

# Fifteen Years of Plan Colombia (2001-2016)

## The Recovery of a Weak State and the Submission of Narco-terrorist Groups?

Quince años del Plan Colombia  
(2001-2016)

¿La recuperación de un Estado débil y la  
sumisión de los grupos narcoterroristas?

Quinze anos do Plano Colômbia  
(2001-2006)

A recuperação de um Estado fraco e a  
submissão dos grupos narco-terroristas?

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## Resumen

La idea básica de este escrito es presentar una visión amplia de las implicaciones del Plan Colombia sobre el conflicto colombiano en la última década y media. Durante el curso de estos 15 años, los gobernantes de Estados Unidos y de Colombia han estado trabajando juntos para enfrentar el reto a la seguridad más importante de los inicios del siglo XXI. Los objetivos del Plan Colombia (reducir el cultivo, procesamiento y distribución ilegal de narcóticos, con el cultivo de coca como objetivo) no se han alcanzado. Adicionalmente, con el Plan Colombia la minería ilegal comenzó a prosperar y se convirtió en una importante fuente de ingresos para los grupos narcoterroristas colombianos. No obstante, con esta estrategia Colombia ha alcanzado importantes metas como la recuperación de la institucionalidad colombiana y consolidar la presencia del Gobierno en todas las áreas del territorio nacional. Al mismo tiempo, se ha conseguido la reestructuración de sus sistemas políticos y legales, el fortalecimiento de su economía, la profesionalización de las Fuerzas Armadas y la posibilidad de iniciar un proceso de negociación que permita obtener un acuerdo de paz negociado con las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) y el Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN).

### Palabras clave

Seguridad del Estado, narcotráfico, conflicto armado, violencia, Estados Unidos.

## Abstract

The main purpose of this discussion paper is to present a general view of the consequences of Plan Colombia for the Colombian conflict during the last 15 years. During that period, the governments of the United States and Colombia have worked together to fight the most significant challenge for security at the turn of the 21st century. The goals of Plan Colombia of reducing the cultivation, production, and distribution of illegal narcotics –being the cultivation of coca the main target– were not achieved. In addition, with Plan Colombia illegal mining grew and became an important income for Colombian narco-terrorist groups. However, with this strategy Colombia has achieved significant goals such as the strengthening of Colombian institutions and the consolidation of government presence in all regions of the national territory. Such a strategy has also contributed to restructuring the political and legal systems, the strengthening of the economy, the professionalization of the Armed Forces, and has made possible the beginning of processes that aimed at obtaining a negotiated peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the National Liberation Army (ELN).



### **Key words**

State security, drug trafficking, armed conflict, violence, United State.

## **Resumo**

A ideia básica deste escrito é apresentar uma visão abrangente das implicações do Plano Colômbia no conflito armado colombiano nos últimos 15 anos. No decurso destes 15 anos, os governantes dos Estados Unidos e da Colômbia têm trabalhado em conjunto para enfrentar o desafio mais importante para a segurança do início do século XXI. Os objetivos do Plano Colômbia (reduzir o cultivo, processamento e distribuição ilegal de narcóticos, considerando como alvo o cultivo de coca) não foram ainda alcançados. Além disso, com o Plano Colômbia, a mineração ilegal começou a prosperar, e tornou-se uma importante fonte de recursos para os grupos narco-terroristas colombianos. No entanto, com esta estratégia a Colômbia atingiu importantes objetivos como a recuperação da institucionalidade colombiana e a consolidação da presença do governo em todo o território nacional. Ao mesmo tempo, se conseguiu a reestruturação dos seus sistemas políticos e legais, o fortalecimento da sua economia, a profissionalização das Forças Armadas e a possibilidade de iniciar um processo de negociação com as Forças Armadas Revolucionárias da Colômbia (FARC) e o Exército de Libertação Nacional (ELN).

### **Palavras-chave**

Segurança do Estado, narcotráfico, conflito armado, violência, Estados Unidos.

## Introduction

The main purpose of this discussion paper is to present a broad view of the implications of Plan Colombia in the Colombian conflict during the last 15 years. This paper aims to provide some analysis about this controversial situation and an analytical reflection about the effectiveness of this strategy to recover Colombian institutionality and consolidate government presence.

In order to meet this goal, the first section offers an overview of new concepts that have appeared in the international arena since 9/11 2001, such as strong states, weak states and failed states. The second section, analyses the reasons why Colombia is a weak state and the relationship between narco-trafficking and terrorism. The third section studies the United States participation in the Colombian conflict with Plan Colombia and finally, I focus my attention on presenting the main implications of Plan Colombia after 15 years.

Attempting to define the situation in Colombia during the last fifteen years as a failed state, as a civil war or as just as narco-terrorism would very likely lead to inaccurate results. Instead, a combination of all of the above descriptions would probably be more concise for a better understanding of the reality of the Colombian conflict.

This paper aims to provide some analysis about this controversial situation. Initially, it is important to say that Colombia has not been a failed State, because the concept of failure has two main elements; the loss of territorial control and the monopoly of force by the state. Colombia cannot be categorized as a “failed state” because neither territorial control nor the monopoly of force by the state, have ever been totally lost.

In addition, Colombia has not been experiencing a civil war, because the country is not divided into roughly equal camps, and the majority of the population is not affiliated with the armed protagonists of this conflict. In that sense, Gomez (2001) argues that a civil war may be a conflict between two tribes (eg. Tutsis and Huts), two ethnic groups (eg. Serbs, Albanians), two religions (e.g., Proletariat and bourgeoisie) and two armies within a same state (Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Ireland, and Russia). None of the above describes the Colombian situation (Centro para el Progreso Americano, 2016).

This article proposes the hypothesis that before Plan Colombia's implementation Colombia was a weak state experiencing an irregular war between the Colom-

bian Security Forces and the three main narco-terrorist groups FARC, ELN and Paramilitary Groups. These terrorists control extensive areas of Colombian territory, and are financed by drug trafficking and the extortion of the civil population.

## **Strong States, Weak States and Failed States**

Rotberg (2007) argues that new concepts like strong states, weak states and failed states have appeared in the international arena since 9/11. The first group of countries is called “Strong States” by Rotberg. These countries unquestionably control their territories and deliver a full and high quality range of political goods to their citizens. They perform well according to indicators like gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, the UNDP Human Development Index, Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, and Freedom House’s Freedom of the World Report.

Likewise, Rotberg (2007) mentions that strong states offer high levels of security from political and criminal violence, ensure political freedom and civil liberties, and create environments conducive to the growth of economic opportunity. The rule of law prevails. Judges are independent. Road networks are well maintained. Telephones work. Traditional mail and e-mail both arrive quickly. Schools, universities, and students flourish. Hospitals and clinics serve patients effectively.

Rotberg (2007) called the second group “Weak States”. These states include a broad continuum of states that are: inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks; and a mixture of the two. In weak states typically urban and rural crime rates tend to be higher and increasing. In weak states, the ability to provide adequate measures of other political goods is diminished or diminishing. Physical infrastructural networks have deteriorated. Schools and hospitals show signs of neglect, particularly outside the main cities. GDP per capita and other critical economic indicators have fallen or are falling, sometimes dramatically; levels of venal corruption are embarrassingly high and escalating.

The third group is classified by Rotberg (2007) as “Failed States”. This author declares that in this kind of states, the governments lose legitimacy, and the very

nature of the particular nation-state itself becomes illegitimate in the eyes and in the hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens.

It is not the absolute intensity of violence that identifies a failed state. In failed states the facts show that much of the violence is directed against the existing government. The civil wars that characterize failed states usually stem from or have roots in ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal enmity. The fear of the other that drives so much ethnic conflict stimulates and fuels hostilities between regimes and subordinate less favored groups (Rotberg, 2007).

Another indicator of state failure is the growth of criminal violence. As state authority weakens and fails, and as the state becomes criminal in its oppression of its citizens, so lawlessness becomes more apparent. Criminal gangs take over the streets of the cities. Arms and drug trafficking become more common. In “Failed States”, avarice also propels that antagonism, especially when greed is magnified by dreams of loot from the discoveries of new, contested sources of resource wealth, like petroleum deposits, diamond fields, other minerals, or timber (Rotberg, 2007).

## Colombian Weak State in 2001

Although, numerous authors, analysts, and policymakers believe that Colombia was a failed state in 2001, this article argues that before Plan Colombia’s implementation Colombia was a weak state experiencing narcoterrorist attacks against the civil population. Many factors have contributed to the Colombian conflict; instability in Colombia derives from the interaction and resulting synergies stemming from two distinct tendencies: the development of an underground criminal drug economy and the growth of armed challenges to the state’s authority.

The first source of instability is reflected in the increasingly pervasive influences of drug networks and their infiltration of key societal institutions. Drug trafficking has been identified as the central problem of the Colombian conflict. This phenomenon distorts the economy, reverses the advances of land distribution, corrupts society, depresses the investment climate, destroys fragile ecosystems and provides vast resources to fund all armed groups. The second source of instability is the growth of narco terrorist groups as well as the development of organised violence perpetrated by illegal self-defense forces (Gomez, 2011).

Colombian narco-terrorist groups have used terror and fear as their main war strategy. According to Pecault (2001), since the 90's Colombia has been the most troubled country in the Western Hemisphere. Drug criminals, guerrillas and BACRIM (Criminal Bands) groups are feeding a spiral of violence that made "colombianization" a metaphor for a failing state. The facts show that during the period of analysis Colombia was the most violent country in the world where more than eighty percent of the world's kidnappings took place in Colombia and the displacement of people surpassed that of the Kosovo crisis. Colombia has also been the major exporter of cocaine in the world (Pecault, 2001).

The kidnapping rate was also the highest in the world during this period. Colombian terrorism took the form of indiscriminate kidnapping of people for economic reasons in order to produce resources to finance the war. The FARC has used the civilian population to create a law to exchange guerrilla militants in jail for soldiers kept as prisoners of war.

The degradation of the conflict during the last years of the conflict was also related to the increasing violation of international humanitarian law by irregular groups, whose indiscriminate uses of arms and other irregular resources such as gas cylinders, threatened civilians for refusing to pay extortion money. No respect of indigenous and Afro-American territories, selective assassinations and massacres, mass kidnappings, and attacks against the nation's infrastructure affecting the lives of thousands, are examples of such violations (Snyder & Durán, 2009).

## **Colombia: Home of Narcoterrorist Groups**

Since the late twentieth century, the conceptual and theoretical development around the phenomena of drug traffic and terrorism has been subject to intense media coverage and strong securitization underpinned by the American hegemonic power. The content and meaning of the so-called threat of "narcoterrorism" as it has been defined by the current political debate, has hidden theoretical paradoxes and conceptual simplifications, which however, have justified the act of the war in a global context.

Changes to the international order after the events of 9/11 focused the Colombia-United States relationship on the terrorism issue. Security became a topic of collective and global reach, and conflicts around the world increasingly addressed within the context of the United States. Since then, the links between

international terrorism and the international drug trade have become a source of increased study in law enforcement, government, the media and academia, particularly in the United States (Gomis, 2015).

These events created an environment in which there was much less tolerance for terrorist groups. The (FARC), The (ELN) and BACRIM are organized as military forces, well-armed and equipped with extensive intelligence capabilities. They earn hundreds of millions of dollars per year in ill-gotten profits, much from the drug trade. Different parties of the internal conflict have victimized the Colombian civil population. Kidnapping, massive forced displacements, massacres, violations against human rights and international humanitarian law. These terrorists also control extensive areas of Colombian territory, are financed by drug trafficking and the extortion of the civil population.

Mantilla-Valbuena (2008) claims that the term *narco-terrorism* could be defined as the use of organised terror to secure control over a state by another state or organised criminal networks or by insurgents or by a combination of any or all of them to achieve fixed political, economic or social objectives based on organisational and financial empowerment through drug trafficking.

In addition, Gomis (2015) defines “narcoterrorism” as a wide range of situations, including violence perpetrated by drug traffickers to further and protect their economic interests; drug trafficking and terrorist tactics by state actors; the use of drug trafficking for directly and indirectly related activities by terrorist organizations to fund their operations; co-operation between drug traffickers and terrorist organizations for mutual gains.

The narco-terrorist theory has been employed to suggest that all the Colombian narco-terrorists’ groups, the (FARC) and The (ELN), and BACRIM forces have resources from drug trafficking. The narco-terrorism phenomenon is the result of the relationship between guerrilla organisations, paramilitaries groups and drug traffickers in an alliance that was a strategy to subvert order and pursue specific, illicit interest while mutually guaranteeing their survival.

Mantilla-Valbuena (2008) also argues that this term describes the close links between drug activities and political disruptive, divisive and uncontrollable segments of society in the world. Pécaut (2001) explains how Colombia is the strongest example of what is meant by the phrase narcoterrorism and where the drug trade is a major factor. All of Colombia’s major problems are linked to the drug trade. In the



guerrilla and BACRIM groups controlled areas of Colombia, a cycle of terrorism and narco-trafficking has spiralled into a mutually dependent relationship.

Moreover, narco-terrorism in Colombia threatens international order in the region, and the well being of any number of countries. Its turmoil spill over into Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, and Brazil. The threat takes different forms in different countries: extra-judicial killings, displaced people, fleeing violence, drug trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping, illegal arms trafficking, corruption of government officials, policemen, military, judges and other judicial officers; illegal immigration, ecological damage, and economic distortions caused by quick and unaccounted movements of capital.

## **The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)**

The FARC is one of the largest and most brutal insurgent movements in the world. The group was founded in 1964, when it declared its intention to overthrow the government and install a Marxist regime. But tactics changed in the 1990'ss, as right-wing paramilitary forces attacked the rebels, and the FARC became increasingly involved in the drug trade to raise money for its campaign.

This group has a well equipped and sizeable army, and lucrative sources of income from drug producing and processing areas. Income from trafficking and other illegal activities provides the FARC with the resources to intensify its political and military challenge to the Colombian State. FARC finances have two items that represent about 90% of their total revenues: resources from drug trafficking (represent approximately 54%) and kidnapping (accounting for about 36%) (Lake, 2015). According to the Colombian authorities, some FARC units in southern Colombia are involved in drug trafficking activities and its income is probably between US\$400 million and US\$ 1 billion per year (Pécaut, 2001).

In addition, FARC have employed a wide range of tactics: it directly confronted the security forces in rural areas, maintains urban terrorist cells and has placed bombs at strategic infrastructure locations such as oil installations and pipelines. The FARC is responsible for the majority of the kidnappings committed in Colombia during the last 25 years.

However, in November 2012, the FARC and the Colombian government opened peace talks, focussing on six key issues: land reform, political participation, disarmament of FARC's soldiers, drug trafficking, the rights of victims, and the implementation of the peace deal.

## **National Liberation Army (ELN)**

The National Liberation Army (ELN) is Colombia's second largest leftist guerrilla group. This group is a former Marxist insurgent group formed in 1965 by urban intellectuals inspired by Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara. It has approximately 4.000 armed combatants and its main activities are kidnapping, hijacking, bombing, extortion and guerrilla war (Global Security, 2016).

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis in Cuba led to a restructuring of the financing of ELN movements. In recent years, ELN units have become involved in the drugs trade, often forming alliance with criminal gangs. The group is on US and European lists of terrorist organisations.

It has modest conventional military capability. It annually conducts hundreds of kidnappings for ransom, often targeting foreign employees of large corporations, especially in the petroleum industry. Frequently, it assaults energy infrastructure and has inflicted major damage on pipelines and the electrical distribution network. Rabasa (2001) states, that ELN revenues from illicit sources allowed them to achieve a historic peak in their military capacity.

## **Criminal Bands (BACRIM)**

The Colombian government regards the BACRIM, how it refers to criminal bands, as the new enemy and the biggest threat to security. The gangs, who include former paramilitary fighters, are involved in drug-trafficking and extortion. With names like the Aguilas Negras (Black Eagles), Clan Usuga, Oficina de Envigado (Envigado Office) and Rastrojos, they combine control of cocaine production and smuggling with extreme violence.

The paramilitary groups or Criminal Bands (BACRIM) are private militias, initially organised as self defense units and financed by landowners that have

worked to destroy the Colombian guerrillas and their supporters. The BACRIM carried out massacres and assassinations, targeting left-wing activists who speak out against them. Moreover, these BACRIM groups control over 75.000 coca growing peasants around the country. The BACRIM devotes about two-thirds of its forces to guarding or transporting drugs, and operating drug laboratorios (Céspedes, 2012).

Former AUC fighters, the Aguilas Negras (Black Eagles), Clan Usuga, Oficina de Envigado (Envigado Office) and Rastrojos group finance themselves through drug trafficking and they have carried out numerous acts of terrorism, including the massacre of hundred of civilians, the forced displacement of entire villages, and the kidnapping of political figures. Many of these actions were designed to terrorise and intimidate local populations, so the paramilitary groups could gain control of these areas (Céspedes, 2012).

## **Implications of Plan Colombia after 15 Years (2001-2016)**

The United States relations with Colombia after 9/11 were complex and marked by a pursuit of several important priorities but especially with the implementation of Plan Colombia. The plan's components included helping the Colombian government, secure effective control over its territory; strengthening democratic institutions, defending economic development, protecting human rights, and providing substantial assistance designed to increase Colombia's counter-narcotics capabilities, to expand and consolidate government presence, and to improve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable Colombians by providing sustainable social and economic opportunities, keeping human rights, strengthening rule of law, and making governance more transparent, participatory and accountable (U.S Embassy in Colombia, 2012).

The official text of the Plan Colombia, argues that "It is a strategy to deal with the historical challenge of establishing and securing a society where the Colombian State can exercise its true authority and fulfil its essential obligations" (Plan Colombia, 2001. p. 56). The plan has been praised for bringing Colombia back from the brink of becoming a failed state, but also heavily criticised for the human rights and environmental abuses that took place.

According to Amnesty International (2013), Plan Colombia is:

[T]he name for the United States aid package since 2000. It was created as a strategy to combat drugs and contribute to peace, mainly through military means. The US government began granting large amounts of aid to Colombia in 2000 under the Clinton administration. Since the beginning of Plan Colombia, the US has given Colombia over \$5 billion with the vast majority going to Colombia's military and police forces. These amounts are significantly higher than what is being given in economic and social assistance (p. 89).

In order to achieve the major objectives of Plan Colombia, its strategy was divided in two categories: the military component which includes donations from foreign countries, especially the United States to enhance the army's capacity to fight insurgency; and the social component which aims to increase the government's legitimacy within its population through public investments.

Plan Colombia had 10 main strategies:

1. Economic strategy to support the ability of the Colombian state to collect tax revenues and allow the country to have a viable counterbalancing economic force to drug trafficking.
2. Fiscal and financial strategy that sought austerity and adjustment through agreements with the IMF.
3. Peace strategy against drug trafficking, corruption, and the violation of human rights.
4. National defense strategy to restructure and modernise the armed forces and the police.
5. Judicial and human rights strategy to overcome impunity and the humanitarian crisis.
6. Counter-narcotics strategy to stop the flow of drug money to the insurgent and other armed organizations.
7. The plan incorporated an alternative development strategy that sought to conserve the forest areas and end the dangerous expansion of illegal crops across the Amazon basin and Colombia's vast natural parks of immense biodiversity.
8. Social participation strategy to develop accountability in local government, community involvement in anti-corruption efforts, and pressure over illegal armed groups to end kidnapping, violence and internal displacement.

9. Human development strategy to guarantee more education and health.
10. International oriented strategy to share responsibility in the fight against illegal drugs.

## Negative Consequences of Plan Colombia

There are several negative consequences of Plan Colombia. One is that coca crops grew strongly in the last 15 years. In addition, with Plan Colombia illegal mining started to thrive and became an important source of income for FARC, ELN and BACRIM. Likewise, during the time of Plan Colombia, the emergence of new Colombian Criminal Bands (BACRIM).

### *a. Remains of Coca Crops in Colombia*

Plan Colombia's goal of reducing the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by targeting coca cultivation was not achieved. Restrepo (2016) declares that Colombia has reclaimed its position as the world's largest coca cultivating country, with 69.132 hectares in 2014, the last year for which data are available.

Despite the efforts of the United States and Colombia to counter the trafficking activities of these illegal armed groups, State reports that Colombia remains the source for about 90 % of the cocaine entering the United States. Plan Colombia was supposed to cut Colombian cocaine production by half by 2015, but that goal was clearly not met. According to Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Plan Colombia helped in the aerial fumigation of more than 1.6 million hectares of coca in the country, using the controversial herbicide glyphosate that might have put Colombia's population in danger because glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic".

According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Office report the area under coca cultivation rose 44% in 2015 to 69.000 hectares, which monitors the crops by satellite. Potential cocaine production soared from 290 tonnes in 2013 to 442 tonnes in 2014, up 52%. Coca crops grew strongly in two National Natural Parks: La Macarena and Nukak. The presence of coca also increased in Afro-Colombian Community Councils and indigenous reservations (UNODC, 2015).

As part of its discussions with the FARC, the Colombian government ended its aerial eradication efforts, which also had long been assailed for their negative environmental and human impact. In the absence of aerial eradication, coca cultivation is expected to continue increasing.

### ***b. Surge of Illegal Mining as Source of Income for Narcoterrorist Groups***

While all the focus was on other security issues, illegal mining started to thrive and became an important source of income for illegal groups. That was never factored into Plan Colombia. That was because the main sources of income for the rebel groups originally identified by the authorities were drug trafficking, kidnapping and extortion. But the problem became serious only after 2007, with the increase in the price of commodities.

### ***c. Emergence of New Criminal Bands (BACRIM)***

Despite successes in combating principal non-state actors such as the FARC, Colombia has witnessed the emergence of criminal bands, or BACRIM which are syndicates linked to former paramilitary groups. These criminal bands are a serious security risk and represent a new generation of drug traffickers in Colombia.

## **Effectiveness of Plan Colombia**

Plan Colombia has several strengths. Colombia has restructured its political and legal systems, also Colombia has strengthened its economy. Moreover, the country has developed a professionalization of Armed Forces, and the most important point is the capitulation of narco-terrorist groups with a peace process with the FARC.

In addition, the numbers of FARC combatants and its capabilities have been dramatically reduced by continuous assaults on its top leadership, the capture or killing of FARC members in conflictive zones, and an increasing number of desertions. According to U.S., Colombian officials and other reports, FARC's ca-

pabilities and finances have been substantially diminished as a result of U.S. and Colombian counternarcotics efforts, and continued pressure from the Colombian military forces. Furthermore, with Plan Colombia there has been a reduction of violence. There was also a sharp drop in kidnappings and massacres.

### ***a. Changes in political and legal systems***

With Plan Colombia resources, the country implemented an accusatorial/oral system, characterized by the debate and conversation among the implicated parties, after more than 100 years of inquisitorial/written tradition. Colombia changed from a Mixed Justice System with elements from both the accusatorial and inquisitorial systems to an exclusively accusatorial system. The process of transition from the old system to the new one was funded and supported by the United States Government (USG) through the Department of Justice and with the funds allocated to Colombia every year within the context of Plan Colombia. In the last four years, the Attorney General's Office has received over 150 million U.S. dollars, as well as technical support and assistance (U.S. Office on Colombia, 2014).

### ***b. Economic and social Improvements***

Restrepo in his article "The United States and Colombia from Security Partners to Global Partners in Peace" argues that Colombia has made tremendous economic strides during the past 15 years as its security situation has improved. By 2014, Colombia's gross domestic product, or GDP, had grown to \$377.7 billion, compared to \$99.88 billion in 2000, making Colombia the third-largest economy in Latin America.

Colombia also has seen major reductions in poverty, with the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line decreasing from 64 percent in 1999 to 28,5 % in 2014. Extreme poverty has dropped even more precipitously from 23 percent in 2000 to 8,1 percent in 2014.

Colombia's Gini coefficient, the leading indicator of economic inequality, although still high, has narrowed from 58,7 to 53,3 in the past 15 years, an improvement comparable to Brazil's during that country's much touted efforts to move millions of people out of poverty and into the middle class (Restrepo, 2016).

### **c. Professionalization of Colombian Armed Forces**

By 2016, the United States had invested \$10 billion in improving security and stability in Colombia. According to the NGO *Washington Office on Latin America* (WOLA) 71% of the US investment for Plan Colombia went to: aerial mobility, Illicit crop eradication, drug interdiction (air, sea, land and river), training and development, intelligence, training and maintenance centres (WOLA, 2016).

Restrepo (2016) declares that much of the Plan Colombia funding has been used to increase state capacity, particularly the capacity of Colombia's security institutions. Colombia's military has experienced tremendous improvements over time, in large part due to the financial support from Washington, which has enabled the United States to help train and better equip Colombian forces. From 2000 to 2008, for example, Colombia's Army Aviation Brigade received \$844 million from the U.S. government, allowing it to nearly triple its aircraft fleet to more than 100 helicopters (Restrepo, 2016).

In addition, from 2000 to 2008, the Colombian military increased the number of ground forces as a result of \$104 million allocated by Washington. The United States resources also have been used to advise and train the Colombian military with the number of professional soldiers in Colombia expanding to 83.000 in 2014 from 20.000 troops in 1998.

### **d. Capitulation of Narcoterrorist Groups and the Colombian Peace Process**

After 50 years of armed conflict, the Santos administration initiated a negotiation process in 2012 that sought to obtain a negotiated peace agreement with the FARC on the basis of territorial integrity, democracy and human rights. The peace process has been one of the Colombian government's targets. President Santos assumed personal leadership of the government's role in this process.

Colombia is closer than ever to achieving peace, even as success once again appears to elude the Juan Manuel Santos administration. Delegations representing the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have reached consensus on four of the six official negotiation points, including comprehensive agreements on agrarian reform, political participation, illicit drugs, and victims.



## Conclusions

Before United States intervention, Colombia was a weak state experiencing an irregular war between the Colombian Security Forces against three main irregular groups FARC, ELN and Paramilitary Groups. These terrorists controlled extensive areas of Colombian territory, were financed by drug trafficking and the extortion of the civil population.

Changes to the international order after the events of 9/11 refocused the Colombia-United States relationship on the issue of terrorism. Since 2001 attacks, security become an issue of collective and global reach, and conflicts around the world were increasingly addressed within the context of the United States “War on Terror”. These events created an environment in which there was much less tolerance for terrorist groups. FARC, ELN and BACRIM groups had more relevance as terrorist groups than drug-dealing ones. Colombia narco-terrorism affected significant national interests of the United States in the región. Firstly, between 80 and 90 % of the cocaine and roughly two thirds of the heroin consumed in the United States is produced in Colombia. Secondly, Colombia’s deterioration spreads instability and conflict beyond its borders. Insurgent and BACRIM groups have made frequent incursions into the neighbouring countries of Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama. Thirdly, there was potential for further deterioration of human rights and democracy. Fourthly, Colombia has been an important economic partner of the United States. The United States efforts to control terrorism and drug traffic are directed at influencing most of Colombia’s military, political and social spheres, after 9/11 through Plan Colombia. This Plan was a strategy to deal with the historical challenge of establishing and securing a society where Colombian state could exercise its true authority and fulfill its essential obligations. This joint United States-Colombian military campaign was designed to end the drug trade by fighting drug cartels and eradicating coca being grown for cocaine, and to stop guerrilla and paramilitary groups opposed to the Colombian government.

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