destructive unconventional war in the rural areas.¹ After two years, with both sides weary of the war, the Liberals accepted Conservative peace overtures. The final number of dead was estimated at 100,000.² But, more importantly, the war left the government of Colombia impotent. When the United States supported isthmian separatists in 1903, the Bogotá government was unable to prevent Panama's secession from Colombia. The U.S. immediately recognized the new government of Panama. Both countries then negotiated a treaty that allowed the United States exclusive rights to build the Panama Canal.³



- 1 David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 150.
- 2 "Background Note: Colombia," U.S. Department of State; October 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm; Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 151.
- 3 Frank Safford and Marco Placios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 247–51.



The United States contracted to start work on the Panama Canal in 1904, and it was opened ten years later. The project cost nearly \$375 million at the time and 5,609 lives due to illness and construction accidents.

rural enclave of Marquetalia. There, communist and Liberal forces had set up an “independent republic” where they had originally gathered to weather *La Violencia*. Although the Colombian Army employed new weapons in the assault, including jet fighters and helicopters, most of the rebels escaped the government cordon and fled into the surrounding jungles. The attack at Marquetalia drove the disparate groups of radical Liberals and communists to join together under the leadership of a radical former-Liberal guerrilla named Pedro Marín.¹¹ In 1966, this semi-united group adopted the name *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, better known as the FARC. The following year, a second communist-inspired insurgent group, the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN)

[National Liberation Army] was formed in the northern region of Santander.

During this period, rightist paramilitary units began to evolve. Colombia has a long history of “self defense” militias, dating to the colonial period when small “armies” were formed to protect citizens, landowners, and businesses in rural areas from guerillas and bandits. In 1965, the government accorded them legal status to compensate for the lack of police and military forces in outlying regions.¹² They would later be accused of gross human-rights violations.

The government escalated the war against the insurgents in 1965. President Guillermo Valencia declared a national “state of siege.” This gave the Army “expanded authority” to arrest and try civilians for subversive activities.¹³ Since the authorities were broad and general, the Army interpreted this to include physical suppression of

strikes, protest marches, and critics of the military, who in their estimation became threats to law and order.¹⁴ In essence, the government had granted the Army *carte blanche* authority to use whatever force was necessary to suppress the insurgency. The only condition was that the military would not intervene in politics.

The Army “crackdown” on civilians prompted the creation of another insurgent group, “The 19th of April Movement,” or M-19, in the 1970s. In contrast to the FARC and the ELN, the M-19 was largely an urban group and its membership was filled by the children of the privileged classes. M-19 achieved prominence on 27 February 1980, when it seized the Embassy of the Dominican Republic during an official function. The group captured fourteen ambassadors, including the American, and numerous minor dip-

lomatic personnel and civilian guests. After being held captive for weeks, the hostages were released unharmed in exchange for a sum of money, transportation, and the unhindered escape of the kidnappers to Cuba.

By the mid 1980s, M-19 was Colombia’s second largest insurgent group, behind the FARC. Desperate for funding, M-19 tried to emulate the FARC, which was profiting from the drug trade. But unlike the FARC, M-19 was not integrated into the drug trade. Assuming that they would simply pay, M-19 decided to kidnap family members of drug traffickers for ransom. M-19 committed a grievous error in killing the victims when the narco-traffickers were slow in paying. Unwilling to be extorted, the drug traffickers undertook extreme counter-measures and formed a band called *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS), meaning “Death to Kidnappers,” which received tacit government support. M-19 suspects captured by the police were turned over to MAS, who tortured them for information and then killed them. The M-19 membership was quickly cut in half.¹⁵

Based on the radical example provided by MAS, other groups were formed and funded by narco-traffickers to provide security and to protect their interests. The narco-traffickers dealt with their “enemies” ruthlessly. From the mid-1970s into the mid-1980s, the narco-traffickers had increased their business so much that their profits had mushroomed to billions of dollars. Narco-traffickers purchased huge estates in the Colombian countryside and selectively used their wealth to gain popular support. Thus, the most wealthy and powerful narco-traffickers became quasi-political figures in their own right.

In 1984, the Colombian government negotiated a cease-fire with the insurgent groups. Only the ELN refused to join. The FARC renounced armed struggle and, in 1985, started a political party—the *Unión Patriótica* (UP)—to compete for representation. The UP easily won fourteen national-level political posts as well as numerous provincial and municipal positions. However, within months of being elected, several of the UP legislators were assassinated. In the next several years, hundreds of UP supporters were systematically murdered. These excesses destroyed the cease-fire and renewed the violence.

On 6 November 1985, M-19 conducted a last, desperate large-scale action. Thirty-five M-19 insurgents seized the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, taking some 300 office workers, lawyers, judges, and supreme court justices hostage. Resolution of the crisis was turned over to the Colombian Army. Despite repeated pleas for restraint from the hostages, the Army attacked with overwhelming force. During the chaotic assault, the building caught fire and eleven supreme court justices and ninety civilians died. The majority of the insurgents also were killed. It was the most audacious but final action of the M-19.



In 1966, Pedro Marín, better known by his nom de guerre, Manuel Marulanda, or his nickname, Tirofijo (“Sureshot”), founded the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, better known as the FARC.



FARC flag



M-19 flag

Colombia's Exports: Coffee, Oil, and Cocaine

COLOMBIA has long been an important trading partner with the United States. Although Colombia has many valuable natural resources—gold, emeralds, and coal—the three best-known exports to the United States are coffee, oil, and cocaine. As an industry, coffee has the longest history. Colombia's mountainous regions are ideal for coffee cultivation. First introduced in the late eighteenth century, it was a cash-crop by the early nineteenth century and its production competed with Brazil. Today, Colombia is second only to Brazil, who remains the world's number one coffee producer. As late as the 1970s, coffee was Colombia's most important export, with the majority going to the United States. However, with the decline in coffee prices in recent years, because of increased production in Africa and Central America, the export power of coffee has been marginalized.

Worldwide, Colombia is one of the few net exporters of oil. Although Colombia's oil reserves are far below those of neighboring Venezuela, they are very important to the national economy. In 2003, oil exports from Colombia accounted for nearly 30 percent of export revenues and contributed 10 percent of the government's revenue.¹ Although the country has limited reserves, it will likely continue to be an oil exporter through the decade.² However, the industry does have problems. Much of the oil production infrastructure is located in remote areas of the northern lowlands, called *llanos*, with a low population density. Many

of the delivery pipelines are exposed and unprotected. Since many oil companies are foreign-owned and represent outside influences, the Marxist guerrillas feel justified in "taxing" them. As a result, the petroleum industry in Colombia loses millions of dollars in production annually to extortion and by insurgent attacks severing the pipelines. In 2004, there were 103 attacks on oil pipelines.³ The resulting spillage and environmental damage makes the *Exxon Valdez* disaster appear insignificant in comparison. Illegal siphoning is also a problem. Faced with these problems, several of the foreign oil companies routinely make their helicopters available to speed the military response to guerrilla attacks on the pipelines.

Illegal groups in Colombia also derive a significant income from illicit exports. Colombia is the world's leading cocaine producer. In 2004, some 440 square miles of coca were under cultivation.⁴ Coca has a long history in the region. The coca plant has been used for thousands of years for medicinal purposes—as a tea to ward off altitude sickness and as a mild stimulant by chewing the leaves. Some plants are still legally grown in South America for this purpose. The process of deriving cocaine from coca leaves was not discovered until the late nineteenth century. Cocaine was not declared illegal in the United States until 1914.⁵

Two factors in the 1970s promoted Colombia to prominence in the cocaine trade: first, the United States curtailed Colombian shipments of marijuana, forc-

ing a "need" for narcotraffickers to find a new product; second, Chilean President Augusto Pinochet cracked down on his own country's involvement in the cocaine trade.⁶ Prior to this, Chile had been the dominant world supplier. Compounded by growing popularity in the United States, the Colombian cocaine trade had grown into a multi-billion dollar industry. By the late 1980s, several high profile drug lords wielded enormous power in Colombia. Included among them was Pablo Escobar, whose position in the cocaine trade made him one of the world's wealthiest individuals.⁷ In recent years, Colombia's insurgent groups have moved into the cocaine trade to fund their activities. They have also expanded into the opium trade—and in particular, its derivative of heroin—and now Colombia ranks as a leading producer.

1 Connie Veillette, "Plan Colombia: A Progress Report," *CRS Report or Congress*, 11 January, 2006, 11.

2 "Background Note: Colombia," U.S. Department of State, October 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm.

3 Veillette, "Plan Colombia," 12.

4 "The CIA World Factbook: Colombia," Central Intelligence Agency, 2006, www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/co.html.

5 U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, "Cocaine," <http://www.dea.gov/concern/cocaine.html>, November 2006.

6 Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 61.

7 For information on Escobar and his downfall, see Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001).



Coffee beans come from a small bush or tree that thrives in the highlands. Colombia is one of the world's largest exporters of coffee.



Oil from northern Colombia is transported in pipelines, much of which are above ground and in rural areas. This makes them tempting targets for the insurgent groups.



Cocaine is a derivative of the leaves of the coca plant. It is often grown hidden in the coffee fields.

M-19: *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (Movement of 19 April)

ALTHOUGH the M-19 is now a part of a legal political party, the importance of its insurgent activities merits inclusion. The M-19 was also a leftist group, but unlike the FARC and ELN, was composed primarily of young urban intellectuals from the upper classes. M-19 traced its beginnings to the fraudulent presidential elections of 19 April 1970 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*=M-19), when former dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla was denied victory. The group is best known for its characteristically bold exploits. In 1974, it stole one of the swords of Simón Bolívar from a Bogotá museum, pledging to return it only when the Liberator's ideals were accomplished.¹ In 1979, the group became a serious threat. It dug a 246-foot tunnel to steal several thousand weapons from an army warehouse.² On 27 February 1980, M-19 seized the Embassy of the Dominican Republic during a reception. The group captured fourteen ambassadors—including the American—and many others. In exchange for a large sum of money and unhindered transportation to Cuba, the final hostages were released by the M-19 on 27 April 1980.

By the mid 1980s, M-19 was Colombia's second largest insurgent group behind the FARC. It found itself short of operating funds. The group made the mistake of kidnapping family members of prominent narcotraffickers. When some of the kidnap victims were killed to speed ransoms, the narcotraffickers formed MAS in retaliation. With police and army help, MAS tracked down and killed M-19 members—until its numbers were reduced to half.³

The M-19's boldest operation occurred on 6 November 1985, when thirty-five insurgents seized the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. Three hundred clerks, lawyers, judges, and supreme court justices were taken hostage. The Army assaulted the Palace, killing the kidnappers. Eleven supreme court justices and ninety clerks, lawyers, and judges also lost their lives. This was M-19's last major action. By the end of the 1980s, M-19 had turned in its weapons and renounced further armed struggle. It returned the Liberator's sword and reorganized as a political party. The party existed separately through the 1990s—sometimes achieving a significant percentage of the vote at the local level—but merged with the Independence Democratic Pole coalition in 2003.

1 David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 246.

2 Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Massacres, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 104.

3 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 106–07, 112–13.

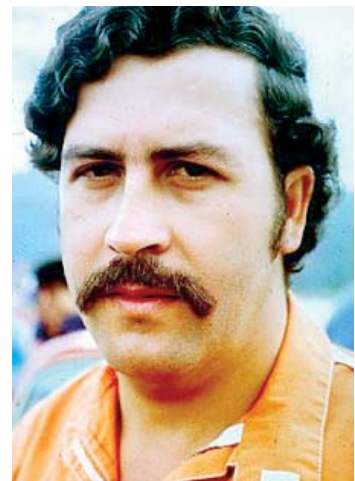


The aftermath of the 6 November 1985 M-19 seizure of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. In a heavy-handed intervention, the Army cleared the building of insurgents, at a loss of over a hundred people; government workers, soldiers, guerrillas, and eleven Supreme Court justices.

By the end of the decade, the remnants of M-19 had surrendered their weapons and transformed the organization into a political party.

The FARC and the ELN kept up their ongoing war against the government but increasingly encountered the right-wing groups and the armed bands formed by the narcotraffickers. These groups exponentially increased the level of ruthlessness set by the FARC and ELN. The para-militaries massacred anyone or any group suspected of providing aid to the leftists. The leftist insurgents retaliated in turn. The vicious cycle of threats, kidnappings, disappearances, bombings, blatant killings, and outright massacres escalated.

In 1989, President Virgilio Barco formally renounced the paramilitary groups and tried to end military and police support. Having lost official sanction, the groups simply financed their activities with drug money. Tacit cooperation from the Army and Police continued. That same year, men working for narcotrafficker Pablo Escobar gunned down presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán. This forced the gov-



The notorious drug-lord Pablo Escobar was a kingpin in the Colombian cocaine trade and was responsible for violence across the country. He was one of the world's richest men, but was hunted down and killed in 1993 by a confederation of Colombian paramilitaries, the Colombian government, and the United States.

ernment to confront Escobar and other narcotraffickers. Barco cracked down, declared a war on drugs, and advocated extradition of drug dealers to the United States for criminal trial.

Escobar responded violently by ordering attacks on government officials who opposed him and/or advocated extradition. Escobar and the other narcotraffickers—banded together. The “extraditables” put so much pressure on the government by targeted killings and bombings that

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President César Gaviria renounced extradition and tried to negotiate the surrender of the “extraditables.” As an incentive, the constitution was rewritten in 1991, making extradition unconstitutional. This prohibition was later repealed.

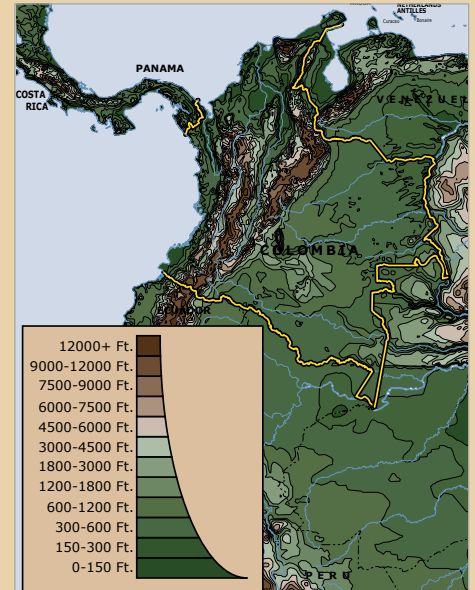
Despite this latest protection, the violence continued. Escobar, who did surrender, later “escaped” from his private and lavish “jail.” After another round of protracted violence, Pablo Escobar was tracked down and killed in 1993 by an alliance of the armed group *Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar* (Victims of Pablo Escobar), commonly known as “Los Pepes,” government forces, and the United States. Instead of slackening, the violence got worse. In 1995 alone, over 25,000 Colombians were murdered, many by self-defense groups that worked with the unspoken consent of

the military and police. As a result of this, in 1997, the U.S. Congress attached the Leahy Amendment to the Colombian Appropriations Bill. This amendment stipulated all U.S. military assistance to Colombia could go only to units cleared of human rights violations. In 1997, the various self-defense forces—still tacitly accepted by the government—formed themselves into a confederation called the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) because the government “affair” with the self-defense forces was at an end. Faced with pressure from human rights groups, denial of visas to Colombian military officers by the U.S. Department of State, and the conditions for U.S. funding, the government declared the AUC—at least on paper—illegal.

Seeing no end to the violence, President Andrés Pastrana took a radical step. He solicited negotiation with the FARC. In 1999, Pastrana expanded the effort by ceding a demilitarized zone the size of Switzerland, known unofficially as “FARClandia,” and officially as the *Zona de Despeje* (the open land). Pastrana also was an architect of *Plan Colombia*, a \$4.5 billion effort co-funded by the United States to end Colombia’s

THE isthmus that geographically separates Panama from South America connects the two continents at Colombia. It is the only South American country with coastlines on the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. In addition to Panama, Colombia is bordered by Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador. It is the fourth largest country in South America with a total area of some 440,000 square miles, making it about three times the size of Montana.¹ A population of forty-three million ranks Colombia as the third most populous country in Latin America, behind Mexico and Brazil.² The population is a mixture of native, European, and African extraction. Ninety percent of the population is Roman Catholic.

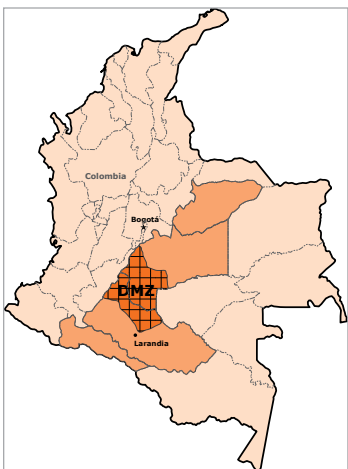
The topography of Colombia ranges from coastal plains along the western seaboard to the Andes Mountain chain that traverses the entire western half of the country. This chain is further bisected by three mountain ranges that create deep valleys and rugged highlands. The waterlogged eastern lowlands, called *llanos*, are the largest contiguous area and constitute some 50 percent of Colombia’s landmass. However, they are virtually cut off from the rest of the country by the Andes chain. The lowlands are sparsely populated and home to only 3 percent of Colombia’s population. Ninety-seven percent of the population lives in the mountains, valleys, and western coastal plain. Even here, the majority of the population is concentrated in the three largest cities; Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. While politically, Colombia is divided into thirty-two administrative departments, the country has been traditionally divided into regions by geography.



AUC logo



The current president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Vélez.



Map of despeje area.

1 *The World Factbook 2005* (Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2005), 122–24.
 2 “Background Note: Colombia,” U.S. Department of State; October 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm



internal conflict, eliminate drug trafficking in six years, and to promote economic and social development.¹⁶ The current president, Alvaro Uribe Vélez, having observed the futility of negotiating with the FARC, took a tough stance. He refused to negotiate with any insurgent groups until they committed to a cease-fire and disarmed. He increased the size of the military and police force and gave them “expanded authorities.” This was followed by *Plan Patriota*, a military campaign to regain control of guerrilla-dominated territory.¹⁷ It began with the dismantling of FARCLandia.

The results of *Plan Colombia* are promising. A key part of this strategy—though controversial—has been aerial eradication of drug crops. Thousands of hectares are sprayed every year, the effect of which greatly reduces potential yields of illicit drugs. According to the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. street price of cocaine and heroin—the two primary drugs involved in the illicit Colombian drug trade—has increased. At the same time, the purity and availability of the drugs have fallen, indicating that the amount being imported into the United States may be decreasing.¹⁸ Now, the cultivation of opium poppies in hard to reach mountain areas has grown significantly in the past few years.

Plan Colombia has also increased security in the rural areas, long the domain of insurgent and bandit groups. The Colombian National Police now have a fixed presence in all municipalities, with more than 9,000 *Granaderos* and *Carabineros* deployed to rural areas.¹⁹ The increased police and military presence has helped to lower the number of kidnappings. Still, Colombia has the world’s highest rate. The plan has also helped reduce the number of insurgents by attrition, surrender, and peace negotiations. Promoting the premise that increased government pressure negated their need to operate against the FARC and the ELN, the AUC entered into negotiations with the Uribe government to demobilize.²⁰ *Plan Colombia* also provides the framework needed to expand U.S. military assistance. This has helped to raise the effectiveness of the Colombian military and paramilitary police in conducting counter-insurgency operations, especially since they are no longer “out-gunned” by the narcotraffickers, FARC, or ELN.

Colombia has long been a country wracked by divisive politics and feud-like violence. At times, the level of violence has threatened to tear the country apart. Still, Colombia remains a country in transition facing serious problems with narcotrafficking and insurgent warfare. Despite these threats, it is a dynamic country with many valuable natural resources. Under *Plan Colombia*, the country appears to be moving in the right direction to

regain control of its future and curb the violence that has stained the twentieth century and threatens the twenty-first century. ♣

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Endnotes

- 1 David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), front cover.
- 2 **Only the American Civil War (1861–1865) and the War of the Triple Alliance (also known as the Paraguayan War 1864–1870) produced greater casualties. Estimates on the number of casualties vary; Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 205, places the number at between 100,000 and 200,000. Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 38, places it at more than 250,000. Other sources place the number of killed even higher. Official Colombian history usually marks the end of *La Violencia* in 1957 with the formation of the National Front.**
- 3 Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 40.
- 4 Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, 40.
- 5 Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Massacres, Drugs, and America’s War in Colombia*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 27–31.
- 6 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 44–45.
- 7 Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, 42.
- 8 The text of the charter can be found at the OAS website at www.oas.org/main/main.asp?sLang=E&sLink=http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/charter.html.
- 9 Ibid, 42, “Visit to Colombia, South America, by a Team from Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina,” 26 February 1962, ARSOF history files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 10 For more on the U.S. assistance to Colombia in this period, see Dennis M. Rempe, “The Past as Prologue: A History of US Counter-Insurgency Policy in Colombia 1958–1966,” March 2002, Strategic Studies Institute Monologue, available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB17.pdf>.
- 11 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 53–55.
- 12 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 56.
- 13 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 56.
- 14 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 56.
- 15 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 106–07.
- 16 Connie Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” *CRS Report for Congress*, 11 January, 2006, 1.
- 17 Veillette, “Plan Colombia,” 3.
- 18 Veillette, “Plan Colombia,” 3–4.
- 19 Veillette, “Plan Colombia,” 8.
- 20 Connie Veillette, “Colombia: Issues for Congress,” *CRS Report for Congress*, 19 January 2005, 5–6.