Negative Brief: Colombia / Drug Interdiction

By “Coach Vance” Trefethen

***Resolved: The United States federal government should considerably decrease its military commitments.***

AFF plan cancels US military presence and/or assistance helping Colombia with drug interdiction. The primary issue in Colombia is the growth of coca plants, which are processed into cocaine. NEG will argue that the only time that has failed is the times when we WEREN’T interdicting – that’s when cocaine in Colombia went up. And the latest US effort, initiated just a few months ago, is not just about drugs, it involves a broader stabilization effort throughout the countryside. Colombia is only now starting to recover from a 50-year civil war that began in the 1960s and ended a couple years ago with a negotiated settlement. But the recovery is fragile and if neglected rural areas don’t see the presence of law and order and civil institutions, they will drop back into civil war and chaos. US military aid, including drug interdiction, is key to the success of that effort.

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Negative: Colombia / Drug Interdiction

MINOR REPAIRS

1. More funding.

If Status quo interdiction efforts aren’t as good as they should be, it’s because we’re not doing much

GENERAL JOHN F. KELLY 2016. (UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS (Ret) FORMER COMBATANT COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND (USSOUTHCOM) statement BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS 13 APRIL 2016 <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Testimony-Kelly-2016-04-131.pdf>

The effort to get at our drug demand begins, or should begin, on the cartel’s end of the field and with a much greater effort. The U.S. military is almost absent in the effort due to an almost total lack of naval forces, although the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Paul Zukunft USCG, seeing the dire need immediately upon assuming his current duties increased the number of cutters and personnel committed to the effort. The Coast Guard’s cupboard is nearly bare, however, given all the commitments the men and women of that organization are required to address in the waters surrounding the United States with an insufficient number of National Security Cutters and other vessels to do what they need to do globally.

SIGNIFICANCE

1. Status quo is wonderful

Status Quo policies have brought great success and “miraculous” results in Colombia

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Colombia does more to help solve our demand problem than do we. For years they have eradicated 40,000 acres of coca annually, destroyed thousands of labs, and just last year seized nearly 200 metric tons of cocaine before it ever left their country. They have done this selflessly and at an incredibly high cost in the blood of their military and police professionals. We have helped them in this decades long effort particularly in the area of information and intelligence sharing, and encouragement. What they have done internally dealing with the terrorist group they have been battling for over 50 years, and in the fight against cocaine trafficking over the last 25 years working with the U.S. as an equal partner under “Plan Columbia,” is nothing less than miraculous. Mr. Chairman I think the Committee knows this, and if it does not it should, Colombia is an exporter of security to the rest of the region. The relationship is a terrific example of how sustained U.S. support based on mutual respect and equal partnership can help a people gain control of their security situation, strengthen government institutions, eradicate corruption, and bolster their economy.

Status Quo US military engagement in Colombia is a model of success. If we lock in current policy, we’ll be on the path to sustainable peace

Ana Rosa Quintana 2020 (Master of Arts degree in global affairs and a bachelor’s degree in political science, both from Florida International University. She also received certificates in National Security, Latin American and Caribbean studies; Senior Policy Analyst, Latin America & Western Hemisphere, at Heritage Foundation) Steps the U.S. Must Take to Secure Peace in Colombia 2 March 2020 <https://www.heritage.org/americas/report/steps-the-us-must-take-secure-peace-colombia>

The U.S.–Colombia relationship serves as a model for the region today. Even with its current challenges, Colombia is a key pillar of stability and security in South America—as well as an economic leader. In order to avoid regression, the Colombian government must provide confidence-building measures at home and to the U.S., demonstrate commitment to the peace plan, and address the cocaine surge with clear and sustained actions. With neighboring Venezuela’s crisis and Nicolás Maduro’s destabilizing activities in Colombia, the U.S. must work with Colombia to solve these hemispheric challenges. Taking the long view amidst these crises, this is an opportunity for the U.S. and Colombia to lock in a sustainable path to peace.

US drug interdiction in Colombia is part of a very successful policy, and it needs to be continued

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In the 1990s, Colombia was on the brink of being a failed state. Today, it has become a regional security leader and economic powerhouse. Colombia is one of Latin America’s greatest success stories and a regional model of U.S. engagement paving the way for a strategic alliance. The U.S. should support a responsible implementation of the peace process. It should have robust policy to deal with the increase in coca cultivation and cocaine production. Congress must provide needed funds for narcotic interdictions along high growth and trafficking areas.

2. No harm to aerial spraying

Fears of cancer risk from herbicide were based on false information

Ana Rosa Quintana 2020 (Master of Arts degree in global affairs and a bachelor’s degree in political science, both from Florida International University. She also received certificates in National Security, Latin American and Caribbean studies) 31 July 2020 How Leftists Would Destroy Congress’ Bipartisan U.S.-Colombia Policy <https://www.heritage.org/americas/commentary/how-leftists-would-destroy-congress-bipartisan-us-colombia-policy>

When Colombia terminated its aerial coca spraying program, it cited a World Health Organization report that has since been disproven (by the World Health Organization itself). The initial report claimed the herbicide glysophate was [“possibly carcinogenic to humans.”](https://www.heritage.org/americas/report/steps-the-us-must-take-secure-peace-colombia) Within a year, a later report stated that glysophate’s ability to cause cancer was [“unlikely,”](https://www.heritage.org/americas/report/steps-the-us-must-take-secure-peace-colombia) thus disproving the health basis for the original decision. At this point, the damage was done. Despite the objections of Colombia’s minister of defense at the time and other security officials, the program was terminated.

3. A/T “Drug interdiction failed”

US interdiction in Colombia didn’t fail. What failed was “NOT” doing interdiction and trying other policies

Ana Rosa Quintana 2020 (Master of Arts degree in global affairs and a bachelor’s degree in political science, both from Florida International University. She also received certificates in National Security, Latin American and Caribbean studies; Senior Policy Analyst, Latin America & Western Hemisphere, at Heritage Foundation) Steps the U.S. Must Take to Secure Peace in Colombia 2 March 2020 (brackets and ellipses in original) <https://www.heritage.org/americas/report/steps-the-us-must-take-secure-peace-colombia>

Policies adopted during the peace process negotiations directly contributed to the current increased production levels. Despite objections from the Colombian Minister of Defense and other Colombian security officials in 2015, the Colombian government chose to end U.S. aerial eradication and other offensive counternarcotics programs. The then-Minister of Health based his decision on a scientifically baseless World Health Organization (WHO) report that the herbicide used to eradicate coca crops, glyphosate, is “possibly carcinogenic to humans.” The following year, the WHO released another report saying the herbicide is “unlikely” to cause cancer. U.S. government officials rejected the WHO report and the Colombian government’s decision, stating that in the more than 20 years the U.S. has used aerial eradication in Colombia “[t]here is not one single verified case…of cancer being caused by glyphosate.” At the same time, coca growers were told of upcoming programs that would pay farmers for substituting coca for other crops. This reportedly created a perverse incentive for coca farmers to grow coca crops in exchange for government subsidies.

4. A/T “Interdiction won’t solve for drug abuse”

Combine it with other social reforms and it can help

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I will close with a few final thoughts. The first is that we must keep the pressure on the cartels and destroy their crops before they are harvested, destroy their production facilities wherever they are, and break up the networks by arrest and prosecution. We must also combine these often times kinetic efforts with locating the financial institutions that knowingly or unknowingly support the financial aspect of drug trafficking—and seize their billions. Second, I want to highlight the efforts of my very good friend Mike Botticelli, the Director of National Drug Control Policy, who quite rightly tells us that with addiction we are really dealing with a disease and we should be focused on saving and rehabilitating those unfortunate to suffer the disease, and not just jailing them even for petty crimes.

SOLVENCY

1. Suspending US military aid won’t make things better

Ending US military aid won’t make anything in Colombia better. Turn: It will make everything worse

Ana Rosa Quintana 2020 (Master of Arts degree in global affairs and a bachelor’s degree in political science, both from Florida International University. She also received certificates in National Security, Latin American and Caribbean studies) 31 July 2020 How Leftists Would Destroy Congress’ Bipartisan U.S.-Colombia Policy <https://www.heritage.org/americas/commentary/how-leftists-would-destroy-congress-bipartisan-us-colombia-policy>

Cutting off U.S. support will not improve the human rights situation and in fact, the lack of oversight and engagement will worsen the situation. Depriving Colombia of U.S. resources will reduce its ability to implement its ambitious peace agreement and reconciliation after over 50 years of conflict. It will also be left with less means to take care of the more than 2 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants inside of Colombia.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Zonas Futuro jeopardized. AFF Plan jeopardizes the Colombian “Zonas Futuro” program

Link: US forces aren’t “just” fighting drugs. They’re doing so as part of a bigger operation to improve security and stability in under-served parts of Colombia

Adam Isacson 2020. (M.A. in international relations) 1 June 2020 BRING THE TRAINERS HOME: THIS IS NO TIME FOR U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL TO BE ADVISING OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN COLOMBIA <https://adamisacson.com/bring-the-trainers-home-this-is-no-time-for-u-s-military-personnel-to-be-advising-offensive-operations-in-colombia/> (brackets added)

The SFAB [U.S. Security Force Assistance Brigade] will “focus its efforts primarily on the ‘Zonas Futuro’ defined by the National Government,” reads the U.S. Embassy [announcement](https://co.usembassy.gov/sfab-mission-arrives-in-colombia/). The Zonas Futuro are an [initiative](https://id.presidencia.gov.co/Paginas/prensa/2019/190808-Tumaco-Presidente-Duque-lanzo-Zonas-Futuro-estrategia-integral-impulsar-desarrollo-territorios-afectados-violencia.aspx) spearheaded by the National Security Council of Colombia’s Presidency. Their stated goal is to introduce government presence in five abandoned, violent regions, making up less than 3 percent of Colombia’s national territory, with much armed-group presence and drug production or transshipment. The five “Zonas” are comprised of parts of:  
Tumaco, in Colombia’s southwest corner bordering Ecuador and the Pacific, the country’s number-one coca producing municipality;  
The Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander department in the northeast, near the Venezuelan border, a zone of heavy ELN presence and cocaine production;  
The area around the Chiribiquete National Park in Caquetá department, a zone of significant FARC dissident activity;  
The department of Arauca, bordering Venezuela in northeastern Colombia, a longtime ELN stronghold;   
and   
The Bajo Cauca region of northeastern Antioquia department and adjoining southern Córdoba department, a cocaine-producing zone brutally contested by two neo-paramilitary groups, FARC dissidents, and the ELN. Defense Minister Trujillo [told](https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/asi-funcionara-la-mision-militar-de-ee-uu-que-apoyara-la-lucha-contra-el-narcotrafico-articulo-921544) local media that the U.S. trainers will be accompanying military units in the first three of these zones: Tumaco (the Colombian armed forces’ Hércules Task Force), Catatumbo (the Vulcano Task Force), and Chiribiquete (the Omega Task Force). They will also accompany the Army Counter-Narcotics Brigade, which operates throughout the country. Colombian government security planners interviewed by WOLA [Washington Office on Latin America, a non-profit human rights group] say that the goal of the Zonas Futuro is to make possible the entry of the entire Colombian government into these abandoned territories: not just soldiers and police, but civilian service-providers.

Link: US counter-narcotics efforts are part of support for Zonas Futuro and PDET, a broader initiative to stabilize neglected rural communities

US Embassy in Colombia 2019. “U.S.-Colombia High Level Dialogue Joint Communique” 9 Oct 2019 <https://co.usembassy.gov/u-s-colombia-high-level-dialogue-joint-communique/>

Colombia and the United States recognized that expanding economic opportunities, police presence, and government services in marginalized long-neglected rural communities is necessary to sustain counternarcotics gains, improve citizen security, ensure a durable peace, and attain our joint 2023 goals of reducing coca cultivation and cocaine production by 50 percent. For that reason, Minister Trujillo and Secretary Pompeo agreed to coordinate counternarcotics, security, and economic prosperity efforts through a strategic cooperation framework between the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Government of Colombia. This effort will focus on six to eight priority PDET municipalities within Colombian government-designated Zonas Futuro, especially those plagued by high levels of coca cultivation and narcotrafficking, selected in agreement with Colombia’s National Security Council. The Zonas Futuro are the Duque Administration’s targeted approach to integrated whole-of-government interventions in strategic areas. Zonas Futuro complement the territorial development plans known by their Spanish-language acronym PDET.

Link: Restoring governance in neglected areas is key to stabilizing Colombia

Janina Staguhn, Erol Yayboke and Melissa Dalton 2020. (Staguhn – Program Coordinator, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Yayboke – Deputy Director & Senior Fellow, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Dalton directs the Cooperative Defense Project and is deputy director and a senior fellow with the International Security Program at CSIS) Colombia at a Stabilization Crossroads 5 March 2020 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/colombia-stabilization-crossroads>

Weak governance is thus a key reason for continued instability in Colombia. While the Duque administration has an opportunity to show the government’s interest and investment in areas via peace accord-related programs, significant governance challenges exist beyond the 170 PDETs municipalities. Justice and accountability remain distant concepts in many places, creating perverse opportunities for illicit groups to play roles traditionally assigned to governments, such as security guarantor, service provider, and dispute resolver. Though there are early positive trends toward recently elected local officials who recognize these economic and governance contributors to instability (for example, in [Medellín and Bogotá](https://latinamericareports.com/colombias-key-local-election-outcomes-mark-a-shift-away-from-political-elite/3572/)), rebuilding trust in institutions after decade of neglect, corrupt, and predatory action will be a long-term process.

Link: Zonas Futuro won’t work without better training and capabilities

Janina Staguhn, Erol Yayboke and Melissa Dalton 2020. (Staguhn – Program Coordinator, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Yayboke – Deputy Director & Senior Fellow, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Dalton directs the Cooperative Defense Project and is deputy director and a senior fellow with the International Security Program at CSIS) Colombia at a Stabilization Crossroads 5 March 2020 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/colombia-stabilization-crossroads>

Though Colombia’s military deserves significant credit for pressuring the FARC on the battlefield to come to the negotiating table, Colombia’s military has yet to transition from an army of war to an army of peace. Under the Zonas Futuro plan, President Duque is now deploying the military out of their barracks and into the territories, emphasizing the security-led intervention discussed above. Without requisite training and capabilities to deploy as a stabilizing and civilian protection force, the military risks deepening local popular distrust and suspicion of their role in communities.

Link: US forces provide Colombia with the needed training and capabilities

US Army, Southern Command 2020. “SOUTHCOM to Deploy U.S. Army Advisory Team to Support Enhanced Counter-narcotics Cooperation with Colombia” 28 May 2020 <https://www.southcom.mil/News/PressReleases/Article/2199735/southcom-to-deploy-us-army-advisory-team-to-support-enhanced-counter-narcotics/>

The U.S. Army’s 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) will deploy an advisory team to Colombia June 1 to support U.S. enhanced counter-narcotics cooperation with Colombian security forces. The brigade’s company-sized advisory team will provide military support to U.S.-Colombia diplomatic and development efforts by training host units with strengthening capabilities crucial to U.S.-Colombia enhanced counter-narcotics cooperation.[**END QUOTE]** The deployment marks the first time an SFAB advisory team supports a partner country in the region and will support the Enhanced Counter-Narcotics Operation announced April 1 by U.S. President Donald Trump. SFAB members receive specialized education at the Military Advisor Training Academy at Fort Benning, Ga., where they learn to assist the professional military forces of U.S. partners and allies based on operational and institutional needs. They are trained and equipped to assess, support, advise and liaise with defense and security partners around the globe. [**THEY GO ON TO SAY LATER IN THE CONTEXT QUOTE:**] In Colombia, the team will work with host units in areas designated by the Colombian government as “priority areas,” where they will focus on logistics, services and intelligence capabilities directly supporting U.S.-Colombia counter-narcotics collaboration and information sharing.

Brink: Colombia is on the brink of finally achieving peace or slipping back into chaos. It all depends on stabilizing its territories

Janina Staguhn, Erol Yayboke and Melissa Dalton 2020. (Staguhn – Program Coordinator, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Yayboke – Deputy Director & Senior Fellow, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Dalton directs the Cooperative Defense Project and is deputy director and a senior fellow with the International Security Program at CSIS) Colombia at a Stabilization Crossroads 5 March 2020 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/colombia-stabilization-crossroads>

Colombia was on the verge of becoming a failed state [20 years ago](https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ad5330.html?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=a0db2ad7ad29fc0db165e62c563b594e60de8817-1581085143-0-AWx8SRkiA6kEKZoB5EELj7KIBbZPCC0575lDxwAQGwVuMpYP0lCPsWlU1phFXTBsEAB53TDpX70gbpE9HWwThGvcONPvD50W3Lvpxf2NB6F65f1RjnhYeWQBsNk4rErwNPOi38b_7tZQzncXgjsRBQU4zsAu2rNvf3dhWk1Q6hOdS8_N7Ldbe2QL6Yp1Rf_T4bScbIWnztpQUZZKvqXwr4W6Of9pKEs0IxUZXXe0nNPJaIytV4TWXGfRa6iWguIiK3Tg2pE2uu2yI8GZK95zAfgmIPazdWJ5814ad8PqKfPg). The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) held territory on the outskirts of Bogotá, and myriad other guerilla groups wrought daily havoc on the government and on citizens across the country. Two decades later, Colombia finds itself at a crossroads. A more promising future hinges on the Colombian government pursuing an integrated and conflict-aware approach to stabilization in Colombia’s territories.

Impact: Going back to the way it was before would be really bad: 250,000 deaths before the peace agreement was signed.

Dr. Barnett S. Koven 2016. (PhD; Training Director, Near-peer Competition Lead Researcher and Counterterrorism Lead Researcher at the University of Maryland’s (UMD) National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) )'“Give Peace a Chance”? Explaining Colombia’s (Failed) Peace Process with the FARC.' November 2016 <https://www.start.umd.edu/news/give-peace-chance-explaining-colombia-s-failed-peace-process-farc>

Colombia is home to Latin America’s longest ongoing internal conflict. Since 1964 an array of Marxist insurgencies have been in violent confrontation with the state. The involvement of right-wing paramilitary forces and narco-traffickers has further exacerbated the fighting, claiming over 250,000 lives and displacing millions more.

Backup: Strengthening Zonas Futuro and PDET are key to Colombia’s future

Janina Staguhn, Erol Yayboke and Melissa Dalton 2020. (Staguhn – Program Coordinator, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Yayboke – Deputy Director & Senior Fellow, Project on Prosperity & Development at Center for Strategic & International Studies. Dalton directs the Cooperative Defense Project and is deputy director and a senior fellow with the International Security Program at CSIS) 5 May 2020 “Mapping Stabilization in Post-Peace Accord Colombia” <https://www.csis.org/analysis/mapping-stabilization-post-peace-accord-colombia>

Finally, a disturbing increase in social leader killings since the signing of the peace accords throughout Colombia’s territories emphasize the importance of synchronizing PDETs and Zonas Futuro initiatives to provide legitimate local justice and security measures to the population. The spike in killings is likely the result of illicit groups pushing back against the threat of more formal governance, security, and economic initiatives introduced in the territories. Empowering locally legitimate justice and security authorities through PDETs, Zonas Futuro, and international stabilization projects will be important to create trust and accountability in Colombian institutions. Doing so will ensure that all Colombians can report on corrupt and illicit actors and will protect local leaders on whom Colombia’s future depends.

2. Cocaine

Crop eradication in Colombia is successful. Cocaine production spiked massively when US program was suspended 2014-2018, and US cocaine overdoses increased too

Ana Rosa Quintana 2020 (Master of Arts degree in global affairs and a bachelor’s degree in political science, both from Florida International University. She also received certificates in National Security, Latin American and Caribbean studies) 31 July 2020 How Leftists Would Destroy Congress’ Bipartisan U.S.-Colombia Policy <https://www.heritage.org/americas/commentary/how-leftists-would-destroy-congress-bipartisan-us-colombia-policy>

One provision in the House, put forward by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., seeks to eliminate U.S. funding for aerial eradication of coca crops—the raw ingredient in cocaine. Consider the following facts to understand how unwise and irresponsible this policy would be. In 2015, Colombia terminated its U.S.-funded aerial coca eradication program, leading to a massive increase in coca cultivation and cocaine production numbers. Between 2014 and 2018, there was [a historic spike](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/ondcp-reports-cocaine-production-colombia-leveling-off/) in coca crop cultivation rates, and with it, an accompanying increase in potential cocaine production. In 2014, 112,000 hectares (roughly 277,000 acres) of coca were cultivated, in comparison to 208,000 in 2018. During this time, U.S. cocaine overdoses also increased. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration [estimates that 90%](https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-01/2019-NDTA-final-01-14-2020_Low_Web-DIR-007-20_2019.pdf) of the cocaine seized in the U.S. is of Colombian origin.

Link: US support is key to reducing cocaine in Colombia, and we need to continue

Ana Rosa Quintana 2020 (Master of Arts degree in global affairs and a bachelor’s degree in political science, both from Florida International University. She also received certificates in National Security, Latin American and Caribbean studies) 31 July 2020 How Leftists Would Destroy Congress’ Bipartisan U.S.-Colombia Policy <https://www.heritage.org/americas/commentary/how-leftists-would-destroy-congress-bipartisan-us-colombia-policy>

[According to Colombia’s president](https://www.reuters.com/article/colombia-politics/colombias-duque-in-court-defends-use-of-herbicide-to-destroy-coca-crops-idUSL1N20U0O0), manual eradication is far less efficient or cost effective. They can only eradicate 2 to 3 hectares per day, whereas aerial spraying destroys 120 to 150 hectares and costs more than two times less. Barring any additional judicial setbacks, Colombia is set to resume its aerial spraying program with U.S. support this fall. The U.S. should not handicap Colombia’s efforts to contain its spiraling cocaine production problems.

Impact: Columbian cocaine = death in the U.S.

Ana Rosa Quintana 2020 (Master of Arts degree in global affairs and a bachelor’s degree in political science, both from Florida International University. She also received certificates in National Security, Latin American and Caribbean studies; Senior Policy Analyst, Latin America & Western Hemisphere, at Heritage Foundation) “Steps the U.S. Must Take to Secure Peace in Colombia” 2 March 2020 <https://www.heritage.org/americas/report/steps-the-us-must-take-secure-peace-colombia>

The U.S. has a deep and long-term interest in supporting Colombia’s efforts against the illicit cocaine industry. Trafficking and abuse of cocaine in the U.S. remains a major threat. Over the past few years, increased Colombian cocaine production has directly translated into “domestic abuse indicators”in the U.S., e.g., cocaine-involved overdose deaths, cocaine initiates, and an exponential increase in export quality cocaine.

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