

There is no Silver Bullet and Other Lessons from Colombia

by **Stuart Lippe**

Colombia has always had large, ungovernable areas where the authority of the central government was often tenuous or non-existent. Colombians seemed to prefer to focus on their home regions, leaving the vast hinterlands to fend for themselves. Fifteen percent of the country's then 1,100 *municipios* (equivalent to U.S. counties) had no national government presence. In many cases, there had never been any.

For much of its history, other than the loss of territory to independence movements, this failure of the central government to establish its authority was of little consequence, and there were always small groups of bandits and political groups in the back country. Usually they could be ignored, except of course by their victims. It was only the growth of the drug industry that provided the most vigorous, best organized, and long-lived of these lawless groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and, to a lesser degree, the National Liberation Army (ELN) the means to grow and pose a serious threat to the national government.

That this happened should have come as no surprise. In 1964, Gerry Sutton, a junior political officer at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota, sent an airgram, "Violence in Colombia: A Case Study," that analyzed Colombia's problems. (Airgrams were "think" pieces prepared on typewriter and air-pouched to Washington in the days before computers). Drawing on all civilian and military sources, Sutton describes Colombia's ungoverned areas and the extensive rural poverty, as well as the origins of Colombia's pervasive culture of violence, engendered by Conservative-Liberal political strife going back to the previous century. Colombia's strong regionalism and the lack of central

The views in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State or the U.S. government.

Stuart Lippe worked as a senior advisor at the Department of State on issues involving Colombia and the implementation of "Plan Colombia" from 2000 to 2013. He has also been the Director of the Research Department at Radio Marti and a consultant at the World Bank. Before this, Lippe was a Foreign Service Officer for 25 years during which he served in Latin America, Europe, and Africa.

government authority allowed rural fighting to flourish. In a preview of what actually happened 35 years later, Sutton predicted that this would continue until Colombia addressed its national authority problems, and that the U.S. could help by providing intelligence, mobility (helicopters), and training. The airgram also emphasized the need for Colombia to attack the basic causes of violence.¹ And indeed, Colombia made some progress under the 1964 “Plan Lazo”; however, these and later efforts fell far short of what was really needed. In spite of the broader and more generous financing of Plan Colombia, it is still not certain that sufficient resources are available to finally resolve the core problems of rural violence, poverty and neglect, and institutional weakness, but there has been progress.

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Sutton also noted a guerrilla chief, Pedro Marín, known by his *nom de guerre* Manuel Marulanda and the nickname “Tirofijo,” was up in the hills and causing serious problems. Over the next four decades, until his apparently natural death in 2008 at age 77, Marulanda led the FARC.

Fast forward to the 1990s and Colombia was facing the dizzying growth of coca cultivation, increasing military victories by the FARC, a campaign of public violence by drug cartels, and a rapidly growing and vicious paramilitary force often aligned with the beleaguered Colombian Army. Colombia had become the murder, kidnapping, and extortion capital

of the world. At the same time, as a direct result of the Colombian Army’s participation in the Mapiripan Massacre of 1997, when paramilitaries occupied the town with Army complicity and murdered a reported 30 persons, the U.S. expanded the Leahy amendment to prohibit the Department of Defense (DoD) from assisting countries with serious human rights issues. The small U.S. military assistance effort was halted. This was already the case for the State Department. In addition, because Colombia was a middle-income, developing country, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) had nearly phased out its social and economic programs. The most important U.S. program was counternarcotics, managed by the Department of State (State) and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and primarily supporting the Colombian National Police.

Over the last few years, there have been numerous efforts to distill lessons learned from helping Colombia, generally seen as a foreign policy success, and applying them to challenges elsewhere. Colombia’s remarkable recovery from its low point in the late 1990s makes it an important case study. In spite of its challenges, Colombia benefited from a generally competent national government with effective leadership through several administrations (Andrés Pastrana, Alvaro Uribe, and Juan Manuel Santos) and strong public support for their programs. These two critical factors allowed Colombia to mobilize and effectively use international assistance, particularly that of the U.S, which viewed Colombia as a dedicated and convinced national partner. U.S. civilian and military cooperation and interagency unity provided an object lesson in how to bring all elements of power— diplomatic, military, public relations, economic, and intelligence— to bear to help resolve the Colombian crisis.

By the mid to late 1990s, Washington was increasingly concerned that Colombia might

collapse and become a narco-state. Then Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the State Department Thomas Pickering was approached by National Security Adviser Sandy Berger in late summer 1999 to “pull together the U.S. government” and see what it could do about the worsening situation in Colombia.² Pickering emphasized that both purpose and process would be fundamental for success. Purpose being what we intended to do to pursue our national interest and process how we organized to do it.

In addition to the two governments being ready to cooperate, six unusual circumstances combined to affect how the U.S. addressed Colombia’s situation:

- A small defensive-minded Colombian Army, which had little mobility, poor logistics, and inadequate intelligence, was losing battalion-sized encounters with the FARC. The prospect of a major Latin American country falling to a narcotics-fed insurgency/terrorist group sent geopolitical chills up the spines of the foreign policy establishment in Washington.
- Coca cultivation was about three times what had been previously thought and growing.
- There was a crack cocaine epidemic in large American cities.
- It was an election year (2000), ensuring that both political parties would respond to the drug issue. Neither wished to be seen as unconcerned. There is ample evidence that Republicans intended to raise the Clinton Administration’s alleged lack of concern over drugs, while the Democrats were not going to allow themselves to be outflanked on this issue.
- The discredited Ernesto Samper had been replaced by Andrés Pastrana, who recognized the challenges he faced and quickly asked for improved relations with

the U.S. and support for his vision to rebuild Colombia.

- With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were no other international issues (save the perennial ones in the Middle East) to distract policy makers.

In response to President Pastrana’s request for assistance, State asked him to develop a plan that would tie together the various programs he wanted to implement and identify where he thought the U.S. could help. In addition to senior-level meetings with the Colombians, there were more detailed working discussions that included State, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), DoD, and the Department

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of Justice. Pastrana’s National Development Director Jaime Ruiz authored Plan Colombia. Because Ruiz purposely did so in English for easier presentation to the U.S. Congress, some claim it was written in the U.S. and that the focus was then shifted from social development and peace with the FARC to strengthening the counterterrorism/counternarcotics elements. This assertion overlooks what the Colombians themselves wanted from the U.S.—support for a broad-based effort to address much more than drugs and guerrillas. The plan’s full title: “Plan Colombia: Colombia’s Plan for Peace, Prosperity and Strengthening of the State” might be a more accurate description of Colombia’s goals.

Plan Colombia contains only general outlines of Colombia’s goals and the following

ten pillars that identify what needed to be accomplished:

1. **Economic.** Generate employment and strengthen Colombia's capacity to collect taxes and offer economic support to counter narcotics trafficking.
2. **Fiscal and financial.** Adopt severe austerity measures to promote economic activity and recover Colombia's traditional standing in international financial markets.
3. **Peace.** Seek agreements with the guerrillas based on territorial integrity, democracy, human rights, and strengthening the rule of law and the fight against narcotics trafficking.
4. **National defense.** Restructure and modernize the armed forces and police.
5. **Justice and human rights.** Reaffirm the rule of law and ensure equal and impartial justice for all.
6. **Drug enforcement.** Combat narcotics trafficking in association with the other involved countries.
7. **Alternative development.** Promote agricultural and other economically profitable activities.
8. **Social participation.** Seek a collective *concientización* (raising of consciousness).
9. **Human development.** Guarantee adequate services of health and education to vulnerable groups.
10. **International support.** Confirm the principles of co-responsibility, integrated action, and balanced treatment.

Plan Colombia was the result of a complex, three-way interaction between the two countries' executive branches and the U.S.

Congress.³ Dr. Alvaro Mendez wryly notes that his paper, "Negotiating Intervention by Invitation: How the Colombians Shaped U.S. Participation in the Genesis of Plan Colombia," contradicts the views held by some of his academic colleagues that the U.S. imposed Plan Colombia on the Colombian government. Dr. Mendez convincingly argues that the power asymmetry notwithstanding, it was the smaller state that took the initiative. This is an important distinction, because it shows the Colombians were ready to respond strongly to Pickering's basic question of "what was Colombia prepared to do?" on its own behalf. The question of Colombian "ownership" was never in question, and it did not become a "U.S. war."

When the U.S. announced its support for Plan Colombia, purpose (what can we do about the worsening situation in Colombia?) became policy, which has endured to this day through continuing follow-on programs, even though Plan Colombia itself has long since been completed.

Once Colombia's commitment became apparent, U.S. planners moved to the second of Pickering's questions, "In what way could the United States organize itself to help Colombia reform and rebound successfully?" by identifying issues and mechanisms for providing support to Plan Colombia. Their efforts were originally called the "Colombia Initiative," a title that never really caught on. Inevitably, perhaps, it became known, simply, as Plan Colombia, which may have contributed to the confusion on the part of some that it was a U.S. plan.

In fact, the U.S. did not announce its intention to support Plan Colombia until some three months after Colombia's invitation was delivered by President Pastrana to President Clinton in September 1999. The Clinton Administration submitted a proposal to Congress on January 11, 2000, for an "urgently needed, two year funding package to assist

Colombia in vital counter-drug efforts,” but it would also include “assistance for economic development, protection of human rights and judicial reform.”

Of course there were strong debates on many aspects of the proposal, from what kind of helicopters to buy, to human rights concerns. Working closely with the interested Congressional leadership of both parties, but especially Republican Speaker Dennis Hastert, the Democratic Administration requested \$1.3 billion. With bipartisan support, it was approved and became law on July 13, 2000.

As the legislation to implement the policy worked its way through Congress, the Executive Branch got ready to manage what was a quantum increase in U.S. funding, from under \$200 million (in primarily counternarcotics programs) to over \$1.3 billion for Colombia and another \$300 million for neighboring countries in just the first two years. Lead agencies for implementation were State, USAID, Justice, and DoD. Others with significant roles included ONDCP, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), DEA, National Security Council (NSC), U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), Department of Commerce, Coast Guard, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Treasury.

Central to success was an interagency group that met at the Assistant Secretary level and later their designees, co-chaired by State and DoD, under the authority and broad guidance of the NSC. Although called the Colombia Initiative Working Group (CIWG), it was, in fact, the standard interagency process of Assistant Secretaries reporting to the Deputies’ and Principals’ Committees. This is important because Assistant Secretaries are at the crucial junction where they receive working-level expertise from below, while also managing political concerns from above, and they are responsible for day-to-day supervision and policy.

Public Law 106-246 describes *Plan Colombia*, as instituted by the administration of President Pastrana to “combat drug production and trafficking, foster peace, increase the rule of law, improve human rights, expand economic development, and institute justice reform.” It was, in effect, a long-delayed effort by Colombians to develop a strategy that would allow the country to exercise national authority throughout its territories. U.S. policy was to support *Plan Colombia* and its follow-on programs as both countries developed a whole-of-government approach. U.S. programs provide training, equipment, and funding to the government of Colombia, civil society, international organizations, and NGOs in the areas of counternarcotics and counterterrorism; alternative development; law enforcement; institutional strengthening; judicial reform; human and labor rights; humanitarian assistance for displaced persons and victims of violence; local government; conflict management and peace promotion; demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, including child soldiers; humanitarian demining; and preservation of the environment.

Because of the large and rapid growth in program funding, the CIWG was given a standing Colombia Initiative Task Force (CITF) to serve as its secretariat. The CITF was led by former Ambassador James Mack and consisted of full-time, working-level members from State’s Western Hemisphere Affairs and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement bureaus; DoD’s Division of Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict; USAID’s Latin America and Caribbean bureau; and a CIA

analyst. Other agencies provided personnel as needed, as did State's Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor/, Population, Refugees, and Migration, and Political-Military bureaus.

The CITF existed from April 2000 through February 2001 and shepherded the process from legislative approval through acquisition and the beginning of implementation. The task force tracked over 100 line items funded by the Plan Colombia legislation. These included Black Hawk and Huey-2 helicopters, glyphosate for aerial spraying of coca, mobile police units, rule of law and economic development projects, additional staff to help with an increased workload and direct support to the Colombia Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as well as many other programs to expand its activities. The CITF also met with human rights and other interested organizations, responded to Congressional concerns, and answered press and public questions.

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One real innovation came about when agencies or individuals sought more senior guidance. The Assistant Secretaries would "adjourn" as the CIWG and "reconvene" as an Executive Committee (ExCom) with Tom Pickering as the chair. Issues that could not be resolved by the ExCom were to be referred to the Deputies' Committee. In fact, the ExCom easily resolved the few issues that were not settled at lower levels. It did report occasionally

to the Deputies' Committee, but only to ensure it and the Principals' Committee were up-to-date on progress. The CIWG and the CITF were often also referred to as the Plan Colombia Working Group and Plan Colombia Task Force.

State and DoD worked almost seamlessly together in what could be a model for "jointness." Still, having the decisive call in the hands of State's Under Secretary for Political Affairs ensured that State's voice was strong at a time when DoD's sheer resources, especially in terms of manpower, might have been overwhelming. DoD and other agencies always had the option of insisting on going higher, but this option was never exercised. A broad agreement on overall policy and goals meant there was no significant dissent from within the government, not even from the OMB, whose job was to crunch and control numbers. Generous Congressional bipartisan support continues, even to this day.

There was also no real opposition from outside, aided by the fact that the FARC had almost no Colombian public or international support. Most Colombians rejected the FARC's ideology, and because of the U.S. emphasis on human rights and economic development, there were never more than sporadic and sputtering protests. Not all in Congress or the NGO community might agree with this, but their concerns were a priority for attention.

In 2000, in another innovative step, the U.S. sent a small interagency team to Bogota to assist government of Colombia (GOC) planning. Over the next few months, this team and the GOC produced a lengthy "execution plan." Even more useful than the plan itself may have been the process of forcing the GOC ministries and agencies to work together and to continue after the U.S. team left. Another benefit was that both sides developed personal relationships that were maintained for years, especially as working-level colleagues advanced to more senior positions.

While both the Clinton and Bush

administrations called for the development of overall “implementation” plans, they were drafted but never finalized. Eventually, the Deputies’ Committee agreed that the annual reports State prepared for Congress adequately addressed planning needs, even if they did not include all the metrics and outputs that some thought essential.

Of course, there were always a fair number of complications to be addressed and resolved including the following:

Counternarcotics versus counterterrorism

Counternarcotics provided the essential focus for the U.S. government and the Colombian National Police. It was also the strongest reason Congress approved getting involved. While there was early recognition by many that counternarcotics and counterterrorism were inextricably intertwined, Congress was focused on the counternarcotics aspect, and it was clear it would not finance a fight against the FARC. Yet, there was no way to differentiate between drugs and terrorism when the primary actors were one and the same. Other voices feared the U.S. could find itself on a “slippery slope,” not unlike Vietnam, and they would not allow it, even as Executive Branch leaders protested this was not in anybody’s plans. In conversations with Congress, the administration made clear it would respect those views, and so the focus remained on counternarcotics for the first years. Congress also enacted three measures that seemed burdensome at the time but, in retrospect, were essential to maintaining public support and contributed to success:

1. No U.S. combat troops in Colombia, only trainers, further reinforcing Colombian ownership.
2. A limit on total numbers of military personnel, which Congress agreed to vary over time based on needs.
3. Strong human rights conditions before any

aid could be provided to the Colombian military.

Later and with experience, there was a growing realization by all that counternarcotics and counterterrorism could not be treated separately. The Administration was in the process of discussing with Congress an amendment to the Plan Colombia legislation that would allow support to Colombia’s “...unified campaign against narcotics trafficking, organizations designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations, and other criminal or illegal armed groups...” It passed easily after 9/11. That legislation also required Colombia to increase the amount of funding it was providing, which it did.

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The Colombian Army and human rights

Related to the counternarcotics / counterterrorism discussions were deep concerns about the Colombian Army’s human rights record and its reluctance to become involved in “police business.” When designing Plan Colombia, the GOC and the U.S. recognized that narcotics trafficking organizations and illegal armed groups formed combinations too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings or by the powers vested in the marshals by law or the police. Suppressing these groups required a stronger response. That response was clearly military, but the U.S. could not support the Colombian Army through State’s Foreign Military Financing (FMF) or International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs, nor could DoD. There was, in fact, not a single army unit eligible to receive

U.S. equipment or training under the Leahy Amendment, which prohibits U.S. assistance to security forces, police, or military, unless they have been “vetted” for human rights concerns. As a result, the GOC agreed to stand up a totally new unit, the Counternarcotics Brigade of the Colombian Army, with a strong aviation (helicopter) element. Every soldier and officer in its three battalions was vetted for human rights concerns. Some did not make it. In one case, Pickering himself vetoed the assignment of a doubtful captain, showing how mindful he was of Congressional and NGO concerns.

The brigade’s role was to undertake counternarcotics operations and provide perimeter security for police counternarcotics efforts, including aerial spraying. The brigade

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also provided a model for reforms within the Colombian Army. Since then, many units of the Colombian military have become eligible to receive U.S. support in accordance with the Leahy Amendment and are capable of providing the security needed to undertake counternarcotics/counterterrorism operations. The Colombian effort that rescued 15 high-profile hostages, including three Americans, on July 2, 2008, was a spectacular demonstration of the greatly improved capability of the armed forces. Full responsibility for the brigade and its helicopters including funding has been turned over to Colombia.

There are other points worth noting: (1)

In spite of its reluctance to become mired in “police work,” the relation between counternarcotics and counterterrorism became clearer over time, and the Colombian Army was increasingly willing to embrace it as an effective tool to further weaken the FARC; (2) Human rights were a central focus of U.S. efforts. To emphasize its importance, the U.S. revoked the visas of five prominent generals and other visas were not renewed. Even though progress was not as rapid as hoped and there were some notable hold-ups and reverses, overall the trend was in the right direction; (3) U.S. military personnel from SOUTHCOM and Special Operations Forces reinforced this message at every opportunity. This contrasts with the days when Military Assistance Advisor Groups and the Defense Attaches would argue human rights was an unnecessary diversion from their real work, some going to the point of vigorously defending Army officers whose crimes are now being prosecuted in Colombian courts.

“Defense is from Mars. State is from Venus”

Differing outlooks held by State and DoD are both needed for effective policymaking, and this classic U.S. Army War College paper is an essential guide.⁴

Role of NGOs

Information provided by human rights NGOs was recognized and welcomed. In addition, during the course of Plan Colombia and its follow-on programs, the U.S. supported the Office of the OHCHR with some \$5 to \$6 million to expand its efforts throughout Colombia. The U.S. did not always agree, either with the OHCHR or all the NGOs all of the time, but never minded criticism that was critical and tough, as long as it was accurate. (In my own listing of the ten worst massacres in Colombia, the Colombian Army always denied it was involved. In fact, in eight of those ten cases when the truth eventually emerged, it was as the NGOs had correctly charged).

Congressional oversight

Congress was more often than not a helpful partner in implementing Plan Colombia, just as it was essential for crafting the original legislation funding U.S. programs. But Congressional support also came with numerous reports and restrictions beyond the three mentioned earlier. In addition to many reporting requirements that were levied each year on specific concerns, there were a number of ongoing quarterly and annual reports. Congress also wanted bimonthly (and then quarterly) reports on the number, location, activities, and lengths of tour for U.S. military and civilian contractors in Colombia. State provided 52 such reports before Congress abolished the requirement.

Most significant, however, were the annual certifications on progress in human rights by the Colombian military before a certain percentage of its funds could be released. This certification was the result of discussions between human rights NGOs, Congressional staff, and the State Department after all three were unsatisfied with the original legislation, which allowed the President to waive the human rights requirements. Of the six or seven original conditions, State was only able to certify that the Colombian Army had complied with two of them, the rest were waived. Nobody was happy doing that, not State, not the NGOs, and not Congress. The new legislation allowed no waivers but provided a “carrot and stick” approach. Most of the funds appropriated to support the Colombian military were released (the carrot), with the remainder held until certified (the stick). As was only to be expected, State saw the glass as half-full and certified that there had been progress, which it believed to be the case. The NGOs and Congress responded that it was half-empty or worse. As with the previous method, nobody was happy with this situation, but in spite of everything it worked. The certification was prepared by State’s Western Hemisphere and Democracy, Human

Rights, and Labor bureaus, in conjunction with the Embassy.

Role of intelligence

On December 21, 2013, the *Washington Post* published a lengthy article titled “Covert Action in Colombia” by veteran reporter Dana Priest that explained how the U.S. and Colombia cooperated in the exchange of intelligence and establishing an “Intelligence Fusion Cell.”⁵ FARC leader Timochenko was recently quoted as admitting the organization had been “weakened,” attesting to fact that intelligence was a central element in overall success, albeit barren without all of the other aspects of Plan Colombia.

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The budget and “hard” vs. “soft” side

Originally, Plan Colombia envisioned expenditures of only \$7.5 billion: \$1.3 billion from the U.S., \$4.5 billion from Colombia, and the remainder from the rest of the world. By the end of Plan Colombia’s six years in 2005, the U.S. had spent \$4.0 billion; Colombia \$7.0 billion; and the rest of the world about what it had promised. This number includes both “hard” side (counternarcotics and counterterrorism) and “soft” side (human rights, rule of law, economic development, and social programs, including support to refugees and other vulnerable groups). Over the longer run, from fiscal year (FY) 2000 through FY 2014, the U.S. government will have spent about \$9.5 billion to support Plan Colombia and its follow-on programs. Of this, about 80 percent is from State Department

funds and the remainder from DoD. Of course, Colombia continued to provide the major share for Plan Colombia. For example, between 2000 and 2006, the GOC spent \$20 billion on the military and police (not including pensions and other non-military expenditures), while the U.S. provided \$3 billion. More important, however, than the size of the investment, U.S. support was an essential element to kick start the whole process by providing equipment and training the Colombians did not have and also to assure Colombians they were not alone. In 2000, the percentage of gross domestic product Colombia devoted to the military and police was only about 1.9 percent; by the end of the decade, that had increased to over 4 percent. In the early years, the “hard” side accounted for about 75 percent of U.S. support, with another 25 percent going to the “soft” side. Today, the programs are about evenly divided between “hard” and “soft” sides.

“Democratic Security” was the critical driving force behind the success of Plan Colombia...

International support

Contrary to widespread belief, the international community did step up to the plate. After a slow start, the European Union, individual countries, the UN, Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Bank have provided programs that more than equal in value the economic and social programs supported by the U.S.

Recovery did not come overnight. President Pastrana’s quest for peace with the FARC at all costs vexed U.S. policymakers, but he was elected on that platform. His failed attempt can now be seen as necessary to convince Colombian voters and the political elites to try

a more confrontational and vigorous approach. When Pastrana finally accepted that peace talks with the FARC were not working and ended them, U.S. programs with the Colombian military and police were already beginning to take hold. Pastrana laid the groundwork and Plan Colombia accelerated during the first term of President Alvaro Uribe (2002—2006). Most importantly, Uribe and his advisors developed a coherent counterinsurgency strategy based on taking and holding territory, protecting local populations, controlling key geographic corridors essential to drug trafficking and supply and mobility for insurgents, and demobilizing the paramilitary forces that threatened democracy and state authority as much as did the FARC. Uribe’s hard-line approach has generated some criticism, but it was widely supported by Colombians tired of the FARC’s depredations. This strategy—“Democratic Security”—correctly identified the sovereignty gap as the central problem in Colombia. Strengthening legitimate state control was the response. This policy was adjusted over time and has continued into the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos (2010).

“Democratic Security” was the critical driving force behind the success of Plan Colombia and follow-on programs; however, security could not do it all. Human rights, rule of law, and economic and social development programs were necessary to solidify this progress. The U.S. and Colombia now increasingly support programs to expand state presence in those rural areas where the poverty, violence, and illicit crop cultivation originally described by Gerry Sutton converged.

Plan Colombia’s comprehensive approach recognized that problems of economic growth, social equality, poverty reduction, and strong political and social institutions depend upon security and peace, defeating illegal armed groups, and choking off narcotics trafficking. Violence is down significantly, narcotics

trafficking groups are weakened, economic growth is up, and poverty rates are declining. Colombia has undertaken far-reaching judicial reform. With the implementation of Plan Colombia, the U.S. shifted its primary focus from counternarcotics to support for Colombia's unified campaign against narcotics trafficking and terrorist groups and then to increased social and economic programs.

Building on his predecessors' successes, President Santos has been able to maintain the counternarcotics/counterterrorism effort while expanding social and economic programs. Coca cultivation decreased 53 percent between 2007 and 2012. Pure cocaine production has declined to an estimated 175 metric tons in 2012. There are hopeful peace talks with the FARC, although it is too soon to predict their outcome this time.

In spite of Colombia's extraordinary progress since 1998, it still faces serious challenges from violence, corruption, social inequities, and a continued urban-rural split in the benefits of economic growth. Whether the resources dedicated to these efforts are sufficient is still an open question. Colombia has yet to resolve its serious challenges, especially in dealing with the large and growing displaced persons population and it still needs to address human rights and inequality problems. High levels of poverty, crime, and government corruption still plague the country, as does a weak judicial system. Moreover, drug cultivation continues, though at reduced levels.

President Santos's focus on changing the country's basic landscape with programs to take advantage of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and addressing land reform and victims' compensation will hopefully enhance Colombia's continued progress.

Lessons

- The U.S. had both purpose and process, and

even though its goals did not align perfectly with those of the GOC, there was enough overlap to pursue similar goals and work out differences.

- People do matter. The U.S. benefitted from effective leadership at the highest levels; excellent mid-level (assistant secretary) coordination among State, DoD, Justice, and USAID; and strong working-level support. Exceptional ambassadors in Colombia managed a large country team and were able to work closely with Washington agencies and SOUTHCOM. Anne Patterson, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia from 2000–2003, played an

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essential role in getting Plan Colombia off the ground and was a brilliant example of how an outstanding ambassador can shape relations with the Congress and the country. One Congressional staffer who was often critical of U.S. efforts said "she is your best," and that reputation on the Hill cannot be overvalued. Congressional leadership was pivotal on both sides of the aisle. Presidents Pastrana and Uribe and current President Santos proved able partners. Pastrana's vision for Plan Colombia, to Uribe's strong implementation, to Santos's broadening of goals could not have been more fortuitous had they been planned in advance. Colombia benefitted from talented

and dedicated leaders with experience in working with the U.S.

- U.S. agencies provided military, civilian, and contractor personnel who had cultural understanding, language ability, and a persistent, long-term presence. There are just too many people to mention at State, DoD, ONDCP, and USAID; however the following contributions should not be overlooked:
 - 7th Special Forces Group (A)’s multiple training deployments.
 - Department of Justice’s Deputy Assistant Attorney General (Criminal Division) Mary Lee Warren’s insistence on the need for judicial reform.
 - Paul Vaky’s implementation of a basic transition in the Colombian judicial system from written to accusatory.
- Congressional support was critical and maintained. Even the seeming restrictions of human rights concerns, a personnel ceiling, and a no combat rule turned out to be helpful. The U.S. recognized that having strict human rights goals would contribute to a more effective, professional Colombian military, and leaders worked with Congressional staff to encourage and strengthen this policy. Congressional support is not automatic, it required many briefings on the Hill for Senators, Representatives, and especially staff, but it is an essential part of making policy understandable and workable. The seemingly endless number of reports to Congress may have contributed as well.
- The U.S. did not take ownership of Colombia’s war. Funding was preponderantly Colombian. The U.S. provided specific items (helicopters and intelligence) and training. Even with a large U.S. personnel footprint, the Colombians considered the U.S. a partner in its efforts.
- Colombian public support was strong. Colombian political will and leadership were critical, as was buy-in from the general public. Eventually, Colombia’s rich minority agreed to a “wealth tax” to help fund the effort and then over-subscribed it. Good design is important, but in the end, there is no substitute for host country dedication and funding.
- The Washington interagency process was clear. With senior-level interest and guidance, all agencies agreed on broad goals.
- Plans must evolve to confront change, often quickly. The U.S. government’s cumbersome bureaucratic and appropriations processes sometimes made it difficult.
- Plan Colombia proved that while development and social inclusion programs require secure environments, security gains can only be sustained and institutionalized through the success of those programs.
- Social and economic development programs require continuing support over many years for what is a slow process, even under the best of circumstances. Active participation by the beneficiaries, security, and state presence are keys to success. Partners must have a strategic vision to illuminate the long haul.

- And finally, as Ambassador Patterson noted early on, there is no silver bullet, just a lot of hard work. **IAJ**

NOTES

- 1 Airgram A-649, April 6, 1964. Airgrams were “think pieces” sent by air pouch to Washington in the days before computers. This airgram is available at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, University of Texas, Austin TX.
- 2 Thomas R. Pickering, “Anatomy of Plan Colombia,” *The American Interest*, Vol. 5, No. 2, November/December 2009, pp. 71–77.
- 3 Álvaro Méndez, “Negotiating Intervention by Invitation: How the Colombians Shaped U.S. Participation in the Genesis of Plan Colombia,” doctoral thesis, London School of Economics, London, 2012, LSE Theses Online homepage, <<http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/519>>, accessed on August 11, 2014.
- 4 Rickey L. Rife, “Defense is From Mars, State is From Venus: Improving Communications and Promoting National Security,” master’s thesis, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, <www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ada351032>, 1998, accessed on August 11, 2014.
- 5 Dana Priest, “Covert Action in Colombia,” *Washington Post*, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2013/12/21/covert-action-in-colombia/?hpid=z1>>, accessed on August 11, 2014.