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# Paramilitaries in Colombia

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**T**he failure to address paramilitary violence is the fatal flaw in Plan Colombia and in the current U.S. assistance strategy. The continued growth in numbers and in scope of operations of Colombian paramilitary groups threatens the ability of the civilian government to govern and undermines all U.S. policy objectives. These illegal groups are responsible for major drug trafficking operations and the majority of political violence in Colombia. Despite this, the United States is making its primary ally a corrupt and abusive army, members of which support, train, supply, and coordinate paramilitary groups in many areas of the country. Far from being marginal actors, Colombian paramilitary groups are sophisticated offensive armies, supported by regional landowners, drug traffickers, and members of the Colombian military. They are responsible for working with major drug cartels to bring tons of cocaine and heroin into the United States. Dismantling these groups, and bringing their leadership to justice, must be a priority for the United States.

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The United States is making a major investment in Colombia: Assistance to the region reached an all-time peak of over \$1.3 billion for 2001–2002 with President Bill Clinton's emergency package. Now, President George Bush has announced a major new program for the Andes. According to policymakers, U.S. assistance is designed to achieve a variety of goals: reducing the amount of drugs coming into the United States, strengthening democracy and human rights, contributing to regional stability, and supporting efforts for a negotiated settlement

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to Colombia's 40 year-old internal conflict. Unfortunately, this mainly military package will not achieve U.S. objectives in the region, and will likely worsen and prolong the bloodshed, undermining efforts for democratic reforms.

U.S. assistance and attention comes at a crucial time for Colombia. After 40 years of war, the largest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the government have sat down at the table for serious negotiations the first time in almost a decade. However, these negotiations will be long and difficult, and they occur in a complicated context. Illicit crop cultivation is spreading to new areas of the country, and drug trafficking provides money and guns that corrupt Colombian institutions and fuel violence. Colombia faces a severe economic crisis, with almost 20 percent unemployment. Political violence is on the rise, with attacks against academics, journalists, and human-rights defenders in urban areas and massacres of peasant farmers throughout the countryside. The growing strength of paramilitary groups effects and is effected by all these factors. Paramilitary groups justify their actions by claiming to support counterinsurgency efforts; their attacks against peace activists and demobilized guerrillas make reaching a negotiated settlement all the more difficult.

Paramilitaries profit from and protect drug production and trafficking, in the process offering a wage to young men in areas of growing unemployment. Their increasing public brutality escalates conflict and feeds into cycles of violence and revenge. Without an understanding of the historic evolution of paramilitary groups, and their current role in the crisis, policymakers will be unable to design effective policies to address any of these related problems.

### The Development of Paramilitary Groups

“Paramilitary organization” and “self-defense group” have been used to describe a range of different armed groups active in Colombia during the past 40 years. These paramilitary organizations have evolved considerably since the 1960s, when U.S. military advisors first recommended the organization of 'indigenous irregulars' as a fundamental component of the Colombian counterinsurgency strategy, then aimed at defeating leftist guerrilla movements. A U.S. Special Warfare Team from Fort Bragg first proposed the strategy in 1962, and later that year a series of U.S. Special Warfare Mobile Training Teams worked with the Colombian armed forces to implement the recommendation. The strategy was formally adopted as the basis for Plan Lazo, a Colombian counter-insurgency plan approved at the end of 1962 and in effect until the end of 1965. <sup>1</sup>

The legal basis for state sponsorship of paramilitary organizations was Law 48, approved by the Colombian Congress in 1968, allowing the government to “mobilize the population in activities and tasks” to restore public order. According to the law, “The Ministry of National Defense, through the authorized com-

manders, may provide, when deemed appropriate, as personal property, weapons that are considered the exclusive use of the Armed Forces.” Despite the fact that this legislation stipulated that only the president was authorized to create such groups, military commanders frequently ignored civilian authorities and used Law 48 to create their own groups.

Paramilitary groups grew in part because of the counterinsurgency strategy the Colombian military adopted to combat mushrooming guerrilla groups and their perceived civilian supporters. Spurred by frustration with a closed political system, there was a proliferation of leftist guerrilla movements within Colombia in the 1970s. In addition to the FARC, ELN and ERP, all of which formed during the 1960s, in the 1970s new groups such as the M-19—Movimiento 19 de Abril—won significant public support. Smaller regional guerrilla groups also appeared, including the Quintin Lame in Cauca, the only explicitly indigenous insurgency group in Latin America at the time. Following its near-total military annihilation in 1973, the ELN regrouped and developed strategic strongholds in the oil-producing Middle Magdalena region and smaller fronts throughout northeastern Colombia, enjoying relatively strong sympathy within urban student and union movements. Although the oldest of the groups, with their roots in the partisan violence and peasant resistance of the 1950s, the FARC was fraught with internal divisions in their nine fronts during the late 1970s, primarily in southern and central Colombia.<sup>1</sup>

The dramatic wealth provided by the drug trade and the massive landholdings amassed by drug traffickers provided a new and volatile element in the escalating political violence the 1980s. Beginning in the 1970s, a boom in marijuana cultivation along Colombia's Atlantic Coast created a class of nouveau riche traffickers supplying the U.S. market. In the late 1970s, Colombia's new cartels, first in Medellín and then in Cali, expanded from marijuana to the processing and export of cocaine. Led by a small number of powerful drug kingpins, these family-based empires came to control a billion-dollar cocaine industry that processed coca grown primarily in Bolivia and Peru. They invested millions of dollars to purchase more than 2.5 million acres of land in Colombia between 1983 and 1985, amounting to more than one-twelfth of Colombia's productive farmland.

In response to a call by the Colombian military for the formation of peasant self-defense groups to combat guerrillas, large drug traffickers that had been buying plantations in the Magdalena Valley region—among them Pablo Escobar, the Ochoa brothers, and Jose Gonzola Rodriguez Gacha—created private armies to guarantee their own security and protect the property they had acquired. Simultaneously, Fidel Castaño Gil, who was involved with drug trafficking from 1975 until 1981, created a paramilitary army in Cordoba and Urabá, together with drug traffickers in Magdalena and Puerto Boyacá.<sup>2</sup>

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traditional Liberal and Conservative parties to prevent the loss of local political control to the FARC and the Patriotic Union (UP) were in response to the trafficker's landgrab.<sup>3</sup> Political leaders, cattle ranchers, and peasants tired of guerrilla abuses helped organize paramilitary groups.

This was the beginning of the 'dirty war' in Colombia, during which paramilitary groups linked to drug cartels, particularly the Medellín Cartel, worked closely with Colombian military officers to eliminate suspected guerrilla sympathizers, while at the same time they attacked Colombian authorities investigating drug trafficking and paramilitary activity. Throughout the 1980s, paramilitary groups were implicated in the assassinations of high-ranking government officials, including the murders of Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in 1984 and hundreds of police officers and judges. In the La Rochela massacre in April, 1989, paramilitary gunmen massacred eleven members of a judicial team investigating paramilitary operations linked to local military commanders.

Political reforms in the late 1980s also created an opportunity for small, alternative parties to gain local power. For the first time, mayors and governors were elected rather than appointed. In many areas, these seats were filled with leftist opposition parties and civic movements, and were met with paramilitary violence. The clearest case is the Patriotic Union, which lost thousands of members and a presidential candidate to assassin's bullets; in 1994, the highest remaining elected UP official, Senator Manuel Cepeda, was killed in Bogotá by members of Colombian military intelligence.

International pressure and increasing attacks against government officials led President Barco to declare the creation of paramilitary groups illegal in April 1989. Despite this, paramilitary violence continued in many regions during the early 1990s. The government's efforts to crackdown on the Medellín Cartel led to a bloody war that cost the lives of hundreds of police, judicial officials and bystanders. In 1994, President Cesar Gaviria once again effectively legalized paramilitary organizations through Decree 356, which established 'special services for surveillance and public security.' This decree was the basis for the creation of the Convivir, or paramilitaries, which were officially launched through Resolution 368 in 1995.

Government officials maintained that the Convivir were designed simply to provide improved intelligence and security in remote rural areas. However, this characterization was inaccurate, both in their legal definition and their conformation. Members of Convivir were authorized to carry sophisticated offensive-combat weapons, including mini-uzi machine guns, repeating rifles and revolvers. Convivir members murdered families and threatened numerous others, leading to their forced displacement. In at least one case, the secretary of a Convivir in Cesar province was granted permission to purchase a submachine gun, despite

being named in a Colombian Judicial Police report as a well-known paramilitary leader.<sup>4</sup> In their March 2000 report, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' Office noted that 'well known members of paramilitary groups became leaders of some [Convivir] associations.'

Human rights groups challenged the constitutionality of the Convivir before the Colombian Constitutional Court, arguing that such groups involve the civilian population in the armed conflict. In 1997, the court ruled that the Convivir were legal, but prohibited them from collecting intelligence for the security forces and from receiving military-issued weapons.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent legislation renamed them 'Community Services Groups' (Servicios Comunitarios), but both the Colombian press and the general population continue to refer to them as Convivir.

In the mid-1990s, paramilitary activity in Colombia expanded qualitatively with the creation of a national coordinating body, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). According to the Disciplinary Rules and Constitutional Statutes adopted at the AUC's second national Conference in May 1998, the organization has developed a highly regimented military command structure which incorporates the regional organizations. Carlos Castaño, Fidel's brother has emerged as the spokesperson for the AUC in numerous interviews with the Colombian and international press. He did not assume total control of the AUC until 1994, however, following his brother's mysterious disappearance in the jungle border with Panama. Castaño has been featured on Colombian prime time television and in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek* and *Time*.

The AUC has embarked on a calculated strategy to expand their operations into new regions of the country. In public documents and press statements, they have announced their intention to begin an offensive military campaign, and have in fact carried out a series of massacres targeting the civilian population in these areas. These operations are carried out by newly created 'mobile squads'—elite training and combat units. Following a summit in July 1997, the AUC issued a statement announcing an offensive war 'according to the operational capacity of each regional group,' establishing as the primary targets the traditional guerrilla strongholds of the western plains and the eastern jungle departments. The July massacre in Mapiripán, Meta appeared to be the first step in implementing this new plan. From 15 July through 20 July 1997, gunmen from the AUC took control of Mapiripán, killed at least 30 people, and threatened others. The exact death toll was never established, as many of the bodies were dismembered and thrown into a nearby river. Following a lengthy investigation, a Colombian general was sentenced to 40 months in jail by a military court for dereliction of duty, because he failed to respond to repeated requests for action by local authorities and his own subordinates.

Paramilitary violence has continued to escalate. The Colombian Commission of Jurists reports that the daily average of politically motivated homicide has

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doubled in the past three years to almost 20 members a day. In 2000, almost 85 percent of these murders were attributed to state agents and paramilitary groups, with the remaining 15 percent to guerrilla groups. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report released in March:

The paramilitary phenomenon continues to expand and consolidate. The government's commitment to confronting these groups has been weak and inconsistent. Evidence of this can be seen in the responses to the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights] Office's communications with the authorities about imminent attacks or about the existence of bases, roadblocks and paramilitary movements. The instruments adopted by the Government to combat paramilitary groups have proven ineffective in containing their expansion and dismantling them. In other cases those instruments have not been applied. There is still great concern about the persistent links between public servants and members of paramilitary organizations, as well as the lack of punishment.

### Paramilitary Threats

While paramilitary organizations claim to share a common enemy with the Colombian government, and to be defending state institutions, in fact they represent one of the most serious threats facing democracy in Colombia today. Paramilitary violence is used to consolidate their control of territory, crush efforts at institutional reform, sabotage peace efforts, protect drug production and trafficking and to ensure impunity from prosecution.

Paramilitary groups are deeply involved in all phases of the drug trade. They tax drug production, run cocaine laboratories, protect trafficking routes and even run drugs themselves. According to the DEA, 'The major North Valle drug mafia organizations are poised to become among the most powerful drug trafficking groups in Colombia. The Henao Montoya organization has been closely linked to the paramilitary group run by Carlos Castaño, a major cocaine trafficker in his own right.' Throughout last year, paramilitary massacres targeted areas of expanding coca cultivation. Paramilitary groups have also consolidated territorial control over strategic drug shipping routes in the Middle Magdalena Valley region and the Atlantic Coast. In interviews with the press, paramilitary leaders admit to taxing coca production to support their operations.

Paramilitary groups pose a central threat to Colombian democracy. Over the past half century, paramilitary groups have targeted their attacks on civilians who promote political reform and public participation in Colombian politics and on those institutions trying to encourage democracy, transparency, and human rights. Paramilitary gunmen have threatened, kidnapped, and killed non-governmental and government authorities investigating human rights violations and drug trafficking cases. The Committee to Protect Journalists named Castaño

as one of the top ten threats to press freedom because of paramilitary attacks against journalists. High-ranking officials are not immune; on 21 May 1999, paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño was responsible for the abduction of Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba, president of the Colombian Senate's Human Rights Commission. Following her release, continued death threats forced her into exile. Paramilitary gunmen are blamed for the killings of three internationally known academics on university campuses in the past two years. Numerous other academics, as well as religious leaders and civil society organizers, have been killed, threatened, or forced into exile.

Paramilitary groups are responsible for more than eighty percent of political violence. In addition to the devastating impact of paramilitary violence on individuals and families, these attacks have forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes. According to Bogotá-based think tank Consultaria para los Derechos Humanos y Desplacimientos (CODHES) paramilitary violence has forced more than 300,000 people to flee their homes in the past two years, many from rural areas to urban shantytowns where they swell the ranks of the urban unemployed.

Paramilitary violence has spilled over Colombia's borders, threatening the stability of neighboring countries. Paramilitary massacres have forced thousands of Colombian refugees into Panama and Venezuela. Paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño has issued public communiques threatening attacks against the Panamanian National Guard and Venezuelan security forces. Paramilitary forces have been responsible for violence in Ecuador and Venezuela.

Paramilitary violence threatens efforts for peace, as the Colombian government and FARC begin the first serious efforts to negotiate in almost a decade. Community leaders organizing efforts to support peace rightly fear attack, as paramilitaries target anyone speaking out against violence. Guerrillas rightly fear demobilizing, as such moves in the past have made them vulnerable to paramilitary attack. During the 1980s, paramilitary violence annihilated the Patriotic Union, a legal political party born of failed negotiations with the FARC. Such violence is not a thing of the past; demobilized guerrillas and civilian peace activists continue to be the target of assassination by paramilitary forces. Without minimum guarantees for civil society groups organizing for peace, and for guerrillas who lay down their arms, a negotiated settlement will be virtually impossible.

#### U.S. Policy: The Salvadoran Model in Colombia

During recent debates over U.S. policy towards Colombia, paramilitaries have rarely been mentioned. Many policymakers persist in the belief that these groups

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are marginal actors that will eventually fade away. Worse, some members of Congress appear to be justifying paramilitary violence by claiming that they simply respond to citizen insecurity and growing guerrilla abuses, ignoring the support of the military, their role in drug trafficking, and the fact that the vast majority of victims of paramilitary violence are civilians.

Paramilitary groups were mentioned only briefly in the documents outlining the U.S. 'emergency' supplemental, passed in July 2000 as 'U.S. Support for Plan Colombia.' This package totaled U.S. \$1.3 billion for two years, with over 80 percent military hardware and training for counternarcotics operations. The bulk of U.S. assistance — \$600 million— is destined for the 'Push into Southern Colombia.' This funding will be used to train and equip three new counter-narcotics battalions of the Colombia Army, provide them with air support and intelligence assistance. Human rights conditions were added to the package by Congress; these conditions did focus on steps the Colombian government must take against paramilitary groups and their allies within the Colombian military before U.S. aid could be released. President Clinton chose to waive these conditions in August, however, a tacit acknowledgment that the Colombian government could not meet the minimum requirements of human rights certification.

President Bush, rather than reassessing the policy he inherited, proposes to expand the strategy of supporting local police and security forces in the war on drugs through the Andean region. Like his father, who proposed a five-year, \$2.2 billion 'Andean Strategy' in 1989, President Bush Jr. has announced an 'Andean Initiative' of his own. His proposal, an expansion of Clinton's plan, allocates approximately \$700 million to the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) account, still sends a majority of the aid —55 percent—to Colombia, but increases the amount to Colombia's neighbors. The State Department continues to oppose additional human rights conditions.

All U.S. military assistance to Colombia continues to be sent as counter-narcotics assistance. This is indicative of the dramatic escalation of the military's role in anti-drug operations; currently almost all U.S. military assistance to Latin America is counter-narcotics aid. The anti-drug role of the Pentagon was formalized in 1989 when the Defense Department was designated as 'the single lead agency' for interdiction operations, made possible by the classification of drug trafficking as a threat to national security. Since then, the Pentagon has expanded its role in anti-drug operations, in part in response to the need to redefine the military's roles and missions in the post-Cold War context. In Latin America, this includes the construction of Forwards Operating Locations (FOLs), bases established following the closure of Howard Air Force base in Panama, as staging ground for counter-narcotics operations, many of them targeting Colombia. The U.S. is in the process of constructing FOLs in Ecuador, Aruba, Curacao, and El Salvador.



The U.S. appears to be adopting a 'Salvadoran' strategic approach. Civilian and military policymakers alike invoke U.S. policy towards El Salvador in the 1980s as the model, in which direct military intervention is eschewed in favor of escalating assistance in the form of equipment, training, and intelligence technology. In addition to military strategy, U.S. policy in Colombia resembles its 1980s El Salvador policy in another way: consistent sacrifice of human rights. Much like the creation of Salvadoran elite battalions in the 1980s, the United States is attempting to create a parallel 'clean' mini-military within the Colombian military structure rather than insist on systemic reform of the military. By vetting individuals in new units, the United States hopes to avoid accusations of complicity in human rights abuses.

#### Collateral Damage: Effects of U.S. Policy

U.S. military assistance is being delivered while members of the Colombian military maintain pervasive links with paramilitary groups. Particularly the deployment of U.S.-trained and U.S.-funded battalions in southern Colombia, an area of increasing paramilitary activity, raises serious human rights questions. Following the human rights screening required by the Leahy Amendment, a U.S. law which prohibits U.S. counternarcotics assistance to abusive units of foreign security forces, one of the Colombian army brigades active in the area has been suspended from receiving U.S. assistance, while the other is under investigation. However, the counter-narcotics battalions continue to share intelligence and train with these brigades. The United Nations reported extensive evidence of on-going relations between paramilitary groups and the Colombian military in the Putumayo:

There is a well-known paramilitary roadblock at the entrance of the village of El Placer, just fifteen minutes from a battalion of the Army's 24th Brigade. The roadblock continued to operate eight months after the Office reported directly observing it. The military authorities denied in writing the existence of this paramilitary post. The Office also observed ongoing paramilitary operations at the 'Villa Sandra' ranch, between Puerto Asis and Santa Ana, Putumayo, a few minutes away from the Army's 24th Brigade.

Given the lack of transparency, it is virtually impossible to monitor the impact of U.S. intelligence assistance; however, Colombia's military intelligence structure has documented links with paramilitary and criminal activity. The United States has been supporting the new 'Central Intelligence Command' (CIC) with undisclosed amounts of technical assistance and equipment. The former central military intelligence unit, the 20th Brigade, was disbanded in 1998 following revelations of members' participation in death-squad style killings, including the 1995

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assassination of Conservative politician Alvaro Gomez. The Colombian military has reorganized intelligence gathering responsibilities under control of the CIC, and removed any operational capabilities for the unit. This centralized command works with intelligence officers stationed within military units. However, the members of the 20th Brigade have yet to be brought to trial and sources within the Colombian intelligence forces have described the reform as merely 'changing the name plate on the door.'

Current policy has profound humanitarian consequences. Colombia already has one of the largest population of internally displaced people in the world. Despite this, the United States anticipates forcing Colombian farmers from their homes: The package includes money 'to provide shelter and employment for the Colombians who will be displaced during this push into southern Colombia.' Particularly in southern Colombia, indiscriminate aerial spraying of herbicides and military operations has already exacerbated the conflict and dramatically increased violence on the border with Ecuador.

Spill over from the Colombian conflict into neighboring countries has increasingly concerned both D.C. policymakers and regional leaders. Porous borders, the violent firepower of drug traffickers, and the ongoing fragility of democratic and law enforcement institutions in the region combine for a volatile situation. Venezuela has already denied asylum and forcibly repatriated thousands of Colombians who fled across the border following paramilitary attacks over the

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past two years. Panama has experienced similar border problems, with violent attacks in Panamanian territory by both paramilitary groups and guerrillas. Peru and Brazil have stepped up military presence along the border in anticipation of

increasing conflict. Refugees, violence and drug trafficking have already begun crossing the Putumayo border into Ecuador, where the dollarization of the economy and ongoing political and economic instability could make Ecuador the next haven for drug trafficking.

Many analysts believe that operations will pull the United States into direct support for counterinsurgency operations, despite the current limitation restricting the United States to supporting counter-narcotics activities. Despite their counter-narcotics mandate, the training and equipment provided for the counter-narcotics battalions funded by the United States, as well as their theater of operations, suggest they will have an overriding counterinsurgency objective. The ini-

tial battalion received light infantry and jungle warfare training from U.S. Special Forces. General Fernando Tapias, head of the Colombian High Command, told *The New York Times* that 'the task of this battalion is to confront the armed groups on land and water,' presumably referring to the FARC, which has long dominated the jungle regions of southern Colombia.

#### Conclusion: A New Approach

In a June debate sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, Senator Christopher Dodd claimed there is no alternative to current U.S. policy towards Colombia. This opinion could not be more misguided, nor further from the truth. While there are no silver-bullet solutions to the myriad problems confronting Colombia, and the real tragedy of drug abuse in U.S. communities, there are a number of policy alternatives that could contribute to conflict resolution in Colombia and the reduction of the harm caused by drug abuse here at home.

European governments, rather than matching the U.S. contribution to Plan Colombia, as expected, have been highly critical of the U.S. strategy. On 1 February, the European Parliament passed a resolution 474-1 supporting the peace process in Colombia, and noting that 'stepping up military involvement in the fight against drugs involves the risk of sparking off an escalation of the conflict in the region, and that military solutions cannot bring about lasting peace.' The resolution urged the European Union to 'pursue its own, non-military strategy combining neutrality, transparency, the participation of civil society and undertakings from the parties involved in the negotiations.' President Pastrana himself requested a radically different aid package in 1998; his initial plan was entirely focused on economic and development assistance.

U.S. drug control assistance should shift toward strengthening sound investigative capabilities of civilian judicial institutions and stimulating sustainable development activities for farmers currently involved in illicit crop production. Although U.S. assistance includes funding for alternative development programs, six months after the fumigation campaigns began none of this assistance had been delivered, further eroding public confidence in the government.

Washington must ensure transparency and accountability in all overseas military operations, including counter-narcotics efforts. There are some 300 U.S. advisers on the ground in Colombia from an array of agencies, including the Pentagon, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Drug Enforcement Agency. Much of the U.S. operations and training is being carried out by private U.S. contractors, making oversight and accountability even more difficult.


For real improvement in the human rights situation, and to create the conditions in which democracy and the rule of law can flourish, the sources of politi-

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cal violence must be addressed. Paramilitary groups must be dismantled, their leadership, and those members of the Colombian security forces supporting their activity must be tried and jailed.

Long-term institution building, establishing transparency and accountability, is the only approach that address the real roots of Colombia's crisis: Weak governmental presence in much of the country, inequality, lack of citizen participation, corruption, and an ineffective judicial system. There are many capable and courageous governmental officials and agencies, as well as civil society initiatives that desperately need international support. To name only one, the Human Rights Unit of the Public Prosecutor's Office, Fiscalía, has had significant success investigating some of the most serious human rights crimes and has suffered from threats and attacks leaving several staff members dead and many more in exile. Bureaucratic problems have delayed promised U.S. support, leaving investigators without funds to pay for plane fare to massacre sites and protection for threatened witnesses.

Finally, the United States should support efforts for peace in Colombia. This conflict will not be resolved on the battlefield. Many civilian-led initiatives for conflict resolution and in support of a negotiated settlement offer a window of opportunity for the international community to contribute to real change in Colombia. Full diplomatic and financial support from the United States is vital to peace efforts, and would demonstrate that the U.S. has finally learned that support for abusive militaries can only exacerbate conflict. 

## Notes

See Michael McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft: US Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Counter Terrorism, 1940-1990*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992): 222-223. *Consejeria Presidencial para la Defensa, Proteccion y Promocion de los Derchos Humanos, Buletin Informativo* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional de Colombia): 2, cited in *Human Rights Watch/Americas, The 'Drug War' in Colombia* (New York: Human Rights Watch): 11.

1. Five fronts operated in southern Colombia (Caquetá, Putumayo, Huila, Cauca, and Tolima), two in the central region (Magdalena Medio and Santander), and one in the north (along the Antioquia-Córdoba border). See Pizarro, Eduardo, *La insurgencia armada: ra'ces y perspectives in Sánchez, Gonzalo y Peñaranda, Ricardo, Pasado y Presente de Violencia en Colombia, Cerec, Bogotá, 1991*.

2. According to the *Washington Post*, "in the mid-1980s drug traffickers such as Pablo Escobar and Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha, leaders of the infamous Medellín cartel, bought huge tracts of land in the Magdalena River valley and transformed the self-defense groups from poorly trained peasant militias into sophisticated fighting forces." Doug Farah, "Massacres Imperil U.S. Aid to Colombia Paramilitary Groups Linked to Army," *Washington Post*, January 31, 1999, A01. By the late 1980s Medellín traffickers controlled 40% of the land in the Middle Magdalena, according to a Colombian military estimate, and also funded most of the paramilitary operations in the region

(Andean Cocaine Industry, 50).

3. Ibid. 288-289.

4. WOLA obtained a resolution passed by the Review and Coordination Committee which approved the 1996 sale of a submachine gun for the personal use of a the Convivir secretary in Cesar, despite a 1995 Colombian Judicial Police report naming him as a well-known paramilitary leader. See WOLA, *Losing Ground*. For a full copy of the Judicial Police report, see HRW Colombia's *Killer Networks*, UNHCHR report, 24.

5. See HRW yearly report 1997. DEA Congressional Testimony; Statement by James Milford, Deputy Administrator DEA before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; 16 July 1997. <http://www.udoj.gov/dea/pubs/cngrtest/ct970716.htm>; [www.udoj.gov/dea/pubs/cngrtest/ct970716.htm](http://www.udoj.gov/dea/pubs/cngrtest/ct970716.htm)., 3.

