

# NON-STANDARD ISSUE

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## Who is Winning the War in Colombia?

A story from the lens of a Colombian

By Monica Heincke

*Monica is a Colombian graduate student at the University of Calgary. Her area of specialization is Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility with a focus on Colombia.*

*Edited by CANDIL*

democratic government fighting them with US support. However we are experiencing an internal armed conflict that is more complex than the battle between victims and villains. There is not a clear battlefield separating the different groups which include the state and its military forces, guerrillas, paramilitaries, narcotics-dealers, criminals, civil society, and foreign influences. They all live, struggle or survive where there are not clear lines demarcating where one group ends and the other begins. However, there are differences between how the conflict looks from an urban or rural perspective. In urban cities the conflict looks like a political issue that most people watch on TV, and that some further discuss how to resolve but few have seen up close and personal. In rural areas it looks more like a matter of life and death, where "the law of the jungle" prevails. For urbanites, preoccupations include the conflicts effects on the economy and on people's income, the country's international relations and its capacity to attract foreign investors, and that one day the conflict may directly affect them. For the rural population major preoccupations are how to survive every day, waking up, eating and raising children in the middle of a war and how to escape the fear of being trapped between armed groups. In both areas, the various parties are difficult to identify in that armed groups, such as guerrillas and paramilitaries, seem part of the social fabric.

Different groups allege to seek the betterment of the country but after more than five decades of violence, the main issues remain. The groups can be fighting for various reasons which include, resolving the country's major social problems and inequities, defending ideologies, to achieve power and control people, and finding ways to survive. Independently from the reasons to fight, the confrontation between

When you think about a war in Colombia what do you imagine? Often mass media sells our war as a fight over drugs. People imagine the country as a battlefield divided and controlled by two different parties: the "terrorist" drug dealers and the

armed parties has gone through thousands of battles and some peace dialogues but problems of exclusion, inequity and appropriation of public richness remain. The country still faces land issues, impunity, and lacks participation of different interest groups in public decisions. The huge gap between the few rich and the many poor is enlarged and reinforced by a structure of socio-economic classes with disproportionate power, wealth, education and opportunities. Also dialogues that need to be about society and public good become businesses, for example awarding of a contract in exchange for political funding. The origins, reasons, groups, and purposes of the conflict hide behind escalating violence, crime, cruelties and narcotics trafficking.

The war does not seem to be the answer to our problems in that everyone has suffered. While the states investments and costs from the war represent the majority of its budget, its military forces remain unable to exercise power, to guarantee citizens' security, or to defend the country's richness. Also, since the 1960s the guerrillas have been fighting, their troops have died in combat, gone to jail, or fled but they have not achieved their aims. Meanwhile their violence has made most people cynical about their true motives. The paramilitaries have not been able to defeat the guerrillas or to defend the elites, nor have they taken control over the narcotics trafficking. Instead, they have perpetrated most of the homicides and massacres in the country. Civil society has expressed its desires for peace in various ways, however it continues to be the target of massacres, homicides, torture, kidnapping, exploitation, and displacement among other cruelties. With more than a million deaths in the last five decades pain, fears, distrust and inequities have been reinforced. We all seem to be losing the war. While I do not see magic solutions to resolve the armed conflict, I believe that if one has the will, there are lots of things that Colombians partnering with Canadians can do to create meaningful changes.

Different from media representations, our problem is NOT drugs and our solution is NOT in arms. Colombia needs constructive alternatives that allow different interest groups to work together to fight fear, build trust and hope, and opportunities for the long term. Colombia needs local leaders and citizens with long-term visions, a clear social sense and a will to work together. It needs partners in Canada and elsewhere—people and organizations willing to participate in facilitating meaningful bottom up changes by creating constructive alternatives. Colombia also needs partners supporting top down changes, to attack the war in its complexity, which support democracy, justice, law enforcement, and socio-economic decisions that benefit everybody.

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### WEBSITES

**Irma Parhad:**

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/md/PARHAD>

**Centre for International Policy:**  
<http://www.ciponline.org/columbia/index.htm>

**Americas Program, Interhemispheric Resource Center:**  
<http://www.americaspolicy.org/>

### UPCOMING EVENTS

CANDIL encourages everyone to go see the movie **Fahrenheit 9/11** Watch for the return of our movie night in September which we'll be focusing on Colombia, and in October on the upcoming US elections.

### THANKS

Thanks to Monica Heincke and Jillian Dowding for all of their work on this issue. We could not have done it without them.

Design by Doug Ward

**WHAT WE BELIEVE**

**CANDIL promotes global human security through a culture of peace, active democracy and respect for international law. Our vision is global; our strategy is local.**

**PRINCIPLES**

**Necessity of International Law for Global Peace and Security**

International law is essential for global peace and security, including the peace and security of Canadians. As citizens of Canada, we are expected to obey the law; we expect the same standard of behavior from our government. The government of Canada, and all Canadian political parties, must comply with the fundamental requirements, principles, and purposes of international law, and give international law decisive weight in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy.

**Lessons from Iraq**

Western policy toward Iraq has contributed to a humanitarian and human rights disaster in that country, and has violated international law, including the law of the UN Charter, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law. The errors and violations of our Iraq policy must be made explicit and used as lessons for constructive change in the direction of Canada's foreign policy, to avoid similarly destructive and costly errors in the future, both in Iraq and in other parts of the world.

**Democracy and Responsible Citizenship**

A critical, informed, active citizenry is a fundamental requirement of democracy. Citizens are ultimately responsible for the public policy of their government. Citizens of Canada are responsible for compliance of Canadian foreign policy with the law of the United Nations Charter, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law. Familiarity with the basic principles and purposes of international law is an indispensable part of education for responsible citizenship.

Canadians can choose to ignore the conflict or to get informed about it, think about it, form their own opinions and promote conversations to better understand it. They can advocate, get involved, act and become part of the changes. I believe Canadians and everyone who cares about others and our common future have the choice and responsibility to do something about this war which no one is winning and to have an influence in Canada, Colombia, and in the world we all create. ✌

<p><b>Timeline: History of Colombia</b></p>
<p><b>By Collette Lemieux</b></p>
<p><b>CANDIL</b></p>

situation. I hope it provides an appropriate background on the situation.

**LA VIOLENCIA:**

The history of the violence in Colombia dates back to colonial times. The current conflict between the government, guerrillas and paramilitaries was sparked in 1948 when Jorge Gaitan the Liberal presidential candidate was assassinated. He was mainly supported by the working class. Spontaneous uprisings occurred in the city of Bogota. The violence soon spread to the rural areas. The result was a ten year civil war between Liberals and Conservatives and is called *La Violencia*. It is estimated that over 200,000 people died.

Various groups could not find a resolution to the conflict. Therefore, the two major political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, decided in 1958 to share power for sixteen years. Each party would rule for four years at a time. This government is called the National Front. It solved the confrontation between the Liberal and Conservative parties but did not guarantee democracy or a resolution to the roots of the conflict.

**GUERRILLA GROUPS:**

Guerrilla groups in their modern incarnation began to form at the end of the 1950s with the advent of the National Front. Union and student leaders in the cities formed groups to advocate for human rights and to stop the repression of political groups and labour organizations. In rural communities, farmers joined together to fight the unequal distribution of land (which resulted in the unequal distribution of wealth). Their formation was intrinsically linked with the weakness of the government and its inability to provide citizens with basic civil and human rights. Many citizens in rural communities went without basic services such as medical facilities, schools, roads and police.

The following article is an attempt to describe the history of the recent conflict in Colombia. The intention is to provide readers with a context to the

There are four major guerrilla groups that have operated in Colombia since the 1960s: FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), ELN (National Liberal Army), EPL (Popular Liberation Army), M-19 (Movement of April 19). EPL signed a peace treaty with the government in 1991 and have effectively disbanded. FARC is the largest group with over 16,000 troops.

Guerrilla groups have been involved in different aspects of the conflict. FARC, ELN and EPL recognized a need to provide basic services in the communities where they formed. The result is that today guerrilla groups militarily control about 40% of Colombia. In this territory, they act as the government.

All four groups pressure the government for reforms. They do this through their own political parties and through terrorist acts.

To finance the services they provide, political parties and military actions the guerrilla groups relied on support from the USSR and Cuba before 1990. They also kidnap civilians, impose "taxes" on the rich and participate in all levels of the drug trade.

In 1991, the government and guerrilla groups began negotiations to reach a lasting peace. Ultimately, the negotiations have not lead to any permanent resolutions of the conflict.

**PARAMILITARY:**

In response to the crimes that guerilla groups committed, self-defence or paramilitary groups were formed in the 1980s. The paramilitary groups consist primarily of landowners, drug lords and industrialists. They use small private armies that consist of farmers. Their objective is to eliminate guerrilla groups by use of force. Their tactics include massacres and torture. They are responsible for the majority of the civilian deaths in Colombia.

The paramilitary groups are active in the drug trade. Even though the paramilitary groups are considered terrorist organizations, they have links with the legitimate military in Colombia. Many members of paramilitary groups are active members of the Colombian military.

In 1997, the paramilitary armies consolidated into one group the AUC (United Self-Defences Forces of Colombia) under the leader Carlos Castano.

**DRUG TRADE:**

In the 1970s, drug cartels formed. Many farmers began growing coca crops because it was more lucrative than growing conventional crops. Others were not given a choice. The drug trade grew rapidly. In 1983, Colombia supplied 70% of the marijuana and 30% of the cocaine that entered the US. In 1984, Colombia supplied 75-85% of the cocaine and 60% of the marijuana that entered the US.

The drug cartels of the 1980s are mostly gone. FARC and the AUC currently control over 60% of the drug

trade and earn approximately a billion US dollars a year from it.

The war on drugs continues. The herbicides used in aerial spraying to eradicate the coca crops contaminate the food crops that grow beside them. Peasants are displaced by the spraying. Some chose to move further into the jungle and clear cut more land to continue growing the lucrative plants.

**PLAN COLOMBIA:**

In 1999, President Pastrana outlined Plan Colombia. Its objective was to strengthen the government and eliminate the drug trade. They hoped that it would end Colombia's civil war and revive the nation's economy. Many feel that the focus is more on the military than on development and poverty, thus not focusing on the root causes of the conflict.

In the end, the conflict is very complex. It is driven by political beliefs, desire for basic human rights and fuelled by the drug trade.

**SOURCES:**

I used many different sources but the three main ones are the following:

Irma Parhad timeline which can be found at [www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/faculties/medicine/PARHAD/student-2002.htm](http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/faculties/medicine/PARHAD/student-2002.htm)

An article by Monica Heincke entitled "Human Rights and the Weakness of State"

Jillian Lyn Dowding's Master Thesis "Rethinking Security: The Lost Decade in U.S.-Colombian Relations, 1981-1989" (MA Thesis, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, 2003). ☺

**VISUALS:**

Fernando Botero is a famous Colombian artist. Since the 1950s, Botero has portrayed the daily life of Colombians but not the violence. Now at 72, Botero's work has taken a dramatic shift. He is focusing on the kidnappings, massacres and car bombs that are a constant in the conflict. He hopes that the paintings "will be a testimonial to a terrible moment, a time of insanity in this country. They are works that will hang in a museum, so people can see their history." ☺



Painting "Massacre in Colombia" by Fernando Botero

**US Increases Colombian Involvement**

By Constanza Vieira

Anti-war.com  
June 30, 2004

BOGOTA - Shrouded in silence in Colombia, the Plan Patriot has begun to emerge as the most ambitious military offensive to date against the leftist

guerrillas, in which the U.S. military is providing tactical and logistical support.

Taking part in the operation, which according to press reports involves 17,000 soldiers deployed in southern Colombia, are mobile forces and special jungle commandos trained by U.S. advisers and backed up by modern technology from the United States.

The offensive is being carried out in a vast territory under the control of the main rebel group, the 18,000-strong Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which rose up in arms four decades ago.

According to a memorandum sent to the U.S. Congress by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the government of President George W. Bush "is offering substantial new levels of military aid in support of a massive Colombian military offensive against the FARC insurgents."

WOLA describes the Patriot Plan as "the most ambitious counter-insurgency offensive ever undertaken by the Colombian government."

"The Patriot Plan signals the entrance of the U.S. into a new, more intense phase of military involvement in Colombia's internal armed conflict," says the memorandum dated May 14 and addressed to Foreign Policy and Defence Policy Aides in the U.S. Congress.

WOLA, which is pressing Congress not to approve an increase in the U.S. military presence in Colombia, says that unlike Plan Colombia - also financed by Washington - Plan Patriot "makes no pretence of furthering U.S. counter-drug objectives."

Instead, Plan Patriot "underscores the potential for escalation beyond the mission understood by Congress and beyond the appetite of the American public," adds the group.

Unlike its predecessor, Plan Colombia, "this strategy has no humanitarian component," said

Jorge Rojas, director of the local Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES).

**CANDIL**

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**NON-STANDARD ISSUE**  
Non-Standard Issue is a bi-monthly newsletter that expresses alternative views in hopes of broadening the minds of citizens and encouraging them to voice their opinions about democracy, peace, international law and responsible citizenship.

**What you can do to become a more responsible citizen.**

1. **Educate yourself.**  
Check out alternative news websites and join CANDIL or a similar group.
2. **Contact your MP or MLA** on issues that you feel they should be addressing.
3. **Make your voice heard!** Send your letters, commentaries, etc. to editors.

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

**UPCOMING  
EVENTS  
continued**

**WEAR A BLUE RIBBON** throughout the month of September and support international law. On September 11th we commemorate the millions of needless deaths that have occurred, and continue to occur, from the cycles of lawless violence in the world. As citizens we are expected to abide by the law. We expect no less from our governments.

For more information or ribbons contact CANDIL

Dr. Irma M. Parhad Programmes at the U of C presents **"THE AMERICANIZATION OF ISLAM"** a presentation by Dr. Mohamed Elmasri, National President of the Canadian Islamic Congress.

The presentation will be followed by a panel discussion.

**WHEN:**  
Thursday September 23,  
2004 7pm

**WHERE:**  
Murray Fraser Hall Rm  
162 University of Calgary

**MORE INFO:**  
220-2136 or  
[www.ucalgary.ca/md/PARHAD](http://www.ucalgary.ca/md/PARHAD)

Former president Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) secured U.S. military support for Plan Colombia while engaging in peace talks with the FARC in a 42,000-sq. km (16,216 sq. mi.) demilitarized zone in El Caguan, in southern Colombia.

But when the talks collapsed in February 2002, the army was sent back into the area, which had been cleared of government security forces in 1998 to pave the way for a peace process.

It is the same region where Plan Patriot is being carried out today.

Plan Colombia, which many observers have declared a failure, sought to reduce the supply of drugs to the United States - the world's largest market for illegal drugs - by attacking production of coca and the jungle labs that convert the leaves into cocaine, a strategy that was simultaneously supposed to reduce the revenues of the leftist insurgents.

Critics of the two plans say they were designed by Bogota in conjunction with the U.S. departments of State and Defence, and the U.S. Southern Army Command.

While Bogota has avoided making public references to the new U.S.-backed offensive against FARC, the Quito-based Latin American Human Rights Association (ALDHU) warned of the impact of Plan Patriot on Ecuador, which shares a 640-km (398 mi.) border with Colombia.

ALDHU warned that the Plan could lead to an increased flow across the border of Colombian civilians fleeing the conflict, and that it could push drug and arms traffickers into Ecuador as well.

Plan Patriot is seen as complementary to the U.S. Andean Regional Initiative, which is focused on Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Panama, and aimed, among other things, at beefing up controls along the borders with Colombia.

Last week, General James Hill, in charge of the U.S. Southern Command, confirmed what Colombian authorities have not admitted: the magnitude and extent of the offensive against FARC.

Hill, who in the past year has held 13 meetings with Colombian military officers and has visited Ecuador six times, passed through Bogota on June 23 after touring the Larandia military base in the southern department of Caqueta, where Plan Patriot is coordinated.

The general praised the progress of the offensive that, it has now been revealed, began in June 2003 with an attack on rural areas where local peasant farmers support FARC, south of Bogota.

The U.S. Congress is now voting on an increase in U.S. military personnel in Colombia. Currently the cap is 400 military troops and 400 civilian contractors at any given time.

But the Bush administration has requested an increase in the limit on military personnel from 400 to 800 and on civilians contracted by the Defence Department from 400 to 600.

The challenge facing the Colombian army is to recover and maintain control for at least a year over a vast territory that has long been under FARC influence.

Hill explained that the U.S. military is providing the Colombian armed forces with fuel, logistical support, and planning.

He warned that the operation will be "long and difficult", but said that in the end, victory will be won, and the guerrillas will be forced to demobilize or to sit down at the negotiating table by 2006.

But according to WOLA, "U.S. and Colombian military analysts recognize that the FARC has not suffered heavy losses, that its leadership is intact, and that it appears to be biding its time by engaging in a tactical retreat. There should be no illusions of a quick and decisive military campaign in Colombia."

Hill said he backed the request for more U.S. troops, to support deeper military engagement in Plan Patriot by the Colombian armed forces.

He added that success depended on the continued leadership of right-wing President Alvaro Uribe and continued aid from the United States. (Colombia is the world's third-largest recipient of U.S. military aid, after Egypt and Israel.)

Meanwhile, the Uribe administration has begun negotiations with another armed group, the right-wing United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), the paramilitary umbrella, whose leaders are wanted on drug trafficking charges in the United States.

AUC, which is held responsible by the United Nations for the great majority of atrocities committed against civilians in the armed conflict, has been offered a sort of amnesty in exchange for demobilizing.

Plan Patriot is an ambitious program that will take a long time to implement, said Hill, who added that the Colombian armed forces have been doing a good job.

But a spokesman from the Bolivarian Movement, FARC's clandestine political arm, told IPS that despite the impressive U.S. technology, "the popular resistance remains unbeatable."

According to the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the ceiling set by the U.S. Congress on the number of military advisers has already been far surpassed. He said there are "around 2,000 U.S. mercenaries. People recognize them by their accent."

"They walk around the town of Cartagena del Chaira (in Caqueta), and are very heavily protected. They don't go into the jungle but stay on the edges, very exposed."

The Colombian army "has not even got past the first ring" of the guerrillas in the area where Plan Patriot is being implemented, he said.

The military are committing "a strategic error by moving into the deep rearguard" of their adversary, he argued.

Many soldiers are asking to be discharged because of the pressure from the war, and the armed forces are suffering "troop fatigue", but the insurgents "never get tired, because they live there," the source added. ✌

## **Plan Petroleum in Putumayo**

**By Gary Leech**

**NACLA Report on  
the Americas  
May/June 2004**

This is an abbreviated version of the original article. The full version can be found at [www.nacla.org/art\\_display\\_printable.php?art=2404](http://www.nacla.org/art_display_printable.php?art=2404).

In December 2000, U.S.-trained counternarcotics battalions, U.S.-supplied Blackhawk helicopters and U.S.-piloted spray planes descended on Putumayo department to conduct Plan Colombia's initial aerial fumigation campaign.

In the more than three years since the initial spraying of coca crops, Putumayo has been a repeat target, as have many of the country's other southern departments. Although the U.S. government claims its fumigation prescriptions finally began decreasing coca cultivation in 2002 and 2003, there is still no evidence that Plan Colombia has achieved its principal goal of dramatically reducing the flow of cocaine to the United States. But while Plan Colombia has failed to affect the price, purity and availability of cocaine in U.S. cities, its militarization of Putumayo has contributed significantly to increased oil exploration by multinational companies in this resource-rich region. Neoliberal economic reforms that constitute the economic component of Plan Colombia have further sweetened the pot for foreign oil companies.

Shortly after September 11, 2001, U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson made clear the importance of finding alternative sources of oil in the context of the war on terror. She said that Colombia, already the third-largest exporter of oil in Latin America and one of the top ten foreign suppliers to the United States, "has the potential to export more oil to the United States, and now more than ever, it's important for us to diversify our sources of oil."

The escalation of the civil conflict in Putumayo over the past decade, however, has made foreign oil companies hesitant to exploit the vast oil reserves that exist mostly in rebel-controlled regions. That is, until the arrival of right-wing paramilitaries in the late-1990s and the implementation of Plan Colombia, both of which have resulted in greater security for oil operations.

The remote municipality of Orito, where four oil pipelines interconnect, is the hub of Putumayo's oil operations. Two pipelines carry oil from nearby fields currently being exploited by the state oil company Ecopetrol, U.S.-based Argosy Energy and Petrominerales, a subsidiary of Canada's Petrobank. Another pipeline brings oil from the Ecuadoran Amazon where U.S.-based Occidental Petroleum and Canada's EnCana have operations. The fourth is the Transandino pipeline, which transports oil from the other pipelines across the Andes to the port of Tumaco on Colombia's Pacific coast.

Ecopetrol's facility in Orito consists of a small refinery, which only produces enough fuel for local consumption by vehicles and helicopters used by the company and the military, and several large storage tanks that supply crude to the Transandino pipeline. The facility also contains an army base housing 1,200 specially trained troops whose mission is to protect Putumayo's oil infrastructure. Leftist guerrillas have repeatedly targeted Colombia's oil pipelines to protest the exploitation of the country's resources by multinational companies. In a seeming contradiction, the rebels profit from the very industry they are attempting to destroy by extorting money from foreign oil companies and their contractors in return for not targeting oil operations.

Foreign oil companies clearly have a vested interest in Lt. Col. Cruz's troops being able to maintain security in Putumayo. According to Steven Benedetti, a Petrobank (a Canadian company) representative in Bogotá, the company began operations in the region in June 2002 because "we believe there is a big prize in Putumayo." That "prize" is the estimated 1.1 billion barrels of oil in the Orito field, of which 80% remains untouched. The implementation of the \$1.3 billion Plan Colombia in Putumayo followed on the heels of a dramatic increase in the number of attacks against the department's oil infrastructure from 48 in 1999 to 110 the following year. According to the army commander responsible for protecting Putumayo's oil operations, Lt. Col. Francisco Javier Cruz, U.S. drug war aid has made the region safer for conducting oil operations because the army has been able to use "helicopters, troops and training provided in large part by Plan Colombia."

According to Lt. Col. Cruz, the Colombian army alone cannot prevent future guerrilla attacks against the oil infrastructure. His men often rely on civilian informers working as part of the informant network created under Uribe's Democratic Security Program. Cruz notes that, in order to accomplish his mission, it is very important that the army "make the people understand that when they collaborate to avoid terrorist attacks, everybody wins." He is referring to the fact that when oil production halts, there is a corresponding reduction in royalties paid by foreign oil companies to the Colombian government. Colombian law stipulates that these royalties are supposed to be used for social and economic programs. Under the terms of an incremental production contract it signed in 2002, Petrobank has the rights to 79% of all the oil produced in the Orito field above a baseline production level of 3,200 barrels a day, which it currently exceeds by 1,400 barrels a day. Its partner Ecopetrol receives the remaining 21% of the oil. With Colombia's sliding royalty scale, Petrobank pays 8% of the value of its 79% share to the national government, which turns over 9% of the royalty payment to the departmental government. Orito municipality then gets 31% of that 9%.

It is difficult to find the benefits of the oil royalties in Orito. Orito municipality is the Putumayo department's largest recipient of oil revenue, but the degree of poverty and underdevelopment is no less stark than in other comparably sized towns that receive no oil funds. Near the centre of the town of Orito sits a huge recreation compound with basketball courts, picnic and games areas, a hall for social gatherings and a huge swimming pool with a winding waterslide for the employees of Petrobank and Ecopetrol. A tall wire and steel fence insures that the residents of nearby shantytowns don't stray into the fortress-like complex. In contrast to his decision to cut-off royalty payments to the oil-rich Arauca department because corrupt municipal governments are allegedly sympathetic to leftist guerrillas, President Uribe has allowed the money to continue flowing to corrupt local officials in Putumayan towns controlled by right-wing paramilitaries.

Despite – or perhaps because of – the presence of the army and the National Police, the town of Orito is controlled by paramilitaries

belonging to the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The paramilitaries arrived in Putumayo in the late-1990s and after a series of massacres they successfully seized most of the department's significant towns including Orito, the paramilitaries' ruthless tactics have helped them retain control of Orito.

Militarization through the war on drugs and terror is not the only factor creating favorable conditions for foreign oil companies in Putumayo; Plan Colombia's economic program has also made oil an inviting enterprise for foreign companies. When the initial phase of Plan Colombia was implemented in 2000, the economic component simply consisted of the economic austerity measures already imposed on Colombia by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in return for a three-year \$2.7 billion loan in December 1999. The neoliberal policies called for by the IMF included public spending cutbacks, opening domestic markets to foreign companies, and privatizing and restructuring state-owned companies.

In March 2004 – two months after Colombia signed a new \$2.1 billion deal with the IMF calling for continued economic reforms – the practical consequences of Uribe's restructuring of Ecopetrol became clear. Colombia's Energy Minister Luis Ernesto Mejía announced in Houston, Texas that foreign companies could negotiate contracts with the National Hydrocarbon Agency without entering into partnership with Ecopetrol.

The new rules also eliminate time limits on production rights and allow foreign companies to keep up to 100% of the oil for as long as a field remains productive. And, with the exception of those operating exceptionally large oil fields, of which there are currently only two in Colombia, most companies will continue to pay only an 8% royalty. Clearly, the terms have shifted dramatically in favor of foreign companies considering contracts signed four years ago called for equal partnership with Ecopetrol, 20% royalty payments and a time limit on production, after which all the remaining oil and drilling assets had to be turned over to Ecopetrol.

The Uribe administration tries to justify its oil policies to the Colombian people by claiming they are necessary to prevent the country from becoming a net oil importer by the end of 2005. To meet its growing domestic demand and still remain a net exporter, Colombia needs to produce more oil. These policies will likely increase oil production, but the fact that Colombia might retain self-sufficiency or its position as a net exporter is merely a technicality. Colombia is not actually producing all of the oil it consumes domestically or exports, it is buying much of it at market rates from foreign companies operating on Colombian soil. So while Colombian oil production will likely increase in the coming years, it will be primarily produced by foreign companies and Colombia will purchase much of this oil at the same global market prices it would pay for overseas crude.

The government has used the misleading concept of maintaining oil self-sufficiency to justify virtually giving away the shop to meet IMF-imposed structural adjustment conditions and to continue receiving U.S. military aid. And foreign oil companies have gladly benefited from Plan Colombia's military and economic components, making Colombia an unsettling example of resource extraction in the neoliberal era. Many residents in Putumayo believe oil exploitation puts them at risk because it helps sustain the conflict. As one local candidly states, "Everyone knows the conflict in the Middle East is because of oil, and Colombia's problems are no different. Maybe the coca is going, but there's still oil. And if there's oil, then the armed groups won't leave because they are interested in places where there is money and power." ✎

## Old Domino's New Clothes in Colombia

By Conn Hallinan

March 05, 2004  
Znet

There are moments in American foreign policy that run a *deja vu* chill down one's spine. Just such a moment was the recent talk to a group of Cali businessmen by William Wood, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia. In his remarks, Wood endorsed efforts by the present government of President Alvaro Uribe to overturn that country's constitution to permit himself a second term. "The U.S. Constitution permits presidential re-elections," Wood argued, "that's why we don't see this

proposal as anti-democratic."

Wood's remark harks back to the dark old days when the U.S. routinely intervened in Latin America, overthrowing governments and constitutions from Guatemala to Brazil.

In fact, the Uribe government's pursuit of military victory in Colombia's four-decade-old civil war has spawned a host of undemocratic measures, a human rights crisis, and the threat that the war might spill over into neighboring Venezuela.

While the Bush Administration argues human rights has improved under Uribe, trade unionists and human rights advocates disagree.

Two years ago, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights found "massive and systematic violations of (human) rights" and recommended 24 initiatives the Colombian government should take. According to human rights advocates, those steps have not been taken.

"The Uribe government has moved backwards on the UN recommendations," says Richard Howitt, a member of the European Parliament and foreign policy and human rights spokesperson for the European Labor Party.

While mass murders and kidnappings have declined, 20 percent and 32 percent respectively, targeted killings and disappearances of unionists and left opposition supporters have increased.

Disappearances have increased from 258 in the 1994-95 period, to more than 1,200 a year since 2001.

In the past 10 years, more than 3,000 trade unionists have been murdered, almost all at the hands of the Colombian Army or the right-wing paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). According to Human Rights watch, "There is detailed, abundant and compelling evidence of continuing close ties" between the two.

The most controversial of the new anti-terror legislation is Uribe's plan to "demobilize" the AUC and allow the paramilitaries to buy their way out of trouble. "Rather than serving time in prison," says Colombian Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo, "there are alternative sentences and the individuals will be allowed to pay reparations."

Human rights organizations contemptuously refer to the plan as "checkbook immunity."

The Bush Administration has endorsed the process, even though AUC founder, Carlos Castano, has already been convicted in absentia for murder and drug dealing. The other AUC leader, Salvatore Mancuso, is a former associate of Medellin cocaine cartel chief, Pablo Escobar. Both are wanted by the US and Interpol for shipping over 17 tons of cocaine to Europe between 1997 and 2002.

This past November the government “demobilized” 856 members of a supposed AUC unit in Medellin. But according to Andy Webb-Vidal of the Financial Times, most of the “paras” were petty criminals and young unemployed men rounded up the night before in 28 government buses.

Human rights groups were outraged. “Instead of handing these criminals a microphone, the government should be concentrating on arresting them and bringing them to justice,” said Jose Miguel Vivanco, executive director of the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch.

While the Bush Administration officially considers the AUC a “terrorist organization,” in practice U.S. aid has targeted only the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN).

FARC, and to a lesser extent the ELN, do engage in assassinations and kidnappings and levy “taxes” on the drug trade. But, according to human rights groups, 85 percent of the civilian deaths in Colombia occur at the hands of the armed forces or the paramilitaries.

Colombia is now the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, after Israel and Egypt. With that aid the Colombian army has added 35,000 troops, becoming increasingly mobile with its fleet of U.S. supplied helicopters. The U.S. has just helped deploy one Colombian combat battalion and is training another.

Colombia also has the largest US embassy in the world, and more than 20 US-based companies share \$178 million per year in contracts. All total, the US has sent more than \$3 billion in aid since Plan Colombia began in 2000, the great bulk of it to the police and the military.

Much of the war has been privatized, with huge arms corporations like Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and TRW providing security forces, surveillance of insurgent movements, and drug interdiction. This privatization has allowed the companies to avoid having to answer to the U.S. Congress.

“My complaint about the use of private contractors,” says U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) is their ability to fly under the radar to avoid accountability.”

Few observers think government forces can win a military victory, in large part because the conditions that ignited the war back in the late '60s have never been addressed by the Colombian government or the country's elite.

Between 65 and 68 percent of Colombia's people live in poverty, and 30 percent of the landowners control 95 percent of the land. “The land problem is at the center of the armed conflict,” says refugee advocate Jorge Rojas.

But instead of urging land reform and solutions to growing economic inequality in the country, the U.S. has turned the conflict into a war against terrorism and drugs.

A recent study by the Council on Foreign Relations, however, called US policy in Colombia and the Andes region “myopic,” arguing that the US's focus on drugs in Colombia was “no longer sustainable.”

Rather than reconsidering policies that are increasingly under fire in the region, the Bush Administration has ratcheted up the rhetoric.

US Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL), chair of the powerful House International Relations Committee, said of Colombia that “three hours by plane from Miami, we face a potential breeding ground for international terror equalled perhaps only by Afghanistan.”

Former US Ambassador to Colombia, Curtis Kamman, told the Senate

Judiciary Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism and Government that “The terrorists who operate in Colombia have not explicitly declared the United States to be their target. But their political and economic objectives are incompatible with our values, and they could ultimately represent a force of evil no less troublesome than al Qaeda.”

The possibility that war could spread into neighboring countries appears very real. The Bush Administration has long hinted that populist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is supporting FARC and the ELT.

Chavez fell afoul of the White House when he thawed relations between Venezuela and Cuba. But the Bush Administration declared virtual war on Chavez when he insisted on trying to re-negotiate 60-year old oil agreements with foreign oil producers. Venezuela has 77 billion barrels of oil and is the US's fourth largest supplier. The Andes region as a whole supplies the US with 20 percent of its energy needs.

Venezuela, like Colombia, is mired in poverty and economic inequality. Some 80 percent of its population live in poverty, and 2 percent of the population controls 60 percent of the land. Rising oil revenues would go a long way toward alleviating some of those conditions.

There are some recent ominous developments.

On Jan. 23, the U.S. State Department coordinator for counter terrorism, Cofer Black, warned Venezuela that it was not doing enough in the global campaign against terrorism.

The Uribe government recently sent three brigades of troops to the Venezuelan border, and one Colombian Defense Department official told the Financial Times that because of the tense domestic situation in Venezuela, Chavez will “look to a confrontation with Colombia.”

There is no evidence that Venezuela wants a fight with Colombia—Venezuela's population is 24 million to Colombia's 44 million—but there may be domestic reasons for Uribe to spread the war.

While the Colombian government has made gains on the battlefield, the rising cost of the war and the growing opposition to the loss of political freedoms have begun to sour the nation on Uribe's “Democratic Security.”

While news polls—always suspect in a media dominated by the nation's elite—indicate 80 percent support for Uribe, facts on the ground suggest the support is not all that deep.

A recent nationwide government-sponsored referendum to increase the powers of the executive and raise military spending went down to defeat, and voters in Bogota elected a left-wing former union leader, Luis Garzon, Mayor. The mayoralty of the country's largest city has long been considered a springboard to the national presidency.

The worry is that Uribe, egged on by an aggressive Bush Administration and his own military, might invade Venezuela on the pretext of attacking “guerilla havens” in the border region. If he did, it would lift a page from another war.

In April 1970, frustrated on the battlefield and chasing the illusion of military victory, the U.S. and South Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, plunging that country into a war that would eventually lead to the killing fields of Pol Pot. It also destabilized nations throughout the region.

Deja vu all over again? ☹

## Bush Administration Seeks to Expand US Military Personnel in Colombia

by Elanor Starmer

Americas Program,  
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Last month the Bush administration announced plans to deepen U.S. involvement in Colombia by doubling the number of U.S. troops and private military contractors stationed there. The move came in the midst of an energetic public-relations campaign by the U.S. State Department and the Colombian government. Both administrations attempted to paint U.S.

policy in Colombia as an assured success. However, statistics show a stable presence of cocaine on the U.S. market, and there's evidence of continued ties between members of the Colombian military and brutal right-wing paramilitary groups.

Four years ago the U.S. Congress voted overwhelmingly to pass a \$1.3 billion aid package known as Plan Colombia. The support of moderate Democrats and Republicans hinged on a number of safeguards included in the legislation, which they hoped would keep the United States out of the "quagmire" of Colombia's internal conflict. Congress has restricted the number of U.S. troops and private military contractors allowed on the ground to 800 total and limited their mission to anti-drug efforts, legislating that no intelligence, training, or equipment be used to assist Colombia in its war against left-wing insurgents. Congressional supporters also promised that the U.S. commitment in Colombia would last no more than five years.

Human rights groups, drug reformers, and some members of Congress warned repeatedly that military aid would pour fuel on the flames of the long and brutal conflict involving the Colombian government forces, right-wing paramilitary allies, and left-wing insurgents. Many critics, including current House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, also argued that attacking drug production at the lowest level of the supply chain – the poor farmers who grow drug crops in Colombia's rural areas – was an inhumane approach that would ultimately prove futile.

Despite these grave concerns, Plan Colombia was signed into law. The Republican congressional leadership touted it as a reasonable policy that was limited in scope but which would help bring an end to America's drug problem. Following September 11th, however, the policy began to transform. The Bush administration and congressional allies broke promise after promise made in 2000, and skepticism of the policy grew in Congress.

In the spring of 2002 the Bush administration expanded the U.S. mission in Colombia beyond anti-drug efforts arguing that U.S. aid should be used to help Colombia fight a "unified campaign against narcotics trafficking, terrorist activities, and other threats to its national security." It earmarked some \$600 million for the cause. This year Colombia is slated to receive over \$500 million in U.S. aid – the majority of it military and police assistance.

The Bush administration now argues that more force is needed to make progress in the joint campaign against drugs and terrorism in Colombia. In a recent visit to Washington, Colombian President Alvaro

Uribe proposed "Plan Colombia II" a second phase of U.S. assistance that could last another 5 years. Bush administration officials applauded the idea.

The proposal to lift the troop cap, announced by President Bush last month, would increase the number of U.S. personnel allowed in Colombia to 800 soldiers and 600 contractors – more than double the current limit established by Congress.

Lifting the cap would mean devoting additional resources and manpower to a failed policy.

Approving additional U.S. military assistance would send all the wrong messages to a war-torn Colombia. It implies that the conflict can be solved by force, effectively squelching civil society and sporadic government attempts to engage in a negotiated peace process with armed groups. As the war accelerates, thousands more Colombian civilians will lose their lives in the crossfire. Committed to a military solution, the U.S. government could be forced to request ever-increasing levels of troops and funding when the conflict proves more enduring than anticipated.

Support and training for the Colombian armed forces also puts the United States firmly on the side of a military with a brutal history and a proven reluctance to reform. According to the United Nations, direct human rights violations by the Colombian military increased last year, and even the U.S. State Department admits that Colombia has failed to break ties with the paramilitaries. Rather than reduce aid pending an improved human rights record, the United States has turned a blind eye to abuses and continued to provide aid.

The result has been grave for many Colombian civilians, particularly Afro-Colombian communities, trade union leaders, and human rights defenders. Those who speak out against abuses by the military or discuss collaboration between the Colombian armed forces and paramilitaries are routinely labeled as being sympathetic to the guerillas, and targeted with threats and attacks. According to international observers such as Witness for Peace, paramilitary presence in areas with a high level of Colombian military activity – notable among them the departments of Putumayo and Arauca, two epicenters of U.S. involvement – has increased dramatically since 2000.

Colombia's conflict is a long and complicated one, and solutions ultimately lie with Colombians themselves. While the United States may never be able to provide a cure for what ails Colombia, a first and crucial step will be to stop aggravating an already grave situation. Rather than back a military approach to the conflict, the United States should support peace negotiations and aid those Colombian institutions that are working to support human rights and address the roots of the conflict. Issues such as poverty, unequal land distribution, and a political system that excludes poor and rural communities must be addressed as Colombia looks toward a better future.

In mid-May Congress will address the troop cap issue during debate over the 2005 Defense Authorization bill. The last few years have shown that military aid feeds a vicious cycle of human rights abuses and killing, while the drug trade simply takes on new, more virulent forms. With no exit strategy in sight in the Iraqi conflict, the last thing the U.S. needs now is expanded involvement in Colombia. ✌