

**THE FAILURE OF US POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA:
FROM THE WAR ON DRUGS TO THE WAR ON TERROR**

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Abstract

Since the 70s when cocaine consumption first took off in the US, this country has been fighting in Latin America the supply-side 'war on drugs' which was placed mainly in Colombia since the 90s, the only country in the region that has an additional component to the drugs problem, guerrillas and paramilitaries, both who use the drug trade to fuel a protracted conflict. The US fashioned under Clinton's administration the controversial anti-drug strategy known as 'Plan Colombia' a policy that made Colombia the 3rd largest recipient of military aid in the world after Israel and Egypt until the Afghanistan and Iraq era; however after 9/11 the strategy took a different course from a war against drugs to a war against terrorism, significantly increasing the military counter-insurgency component of Plan Colombia, deepening the US dependence in the country and isolating it from the rest of Latin America. The results after 40 decades of US investment and intervention are questionable since the policies have proven to be a failure as they have not reached the expected results and have worsened the problems they tried to tackle.

Thesis

The US anti-narcotics policy in Latin America has been a failure since after 40 decades and billions of dollars invested, it has not helped to curb production, trafficking and demand; but it has undermined the democracy and triggered conflict in countries where drugs are produced; the case of Colombia exemplifies this 'war system' where the 'war on drugs' shifted to 'war on terrorism' under the framework of the US strategy.

To the peasant-farmers of Colombia,

people of noble heart,

the real heroes -if any-

in this ignoble 'war'

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Profecía de la Coca, año 1500

...para vosotros será espiritualidad, para ellos idiotez.
Y cuando los blancos quieran hacer lo mismo
y se atrevan a utilizar como vosotros esas hojas,
a ellos le sucederá todo lo contrario.
Su jugo,
que para vosotros será la fuerza de la vida,
para vuestros dominadores
será vicio repugnante y degradante.
Mientras que para vosotros indígenas
será un alimento casi espiritual,
¡a ellos les causara la idiotez y la locura!¹

Coca Prophecy, year 1500

...for you it will be spirituality, for them idiocy.
And when the white man wants to do the same
and dares to use the leaves as you do,
the reverse will happen.
Its juice,
which for you will be the force of life,
for your masters
will be a disgusting and degenerate vice
while for you, the Indians,
it will be an almost spiritual nourishment,
the effect on them will be idiocy and madness!

¹ S. Calvani, *La Coca: Pasado y Presente. Mitos y Realidades* (Bogotá, 2007)

Prophecy made by Kjana-Chuyma, traditional priest at the service of The Inca's Sun Island in the Titicaca Lake near La Paz, Bolivia; tortured and assassinated by the Spaniard conquerors. This legend has been conveyed by Antonio Díaz Villamil, Bolivian writer and lecturer (La Paz, 1897-1948). Before dying, the old priest told those sentences to its people and following he taught them coca's utility, which was formerly reserved only to the indigenous priests. The legend ends up in a prophecy that has become a reality nowadays.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 70s when cocaine consumption first took off in the US, this country has been fighting in Latin America what Richard Nixon in 1973 labelled ‘the war on drugs’. Further, in 1986 under the government of Ronald Reagan, the drug trade was declared a ‘national security problem’ under the National Security Decision Directive 221,² making it a serious threat and certainly a matter of utmost importance for the US. The counternarcotics battle was placed in the Andean region, the starting point of the supply chain. In the 70s Peru and Bolivia were the main producers of coca paste; this paste was transported to Colombia to be refined and processed into cocaine and then smuggled into the United States and Europe.

In the 80s, illicit drug production and trafficking was acknowledged by the US government as a growing threat to national security given an increase in domestic cocaine and heroin consumption, thus forcing policymakers to debate the best approach to tackle with the illegal narcotics industry³, likewise President George H.W. Bush reckoned the drug trafficking Cartels another threat to American society.⁴ As a result of these dynamics US strategy in the 90s turned to supply-side anti-drug initiatives, unintentionally pushing coca cultivation into Colombia by displacing its production out of Peru and Bolivia⁵. This phenomenon is portrayed by Rouse and Arce as the ‘balloon effect’: ‘a cross-country spillover in coca output as decreases in production in one country appear to be followed by increases in neighboring countries’,⁶ therefore due to the pressure exerted by the US on illicit crop eradication in Bolivia and Peru, the drug industry restructured its operations by growing more illicit crops in Colombia to face the demand, concentrating there both production and manufacturing of cocaine.

² M. Stalcup, ‘*The ‘War on Drugs’ and National Security*’, UC Berkeley Department of Anthropology. Paper for conference (14 April 2006)

³ L. Salazar and L. Fierro, ‘Drug ‘Trafficking’ and Social and Political Conflicts in Latin America: Some Hypotheses’ (1993), *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 20:1, pp. 93-94

⁴ C. Banks, J. Sokolowski, ‘From War on Drugs to War against Terrorism: Modeling the evolution of Colombia’s counter-insurgency’, *Social Science Research* (2008)

⁵ K. Sharpe, ‘*Realpolitik or Imperial Hubris: The Latin American Drug War and US Foreign Policy in Iraq*’, p. 489

⁶ S. Rouse and M. Arce, ‘The Drug-Laden Balloon: U.S. Military Assistance and Coca Production in the Central Andes’, *Social Science Quarterly* (September 2006), Vol. 87:3, p. 541

The US anti-drug strategy also encompassed the destruction of the large drug cartels that controlled the Colombian drug industry, what was accomplished pressuring the Colombian government to vigorously fight the cartels with the provision of American arms, training, logistical support and advisors⁷. The ensuing result was indeed the elimination of the cartels but ironically it did little to curb the production and manufacturing of drugs. Instead, the Colombian drug industry became more diffuse and arguably more effective. As the cartels (Cali and Medellín) prior 1994 dominated the entire drug business spectrum - notably on cocaine- the death of Medellín Cartel drug lord Pablo Escobar in 1993 followed by the capture of leading members of the Cali cartel, dismantled the structure of control turning the country's drug trade disperse. As pointed out by Rabasa and Chalk, 'the immediate effect of repression was to disorganize the networks'⁸ giving way to less-structured organizations to undertake the drug's traffic.

Soon guerrillas –chiefly FARC, the largest insurgent group in Colombia, and the National Liberation Army ELN- and right-wing paramilitaries would enter the scene benefited by the realist strategy propelled by the US in Colombia, ever since the successful interdiction of coca hailed from Peru and Bolivia, combined with the disruption of the drug cartels' supply networks, increasingly pushed coca cultivation into the areas of Colombia controlled by guerrilla groups. This way Colombia vaulted from third place into first, displacing Peru, among Andean coca producers.⁹ It will be argued along this essay how the escalation of FARC until becoming one of the largest crime for-profit organizations the world has known, was in great part an unintentional consequence of a series of tactical successes of US antidrug policies during the 1990s.

Alterations in the dynamics of the Colombian drug trade in the 1990s helped set the stage for both FARC and paramilitaries to earn greater amounts of money from that source. The timing was especially fortuitous for FARC¹⁰ who found an unprecedented opportunity to tax the drugs in every step of the production chain by charging fees paid by the growers, the buyers, the processors, etc, making the drug trade an important component of their finances and therefore strengthening their decades long insurgency war against the Colombian state, a

⁷ Sharpe, 'Realpolitik or Imperial Hubris', p. 484

⁸ A. Rabasa and P. Chalk, 'Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and its Implications for Regional Stability' (2001), p. 15

⁹ M. Steinitz, 'The Terrorism and Drug Connection in Latin America's Andean Region', *CSIS Policy Papers on the Americas* (July 2002), Vol. 13:5, p. 113

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 9

fight older than the emergence of the drug problem itself. Once FARC entered the drug's business by becoming involved directly in it, they have been fuelling their so called 'revolutionary fight' deemed for some as a criminal action disguised as a class struggle, in the framework of an already outdated communist doctrine; by the means of narcotraffic and terror, an intricate combination described by Mincheva and Gurr as the 'unholy alliance'¹¹ of narco-terrorism. It has been argued that the late evolution of FARC and paramilitaries in Colombia is directly linked to the insurgents' control of drug producing and drug processing areas, likewise some scholars discuss how the guerrillas used drug proceeds to fuel their territorial expansion throughout Colombia and conclude there is strong relationship between armed groups, coca cultivation and violence.¹²

Having turned out to be a timid success, as the drug cartels were disbanded but the drug trade kept unchanged, the 'drug war' strategy shifted to a counter-insurgency strategy seeing as the guerrillas breathed new life into drug income, weakening the Colombian state until the point to almost make it failed in so far as the government was unable to impose its authority over a vast territory of difficult geography where the outlawed groups exerted their own authority over the population.

In the meantime Washington insisted that they had little choice but to emphasize support for the Colombian military, given that FARC and other illegal armed groups were involved in the drug trade¹³ though it has been widely argued, the US antidrug policies have shaped the Colombian civil war by shifting the balance of power among the combatants,¹⁴ as it will be examined in this essay. In 1993 under President Clinton's administration, the US government was committed to support a new program focused on fumigation and forced eradication of coca crops, however as figures showed -Colombian coca production more than doubled between 1995 and 2000¹⁵ - the policy failed again.

¹¹ L. Mincheva and T. Gurr, *'Unholy Alliances? How Trans-state Terrorism and International Crime Make Common Cause'* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, Panel on Comparative Perspectives on States, Terrorism and Crime (San Diego, 24 March 2006)

¹² Camilo Echandía (1999) cited in J. Holmes, S. Gutiérrez and K. Curtin, *'Drugs, Violence and Development in Colombia'* (2006)

¹³ Rabasa and Chalk, *'Colombian Labyrinth'*, p. 67

¹⁴ M. Peceny and M. Durnan, 'The FARC's Best Friend: U.S. Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s', *Latin American Politics & Society* (Summer 2006), Vol. 48:2, p. 111

¹⁵ Steinitz, *'The Terrorism and Drug Connection in Latin America's Andean Region'*, p. 9

Then in 1999 the Clinton administration escalated the drug war expanding the US assistance to Colombia to \$317 million, turning Colombia into the leading recipient of US military and police assistance, replacing Turkey and even receiving by far more US military aid than the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean combined.¹⁶ In 2000 the Clinton administration launched the controversial Plan Colombia, ‘the biggest drug offensive ever undertaken in a single country’,¹⁷ a \$1.6 billion ‘emergency aid’ package for two years to eradicate coca in the southern Colombian provinces, geographically hard-to-reach areas near the Amazon. Since 2000, the US whereby Plan Colombia has trained and helped to equip the Colombian security forces at a cost of more than \$6 billion.¹⁸

The Plan was originally conceived in 1999 as a multilateral peace initiative of Colombian President Andres Pastrana, who was willing to establish peace talks with FARC. Initially the plan had solid social objectives whereas the military component was thought to underpin the first. Among the main objectives were economic recovery, a peace strategy with a view to achieving a negotiated peace settlement with the guerrillas, agricultural alternative development, social programs for health, education, alleviation of poverty, strengthening the armed forces and the police so that they could restore the rule of law and security throughout the country, and a counter-narcotics strategy¹⁹. Nevertheless the final version approved by the US congress in April 2002 contained solid military objectives whereas the social component was a mere façade of the real US interests. This strategy made Colombia the 3rd largest recipient of military aid in the world after Israel and Egypt²⁰ until the Afghanistan and Iraq era.

However after the 9/11 the strategy took a different course from a war against drugs to a war against terrorism, FARC was included in the world’s terrorist list and the Plan served to increase the military component and the presence of the US in Colombia, deepening US dependence in the country and isolating it from the rest of Latin America. The ‘Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State’ was replaced by a counter-insurgency scheme under the veil of an anti-narcotics battle.²¹ As a result the Plan Colombia has been highly criticized for its overreliance on military and as Daniel García-Peña observes, what

¹⁶ N. Chomsky, ‘The Colombia Plan: April 2000’, *Z Magazine* (June 2000)

¹⁷ Sharpe, ‘*Realpolitik or Imperial Hubris*’, p. 485

¹⁸ ‘Dealing with Drugs: On the trail of the traffickers’, *The Economist* (7th-13th March 2009), p. 29

¹⁹ Rabasa and Chalk, ‘*Colombian Labyrinth*’, pp. 61-62

²⁰ R. Kaplan, ‘*Supremacy by Stealth*’ (July/Aug. 2003)

²¹ D. García-Peña, ‘Good-bye Plan Colombia’, *El Espectador* (24 March 2009)

was sold as a multilateral plan to achieve peace ended up in an unilateral policy (from the US) to deepen the war.²²

Robert Kaplan in his essay ‘Supremacy by Stealth’ has compared the US politics in the Middle East and in Latin America, stating about the latter that ‘Colombia, still so remote from public consciousness, illustrates the imperial reality of America’s global situation’ by describing how the US has sponsored the war in Colombia from which started as a fight against narcotics to a civil war, now with the unconditional acquiescence of its strongest ally in the region, the hardliner, right-wing government of Colombia’s President Álvaro Uribe.

The Plan Colombia has survived from 1999 changing its name and passing through different administrations in both countries: Clinton-Pastrana, Bush-Uribe and now still under Obama’s administration in the middle of the biggest financial crises of the recent times, the military commitment still subsists, at the moment, under the agreement of five US military installations in Colombia to continue the same rhetoric under different tactics. The results after 10 years are questionable in so far the reduction in coca plantation has been feeble (figures from the UN office on drugs and crime UNODC recently revealed even an increase in coca plantation)²³ but the plan served to well fund a protracted war in Colombia.

Kenneth Sharpe describes the dynamic as a ‘war system’ where none of the actors have the power to win, but all of them find it in their interests to continue the war. He argues that one of the main reasons lays in the means and incentives provided by the US drug-war to keep up the fight: funds for the military and high profits created by prohibition which spur the drug trade and provide revenues for FARC and paramilitaries.

Therefore, the scope of this work is to show how the US anti-narcotics policy in Latin America has been a failure since after 40 decades and billions of dollars invested, it has not helped to curb production, trafficking and demand; but it has undermined the democracy and triggered conflict in countries where drugs are produced; the case of Colombia exemplifies

²² Ibid

²³ UNODC revealed evidence of a surge in the cultivation of coca crops in Colombia, the area under cultivation in 2007 expanded 27% respect to 2006, in figures it means that from an area of 78.000 hectares cultivated in 2006 there was a boost to 99.000 in 2007. Report ‘Colombia: Monitoreo y Censo de Cultivos de Coca’, UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, (June 2008)

this war system where the ‘war on drugs’ shifted to ‘war on terrorism’ under the framework of the US strategy.

A sound number of sources have been examined and analysed in the production of this work. Primary sources from the Colombian government regarding Plan Colombia such as official documents as well as those from the US government, US Department of State, and some of US government specialised agencies and military, (like the US General Accounting Office –GAO-, Drug Enforcement Administration –DEA- and the US Southern Command –SouthCom-) have been used; also UN documents regarding relevant figures of coca production, and a special report from the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy led by 3 ex-presidents of Colombia, Mexico and Brazil. A copious amount of secondary sources ranging from Colombian and US politicians, ex-guerrilla combatants reintegrated into the civil society, works of scholars and academics, and several reports of different organisations and NGOs involved in Latin American studies, US-Latin American relations, human rights, drug trafficking and democracy, have been compared and used overall the body of this work.

I. THE GENESIS

The scope of the drug trade has pervaded the sphere of security making drugs a 'prime topic of IR'.²⁴ Drugs smuggling has triggered interventionism, has undermined democracy and stability and chiefly has fuelled violent domestic conflicts; in Colombia, the armed conflict has become even more intractable 'since left-wing insurgents and right-wing paramilitaries began receiving revenues from the drug trade in the mid-1990s'.²⁵

Additionally, the expansion and penetration of the cocaine trade affects legal economic activities in both state and society. The real engine behind the cocaine traffic is the lucrative business it creates. As pointed out by Wisotsky, 'drug money, rather than drugs, is the root of the evil'.²⁶ Drug traffickers use those revenues to invest in the legal economy and thereby penetrate and manipulate national economies,²⁷ as well as to exert political influence expanding corruption and undermining state accountability and legitimacy. 'Moreover when drug entrepreneurs attack competitors or the state, they question a state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force'.²⁸

On the other hand, the cost of controlling drugs trade has become a substantial drain for the US and producer countries, the first has invested a vast amount of its budget in law enforcement, and the former have paid an enormous cost in economic, human and social resources and have faced the grievous consequences of following US prohibitionist policies based on repression of production and interdiction of traffic and distribution; that at the end have not compensated the cost effectiveness of law enforcement, have distanced the stated objective of a world free of drugs, have transformed into politics a public health problem, have greatly contributed to political instability, increased poverty, environmental degradation and insecurity in Latin America.

In a nutshell these policies have failed to recognize the complex social and economic nature of both illicit drug production and consumption, have tended to 'shift the pattern of

²⁴ C. Friesendorf, 'US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: Displacing the cocaine and heroin industry' (2007), p. 6

²⁵ Ibid, p.6

²⁶ S. Wisotsky, 'Beyond The War on Drugs : Overcoming a Failed Public Policy' (New York, 1990), p. xxxi

²⁷ S. Fukumi, 'Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America: EU and US Policy Responses' (2008), p. 78

²⁸ Friesendorf, 'US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs' p.7

players in the drug trade without significantly reducing the trade itself',²⁹ and have failed to realize the primary objective to reduce the availability of illicit drugs. Instead they have created a new wave of widespread and negative consequences: US policies have contributed to confuse military and law enforcement functions; have strengthened military forces at the expense of civilian authorities; have exacerbated human rights problems and generated significant social conflict; they have also led to the adoption of harsh antidrug campaigns and programmes that usually fail to incorporate mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. 'Even when drug policy officials have acknowledged the damage caused by current policies, they have dismissed it as an unintended consequence of a top-priority mission'.³⁰

Since the very creation of the independent states of Latin America, US representatives considered that there were not community of interests or of principles between north and South America, as President Monroe's Secretary of State John Quincy Adams wrote in his diary in 1820. However as it made little sense to suggest that the US shared no common interests with its neighbours, what John Quincy Adams's comment reflected was the belief that any relationship with Latin Americans would be difficult, because differing principles governed their behaviour.³¹ Yet the fear that non-hemispheric adversaries might use the newly independent Latin American territory as a base to attack the United States,³² inspired a doctrine based on national security to warn the Europeans that any territorial claim in the Americas would be considered as a threat to the peace and security of the United States, 'effectively making Latin America the proverbial US backyard'.³³ Since it was first announced to the Congress in 1823,³⁴ this seminal principle has shaped for nearly two centuries the US foreign policy towards Latin America. In the past, the US claimed to be practically sovereign in the American continent;³⁵ today indirectly it continues exerting hemispheric hegemony through security policies, an issue that has been 'a central element in overall US strategies of domination and relations with individual Latin American States'.³⁶

²⁹ C. A. Youngers and E. Rosin, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The impact of US Policy* (2005), p. 4

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 339-340

³¹ L. Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of US Policy Toward Latin America* (1998), p. 2

³² Ibid, p. 3

³³ J. Zuluaga, 'US Security Policies and United States-Colombia Relations', *Latin American Perspectives* (January 2007), Issue 152. Vol. 34:1, p. 113

³⁴ Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, p. 3

³⁵ Schoultz, p. 115

³⁶ Zuluaga, *US Security Policies*, p. 113

The US relation toward Latin America, is in consequence one of coercion and dominance in favour of US interest, rather than cooperation; moreover the US has also widely used its economic power to subdue its poorer Latin neighbours under the threat of a halt in economic assistance when one of them refuses to apply US policies in their own territory or dares to disagree with them. Given the strong dependency of the Latin American states on the US economic support, they have no other alternative than to agree and comply with the US mandates.

The annual drug certification has been another tool for Washington to impose its will at the expense of Latin America. The logic of this process is to deny economic aid and trade benefits to countries not viewed as doing their part to combat illicit drugs.³⁷ And once again, due to their dependence on economic aid and hope for trade agreements, many countries find themselves obliged to adopt even counterproductive policies and programmes supported (or rather dictated) by Washington.

Rereading the modern US national security policies in Latin America after the World War II, three phases can be highlighted: Cold War and counterinsurgency (1947-1990), counternarcotics (1990-2001), and the war on terror (since 2001).³⁸ The first phase marked the declaration of continental solidarity in defence of the so-called democratic values as opposed as the communist threat. Later when the insurgent revolution emerged in Cuba (1959) embracing socialism against the US interest, it 'altered the map of political conflict in the hemisphere and set off a new era of insurgency that was met with new forms of United States-sponsored intervention'.³⁹

But the era of insurgencies in Central America came to an end in the early 90s, thereafter, the war on drugs gradually came to dominate the sphere of US-Latin America relations. As Loveman has observed, in the practice, either on the ground (and also in the air and the oceans) as in the US Congress, the war on drugs has over determined and subverted bilateral and regional policy from Mexico to the Southern Cone.⁴⁰

³⁷ WOLA, Drug War Monitor, '*Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy*' (November 2004), p. 3

³⁸ Zuluaga, '*US Security Policies*', p. 113

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 114

⁴⁰ B. Loveman, '*Addicted to Failure: US Security Policy in Latin America and the Andean region*' (2006), p. xv

The end of the Cold War seen as the collapse of the socialist bloc, however, left the US without its top adversary causing a change in the centre of gravity that for long time was the communist threat. Having the Soviet Union disappeared, Washington quickly identified a new set of threats, redefining its external agenda to give now primary importance to drug trafficking and moved to increase its hegemony over Latin America. The new agenda for Latin America, was reoriented toward antinarcotics campaigns and the strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights as the means to secure United States interests.⁴¹ The old promise of supporting democracy, human rights, socio-economic development and political instability in Latin America, was made again, however 20 years after, the democracy in the sub-region remains fragile; likewise, economic and social conditions for millions of Latin Americans had not improved.⁴²

Having elevated the drug trafficking to the level of national threat, the US focused primarily on ‘the external enemy (the supply of cocaine) rather than the internal problem (the demand for cocaine)’⁴³ fact that has been the centrepiece to explain the failure of US anti drugs fight in Latin America. This way, the US government chose the capitalist approach under the rational belief that wiping out drugs at their source would decrease its availability in the US streets; thus, reducing supply would cause an increase in the price market discouraging consumers from purchase. Nevertheless, flawless Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ has proven wrong for drug trade, as official US figures have shown, according to WOLA, cocaine’s retail price dropped fairly steadily during the 1980s and early 1990s. The price never rebounded, even as purity rose and then stabilized. These low and stable prices for cocaine that prevailed over the 90s show that, despite US efforts, the supply of drugs continues to be robust.⁴⁴ The same report draws attention for policymakers to recognize the fact that while controlling illicit drug abuse is a legitimate and important goal, drugs will be produced as long as there is demand for them; following this logic, the goal should be to reduce both demand and the damage that illicit drugs cause to individuals and society.⁴⁵

Accordingly, in another academic study, Latin Americanist Laura Huggins summarizes the viewpoint of many in the United States, indicating that apart from the fact

⁴¹ Zuluaga, ‘*US Security Policies*’, p. 115

⁴² Loveman, ‘*Addicted to Failure*’, pp. xii-xiii

⁴³ Fukumi, ‘*Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America*’, p. 138

⁴⁴ WOLA ‘*Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*’, p. 5

⁴⁵ Ibid

that the US drug policy has extremely undermined foreign countries leading thousands of deaths and enormous losses of wealth in countries like Colombia, Peru and Mexico and has undermined at the same time the stability of their governments; this outrageous situation is mainly the outcome of the lack of capability of the US to enforce its laws at home. In supporting the demand-side control opinion, Huggins argues that if the US were able to do so, there would be no market for imported drugs.

There would be no Cali cartel. The foreign countries would not have to suffer the loss of sovereignty involved in letting our ‘advisers’ and troops operate on their soil, search their vessels, and encourage local militaries to shoot down their planes. They could run their own affairs, and we, in turn, could avoid the diversion of military forces from their proper function.⁴⁶

Other scholars such as Friesendorf are more categorical in giving out the bulk of the responsibility to the US, by asserting that its drug policies have worsened the drug-related problems, for Friesendorf, ‘the fact that we are living in a world of drugs is partially a consequence of coercive US drug policies’.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding this reality, the US chose the controlling-supply emphasis since the mid-80s comprised in the ‘Andean Strategy’, a policy that additionally enabled the US to militarise the drug control. ‘It was the Reagan and Bush administrations in the 1980s that shaped a policy toward the Andes that became known as the ‘war on drugs’⁴⁸, this policy was set in motion since the 70s but it was until the Reagan administration, when the supply emphasis was established. This strategy aimed on three components: drug-crop eradication, interdiction of drug trafficking routes, and alternative development (AD),⁴⁹ however the largest part of the resources was concentrated in the first two components.

As described by Carpenter, the overall goal was to encourage, persuade, bribe, or coerce foreign governments into joining the US-led war on drugs,⁵⁰ however what Washington found out was rather indifference or perfunctory agreement with its position from foreign governments especially those from Latin America. Moreover US officials usually had to struggle to ‘overcome a pervasive assumption on the part of governments in

⁴⁶ L. Huggins, ‘*Drug War Deadlock: The Policy Battle Continues*’ (2005), pp. 79-80

⁴⁷ Friesendorf, ‘*US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs*’, p. 166

⁴⁸ Fukumi, ‘*Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America*’, p. 139

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ T. Carpenter, ‘*Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington’s Futile War on Drugs in Latin America*’ (2003), p. 21

the drug-source and drug-transiting countries that illegal drugs were a US problem'⁵¹ since in that moment the mainstream attitude in Latin America was to see the drug consumption as an American problem, that had 'its roots in the Vietnam War and the rebellion of American youth against the establishment'; that way, as seen from the perspective of most of Latin Americans, the drug problem 'if there was one, had to be dealt with on the demand side'.⁵² However, while most leaders tended to respond to Washington's demands with little interest, some were adamantly hostile, as in the case of Bolivia where the coca farming (different of cocaine trade) was a cultural tradition. The Bolivian perspective was that the US should invest in alternative development schemes instead of the militarization of the counternarcotics efforts. As epitomized by Gustavo Sanchez, Bolivian Undersecretary of the Interior, he and his countrymen 'were being asked to put their lives in danger merely to prevent drugs from entering the US'.⁵³ Likewise, a high-level Panamanian officer indicated 'if there weren't the frightening demand in the States, we wouldn't even have to worry about trying to eliminate the supply'.⁵⁴

Further, Carpenter points out that among the several reasons for the resistance to Reagan administration's demands particularly at the time, most drug-producing nations did not have serious internal drug abuse issues, therefore the obstinate US war on drugs over Latin America was perceived by the leaders as if 'they were being asked to assume onerous law-enforcement burdens merely to alleviate a social problem in the rich and spoiled United States'.⁵⁵

Subsequently, the Bush administration adopted an even more vigorous supply-side war policy, escalating the investment in budget, and also allowing a greater militarisation of foreign narcotics operations. The idea of giving the military greater power in countries with grievous history of dictatorial regimes, authoritarianism and coups d'état from Mexico to the South Cone, contradicted the aim of reinforcing democracy in the region and jeopardized civil rights. In a region with those precedents, when military subordinates civilian authorities, there's more probability to abuse power, contravene human rights, erode already fragile

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 22

⁵² F. Thoumi, '*Political economy and illegal drugs in Colombia*' (1995), p. 205

⁵³ Carpenter, '*Bad Neighbor Policy*' p. 22

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 23

legislative and judicial institutions (spreading corruption), violate the due process; and in summary impair civilian control over the armed forces.

Notwithstanding the harm, the militarisation of the war on drugs over Latin America was bound to happen as it was necessary for the US interests. It was confirmed when in 1989 George H. W. Bush declared that ‘states fighting against drugs may be provided with military aid if request it’⁵⁶ In consequence the Bush administration gave the Department of Defence (DoD) ‘prime responsibility for monitoring and detecting the transportation of illicit drugs in the hemisphere’.⁵⁷

DOD is the lead federal agency for detecting and monitoring maritime and aerial shipments of illegal drugs and provides assistance and training to foreign governments to combat drug-trafficking activities. DOD’s counterdrug activities are integrated with the international activities of other US agencies such as the Customs Service, the Coast Guard, and the Drug Enforcement Administration and with foreign governments.⁵⁸

And subsequently launched the ‘Andean Initiative’, a strategy that was centred in Bush’s determination to militarize the drug war’s supply-side campaign, but despite the administration insisted that there were no plans to use American forces in a combat capacity, the facts contradicted the theory; as shown by Hoffman, the emergency aid package conceded to Colombia in 1989 had limited relevance to the drug war: eight Huey Helicopters to be used for troops and equipment transportation, machine guns, antitank weapons and grenade launchers were provided as well as US\$8.5 million for fixed wing aircraft.⁵⁹ Similar concerns were raised by the US General Accounting Office –GAO- to the Congress regarding the funding escalation to the war on drugs while effectiveness remained unknown:

DOD’S designation as a major drug war participant in fiscal year 1989 was prompted by the national cocaine crisis and the threat it posed to US security. However, passage of the legislation giving DOD the key detection and monitoring role was preceded by congressional hearings that raised questions and concerns about the feasibility of employing the military in what is

⁵⁶ Fukumi, ‘*Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America*’, p. 145

⁵⁷ TNI, ‘Forward Operation Locations in Latin America: Transcending Drug Control’, *Transnational Institute* (September 2003), p. 4

⁵⁸ GAO, ‘*Assets DOD Contributes to Reducing the Illegal Drug Supply Have Declined*’ US General Accounting Office (Washington, December 1999), p. 3

⁵⁹ D. Hoffman cited in Carpenter, ‘*Bad Neighbor Policy*’, p. 40

essentially a law enforcement mission. Questions and concerns have persisted over the years (...) some congressional members, defence officials, and other witnesses have raised questions and expressed concerns about such issues as (1) the cost-effectiveness of sophisticated military weapon systems designed for combat missions being used to detect and monitor a low-technology enemy (2) the lack of a way to gauge DOD'S effectiveness, (3) the quality of military training that could be obtained from counterdrug operations, and (4) the adverse impact the mission could have on military preparedness and other military operations.⁶⁰

Moreover Bush's administration stressed as well that 'requests from the host countries were a pre-requisite for the introduction of US military personnel' although according to Carpenter, Washington intended to exert the maximum pressure on the drug-source governments for them to 'request' US military assistance.⁶¹ This strategy served for US officials to encourage Latin American armies to 'fight drugs by taking on internal roles that would be unthinkable for the US military at home';⁶² in 1990 though, leaders of the three Andean countries pleaded for more economic assistance instead of such a level of military aid, they called for 'greater access to US markets in order to provide economic alternatives'.⁶³

The military presence of the US in Latin America has increased and diversified since then, in its National Drug Control Strategy for 1998-2007, the US congress delegated to the DoD, particularly the Southern Command (SouthCom), 'operations related to the detection and monitoring of the transportation of illicit drugs in 'transit zones' and programmes aimed at interrupting the production and shipment of drugs in source zones',⁶⁴ the US has established also military installations and bases in different strategic areas and deployed large numbers of troops for training purposes, joint operations, and intelligence under the umbrella of the anti-drugs campaign; private contractors have also helped to complete the quota of US presence in the region. However as pointed by a TNI report, serious concerns were raised that the bases may be used for more far reaching US foreign policy goals as the distinction between counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics operations became progressively more blurred in Washington.

⁶⁰ GAO, *'Heavy Investment in Military Surveillance Not Paying Off'*, US General Accounting Office (Washington, September 1993)

⁶¹ Carpenter, *'Bad Neighbor Policy'*, p. 39

⁶² A. Isacson in Youngers and Rosin (Eds.) *'Drugs and Democracy in Latin America'*, p. 23

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 24

⁶⁴ TNI, *'Forward Operation Locations in Latin America'*, p. 4

The position on the US drug control policy, nonetheless, changed when Bill Clinton became president of the US in 1993, the administration intended a shift of emphasis in the drug-control strategy from supply reduction to demand reduction, reflecting a shift of emphasis from international to domestic programmes, it contemplated ‘instituting a controlled shift in emphasis from the present stress on interdiction in the transit zones to one that gives a high priority to programs in the source countries’.⁶⁵ The decision of downgrading the role of the military in interdiction activities drew support from a GAO report on drug control which noted that ‘the government's investment in military drug detection and monitoring, when assessed against the success rates of the interdiction activities and the goal of reducing the supply of such drugs, does not appear to be providing a reasonable return’⁶⁶. Moreover, GAO stressed that the very objective for which DoD was brought into the drug war was to reduce the drug flow into the US, an objective that remained intangible, reason enough to envision modification and reallocation of resources.

In September 1992, Office of National Drug Control Policy told the Joint Staff that: the Federal government is spending billions of dollars to detect, monitor, and apprehend suspected drug traffickers (...) and from a cost/benefit analysis perspective, the detection, monitoring, and interdiction system should have tangible goals (...) that would not only measure the effectiveness of these programs, but would also provide an indicator of their impact on the flow of drugs to the United States.

(...) In September 1991, we reported that although DoD had made a strong commitment to its mission and had expanded the nation’s surveillance capabilities, its impact on supply reduction goals had been negligible. Two years later, that situation remains unchanged. Despite the government’s sizable investment in military surveillance, the estimated cocaine flow into the United States has not appreciably declined since DoD became the lead agency for detection and monitoring. And, as we reported in February 1993, high-purity cocaine remains affordable and plentiful in US communities.⁶⁷

However, few years after the launch of those results, the Clinton administration was compelled to adjust its strategy in order to go back to the supply-reduction control, therefore the Clinton administration was pressured to prioritise eradication and activate an appalling certification process to coerce the host governments to greatly contribute with the drug-

⁶⁵ R. Perl, ‘Clinton's Foreign Drug Policy’, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* (Winter, 1993-1994), Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 146

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 147

⁶⁷ GAO, ‘Investment in Military Surveillance Not Paying Off’, pp. 16-17

enforcement's operations. 'The US war on drugs could not end or change direction easily because there are lots of related interests involved. The reduction of the supply of military equipment provided to Latin American states, such as helicopters, is a serious issue to the US military industry'.⁶⁸ In addition there are large numbers of personnel involved in drug control and the law enforcement, making reference not only to the US agencies involved but also the US private contractors, such as DynCorp Aerospace Technology.

With those manoeuvre shifts, Clinton's administration decided to support Colombia's drug control programme, Plan Colombia. On 13 July 2000 President Clinton signed into law a bill that provided \$1.3 billion for military aid in order to support anti-narcotics efforts in Colombia and the Andean region. Most of this money was designated for military assistance and equipment in Colombia.⁶⁹

Colombia is at a decisive point in their fight (...) consequently, we must maintain our steady, patient support in order to reinforce the successes we have seen and to guarantee a tangible return on the significant investment our country has made to our democratic neighbor. (...) No meaningful distinction can be made between the terrorists and drug traffickers in our region.⁷⁰

If I may make an off-the-cuff comment referencing the effect of drugs on the United States (...) we at US Southern Command view drugs and its movement into the United States as a weapon of mass destruction, and we treat it accordingly.⁷¹

Until today, Colombia completes almost 50 years of a conflict between the guerrillas and the State, represented by around 13 governments ever since. Though many countries in Latin America have suffered the violence of communist insurgency inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution; the communist insurgency in Colombia is older than the Castro takeover. Its genesis dates from the late 40s strife between the two traditional ruling parties in the power, of which most notorious confrontations was the period known as 'The Violence' (1948-58). Yet at the end of this era though, many communist groups emerged. The military took over the power from 1953 to 1958 and by the end this period a provisional coalition was

⁶⁸ Fukumi, 'Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America', p. 141

⁶⁹ M. Falco, 'U.S. Interests and Objectives in Colombia: A Commentary', *Report of the Working Group on Colombia Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations* (2000), p. 3

⁷⁰ Written statement of Brigadier General Benjamin Mixon, United States Army Director of Operations, *United States Southern Command*, before the 108th Congress Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities (2 April 2004)

⁷¹ Brigadier General Benjamin Mixon, testimony before Congress (April 2004)

instituted, the National Front (1958-74) a dual party system that on one hand ended the confrontation between the two traditional parties, whereas they alternatively were shifting the power denying participation to other positions, but on the other hand gave rise to the armed conflict between the communist groups and the coalition government. This limited third party participation in addition to an unbalanced distribution of power led to internal dissent due to the lack of democracy of the National Front scheme. The FARC-EP (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces – People’s Army) was formed in 1964 amid this turmoil in opposition to the National Front as a response to the official violence and militarist aggression on the part of the government. It won the support of many peasant farmers by introducing agrarian reform programs and also attracted the masses introducing social programs. As the guerrilla groups expanded in the number of fighters and moved into areas that were unsympathetic or indifferent to their ideology, they turned to bribery and extortion as their primary sources of funds. In the 70s kidnapping became a systematic and widespread activity, however in this period, another factor began to affect Colombian society as a generator of corruption and violence; the drugs. After the end of the cartels, the guerrilla groups became directly involved in the drug business and what had started out as a means to an end (funding) increasingly became an end in itself. The guerrilla become in effect one of the largest crime-for profit organization the world has known abandoning their ideological aims.⁷²

FARC embodies the link between narcotics and conflict described by Cornell regarding the dynamics whereby narcotics and conflict interact: increasing drug production in situations of war creates an economic function of violence for actors and hence incentives for the continuation of armed conflict;⁷³ however, as he highlights, this case fits the theory in which the presence of narcotics is linked to the duration of the conflict, but surprisingly not to the initiation of the conflict. Equally, FARC has conveniently used illegal drug-trade to fuel its criminal activities and prolong the conflict to a point that they are not interested in supporting a peace solution when they run a highly successful drug business; nevertheless, illegal drug-trade was not the motivation of its foundation. To this respect, Rosenthal adds that the success of so-called ‘terrorist’ FARC, the loss of ideological efficacy and the inadvertent aid of the government turned FARC into a group more involved and motivated by

⁷² M. Posada, ‘Colombia: Forty Years of communist insurgency’ in L. Villamarín, *‘In Hell: Guerrillas that devour their own’* (2003), pp. 7-12

⁷³ S. Cornell, ‘The Interaction of Narcotics and Conflict’, *Journal of Peace Research* (2005), Vol. 42:6, pp. 751, 753

continued financial gain than ideological revolution, no matter their original aims, reality reflects the overwhelming drive to sustain and even expand its profit base.⁷⁴ Moreover, Kaplan points out that in Colombia both left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries, have downplayed ideology in favour of franchises built on terrorism, narcotrafficking, kidnapping, counterfeiting, and other criminal activities' revenues. According to him, FARC is 'Karl Marx at the top and Adam Smith all the way down the command chain'. He stresses that the Colombian rebels take in hundreds of millions of dollars annually from cocaine-related profits alone; and even complements this viewpoint by referring to FARC's cooperation networks as a factor to increase their expertise: [FARC] 'have documented links to the Irish Republican Army and the Basque separatists (who have apparently advised them on kidnapping and car-bomb tactics)'.⁷⁵ Finally Kaplan warns that 'if left unmolested, they will likely establish strategic links with al Qaeda'.⁷⁶ This evidence supports Rosenthal's thesis that cooperation between terrorists increases the possibilities of 'training-for-profit' and 'collusion-for-funding' at a transcontinental level.⁷⁷

An examination of FARC's financial balance sheet reveals why it is said to be the world's richest insurgent (and now 'terrorist') group. According to figures obtained in 2005, more than 90% of FARCS's revenues come from the drug trade, extortion and kidnapping. The first leaves them earnings for approximately \$600 million annually from which they spend around \$110 million in manufacturing cocaine.⁷⁸ Although FARC is not clearly considered as a drug cartel, the guerrilla group has managed to establish a tax system covering every phase of the industry 'in an archetypical case of symbiosis between the insurgents and the regional economy'.⁷⁹ Supplies have to go through control posts, and there are fixed taxes for each ton or gallon of cement, gasoline, sulphuric acid, and other raw materials. Cultivators of coca who have more than four hectares of land pay according to the extension of their crops, whereas processors pay according to the weight of the coca paste or cocaine⁸⁰ a tax known as 'gramaje' (because the fees are assessed on grams of the product).

⁷⁴ J. Rosenthal, 'For-Profit Terrorism: The Rise of Armed Entrepreneurs', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2008), Vol. 31, p. 492

⁷⁵ Kaplan, 'Supremacy by Stealth'

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Rosenthal, 'For-Profit Terrorism' p. 490

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 485

⁷⁹ G. Waalen Borch, 'The Organisational Resources and Internal Legitimacy of the FARC-EP in Colombia', *Centre for Peace Studies University of Tromsø* (Norway, 2007), p. 47

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 48

Until 1985 through 1990, the guerrilla did not pose a real threat to the establishment. While it did generate a ‘chronic perturbation of the established order,’ its capability until that time was minimal. This changed with the emergence of the drug factor.⁸¹

As kidnapping and extortion became another biggest source of funding, yet another insurgent group emerged as consequence of this FARC’s activities, the paramilitaries, who were usually referred as ‘the armed wing of the middle classes’,⁸² being the latter victims of this kind of FARC’s aggressions. Before long, however, they developed close, unacknowledged ties to Colombia's military. Today, paramilitaries are said as the biggest violators of human rights in Colombia

The paramilitaries are ultra right-wing cells who arose basically to defend the interests of rich landowners and politicians who were kidnapped and extorted by the guerrillas.

In 1964, the Colombian Government passed a civil defence law that permitted the Colombian military to organize and provide arms to groups of civilians called self-defence units, so that they could defend themselves against illegal armed groups operating in rural areas. Based on this law, modern self-defence groups emerged in Colombia during the 1980s in response to insurgent violence. By mid-1989, the Government outlawed those civilian self-defence groups after it was revealed that some of these private militias, although ostensibly established to protect Colombian citizens, had evolved into little more than right-wing death squads. Again in 1994, the Government reinstated the concept of rural self-defence groups by creating over 900 legal ‘security cooperatives’ (known as Convivir) that were authorized to protect their rural communities from insurgent attacks. Those Convivir also passed information on to the Colombian military regarding insurgent activities. They were forbidden again by law to engage in offensive operations against guerrillas. By 1998, the Government ended the program and began dismantling most of them. Some did not disband and remained active as illegal self-defence groups. Today, hundreds of illegal self-defence groups financed by wealthy cattle ranchers, emerald miners, coffee plantation owners, drug traffickers, etc., conduct paramilitary operations throughout Colombia.⁸³

⁸¹ Bejarano cited in L. Garcés ‘Colombia: The Link Between Drugs and Terror’, *Journal of Drug Issues, Florida State University*, vol. 35 No. 1, Winter 2005

⁸² P. Canby, ‘Latin America’s Longest War’, *The Nation* (29 July 2004)

⁸³ DEA, Intelligence Division, ‘*The Drug Trade in Colombia: A Threat Assessment*’ (March 2002)

In 1997 most of those cells joined together into the so-called United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia AUC and as same as FARC they became a powerful organization once they joined the lucrative illegal drug trade.⁸⁴ It has been argued that while FARC remains as an insurgent organization that engages in criminal activity to advance its political agenda, AUC represents a fusion of paramilitary and criminal organizations, which makes it difficult to discern the precise combination of criminal greed and political agenda that drives the group,⁸⁵ nonetheless, not only both FARC and AUC have become deeply involved in the drug business, they have also turned into the largest human rights transgressors in the country and this symbiosis between political violence and drug-trafficking is a critical factor in explaining the length and strengthening of the Colombian conflict.

It is important to note how the US government has been indirectly involved in every step of conflict's intensification through its antidrug policies, first in the 80s when it helped to cut down the cultivation in Peru and Bolivia and therefore to close down the routes for smuggling the raw materials for cocaine production transferring both, cultivation and production to Colombia where new crops started to be cultivated so as to replace the production that was before in hands of the neighbouring Andean countries. This way the successful US policy of eradication in one area contributed to the restructuring in another, and as the traditional routes were closed, new ones were opened once the structure was relocated. The ensuing consequence was an increase of cultivation in Colombia during the 90s precisely in those areas dominated by guerrillas giving them a new form to expand the resources they could extract from cocaine industry twofold, first when guerrillas found out they could obtain money by taxing the drug barons, and secondly taking part in the business directly, process that was underpinned once the cartels disappeared in Colombia, -a US short-term tactical success- the destruction of the cartels, furthermore, 'contributed to the shift of coca cultivation from Peru to Colombia, because the decentralized criminal networks found it easier to gather their raw materials from local producers'⁸⁶. This 'balloon effect' therefore means that while U.S. antidrug policies are unlikely to reduce the amount of drugs that enter the U.S. market over the long term, they can have a huge impact on the distribution of profits from the drug trade.⁸⁷ Accordingly, Youngers and Rosin support this thesis, asserting that

⁸⁴ M. Arce and L. Reales, 'Violencia Política, Asistencia Militar de Estados Unidos y Producción de Coca en los Andes Centrales', *Revista de Ciencia Política* (Santiago de Chile, 2006), Vol. 26:1, p. 35

⁸⁵ Canby, 'Latin America's Longest War'

⁸⁶ Peceny and Durnan, 'The FARC's Best Friend', p. 101

⁸⁷ Ibid

when coca production is suppressed in one area, it quickly pops up somewhere else disregarding national borders. Similarly, arrested drug lords are hastily replaced by others who move up the ranks, dismantled cartels re-emerge in smaller organisations harder to detect and deter, and when drug trafficking routes are interdicted they simply shift elsewhere.⁸⁸

The big question is why the US continues pursuing in Latin America policies that have proven failed from past decades as if the US policy makers were unable to learn the lesson? The ill-conceived and badly executed drug war is one reason for the failure of US policies: aerial fumigation of coca crops, interdiction, and increased military and police assistance (which comprised over 80% of Plan Colombia package).⁸⁹

It will not be asserted that Washington's unprecedented anti-drug efforts alone caused the displacement of the drugs industry from Bolivia and Peru to Colombia, it responds to several reasons; although displacement was also enabled, among others, by the lack of response of the Colombian government to insurgency and the simultaneous strengthening of rebel groups, the lack of funding, and corruption, US policies however have been a major factor behind this phenomenon.

From the late 1980s to 2001 US anti-drug initiatives were concentrated in the interdiction of drug trafficking using aerial space. The initiative was envisioned to reduce the illegal drugs traffic in South America usually moved by aircraft in and out of Colombia, what was referred to as the 'air bridge', therefore 'the United States began operating a program in the 1990s called Air Bridge Denial (ABD) in Colombia and Peru. The ABD program identified aircraft suspected of drug trafficking and forced them to land, using lethal force if necessary'⁹⁰. ABD's objective was 'to help Colombia stop the trafficking of illegal drugs - primarily cocaine- in its airspace by forcing suspicious aircraft to land safely so that law enforcement authorities can take control of the aircraft, arrest suspects, and seize drugs'⁹¹ As a result of this programme dozens of airplanes flying between Bolivia, Peru and Colombia were interdicted, but on the other hand coca cultivation 'surged in Colombia and declined in

⁸⁸ Youngers and Rosin, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*, p. 6

⁸⁹ Loveman, *Addicted to Failure*, p. xviii

⁹⁰ GAO, *Air Bridge Denial Program in Colombia has Implemented New Safeguards, but Its Effect on Drug Trafficking is not Clear* (Washington, September 2005)

⁹¹ Ibid

Peru, cocaine production increased in Peru and Bolivia, and trafficking routes and methods became more diverse'⁹². According to Friesendorf, by the time the programme was suspended in 2001, the structure of the drug industry in the region was much more intricate than before the programme⁹³. In this case a selective application of US policies enabled the displacement by the means of pressure, however the traffickers quickly found a way to minimize the impact of this strategy by diversifying the traffic routes and using sophisticated technology in order to avoid to be identified by the US radars.

The success of the programme was feeble it did not alleviate the US drug problems in one hand and in the other, the stated objective of the programme 'for the Colombian National Police to take control of suspicious aircraft' rarely happened.⁹⁴ It has been argued that although the displacement from Peru to Colombia of coca cultivation, the diversification of traffic routes and the verticalization of the Peruvian and Bolivian drug industries happened as the outcome of an assortment of causes, the US-sponsored interdiction was one of them. As Friesendorf adds, it is likely that this product might had happened even in the absence of the US air interdiction, however 'displacement would have been slower and would have occurred along different geographical lines'.⁹⁵

The other controversial US policy that accounted for the military component was the aerial spraying or fumigation, which coupled with manual eradication are part of the law enforcement project. Observes criticized this policy, which intended to destroy as much coca crops as quickly as possible by using unprecedented levels of destructive herbicides. While manual eradication is not a feasible option because it requires large numbers of labour dedicated in long shifts, it is dangerous as the peasants and the police contingent that escorts them are usually targeted by guerrillas or drug traffickers, on the other hand, as the eradication is forced, people compelled to carry it out is usually hostile with the authorities, therefore it generates social unrest; a study of WOLA underscores that 'when poverty is the root cause of production, repressive eradication measures are inappropriate and counterproductive'⁹⁶ as more violence is the product as a consequence of the constrain. In contrast, eradication by aerial spraying is the most effective means for the governments to

⁹² Friesendorf, *'US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs'*, p. 167

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ GAO, *'Air Bridge Denial Program in Colombia'*

⁹⁵ Friesendorf, *'US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs'*, p. 168

⁹⁶ WOLA, *'Drugs and Democracy in Latin America'*, p. 12

eliminate large numbers of coca fields with the minimum danger to personnel. The US has enabled since the 80s (when the primary target was marihuana) the Andean states with equipment and chemicals to operate aerial spraying in their territories.⁹⁷ The chemical sprayed consisted in a mixture whose active ingredient is glyphosate, ‘a non-selective systemic herbicide that kills most of plants and trees if a sufficient dose is applied (...) the mixture applied in Colombia consists of a glyphosate formulation, water, and a surfactant, Cosmo-Flux411F, which increase the effectiveness of the herbicide’.⁹⁸ This way, fumigation seen in the big picture, would be translated as a ‘chemical warfare operation’⁹⁹ as it does destroy illegal as well as legal crops, livestock, and creates intern displacement of the affected farmers from their devastated lands. Additionally, in the Plan Colombia framework this happened to be a very expensive operation due to the equipment required and the maintenance costs to keep it operational, another disadvantage for the overall effectiveness of the policy.

Fumigation, though, caused a serious collateral damage in Colombia at the same time that its ineffectiveness was proved, as the production was displaced from one area to others following the balloon effect logic creating ever bigger challenges for control in the future, moreover it failed to convert peasant farmers from coca cultivation to legal crops. Even worse, it destroyed the livelihoods of hundreds of peasant farmers as well as the environment. As a matter of fact, those areas targeted by this scheme, where the largest concentrations of coca exist are provinces with high indexes of poverty, this way the policy undercuts the welfare of Colombia’s most vulnerable population, situation that gravely contravenes the National Constitution. At this respect, Vargas Meza points out that a wide range of rights and principles are being eroded and breached with this policy of eradication, by the laws that certainly claim to protect them:

Al colocar como prioritaria la guerra antidrogas y dentro de ella el cumplimiento de las tareas de erradicación, se socavan los derechos civiles, económicos, ambientales y los procedimientos legales, de este modo los principios que se dicen defender en nombre de la lucha antinarcóticos (la democracia, la ética social, la soberanía, el cumplimiento de la ley, entre otros)

⁹⁷ Fukumi, ‘*Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America*’, pp. 151-152

⁹⁸ Ramírez Lemus, Stanton and Walsh in Youngers and Rosin, ‘*Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*’, p. 113

⁹⁹ Noam Chomsky in D. Stokes, ‘*America’s Other War: Terrorizing Colombia*’ (2005), p. xii

son precisamente los que más se están afectando en la aplicación de la actual política antidrogas.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, Colombia as well as the other Andean states accepted US-led eradication policy because of their strong dependency on the US¹⁰¹ and inability to preserve their sovereignty and own interests over the US'. On the other hand the policy was thought to be offset with alternative development, in order to 'generate legal employment alternatives, alleviate poverty, and spur investment and economic growth. Such efforts (...) entail creating other employment opportunities, such as those provided by various types of agro-industry. Complementary measures may include improving infrastructure, providing social services, strengthening local governments, offering access to credit, and giving marketing and distribution assistance',¹⁰² however as pointed out by Ramírez Lemus, Stanton and Welsh, the AD was too little and too late.¹⁰³

In the practice not only the funds were not enough to cover the goals, but also the allowance available was not paid out on time, and above all the efforts to substitute coca crops for licit ones were too dim; 'between 2001 and 2003, nearly 340.000 hectares of coca were sprayed, but the US Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the cultivation of fewer than 39.000 hectares of legal crops',¹⁰⁴ *too little!* Additionally the same GAO report also highlights the deficiency of the AD policy: 'USAID alternative development project activities have been limited to date, and the pace is not expected to quicken significantly until 2002',¹⁰⁵ *too late!* Additionally, the US boldly insisted in interdiction and fumigation to be the pillars of the policy, while fumigation itself destroys what is intended to build with the AD policies. GAO in its report recommended that in order to promote and sustain coca cultivation reductions 'the host government must have a strong commitment to carry out effective interdiction and eradication policies'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the US State Department even suggested the inconsistent idea that AD should come after the eradication, but what those respectable policymakers did not take into account was that in the interval

¹⁰⁰ R. Vargas Meza, *Fumigación y Conflicto: Políticas Antidrogas y Deslegitimación del Estado en Colombia* (1999), p. 211

¹⁰¹ Fukumi, *Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America*, p. 153

¹⁰² GAO, *Efforts to Develop Alternatives to Cultivating Illicit Crops in Colombia Have Made Little Progress and Face Serious Obstacles* (Washington, February 2002), p. 1

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 116

¹⁰⁴ Ramírez L., Stanton and Walsh in Youngers and Rosin, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*, p. 117

¹⁰⁵ GAO, *Efforts to Develop Alternatives to Cultivating Illicit Crops in Colombia*, p. 10

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 16

between eradication of coca crops and its replacement by AD crops, the peasant farmers were left with no possible livelihood.

State said that it believes it is appropriate and constructive for the spraying of illicit coca to be conducted before alternative development programs are initiated in an area and suggested (...) that aerial eradication and alternative development should not be conducted in the same location.¹⁰⁷

Youngers and Rosin indicate at this respect the impracticality of a policy like aerial spraying to be compensated with AD, 'the repressive nature of the former greatly limits, or hinders altogether, the cooperation needed for the latter'.¹⁰⁸ The adverse application of both and the failure to meet the goals for AD has left many Colombian farmers sceptical about the intentions of the Government to protect them and provide them real alternatives for living.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 17

¹⁰⁸ WOLA, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*, p. 12

II. THE PLAN COLOMBIA ERA

By 1999, according to a GAO report, the United States has had limited success in achieving its primary objective of reducing the flow of illegal drugs from Colombia. Despite 2 years of extensive herbicide spraying, US estimates showed there had not been any net reduction in coca cultivation; net coca cultivation actually increased 50%.¹⁰⁹

These meagre results pushed to modify the direction of the US anti-drug policy to counter-insurgency focused in Colombia as the centre of gravity. Plan Colombia marked the tipping point of the change. With an extremely military inclination, it has been considered for many experts as a project conceived by the US 'to clean up its backyard'.¹¹⁰ Was envisioned as a peace initiative during Colombia's Pastrana President administration (1998-2002) but a failure during the intended peace talks forced Pastrana to change the course of the plan and accept new clauses.

As its predecessors since 1982 Pastrana attempted to open dialogues with FARC, in this enterprise he consented to demilitarize 42.139 square kilometres in southern Colombia demanded by FARC as a condition for negotiations, however FARC's top representative failed to show up for negotiation sessions and escalated the violence, causing a break up in the peace talks. Pastrana was pushed by the army, who was opposed to the demilitarization,¹¹¹ the generals were opposed to serious negotiations from the very beginning and did everything they could to undermine them,¹¹² this combined with strong US opposition to the negotiations who demanded more results as the situation had reach stalemate, the US government argued that Colombia's President Andres Pastrana was caving in to the FARC. In this view, Pastrana was acting more like a mediator between the FARC and the Armed Forces than as a head of state.¹¹³ In February 1999 FARC kidnapped and subsequently assassinated three US NGO activists, providing enough justification for the Republican-led Congress to abort any initiatives coming from the peace camp of the Clinton Administration. 'US policy was once again on a collision course with the Colombian

¹⁰⁹ GAO, 'Narcotics Threat From Colombia Continues to Grow', (Washington, June 1999), p. 2

¹¹⁰ M. Arce, 'Violencia Política', p. 26; also in N. Chomsky, 'The Colombia Plan'

¹¹¹ R. Vargas, 'Drogas, conflicto armado y seguridad global en Colombia', Nueva Sociedad No. 192

¹¹² Sharpe, 'Realpolitik or Imperial Hubris' p. 492

¹¹³ N. Richani, 'The Politics of Negotiating Peace In Colombia', *NACLA Report on the Americas* (May-June 2005), Vol. 38:6, p. 18

insurgents and Pastrana's peace initiative'¹¹⁴. Consequently in August 1999, Secretary for Political Affairs Thomas Pickens and Barry McCaffrey, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, visited Bogota and communicated a message to Pastrana that if he continued his concessions to the FARC, he would risk losing US support, at the same time though Pastrana was offered a substantial increase in US military aid to Colombia if he would adopt a comprehensive plan designed to refurbish the military and reinvigorate the drug war.¹¹⁵

This way the US exerted once again its 'imperialist rule'¹¹⁶ stepping up the war in convulsed Colombia, whose President had no other choice than to cut short a peace and dialogue process with the leftist rebels of FARC and accept the military alternative sponsored by the US. Kaplan and Sharpe agree to mention the features of this kind of US interventions in countries like Colombia where this case fits: an unilateral decision to support war instead of peace, 'no consultation with allies, no vote in the Security Council'¹¹⁷ as the US had its own agenda in Colombia driven, like many experts have argued, by particular interests based on Colombia's natural resources, strategic to the US.

Same view is shared by the Transnational Institute researchers, for whom it was clear the military part of the new counter-drugs strategy for the region, first under Plan Colombia, then under the framework of the Andean Regional Initiative from 2002 on, 'was not limited to the fight against drugs',¹¹⁸ it had a particular objective to watch over in the near future: 'military protection for energy resources vital to the United States'.¹¹⁹

Kaplan indicates that Colombia is the possessor of untapped oil reserves and is crucially important to American interests.¹²⁰ Klare agrees on this view and deems that American interests in Colombia are related with oils reserves for the future, he highlights that US military involvement in Colombia has to do as well with Colombia's potential to supply cheaper energy to the US. Since this country's consumption will increase in the foreseeable future and domestic reserves are progressively depleted, oil demand will have to be provided

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Widely argued in Kaplan's 'Supremacy by Stealth'

¹¹⁷ Sharpe, 'Realpolitik or Imperial Hubris', p. 483

¹¹⁸ TNI, 'Forward Operation Locations in Latin America', p. 10

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Kaplan, 'Supremacy by Stealth'

by the Middle East and Gulf countries, however the US aware of this dependence in an unstable region, is looking for more accessible suppliers, therefore Colombia and Venezuela come into the picture. Venezuela is the largest oil producer in Latin America, however the instability of its regime coupled with reticence of President Chavez against the US darkens the situation, leaving Colombia as an option.¹²¹ For Ungerman and Brohy, coincidentally or not, the focus of the U.S. military assistance under Plan Colombia is precisely in these oil-rich countryside areas where the Colombian military and paramilitary forces are having a hard time fighting the guerrilla.¹²² Moreover, Sharpe, Klare, Ungerman and Brohy coincide in the point that the US is also interested in helping the Colombian military to protect the pipeline that delivers oil from US giant Occidental Petroleum's Caño Limón-Coveñas oil field to refineries and terminals threaten by FARC rebels.¹²³

Indeed, as WOLA and the TNI points out, the first significant non-drug military aid US disbursed to Colombia since the Cold War was for \$99 million to help the Colombian Army to protect against insurgent attacks an extended segment (770 km) of Caño Limón-Coveñas oil pipeline, and for fiscal year 2004, the Bush administration included an undetermined amount, up to \$147 million in order to provide munitions and equipment to continue the programme.¹²⁴ Caño Limón-Coveñas is a jointly owned pipeline in which Occidental Petroleum holds 44% with the Colombian state-run Ecopetrol (50%) and Spain's Repsol-YPF (6%).

As a matter of fact, in September 2002 Anne Paterson, US ambassador to Colombia placed US energy and corporate interest at the core of US policy toward Colombia, she admitted that Caño Limón-Coveñas was among 338 critical infrastructure points in Colombia of concern to the United States and in addition acknowledged explicitly that the pipeline plan reached beyond the anti-narcotics mission to which the United States was limited at the time, in an interview made by a Colombian journalist Patterson said, 'it is something we have to do (...) It is important for the future of the country, for our petroleum supplies and for the

¹²¹ M. Klare, 'Oil moves the War Machine' *The Progressive* (June 2002); also in M. Klare, 'Detrás del petróleo colombiano: Intenciones ocultas', *Equipo Nizkor* (Nov. 2000)

¹²² G. Ungerman and A. Brohy, '*Plan Colombia: Chasing-in on the Drug War Failure*' (2003)

¹²³ Ibid Ungerman and Brohy; Sharpe, 'Realpolitik or Imperial Hubris', p. 483; and M. Klare, 'Oil moves the War Machine'

¹²⁴ WOLA cited in TNI, 'Forward Operation Locations'

confidence of our investors’,¹²⁵ realizing this way the presumptions aforementioned by the several scholars.

The intentions of the US in safeguarding its own interests in Colombia under the oil rhetoric become evident since, as stated by US SouthCom General Charles Wilhelm oil discoveries have increased Colombia’s strategic importance for the United States, furthermore Senator Bob Graham and former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, told in April 2000, so as to justify the considerable investment of US tax payers in Colombia, as Plan Colombia was being developed, Colombia’s oil reserves were only slightly less than OPEC members Qatar, Indonesia and Algeria. These reserves, they warned, would not be available unless stability in Colombia is restored,¹²⁶ remarking the need to intervene in the country for the sakes of US own advantage.

Other promoters of Plan Colombia in the US Senate maintained that oil should be placed as a key purpose for military strategy in Colombia. Between 1996 and 2000, oil exports to the United States from Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador together were equal, on average, to the amount from all the Persian Gulf states combined¹²⁷, and comparing the Andean region to the Persian Gulf, Senator Paul Coverdell stated:

The recent rise in oil prices has revived America’s appreciation for its strategic relationships in the Middle East and reminded us why we came to their defense in the Persian Gulf War a half-world away. To me there is an indisputable parallel to the situation in our own back yard: the crisis in Colombia.¹²⁸

Not only did politicians lobbied for the US Congress approval of Plan Colombia, private interest were also crucial in this contest, as WOLA found out, during fiscal year’s 2000 House of Representatives hearing, a high authority of Occidental testified that oil from Colombia would help to reduce the dependence from the volatile Middle east, given the country’s potential to add new production as there are large areas of the country rich in oil, still unexplored.¹²⁹ The emphasis of Bush administration in protect the Colombian oil, was

¹²⁵ WOLA, Colombia Monitor ‘*Protecting the Pipeline: The U.S. Military Mission Expands*’ (Washington, May 2003), p. 4

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 5

¹²⁷ TNI, ‘*Forward Operation Locations in Latin America*’, p. 11

¹²⁸ Paul D. Coverdell, ‘Starting with Colombia’, *Washington Post* (10 April 2000)

¹²⁹ WOLA, *Protecting the Pipeline*, p. 6

therefore closely linked to the US energy corporative interest of future large-scale exploitation of Colombian oil reserves. Moreover as Colombia is not an OPEC member, its production is not restrained by quotas as is Venezuela's, a strategic advantage for the US and another reason to increase its oil imports from Colombia and in a given situation 'put some pressure on the market in times of supply stress'.¹³⁰

However for this purpose, the fact that Colombian oil is located in remote areas historically far from the government reach, troubles the situation for US energy companies as those strategic zones are also the centre of Colombia's production of cocaine, and therefore, are areas fiercely disputed for insurgents: guerrillas and paramilitaries, what adds a great drawback for exploration intentions. Nevertheless, the link between oil and violence has been regular in Colombia, where the multinational companies would comply to the dominant authority, either paramilitaries or guerrillas, in order to continue their operations.

On the other hand, also the Colombian army has received significant income from those multinationals in order to protect installations and personnel. 'Beginning in 1992, foreign companies were charged a 'war tax' of around \$1 per barrel so the Colombian government could improve military presence and operational capacity in oil zones.'¹³¹ The oil companies have as well resorted to paid private security international contractors, which in turn help to worsen the human right situation given their lack of accountability to any official authority. This situation is depicted by Richani as a 'positive political economy of war under which armed actors acquire resources through war that they could not access under conditions of peace'.¹³²

Pipeline protection programme under the framework of Plan Colombia has been the most substantial manifestation of the US' desire to expand its commitments in Colombia beyond drug control to include counter-insurgency operations and the defence of physical infrastructure strategic to private corporative interests. However, considering the brutality caused by an entrenched Colombian conflict, it is perverse to put first the safeguard of a pipeline before the lives of civilians being targeted by armed groups.

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 12

¹³² N. Richani, '*Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*', (New York, 2002), pp. 4-6

More aligned to US regulations than its predecessor, Álvaro Uribe came into power in 2002 fully embracing Plan Colombia and supporting the military component, what was in consonance with its 'Democratic Security' strategy, based on Bush's political discourse on War on Terror. The final version of Plan Colombia, written first in English than in Spanish¹³³ right after US Secretary of State Pickering visited Bogota in 2000,¹³⁴ is in words of Colombian analyst Navarro-Wolf, a US initiative to broaden US presence in Colombia, exert wider control and disguise a military driven counter-insurgency strategy in an anti-drug's plan.¹³⁵ The events occurred on 11 September 2001 paved the way for President Uribe to introduce his state-based, hard-line approach to insurgency as terrorism backed by the Bush administration. To this respect, Attorney General John Ashcroft cited drug trafficking and terrorism as one in the same, meaning that the counter-insurgency once accepted as the War on Drugs would be subsumed into the War against Terrorism.¹³⁶ The Bush administration turned the Colombian guerrillas into narco-terrorists, and in August 2002 Congress approved a counterterrorism bill which had buried within it the removal of restrictions on the US-backed Counter-Narcotics Brigade, allowing it to use its equipment and training for counterterrorism as well as anti-drug missions.¹³⁷

While our attention is drawn to another region of the world, we must keep in mind that we live in this hemisphere, and its continued progress as a region of democracy and prosperity is paramount to our national security.¹³⁸

The first phase of the plan was designed to take control of the FARC-controlled coca-growing areas in the department of Putumayo in southern Colombia. Putumayo and the neighbouring department of Caquetá account for over one half of Colombia's coca acreage. In the second phase, counter-narcotics operations would extend to the coca-growing regions in southeastern and central Colombia, and finally, to the whole country. The bulk of the US assistance package was designed to help the Colombian government implement its so-called Southern strategy, translated as only military intrusion. Key priorities then, are to train and equip the new counter-narcotics battalions, improve the Colombian navy's control of traffic

¹³³ García-Peña, 'Good-bye Plan Colombia'

¹³⁴ Rabasa and Chalk, 'Colombian Labyrinth', p. 67

¹³⁵ A. Navarro-Wolf, 'El Plan Colombia: Implicaciones para el Proceso de Paz' (2001), p. 15

¹³⁶ Banks and Sokolowski, 'From War against drugs to War against Terrorism'

¹³⁷ Sharpe, 'Realpolitik or Imperial Hubris', p. 487

¹³⁸ Brigadier General Benjamin Mixon, *US SouthCom*

on the country's 18,000 kilometres of navigable rivers, improve radars, airfields, and intelligence collection capabilities.¹³⁹

The outcomes of Plan Colombia have been widely questionable, in one hand the counter-insurgency strategy has been said to have yielded results as the US added hardware and training to a big Colombian effort that has strengthened the state and made the country safer. The American aid package has been crucial to keep the military expenditure, however inasmuch as Plan Colombia dwindles, Uribe's war will be unable to be sustainable, as some analysts assert. On the other hand, as an anti-drug programme, it has been a big failure. It did not decrease the drug production and did not curtail the drug's offer in the US, cocaine prices have been kept constant and in general the availability of drugs has not been affected in 10 years of the Plan's implementation.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, war in Colombia has shifted its balance of power between actors and now the paramilitaries control big areas of the country and have pervaded many aspects of Colombian society, from the mafia business to the politics. The conflict is in stalemate as it has always been, there is no light for negotiations and in spite that it is true that FARC have been weakened, the paramilitaries have been taking their space in the drug business and have constituted themselves as a major factor of violence and internal displacement of farmer peasants who refuse to lend their lands for coca cultivation or to cooperate with them in any way.

Initially, Plan Colombia was thought as a multilateral initiative for achieving peace and economic development in Colombia that included financial cooperation from the Colombian government, the US and the EU. However, opposite to the US, the European Union decided not to support the military-intensive Plan Colombia as they regarded it as a strategy for war instead of a tool for effective drug control. Its high reliance on the military also upset and raised suspicion in neighbouring countries such as Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil and Panama, who feared a spill over of the Colombian conflict in their own territories and a US enterprise based on its own interests rather than the Colombian wishes and needs.

Unlike the US, the EU see the drugs control as a shared responsibility and a matter of self-interest of the international community, therefore they do not circumscribe the bilateral relations with Colombia all around the drugs, a remarkable issue in comparison to the US-

¹³⁹ Rabasa and Chalk, *'Colombian Labyrinth'*, pp. 64-65

¹⁴⁰ H. Salazar, 'Plan Colombia: diferentes balances', *BBC online* (22 Aug. 2007)

Colombian relationship, in which drug control is the dominant factor. For the Europeans, the support to Colombia should be aimed ‘at the root causes, and not just the symptoms of Colombia’s years of conflict’¹⁴¹ therefore Europe’s sight is spotted to the demand side: curbing drug demand and treat the problem internally as a public health issue. For the EU the military inclination of the Plan was not a suitable means for peace building or drug control, on the contrary, it was believed that military component would aggravate problems in Colombia, therefore it refused to do any contribution under this framework on the grounds that the US backed anti-drug approach would harm the peace process. Consequently, the EU was unable to support the Plan and it was concluded as a bilateral cooperation between Colombia and the US. For the Europeans, the preference for a non-military approach ‘stemmed from the belief that force is not the way to obtain development and peace’ as it has been proved for over 40 years in Colombia.¹⁴² In order to help Colombia to achieve social and economic development, the EU chose to support the peace process, human rights and alternative development projects.

As a matter of fact the US-led fumigation agenda jeopardises the agricultural programmes the EU develops in Colombia, actually there is a high degree of criticism among the Europeans against the forced eradication, for them, eradication should be pursued through voluntary and manual measures in order not to disturb the environment and agricultural activities; it has been demonstrated in Colombia that aerial eradication not only kills coca crops but also damages the soil, water bodies and legal crops; and failure to harvest coca crops as well as alternative crops devastates the lives of peasant farmers, leaving them without any income and any other viable source of revenue and food.

The view of the EU toward drug trafficking differ in key aspects from that of the US, in the first place, for the Europeans cocaine trafficking is seen as a societal threat that damages its social fabric and moral values, therefore the Europeans regard drug users as sick people who need treatment and rehabilitation, instead of criminals, that way there is an increasing acceptance within the EU that what drug users need is help rather than punishment. Another aspect that greatly differentiates the EU from the US view is the securitisation of the problem, for the EU cocaine trafficking does not require external policies to control the flow, they agree in the position that as a social problem it should remain as a domestic matter of the

¹⁴¹ Fukumi, ‘*Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America*’, p. 201

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 203

EU member states and in consequence as an internal issue, for that reason the EU does not prioritise in the supply reduction in the source countries as the US does.¹⁴³ On the contrary the EU focuses on curbing demand to reduce the number of addicts who are the real cause of the production and trade of cocaine. Thus, drug control is not the key factor between the EU and the Andean countries. This shared responsibility, is a more conscious approach as it does not attack the source for a problem originally created by the consumption.

The EU agreed to participate in Colombia's peace process as a way to support Colombia's drugs problem given that 80% of European cocaine comes from Colombia.¹⁴⁴ Actually although the largest cocaine markets are concentrated in the US, there is been an increases in both distribution and use in Western Europe. According to UNODC globally, 'most cocaine is seized in the Americas (81%) of which South America, where most cocaine is manufactured, accounted for 45% of global seizures in 2006. 'North America, the world's largest cocaine market, accounted for 24%. Central America and the Caribbean, which are major transit regions, accounted for 11% of global seizures'.¹⁴⁵ Yet, the only large market outside of the Americas is Europe. Seventeen per cent of global cocaine seizures were made in Europe in 2006, and 99% of these were made in West and Central Europe'.¹⁴⁶ The 2008 UNODC World Drug Report shows that the trend of cocaine trafficking and consumption in the European market is ascending. In 2006/07, an estimated 16 million people worldwide, or 0.4% of the global population aged 15-64, consumed cocaine. The largest numbers of cocaine users are found in North America (7.1 million people or 45% of the world total), followed by West & Central Europe (3.9 million people or 24%) and South America (including Central America and the Caribbean: 3.1 million or 19% of the total).¹⁴⁷

Another consequence for Colombia respect to the region has been the isolation in which the country has been left after Bush's administration. Colombia's insurgents are nowadays a threat for neighbouring countries, as they routinely cross over into the adjacent territories of Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru, exploiting poorly monitored border regions for safe havens as well as to facilitate the regional movement of drugs.¹⁴⁸ The Colombian government's inability to secure its borders has severely complicated Bogota's

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 217-218

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 204

¹⁴⁵ UN Office on Drugs and Crime '2008 World Drug Report' (Vienna, 2008), p. 72

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 84

¹⁴⁸ Rabasa and Chalk, 'Colombian Labyrinth', p. 18

regional relations, particularly with Venezuela and Ecuador, who have led a campaign to isolate Bogota on the grounds of security, extreme right ideology and reliance on the US.

In Colombia, the cause of the conflict is not the illegal drug-trade, the very roots of this conflict are the anarchic rural conditions, the unequal redistribution of land and wealth, problems that will not change as the aristocrats, opposed to land reforms, remain in the power as it has been the history of the country since its inception as a Republic in the early XIX century.

In US officials' eyes, the fact that over the time drug threat had become more difficult to address is explained due to the increasing number and types of organizations involved in illegal drug activities, including insurgent groups, and the fragility of Colombian government to control the totality of its territory.¹⁴⁹ On the contrary, other US drug experts have found out that it is common to blame the narcotics trade and the guerrilla insurgencies for the country's troubles, when the growing power of drug traffickers, rebel groups, and right-wing paramilitaries rather reflect the breakdown of authority and of the legitimacy of political institutions¹⁵⁰ that Plan Colombia failed to repair supplying the country with tools to escalate the war instead of heal its structural problems.

¹⁴⁹ GAO, *'U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results'* (Washington, October 2000) p. 4

¹⁵⁰ Falco, *'U.S. Interests and Objectives in Colombia'* (2000), p. 5

III. FROM THE WAR ON COMMUNISM, THROUGH THE WAR ON DRUGS, TO A WAR OF TERRORISM; THEATRE: COLOMBIA

The language might change through the time but the intentions remain almost invariable, and tactics shift according to the circumstances. US Colombia bilateral relations however must be understood under the logic of an uneven interaction between a superpower and a relatively weak developing country, both who concur in the same hemisphere, and since the advent of the war on drugs in the early eighties, as remarked by Crandall, the otherwise legacy of bilateral cooperation has periodically disintegrated and overall replaced by unilateralism on the part of the US and suspicion and frustration on the part of Colombia.

It was in the early to mid 80s when the US-Colombia relations became narcotized,¹⁵¹ when effectively the US started to conduct the war on drugs outside their boundaries and made it primary issue in its bilateral relations with Colombia. Until the 70s Colombian governments maintained a more combative posture against the US in the drug issue, however ‘tired of battling Washington’ Colombian attitude shifted to a more cooperative position upon US pressure. As depicted by Tokatlián, Colombia went from a distant, conflictual position vis-à-vis Washington, to friendly, non-frictional cooperation with the White House on narcotics matters and obeyed to follow the three pillars the US demanded to be applied:¹⁵² extradition of Colombian nationals to the US, militarisation, and eradication, which started initially with marijuana plants when cocaine had not taken all the spectrum of Colombia’s drug problem. Randall deems this period as the turning point of the contemporary relations US-Colombia, as, in his opinion, by cooperating in US antidrug efforts and complying with its entire demands, the Colombian government ‘was conceding that the drug issue had a large supply component’¹⁵³ and since then, it has been minimal debate either in Washington or Bogotá around the question whether supply reduction should be the core component of the war on drugs.

¹⁵¹ R. Crandall, ‘*Driven by Drugs: US Policy Toward Colombia*’ (2002), p. 30

¹⁵² Juan Gabriel Tokatlian cited in Crandall, ‘*Driven by Drugs*’, p. 30

¹⁵³ Randall, ‘*Driven by Drugs*’, p. 28

Regarding Washington's responsibility for Colombia's catastrophic decisions, Colombian journalist Antonio Caballero, categorically blames Washington in two instances: the first appalling decision was made in the Cold War during the period known in Colombia as 'La Violencia' (1948-58, partisan clash between the supporters of the two ruling political parties that gave rise to subsequent foundation of guerrilla movements) period in which Washington fitted all the social issues in Latin America into the framework of the global anti-communist crusade, resulting in a doctrine that 'maintained and reinforced political, economic and military power in the hands of the most reactionary elements of the society'.¹⁵⁴ The second decision was made about two decades after and placed Colombia as the heart of even further militarisation and tension, 'the declaration of the universal war on drugs (...) a war that was declared abroad but fought almost exclusively in Colombia'.¹⁵⁵

Although it might be an oversimplistic way to blame the empire, there is conclusive evidence that shows how policies developed by Washington have had a direct impact in Colombia's internal systems in adverse ways.

The Cold War years were the scenario for countless forms of interventionism all over Latin America, if one way or another the communist threat had to be contained throughout the globe it had to be done especially in US' own backyard. During that period, it has been observed, the primary means for exerting pressure in the region was spreading the doctrine of counter-insurgency (CI) warfare especially designed for the US to prevent any form of ideology that would challenge its interests. Stokes describes this situation as 'coercive statecraft' to internally police US-backed dictatorships and to prevent credible attempts to defy pro-US governments.¹⁵⁶ In order to attain so, the support used to take different forms, which sometimes included the legitimization of repressive regimes (US-backed coup in Guatemala 1954, Chile's US-backed dictatorship under General Pinochet 1973, demonization of Castro's Cuba, as well as Nicaragua's Sandinistas, among other examples), if they safeguarded US interests, and mainly security assistance through extensive military training. US-sponsored CI was justified on the grounds of providing a necessary response to the bipolar status quo, therefore internal insurgencies were portrayed as manifestations of

¹⁵⁴ Antonio Caballero cited in A. Murillo, '*Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization*' (2004), p. 122

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁵⁶ D. Stokes, '*America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia*' (2005), p. 57

externally sponsored subversion and guerrillas as Soviet proxies.¹⁵⁷ However the definition of subversion had a broad spectrum in US' language, basically any popular expression or group who dared to oppose the establishment was at risk to be targeted as subversive, CI discourse, that way, as understood by Washington's CI strategists was seen as communist insurgency that broadly encompassed virtually any form of dissent.¹⁵⁸ The right to combat the internal enemy, as instructed within the CI doctrine dictated to Colombia, is the right to fight and exterminate that segment of population who is not supportive of the establishment including human rights activists, priests organising peasants, labour leaders and the like.¹⁵⁹

In Colombia, where oligarchies historically have run the country leaving no space for broader participation, every social force or alternative movement with progressive, anti-official slant was linked with communism; therefore trade unions and grassroots movements have been considered communist or subversive. Indeed this domination of state apparatus by elites gave way to insurgent movements that have been at the core of the protracted internal conflict, as there was no way for organized democratic alternatives to this existing system.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless the US has been there to continuously fund the Colombian military so it can pacify those insurgencies and unarmed alternative groups that potentially threaten a stability geared towards US interests¹⁶¹ that range from economic and political to strategic (as energy resources) and keep the pro-US elites in the power.

For Stokes, the US CI strategy in Colombia has sought to insulate the state from popular pressures for reform using as main mechanism widespread and pervasive state terrorism justified under the rubric of Cold War anti-communism.¹⁶² Funding and training the Colombian military, the US has indirectly contributed to prolong an internal war by making the military the 'masters of the game',¹⁶³ undermining repeatedly failed peace talks, turning what was a regular force into counter-insurgency professionals, and fostering the paramilitary factor as the links between the Colombian military and outlawed paramilitary forces, who are the principal human rights violators in Colombia, are very close.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 59

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 78

¹⁵⁹ Chomsky in Stokes, *'America's Other War'*, p. xiv

¹⁶⁰ L. Garcés, 'Colombia: The Link Between Drugs and Terror', *Journal of Drug Issues, Florida State University*, vol. 35 No. 1, Winter 2005, p. 91

¹⁶¹ Stokes, *'America's Other War'*, p. 3

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 78

¹⁶³ Chomsky in Stokes, *'America's Other War'*, p. xiv

The post Cold War era marks the switch from the language of anti-communism to anti-narcotics, a tautology used as a necessary pretext to continue the flow of economic aid to the military and renovate the rhetoric according to the context. Guáqueta unlike Stokes, considers that Colombia tried to set rules to protect the country's sovereignty, as by 1989 the country welcomed military aid as long as it observed historical definitions of sovereignty, defined in traditional terms as not allowing foreign troops into its territory,¹⁶⁴ however, she supports Stokes' argument on the point that despite those efforts Colombia seemed unable to overcome the dependence trap, whereby greater assistance fuelled the appetite among Colombian military and law enforcement for more aid, which invariably came along with greater US involvement.¹⁶⁵

The new US agenda continue to be based in the preservation of democracy, stressing the importance of policy options that uphold democracy as understood in a capitalist reign: The use of international financial institutions, and a array of free trade agreements became widespread tying down national states' policies; coups kept being an option as long as it was necessary to revert forms of governance that could threaten US interests, and funding CI campaigns remained as the most effective means to destroy armed groups and pacify civil societies.¹⁶⁶ In this context the US exerted additional influence in Latin America propagating the neo-liberalism doctrine, using multilateral agreements and through its dominance of the international financial institutions that conditioned any aid to Latin America in exchange of the governments to set neoliberal models in their own countries that eroded national economies, devastated social welfare and constrained popular reforms.

In Colombia there are clear indications that the neoliberal programmes pushed through by the US had a dire impact in the rapid deterioration of the conflict. In 1990 César Gaviria arrived to the Office embracing a process of economic opening of the country to external capital with distinctly neo-liberal nuances (known as 'apertura económica') whose consequences intensely marked the future of Colombia's economic history. The most critic scholarship have blamed Gaviria's economic opening for the end of Colombia's agricultural sector. As a result of the process by 2001, 80.5% of people in the countryside were living below the poverty level, up from 65% in 1993. Murillo brings up to this respect that the

¹⁶⁴ A. Guáqueta, 'Change and Continuity in US-Colombian Relations and the War Against Drugs', *Journal of Drug Issues, Florida State University* (Winter 2005) vol. 35 No. 1, p. 39

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 40

¹⁶⁶ Stokes, '*America's Other War*', p. 47

coffee sector (once Colombia's most salient exports), was especially struck, following the *apertura*, worldwide agreement was reached to hold coffee prices fixed, since then global production has exceeded demand and sent prices down. Besides, those developments led to a flood of cheap coffee entering Colombia from Brazil, Vietnam and other countries, sending many farmers to bankruptcy and pushing unemployment high¹⁶⁷. In consequence, it made easier for guerrillas and paramilitaries recruit the rising number of unemployed young peasants who joined the irregular militias as no other work option was left; and on the other hand, it also forced many farmers to abandon coffee and adopt coca cultivation instead. The same pattern for coffee was followed with a number of agricultural products, the sudden influx of cheaper imports ruined great part of Colombia's peasant farmers, who also lost state subsidies, and access to credit, both as part of the neo-liberal measures package.

On the verge of a collapse in the agricultural sector, exacerbated by the neoliberal policies, coca was left as the only safe-guard for peasant farmers. Coca growing offered high revenues and its plantation was relatively easy, no chemicals had to be applied to the crop and it needed minimal care (unlike crops like coffee that demand extreme care and in some cases chemicals that made its cultivation more expensive for the producer). With small investment and high revenues, the rational logic led the peasantry, chiefly in southern Colombia, to choose coca as their option for living. The remaining majority of peasants who chose not to cultivate coca had to flee to the outskirts of the big cities to live in urban slums, as the poverty and lack of options drove them off their lands. Therefore, the response of the Colombian government, backed and blessed by the US, was to wage war on those peasant farmers, making them targets of 'expansive military operations';¹⁶⁸ the aforementioned chemical warfare and unfulfilled alternative development under Plan Colombia are clear examples of this circumstance.

The contemporary history of US intervention in Colombia has taken different names. Formerly it was the war on communism, then the war on drugs, and after September 11/2001 Washington found the appropriate pretexts to encompass a comprehensive strategy of counter-narcotics, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism escalating the war to a new stage: the war on terror. One of the most significant outcomes of this new change of language was how it cleared the way for Washington to pick on the guerrillas who were no longer

¹⁶⁷ Murillo, '*Colombia and the United States*', p. 129

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 130

considered insurgent forces, but terrorist movements financed by drug trafficking, ‘direct or indirect combat against them was therefore legitimized with a simple stroke of the pen’.¹⁶⁹ The restriction Washington faced during Clinton’s administration to use military aid exclusively for counter-drug operations disappeared in 2002 with the promulgation of the National Security Strategy for the United States,¹⁷⁰ which allowed President George W. Bush to officially cross ‘the invisible line’¹⁷¹ that separated the counternarcotics fight from counterinsurgency. The utilization of US military funds could now include fighting guerrillas and paramilitaries, and now officially protect the oil pipelines in Colombia.

Moreover, the shift from the US war on drugs to the global war on terror was facilitated when Álvaro Uribe took the presidency of Colombia in May 2002. Uribe’s policy, like Washington’s, has been focused since then on the defence of the state rather than on the defence of the individual,¹⁷² his discourse is one of all-out war against the ‘terrorists’ and the peace process and negotiated alternatives to the conflict have been downplayed under his administration. His strategy, enthusiastically welcomed by Washington, has been compiled under the name of ‘Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática’ (Defence and Democratic Security Strategy) and it declares that Colombia will keep a dissuasive capability necessary to assure the respect of its sovereignty within an strategic defensive posture; it emphasizes that security is not the only concern of the Government but it is the first, and lists as the first two immediate threats to National Security, terrorism and illicit drugs. In Uribe’s language as well as Washington’s, terrorism is the greatest threat that undermines the stability of the state and the world, therefore its government is committed to develop measures and take actions against it and this will be developed as a State policy.

Colombia seguirá siendo fiel a su tradición de país respetuoso del derecho internacional, pero mantendrá una capacidad disuasiva, con la proyección necesaria para asegurar el respeto a su soberanía nacional e integridad territorial, dentro de una postura estratégica defensiva (...) El terrorismo como método para atentar contra la estabilidad del Estado es la mayor amenaza a la democracia en Colombia y el Mundo. Las medidas y acciones contra el terrorismo se desarrollarán como una política de Estado. (...) La seguridad no será la única preocupación del Gobierno Nacional, pero sí la primera. (...) las siguientes amenazas constituyen un riesgo inmediato para la Nación, las

¹⁶⁹ E. Pizarro and P. Gaitán in Loveman, *‘Addicted to Failure’*, p. 62

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 63

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 69

¹⁷² Zuluaga, *‘US Security Policies’*, p. 117

instituciones democráticas y la vida de los colombianos: El terrorismo, El negocio de las drogas ilícitas¹⁷³.

Uribe's full embracement of The White House's approach of war on terror in Colombia has assured him unconditional support from Washington. However his administration which has successfully consolidated the nation's military apparatus, still fails to recognize the very roots that threaten the Colombian democracy: poverty, inequality, social exclusion, and the lack of a comprehensive agrarian reform for the unequal distribution of land and natural resources that has favoured large landowners, ruling classes and elites in detriment of the majority. Like in a vicious circle, as long as those problems remain unaddressed, social unrest will continue strengthening the conflict and giving the peasantry a justification for pursuing illegal forms of income cultivating illicit crops, which in turn supports guerrillas and paramilitaries.

Given the action-reaction logic revised until now, it could make for the third worst decision of Colombia the most recent pact the Uribe Government has signed with Obama's administration: 'US-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement' (DCA), the establishment in Colombia of five US military facilities in strategic points over the country for at least a decade, whose missions include counterinsurgency and transcend Colombian borders.¹⁷⁴ This agreement came to fill up the gap left for the Manta installation in Ecuador, recently closed by Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa.

Although officially stated by the US State Department the agreement does not contemplate the establishment of military bases, the general opinion understands as such those kinds of 'installations'. State has declared that the DCA does not permit the establishment of any US base in Colombia, instead it ensures continued US access to specific agreed Colombian facilities in order to undertake mutually agreed upon activities within Colombia.¹⁷⁵ The agreement facilitates US access to three Colombian air force bases, located at Palanquero, Apiay, and Malambo and also permits access to two naval bases and two army installations, and other Colombian military facilities if mutually agreed.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Presidencia de la República, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, '*Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática*', República de Colombia (2003)

¹⁷⁴ J. Lindsay-Poland, 'Revamping Plan Colombia', *Foreign Policy in Focus* (21 July 2009)

¹⁷⁵ US Department Of State, '*US-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement*' (18 August 2009)

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

The agreement has raised controversy in several instances. The automatic renewal of the pact after the 10 years period even surpassing Obama's administration is one of them; but even more sizzling are the locations selected for the installations. If Manta was located in the Pacific with the intention to patrol drug traffic, none of the new locations covers the Pacific coast. Instead two of the bases are clustered near each other on the Caribbean coast, not far from existing US military sites in Aruba and Curaçao, suspiciously closer to Venezuela than to the Pacific Ocean. The question around this convenient retreat from the Pacific is why the US negotiators are moving away from this zone if the drug war remains part of the US military mission. It leaves unclear what missions beyond Colombia's borders" is the US devising.¹⁷⁷

The agreement does not limit its scope to counter-narcotics, as the Manta one did, it even embraces a broader geographical section and extends its functionality to assistance in the war on terror, meaning fighting guerrillas.

The agreement has been widely rejected for the Colombians and even infringes the National Constitution in which the presence of foreign troops except in transit is outlawed. Uribe's decision has been seen as another stunt of his administration to remain in the good graces of Washington, while for Obama, who recently came into the office under the banner of the 'change' it would be a clear demonstration that towards Latin America, Obama, on the contrary, means a continuation of the same.

By establishing 5 military installations in a single country, the US will divide even further the already fragmented Latin America, where the interference of the US is rejected by the majority of South American states and another concession of Colombia after controversial Plan Colombia is acknowledged as an aggressive move and a sign of disloyalty against its neighbours.

¹⁷⁷ Lindsay-Poland, *'Revamping Plan Colombia'*

CONCLUSION

This work has tried to demonstrate how the US policies have undermined Latin American democracies by domination and manipulation imposing counterproductive policies that the weak and dependant Latin American states have been unable to reject. The region was engaged since the 70s in a war on drugs whose results are widely questionable and deemed in some cases as a complete waste.¹⁷⁸ Some other voices in the region reckon those results as unsatisfactory but do not downgrade the efforts of policies that have cost millions of resources invested and the countless sacrifice of human lives in fighting the war on drugs. For the latter, it is imperative to recognize the insufficiency of the results in order to open debate on alternative strategies that includes the until now relegated sectors of society who have been kept away from the problem in so far as it has been considered that the solution should emerge from the authorities.¹⁷⁹

Colombia epitomizes the laboratory for the majority of the US immaterial sometimes, and some others, indirect wars waged in the hemisphere. Nevertheless this work does not intend to be conclusive in blaming Washington for all the evils of unstable Colombia, where the rule of corruption, impunity and a political class historically driven by the elites (who have consistently denied the democratic right to other layers of society), have been greatly responsible for the situation in which the country finds itself today. Yet several viewpoints have been compiled ranging from moderate to the most censorious portraying Washington's substantial responsibility for the failure of counterdrug policies in Latin America, which in turn have continuously shifted with maximum benefit for the US allowing it expand its pervasive intervention in the sub-continent now under the global war on terror strategy.

The results are conclusive; policies have failed because this war as it is currently conceived cannot be won and should not be fought. By insisting that the objective is to stop the flow of drugs that cause physical dependency, the warriors lock themselves into a questionable view of human nature: The cause of addiction is not in the substance but in the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Comisión Latinoamericana Sobre Drogas y Democracia, *'Drogas y Democracia: Hacia un Cambio de Paradigma'*, p. 8

people who use it.¹⁸⁰ It is also controversial how substances that cause harm to the individuals who use them and to others, and create high dependence, are sold in the free market. Regarding this point, Chomsky indicates that the deaths from tobacco and passive smokers vastly exceed those from all hard drugs combined, and not to mention the deaths caused by alcohol, which is heavily implicated in killing others (car accidents, alcohol-induced violence, etc),¹⁸¹ however there is no government declaring any war against the multinationals that produce them.

On the other hand, the nature of US war on drugs is shockingly unfair. As it has been proved, attempting to dry up the supply does not reduce the availability in the US or other markets for consumption and does not increase the prices in the streets to dissuade its acquisition. Conversely it inflicts grave damages on the peasant farmers of the source countries, it helps to lengthen armed conflicts and creates a vicious circle of poverty, need for means of subsistence, illicit activities and violence.

The peasant farmers who live in the rural areas where coca grows, are not responsible for the dependence of urban US or European users (currently the large consumers), it is not their fault to have been born in a soil fertile for coca crops, neither have they created the business resultant from processing coca into cocaine. The peasant farmers of the Andean region are assiduous workers, indefatigable cultivators, who harvest the land from which our sustenance comes from. It is irrational that a foreign state so remote and ignorant of their reality could be entitled to carry out extensive chemical warfare against them.

There were poverty, inequality and exclusion the root factors who encouraged the creation of insurgencies, FARC was not envisaged to be a terrorist movement, its creation was encouraged by agrarian concerns, it was a movement of peasant farmer extraction that reacted to the partisan violence and demanded for land reform. Similar reasons fostered other guerrillas to emerge. However the lack of democratic participation denied by the Colombian political elites turned those groups into insurgencies and it was until the advent of the drug factor when they started to diversify their financial sources and collude with criminals.

¹⁸⁰ Wisotsky, *'Beyond The War on Drugs'*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii

¹⁸¹ Chomsky in D. Stokes, *'America's Other War'*, p. xiii

The threat those insurgencies represented for the US in the Cold War, motivated US intervention in Latin America, which was materialised by militarising the region and carrying out an extensive counterinsurgency campaign concomitantly.

Plan Colombia symbolizes the scope of US intentions in Latin America: empowering the military establishment under US guidelines in order to exert influence over any kind of social manifestation that might contradict or threaten US interests or those of its corporations. That way the US keeps its interests in the sub-region under control. On the other hand, Washington has well funded the Colombian military, an army with one of the worst records of human right violations and whose nexus with paramilitaries remain close. The military aid has been thankfully welcomed by the Colombian administrations, it has strengthened their military power while it creates a source of income for US contractors and military supplier corporations. The military consolidation has also created a barrier for peace negotiations between the Colombian government and guerrillas and paramilitaries, and given the figures the drug business yields for the insurgents, neither is in their interests to bring about peace.

At the end, violence and drugs create an economic function of war that benefits all the parts involved. Winning the war or making peace may not be desirable: 'the point of war may be precisely the legitimacy which it confers on actions that in peacetime might be punishable as crimes'.¹⁸² David Keen analyses this phenomenon concluding that while usually the tendency is to assume that war is the 'end' and abuse of civilians the 'means', it is important to consider the opposite possibility: that the end is to engage in abuse or crimes that bring immediate rewards, while the means is war and its perpetuation.¹⁸³ It is seemingly the logic of the never-ending war to control the cocaine trade.

This war, no matter the label under which it is waged (drugs, insurgency, terror...) is ultimately a war on the poor, who are its greatest victims. It has been a war imposed by the US at the expense of the Colombians, who account for the great majority of death tolls. As long as the US government does not recognise the failure of its supply-side war and shift it into a conscious domestic matter, the policies will continue to fail. As it has been pointed along this work, as long as the demand exists, production will keep on as well. Drugs are a

¹⁸² Garcés, 'Colombia: The Link Between Drugs and Terror', p.4

¹⁸³ D. Keen, 'The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars' (Oxford, 1998), p. 12

public health problem and as so they should be treated. Investment of funds therefore, should focus on the issue of treatment instead of on making the addicts criminals. Likewise, as long as the policies fail to give the peasant farmers viable alternatives, illicit crops will remain as the only and easiest option to overcome poverty.

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