

PLAN COLOMBIA:
THE VIEW FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE

Eduardo Pizano

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FOREWORD

This is one in the special series of monographs emanating from the February 2001 conference on *Plan Colombia* cosponsored by the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College and the Dante B. Fascell North-South Center of the University of Miami. This monograph is a transcription of a luncheon speech delivered by Eduardo Pizano, a former member of the Colombian Senate and now the General Secretary to the President of Colombia. In effect, it is a presidential rebuttal of various “misconceptions” stemming from the uncertainty and confusion that permeated conference discussions involving U.S. policy in Colombia and the implementation of *Plan Colombia*.

Mr. Pizano makes several points that are both compelling and instructive. First, Colombia's sovereignty is being impinged by illegal narco-trafficking organizations and insurgent allies that threaten democratic governance from within. Thus, of necessity, *Plan Colombia* must include strong military and counternarcotics components. Second, Colombia has the military forces necessary to deal with the violence in the country, but the armed forces and the police need training, equipment, and mobility assets. Third, *Plan Colombia* also includes a very strong social component—as a matter of fact, the vast majority of the \$7.5 billion being allocated for the plan is designated for social and economic development purposes. Finally, President Pastrana's General Secretary argues that there are no “cocksure” short-term answers to Colombia's problems. What is certain is that these problems are being dealt with aggressively by Colombia and its friends.

The Strategic Studies Institute and the North-South Center are pleased to offer the comments of Mr. Pizano to help inform the ongoing national and international debates concerning security issues that affect the vital interests of

the United States, Colombia, and the entire global community.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

PREFACE

The "insider" in this monograph is indeed a brave man. A former Colombian senator who was forced to flee his country with his family when targeted by the Cali Cartel, he has returned to continue to work for a Colombia which its citizens yearn to have. He gives us reason to hope.

Violence and guerrilla movements, he tells us, are typical of the history, including recent history, of many countries. In Colombia the current waves of violence started in the 1940s, while the two major guerrilla movements, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional, come out of the 1960s. Yet, he says, there is a major difference between these movements and those which have wracked other Latin American countries. That difference is drugs. In addition to the guerrillas, the more recently-appearing "self-defense" or "paramilitary" forces and their growth are also attributable to their involvement in the drug trade.

Drugs not only provide the money to sustain these violent movements; they also build a base of political support. Since the growing of coca was shut down in Peru and Bolivia, it began in Colombia, hence the involvement of thousands of peasants who earn their livelihood from it. That is a formidable political base. The FARC, therefore, he tells us, have doubled their size in the 1990s.

What can be done? The "insider," like the more thoughtful outsiders, does not have a quick or easy solution. It is obvious to him, however, that *Plan Colombia* must have a strong military component. Until it began to be restructured, the Colombian army was simply losing the war in serious military encounters. The author tells us that "those who suggest that *Plan Colombia* should not have a military component are not facing the realities on the

ground. . . ." This also includes the best equipment; the army cannot continue to be outgunned by the FARC.

At the same time, he says, it is absolutely essential that, through a military criminal court, the Colombian military assure respect for human rights. This is now being done. He argues against the many "misconceptions" about Colombia held abroad, one of which is that the government and army tacitly support the "paramilitaries" since they can fight the "enemy" in ways which the army cannot. He offers a resounding defense to that persistent charge.

What else should be emphasized to help Colombia? The author tells us that "Colombia is confronting its challenges" across the board and that economic measures, especially membership in a hemispheric free trade area, would be a great help. Colombia is helping itself, goes his message, and it deserves the cooperation of the international community in return.

Ambler H. Moss, Jr., Director
The Dante B. Fascell North-South
Center
University of Miami

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

EDUARDO PIZANO DE NARVAEZ studied through 8th grade at the Colegio San Carlos in Bogotá, Colombia. He finished high school in the United States at the Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania. He also studied at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogota, Colombia, and holds an MPA from Harvard University. Among his areas of interest are history, information technology, family, and the countryside. At 19 Mr. Pizano was mayor of the county of Chia in Colombia, and later served as a councilman for 12 years. He is owner and manager of Hortaexport, a food trade company. He served for 6 years as presidential counsel for the Shell Group in Colombia, dealing with governmental issues, community relations, and business image. Mr. Pizano was elected a national senator and represented the New Democratic Force in the Colombian Congress from 1991 to 1998. From August 1996 to May 2000, he served as president of the National Telecommunications Company. Mr. Pizano now serves as General Secretary to the President of Colombia.

PLAN COLOMBIA: A VIEW FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE

I begin by recollecting briefly what the guerrilla movement has been doing in Colombia for the last 40 years. More specifically, I shall glance at what the current government is trying to do in its confrontation with the violent actors in this nation. Guerrilla movements have been active in Colombia going back to the early Sixties, with 1960 having been a particularly hard year. And even since the late Forties, Colombia has been living with *la violencia*, in which liberals and conservatives kill each other in order to seize control of the government. Of course, there have been efforts to reconcile the liberal and conservative camps. A peace agreement permitted the *Fruente Nacional* to develop in which liberals and conservatives shared power until 1960. Thereupon, the Liberal Party decided to create an armed group which came to be known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Its leader, Manuel Marulanda, initiated a guerrilla movement which now after 40 years deploys a military force numbering close to 18,000 armed guerrillas active in most of the rural areas of Colombia.

The mid-Sixties brought a second armed group to Colombia. Partially as a result of the economic blockade against Cuba, the Cuban government under Fidel Castro initiated a series of revolutionary movements in Latin America. Thus arose in Colombia the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN), which continues to this day. A tenuous peace agreement between this guerrilla group and the government is in force at the present time. The government is trying to initiate formal conversations.

What is the difference between FARC and the rest of the guerrilla movements in Latin America or elsewhere? There were guerrilla movements in Guatemala and Salvador. They existed in the Far East in Malaysia. Such movements

have traditionally seemed to wax and wane, but in Colombia the guerrilla movement seems to persist and grow. So, to return to our question, what is the difference between what is happening in Colombia and what is happening in the rest of the world? The difference is drugs. Until the beginning of the 1990s, virtually all the coca drug paste came from Peru and Bolivia. Colombia was a transition country, containing the processing labs. The cocaine paste came to Colombia, where it was processed into a consumable powder and then transshipped to the North American market.

Crop eradication programs were initiated in Peru and Bolivia. Additionally, the United States, with the permission of Colombia, installed a radar screen situated to detect aircraft carrying cocaine paste into Colombia from such sites as Peru and Bolivia. This radar screen hurt considerably the traffic of drugs. In fact, though much of the reduction has been attributed to the crop eradication programs in Peru and Bolivia, it is my feeling that the radars installed in Colombia were the most important tools in reducing the drug flow into that country.

In response, the Cali Cartel headed by Rodriguez Orejuela undertook to bring the cultivation of the coca crop to Colombia itself. The Colombian government mustered strong resistance to this tactic, especially after it was augmented by assassinations of judges and ministers, and attacks on Colombian society. But the nature of the struggle was changed fundamentally by the massive shift of coca cultivation onto Colombian territory.

Before, the struggle was essentially against expressly criminal elements—those who operated the labs that processed coca paste into powder cocaine. Now, however, the Colombian peasantry entered the picture, for it was this part of the population whom the drug lords called upon to plant and harvest the coca crops. Whereas earlier the antidrug policing effort consisted largely of jailing or extraditing a relatively few lab entrepreneurs, the problem now came to involve an entire economic class. Moreover,

this was an economic class traditionally marginalized in Colombia and in behalf of which there was no agrarian policy in place to provide attractive farm or employment alternatives. This was a class for which the government had no credible policy to provide good nutrition, good education, and a decent quality of life. And the drug lords came upon the scene with their coca crop initiative in Colombia itself at precisely the right historical moment to implicate an entire economic class, rendered vulnerable to exploitation by centuries of governmental neglect.

Meanwhile, as the indigenous production of coca expanded in the 1990s, U.S. Government crop eradication efforts also expanded in an effort to control such production. This meant that the coca growers needed protection. Thus a marriage of convenience occurred between the guerrillas, which are essentially armed bandits, and the cocaine growers, including not only the farmers but all those sponsoring the growers—those providing the seeds, the fertilizers, the chemical precursors. These elements are financed by the big drug lords. The drug lords cooperate with the guerrillas in order to achieve protection of the labs and the plantations when police arrive to disrupt the operation or perform aerial spraying.

In exchange for protecting crop areas and labs, the guerrillas receive a share of the income provided by sale of the cocaine. In some cases, such as Guaviare Province, the drug lords are pushed aside and the guerrillas grab control over the entire process. Even where the drug lords and cultivators remain, the guerrillas seem to be involving themselves more and more in the cocaine business itself. Gaining control over drug production in Colombia has permitted the FARC to grow, in fact doubling its size in the 1990s. Obviously, the emergence of such a behemoth cocaine engine in such a short time is seen as a threat by everybody in the country.

To protect themselves from such erosion of their position, the drug lords have recruited and organized

so-called "self-defense groups"—paramilitaries—which, according to the Colombian Constitution and the law, are illegal. They are not supported by the government, and they are not supported by the armed forces. And what begins as self-defense groups linked solely to drug lords later leads to cattle ranchers and local businessmen adversely affected by guerrillas organizing their own self-defense groups.

Carlos Castano has emerged as the leader of these groups. He observed what the guerrilla was doing and what the FARC was doing—how they were able to double their forces—and he copied their model. He began to control cocaine, cocaine trade, and chemical precursors, wherever his so-called paramilitary—which are *not* paramilitary; they are illegal self-defense groups—have a presence.

This movement is expanding rapidly. Today, for example, in the Middle Magdalena in the Sierra de San Lucas, close to 20,000 hectares of cocaine are planted. In Catatumbo in the province of Norte de Santander, next to Venezuela, there are today some 8,000 hectares in cultivation. In Putumayo, which was a FARC stronghold until mid-2000, the paramilitary is going in and trying to take control of the cocaine business.

While the paramilitaries are moving, the FARC is moving as well. Drugs and cocaine are moving to the Pacific coast in Tumaco along the lower Colombia Pacific coast next to Ecuador. Plantations are emerging there. In an episode occurring as the year 2000 drew to a close, 70 ELN guerrillas were shot, and the FARC began taking control over Latso next to the Pacific coast of Colombia. Drugs have become the gasoline fueling the war in Colombia.

Mr. Castano admits that more than 50 percent of the income sustaining his illegal self-defense groups comes from drugs. The FARC as well says that most of its income comes from drugs, augmented by extortion and kidnappings. This is the actual situation that confronted Andres Pastrana when he assumed leadership of the government. He took over a country in which guerrillas and

illegal self-defense groups are receiving between 500 million and a billion dollars a year in cash money from the cocaine and heroin businesses.

So what is to be done? One should be extremely leery of positing cocksure answers to that question. There are no short-term answers. And even the most intelligently conceived long-term approaches, while perhaps unexceptionable in theory, will in practice face incredibly long odds. I have lived in Colombia for some 40 years. I have been in the Colombian Senate for 8 years. I've traveled all over Colombia. I've been familiar with Colombia's problems for most of my life. And I still have fundamental doubts about what we should do and how we should proceed. It's an extraordinarily complex and intricate situation.

Colombia is not Guatemala, it is not El Salvador. Colombia presents an entirely different reality. The guerrilla movement it faces does not have any political support from abroad. Castro does not have any possibility of assisting with a peace process in Colombia. The guerrillas are completely independent of any foreign supporters. There are reports that some governments are supporting the guerrillas in Colombia, and it is possible that some technical support has been or could be provided from abroad. But the guerrilla organizations have all the money they require. In talking about the FARC, one is talking about an institution that controls close to a billion dollars a year in income.

In deciding how to counter such a powerful force, it is natural for the government to tend to its own military as part of its early initiatives. Thus we concluded that the armed forces needed to be restructured. After all, the armed forces had experienced severe defeats in the initial months of 1998. Their military bases had been overrun and seized, armaments were looted, and soldiers were killed or kidnapped. The FARC showed every sign of achieving military ascendancy in those areas that mattered to it. In fact, a reasonable estimate in 1998 was that if current

trends continued, the entire country would be lost in 5 years. The guerrilla movement had completed phase one of revolutionary war, consisting of ambushes and hit-and-run raids. Now they were entering phase two—the use of 300 to 500-man guerrilla units in seizures of small towns and stand-up confrontations with regular units.

Thus Rodrigo Llored, who was then the Minister of Defense, made the decision to restructure the armed forces. This effort has been continued by Luis Fernando Ramírez and his team in the Ministry of Defense. We have received strong support from the U.S. military, which has helped us develop a plan for professionalizing the armed forces in Colombia and increasing their numbers to 452,000 by mid-2001 from the level of 12,000 that existed formerly. We have moved from an infantry-based army to a helicopter-transported army. We should have something in excess of 265 helicopters carrying soldiers from one corner of the country to the other.

Colombia's geography is distinctly mountainous, which entails transporting forces and materiel across the Andes at very high altitudes. The country also contains jungle and a coastal area. Such varied geography makes it difficult to combat the guerrilla phenomenon.

As an adjunct to restructuring the armed forces, judicial reform was undertaken, touching those aspects that dealt with the war. A new military criminal court was created by Congress. A law was passed granting the president discretionary authority to fire and take to court any military member who had compromising contacts with the paramilitary or illegal self-defense groups. Moreover, what we call "la desaparacion forzosa"—the forced abduction and "disappearance" of a citizen at the hands of a member of the armed forces—became classified as criminal conduct. Perpetrators could be tried as criminals, not by military courts but by the civil jurisdiction. In a similar vein, the Constitutional Court produced a landmark decision, the effect of which was to transfer jurisdiction from military

courts to civil courts for a range of civil rights offenses by soldiers. That being done, the time is now ripe for direct action against the violent actors standing at the heart of the Colombian drug problem.

Colombia had been receiving support from the U.S. Government since the early 1980s. Fumigation was undertaken in the northern part of Colombia, initially against marijuana plants in the Sierra de San Lucas and Santa Marta, and every year funds were provided for the police to attack the drugs. But all such efforts were as mere pinpricks on the drug trade. There was never a decisive act or resolve to end drug trafficking in Colombia. For example, consider the case of Putumayo, whose territory represented close to 50 percent of the area planted with coca in Colombia. The former government of Colombia never went into Putumayo. Anti-drug operations were prohibited there, not because drugs were welcomed but rather because the government lacked the projectible military power to contend with the well-armed guerrillas and protect the 300,000 inhabitants. The FARC alone maintains five guerrilla fronts in the state of Putumayo. In the state of Putumayo today, there is roughly one guerrilla for every 150 inhabitants. Those who suggest that *Plan Colombia* should not have included a military component are not facing the realities of conditions on the ground in Colombia.

It was against such a backdrop that the government decided to transform its armed forces. It needed the support of fumigation aircraft, it needed the support of armed helicopters to protect the aircraft while they were eradicating the coca, and it needed a land force to enter hostile areas and perform essential neutralization tasks on the ground. Some 3 or 4 years ago when I was a Colombian senator, there was a persistent rumor afoot that when the El Salvadoran war ended, the remaining rebel antiaircraft missiles were moved to Putumayo for the use of the guerrillas there. That suspicion was an important reason why the police never flew over Putumayo in a major cocaine-eradication effort. I mention this to drive home the

point that the Colombian armed forces, if they are to be successful in their war against the guerrillas, must among other measures be equipped with the appropriate military hardware.

In 1998, Putumayo had essentially been lost as part of the territory of Colombia. Yes, there were some elected politicians in the area, but the government did not have control. Prospects improved, however, when *Plan Colombia* was adopted. We asked for the hardware. We received strong support from then Commander-in-Chief Southern Forces General Charles Wilhelm and many concerned authorities in the U.S. Government who grasped the gravity of the situation in Colombia. During the year 2000, I saw at least 50 or 60 U.S. Congressmen and Senators visit Colombia. I accompanied some of them to Putumayo itself, not to the city of Bogotá or to Cartagena. I've seen these legislators sitting in the Putumayo fields taking a first-hand look at the situation. That's why enlightened decisions on the question of Colombia have been issuing from the halls of the U.S. Congress. Every time a ballot is cast in the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives, it becomes a matter of public record, and the elected official has to go out to the streets of his or her home district to defend the vote. To defend their votes, elected U.S. officials need to learn the truth up close and personal. I have little use for outsiders who come to Colombia and, as soon as they get off the plane, announce that Colombia has not done its job.

In the mid-1990s, I had to get away from Colombia for awhile, taking my family with me. I had problems specifically with the Cali Cartel leader, Mr. Santa Cruz, who is now deceased. But I always had in my heart the idea of coming back to Colombia. I am a Colombian, a proud Colombian citizen. I love my country, and I want it to survive for my children. I want to be able to live in Colombia because I believe it is among the very best countries in the world. If those such as myself, who had an opportunity to obtain the finest education and so many avenues to success

in Colombia, did not take seriously the responsibility thereby incurred to return to our homeland, there would never be enough citizens of resolve to set things aright. I did indeed come back to Colombia. The day after I returned, I voted for a constitutional reform measure authorizing the extradition of Colombian nationals implicated in the drug trade. If we in Colombia are not able to subject such people to the rigors of justice ourselves, then we should permit some other concerned government to undertake that essential role.

The last issue we decided to tackle in 1998 was the need to get the international community involved. As soon as President Pastrana was elected, he went to the United States for consultations with President William Clinton. He carried the message that there was a co-responsibility in dealing with the drug problem—that it wasn't Colombia's problem alone. President Clinton understood this co-responsibility, and he was forthcoming in laying the groundwork for the necessary assistance. Japan, the European Union, and many other countries have also been helpful, providing resources and support, particularly with regard to the guerrilla problem posed by the ELN. One now finds the ambassadors of helpful nations walking in the middle of very dangerous guerrilla and self-defense group controlled areas, trying to come up with solutions.

The international community today does indeed have an important role to play in resolving the problems of Colombia. Naysayers claim that Colombia loses its sovereignty to the extent that outsiders share in important decisions touching the nation's fate. They forget that Colombia has already lost its sovereignty to the extent that inside power groups like the FARC control its territory. They forget that we will not be able to achieve a peace agreement with the FARC by ourselves. We need the support of the international community, but achieving full support will take time. What President Pastrana has in mind is simply to start the process. Once the machinery is in place and the process is securely and robustly in motion,

then nobody will be able to stop it. Only the international community can provide the impetus to set the process in motion.

I would like now to address ten misconceptions that have arisen with regard to the situation in Colombia. Only if the facts are out on the table and known to all parties concerned will we have a realistic chance for discovering solutions.

Misconception 1: Colombia has asked Europe to contribute military support. That is false. Colombia never sought military resources in Europe. It is true that with the commencement of coca crop eradication programs in 1983, the Colombian government was concerned for communities, families, and farmers adversely impacted by the destruction of their economic base. President Pastrana had the insight to formally set aside a proportion of the international resources dedicated to fight drugs to take care of that proportion of the population economically victimized by the war. Somehow this request became confused with a request for military aid. Thus, to repeat, Colombia doesn't want any German or French helicopters. What Colombia is looking for is support for specific rehabilitative programs.

The European Union will be providing resources to address the area of the Middle Magdalena. We made a decision to eradicate 20,000 hectares in that zone and initiated rehabilitative agricultural programs there to be funded by the European Union. There is even the possibility that the People's Republic of China will underwrite a program in the Catatumbo area. We're speaking with them regarding that proposal. But we need the support of the entire international community. Colombia cannot confront such a gargantuan problem successfully on the basis of piecemeal assistance from here and there.

We think we already have a military force able to take care of eradication in the areas where cocaine is planted. We fumigated or performed aerial spraying in 25,000 hectares between December 19, 1999, and January 31, 2000, for example. We expect to sign agreements with 26,000 families

in Putumayo. Today we have close to 5,000 families working in programs where they are voluntarily weaned from cultivating drugs, especially in the Puerto Asis area. The Mayor of Puerto Asis is a strong man in his mid-sixties who stood up to the illegal self-defense groups and the guerrillas. He said, in effect, "I don't want cocaine in my municipality," and he decided to work with the authorities to get rid of the cocaine curse. He is somebody whose name will never be known in the streets of New York or Chicago. But that man has done a lot to prevent drugs from being transported and sold to the children of American families. He is the kind of hero I would like to see highlighted by the U.S. press so that people who are so highly critical and skeptical about the Colombian situation will know there are Colombians who stand tall. This mayor probably deserves the Purple Heart, not because of what happens to him but for what he does so that nothing bad happens to others.

Misconception 2: Colombia is not a democratic country. The truth is that if there is a democratic country in Latin America, it's Colombia. Since the enactment of the current constitution, Colombia has had only one dictator, Rojas Pinellia from 1953 to 1957, and even he was a man selected by the political parties to assume power with a mandate to end the bloodshed that had descended upon the country because of *la violencia* in the early Fifties. Colombia, since the end of that unfortunate turn, has enjoyed a robust democratic system under which presidents, congressional members, state senators, and city councilmen are always duly elected. Colombia has never had a Pinochet, a Galtieri, or a Noreiga, all types of authoritarian, illegitimate rulers common to the rest of South and Central America. Colombia has maintained a democratic tradition in which its presidents, with the single exception noted above, have always been elected. Elections were even held in the demilitarized zone. Mayors who posted themselves as candidates defeated the FARC candidates in the demilitarized zone. Those who question democracy in Colombia should take such facts into account.

Misconception 3: Colombians did not have the opportunity to analyze *Plan Colombia* and rid it of objectionable features such as deep U.S. involvement in Colombia's internal affairs. Nothing could be further from the truth. Recall our earlier point that Colombia views the United States as having co-responsibility for the drug war. *Plan Colombia* is a broad plan to address that war, recognizing the shared responsibilities. It is a 7.5 billion dollar project that provides for aerial spraying along with U.S.-made helicopters in Putumayo. But it is much more than that. That hardware represents only 10-15 percent of the total *Plan Colombia* project. Colombia has a constitutionally-directed budget planning process based upon inputs from the entire country, including the various municipalities. Everything that dealt with *Plan Colombia* was treated in this budget development process. No Colombian can legitimately complain, 2 years after the program was discussed in Congress and all around Colombia, that there was no discussion. Moreover, multinational polling companies have asked Colombians whether they support *Plan Colombia*, and a majority responded affirmatively.

Misconception 4: *Plan Colombia* does not carry a social component. This is false. In the budget for the 2-year period 2001-2002, 900 million dollars are set aside for a social safety net. When we came into Putumayo on December 19, 2000, to eradicate industrial crops, we had already tendered 100 million dollars in infrastructure for the state of Putumayo. This sum addresses such needs as roads and hospitals. More than ten hospitals will be constructed. A road leading from Pitalito to Mocoa is being paved with asphalt. We are putting in a complete electrical power infrastructure connecting all localities. We are spending 25 million dollars in Putumayo alone to assist farmers replace their illegal crops with maize, yucca, pigs, and cattle. We are spending 25 million dollars on quality-of-life programs on behalf of 26,000 families. Later, we will spend an additional 20 million dollars on crop and livestock subsidies for these

families. We are examining all the area entities that work with the Ministry of Agriculture. We are looking for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to develop community projects and agricultural projects in the area of Putumayo. We want communities to have the right to develop themselves and have a decent quality of life. We want the state of Putumayo to be re-integrated into the nation of Colombia.

Misconception 5: Plan Colombia is a military plan solely financed by the United States. The truth is that the United States will contribute only 1.3 billion dollars of the 7.5 billion dollar package comprising *Plan Colombia*. The 1.3 billion dollars, to be provided over a 2-year period, will be mostly in the form of transport helicopters and military trainers that will help Colombian armed forces in their battle against the drug crops. Some of the U.S. contribution will also go to the judicial sector and the communities. The balance of the 7.5 billion dollar *Plan Colombia* package will mostly be lent to us by foreign governments and international institutions. It will eventually have to be repaid by Colombian citizens themselves, who will pay special surtaxes for that purpose.

Colombia allocates 4.5 percent of its gross domestic production to national security. Of our total national security budget, 40 percent goes to fight the drug war. Colombia is shouldering its share of the responsibilities, including those for the welfare of its people.

Misconception 6: A military component in Plan Colombia was unnecessary. This allegation defies common sense. Crop eradication personnel cannot do their jobs in hostile, isolated territory like Putumayo without transport and security—it is as simple as that. U.S. trainers are not providing the security. They are advising Colombian armed forces personnel on security techniques. Perhaps more important, they are providing advice on dealing with the local population, that is, cultivating relations based on mutual respect and cooperation. They are teaching respect

for human rights. Since December 19, 2000, when our aerial spraying began in Putumayo, we haven't had a single complaint of human rights abuses in Putumayo.

Misconception 7: Plan Colombia is creating a regional problem. This is false. Complaints are heard that the war will be extending to the entire region, that there are one million displaced people, that they will begin to move to nearby countries, that immigration to the United States and Europe has begun because of the war. All of that is false. But if Colombia doesn't do a thing against the cultivation of cocaine, there will be a regional problem. We could see the emergence of a narco-state. Such a development would have incalculably adverse implications for the security of the region and for the United States. What, for example, if strong self-defense groups started to move into Panama or Ecuador?

Under President Pastrana, Colombia has decided to fight the effort to turn it into a narco-state. It has decided to internationalize the effort. It has decided to open the door for discussions with the FARC. Mr. Pastrana is saying to the FARC, if you sit at the table, everything is discussable. If you feel there is inequity and injustice in Colombia, you should sit at the table and help us create the country you envision. But come to the table with a voice, not with a weapon. To the extent that there is displacement of the populace in Colombia, it is the violence perpetrated by the guerrillas and self-defense groups causing it, not the elimination of drugs.

According to the figures for year 2000, there were 126,000 people who registered as being displaced. There probably were some additional people who never registered. Moreover, we have been experiencing a severe economic recession in Colombia which has not helped. We have lost a large number of talented young men and women whom we would have preferred to stay in their homeland but who left because of business and employment opportunities abroad.

I very much regret that we are not able to offer these young people the right conditions to persuade them to remain in Colombia. We will not be able to improve the Colombian economy, however, unless the violence ends. When that day arrives, foreign investors and Colombians themselves will start putting money into new businesses, and an agricultural sector will emerge. That is why President Pastrana strongly supports the pursuit of peace through negotiations at the table.

There are some who say that a cessation of violence will never be achieved at the negotiating table, that in order to reach peace Colombia must win the war in the field. I can't agree with that. There's no possibility in a country like Colombia for the government to win a decisive war for control over the entirety of its territory. Thus we need to reach an agreement at the table.

The fact that Manuel Marulanda, leader of the FARC, acceded to meeting with President Pastrana early in 2000 was very good news. That meeting, or possibly others like it, could eventually lead to a restructuring of the peace process.

Misconception 8: Colombia will not be able to spend the *Plan Colombia* money in the allocated 18-24 months. Here, zealous hope is our best ally. We are creating the infrastructure to do it. We are setting up the programs. We are working with the mayors and governors. The plan is in place. We have only to implement it.

Misconception 9: Colombia does not fight the illegal self-defense groups. So far as the Colombian government and its armed forces are concerned, the self-defense groups are criminal organizations. They are being confronted by the army and the police with full vigor. Under new Colombian legislation, any member of the armed forces linked by evidence to a paramilitary group can be dismissed immediately by the president. Since 1997, close to 200 members of the illegal self-defense groups have been shot in confrontations with the armed forces. Today there are close to 700 members of the United Self-Defense Forces of

Colombia (AUC) in jail in Colombia. Prosecutions against AUC members are 4.2 times more numerous than those of guerrilla groups members. Detention orders or arrests are 3.8 times more numerous for members of the AUC compared to those for the guerrilla members. Criminal investigations are 2.7 times more numerous for AUC paramilitary members than for the guerrillas. Since 1998 the office of the Colombian Attorney General has initiated 1,213 criminal processes against members of the AUC. With the support of the police and the armed forces, 349 have been captured by the authorities. Thus to claim that there is no interest on the part of the Colombian government in prosecuting members of the illegal self-defense groups simply has no basis in fact.

Misconception 10: U.S. support for Plan Colombia will solve Colombia's problem. This is false. Yes, such support will contribute substantially in tackling the drug menace which is funding the war in Colombia. But, as was noted earlier, no one party can impose peace unilaterally. Peace can emerge only if freely agreed upon by all parties at the negotiating table. The search for peace can be greatly facilitated if all concerned parties disabuse themselves of the ten misconceptions discussed above.

So far as Colombian reconstruction is concerned, it would help to have a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)-type agreement for all of North and South America. Such an agreement would lower tariffs for Colombian products entering North America, thus generating employment in Colombia itself based on prosperous legal businesses. The U.S. Congress approved a bill by which all the garment industry products from Central America will enter the States with no tariff. This is a good thing for Central America, but it bodes ill for the garment industry in Colombia, which remains unprotected.

Nonetheless, *Plan Colombia* works, and it provides a sound alternative for Colombia. With support from the United States, we were able to eliminate in January 2001 alone 27,000 hectares of cocaine in Colombia. That means

that 39 million grams of cocaine were eliminated, cocaine that will never reach the streets of America. We elected a governor in Putumayo whose campaign slogan was "Putumayo without cocaine." He is working with the national government to eradicate cocaine in his territory. We were able to fumigate this area using a well-trained military component, and with no casualties. There are no complaints about human rights violations in Putumayo perpetrated by the military brigade or the anti-narcotics brigade, the two units that went into Putumayo. Since mid-year 2000, we have been installing a strong infrastructure in that area, which had traditionally been neglected by the Colombian government.

In sum, Colombia is confronting its challenges. We are promoting a comprehensive plan that lays out the strategic actions to be followed. We have enacted aggressive legal reform of the military judicial system. We have strengthened our security forces. We are actively collaborating with other national judicial systems. Our security forces have compiled an impressive human rights record compared with their record of the past. We have strengthened our local governments. And we have assumed a cooperative and collaborative posture with regard to the international community. If these and similar measures continue to be pursued aggressively, Colombians have every right to be optimistic concerning the future of their beloved country.

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

Major General Robert R. Ivany
Commandant

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

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Dr. Earl H. Tilford, Jr.

Author
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Director of Publications and Production
Ms. Marianne P. Cowling

Publications Assistant
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Composition
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Cover Artist
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