

The Making of Narco-Terrorism

Constructing the U.S. War on Drugs in Colombia



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Map of Colombia



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Introduction

Although claiming to be Latin America's oldest democracy, and furthermore a culturally rich and diverse country, nowadays Colombia has become associated with rather less attractive features: the prevalence of illegal drugs, and the violent disorder of its guerrillas and paramilitary bands. Despite relative political stability, Colombian democracy has been undermined by ongoing violence generated by left-wing guerrillas as well as paramilitary groups and their successors, both with ties to the extensive narcotics industry¹. Colombia's civil society is struggling against corruption, organized crime, the presence of illegal armed groups within political parties, political clientelism and human rights violations (Cameron & Luna, 2010; Osterling, 1989). Over the past decades Colombia has witnessed a rise in organized crime caused both by the international narcotics trade and by the growing control exercised by criminal groups over domestic markets and territories; a growth in unacceptable levels of drug-related violence affecting the whole of society and in particular the poor and the young; the criminalization of politics and the infiltration of democratic institutions by organized crime; and the corruption of public servants, the judicial system, governments, the political system and the police forces (Gaviria, et al., 2009: 1). Even though these internal problems have been existent in Colombia for decades and are historically rooted, external factors have substantially expanded the scope and the nature of these challenges: the international drug trade and the United States' (U.S.) "War on Drugs" (Barry, 2002).

The U.S. "War on Drugs", and the policies resulting from it with the aim of reducing illicit drug trade in Latin America, can be drawn back to the mid-1980s, when the explosion of crack cocaine and its related violence in the U.S. caused a great deal of anxiety and set in motion many of the hard-line U.S. drug control policies still in effect today (Reinarman & Levine, 1997: 47). Drugs became the number one problem in the country and it was in 1986

¹ National Democratic Institute Washington, Retrieved from <https://www.ndi.org/colombia>

when President Reagan first declared illicit drugs as a “national security threat” (Ibid.). The “crack epidemic” appeared regularly on front pages and TV screens (Reeves and Campbell, 1994) and when President George H.W. Bush launched the so called “Andean Initiative” as part of the key strategy of the “War on Drugs” in 1989, one politician after another enlisted to be part of it (Reinarman & Levine, 1997). Overwhelming majorities of both houses of Congress voted for new antidrug laws with harsh penalties or even death sentences, and large increases in funding for police and prisons (Ibid.).

Although President Nixon had already maintained the position that the situation regarding illicit substances constituted a “national emergency” which had to be combated, it was only under the Reagan administration that these claims found legal grounds. In the National Security Decision Directive 221 (NSDD 221) on Narcotics and National Security it was stated that “the national security threat posed by the drug trade is particularly serious outside the U.S.” and that “of primary concern are those nations with a flourishing narcotic industry, where a combination of international criminal trafficking organizations, rural insurgents and urban terrorists can undermine the stability of the local government”². In other words, the main focus of the “War on Drugs” was put on the so-called “source countries” in Latin America, with the ultimate aim of reducing the supply of mainly coca, opium and marijuana. This would make the illicit drug trade more dangerous and costly and hence drive down production, drive up prices, and ultimately discourage U.S. citizens from buying and selling illicit drugs (Youngers & Rosin, 2004).

Since Colombia is the U.S.’s number one supplier of coca (Crandall, 2008), the country was one of the focal points of the U.S.’s policy approach. The core of the Andean Initiative was to empower Latin American military and police forces to carry out counterdrug initiatives, and significant U.S. training and support was provided to those forces willing to cooperate. In Colombia, the program of the Andean Initiative was run under the name “Plan

² View NSDD 221 at <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=463177&advanced=advanced>

Colombia”, originally designed by Colombian President Pastrana but adapted and mainly shaped by the Clinton administration.

However, “[t]he War on Drugs has been spectacularly unsuccessful” (Livingstone, 2003: 171). It has failed to reduce the production or consumption of drugs, and it has caused misery, illness, increased violence, and environmental destruction in Colombia. But even though Plan Colombia was an obvious failure in terms of U.S. foreign policy – as it did not bring about the intended or manifest consequences – throughout decades the several U.S. administrations stuck to the framework. Regardless of the administration, presidents seemed to agree that the U.S. continues to have strategic interests in Colombia. In fact, from the end of the Cold War until the events of September 11th, the “War on Drugs” defined security policy in the Western hemisphere, and ever since 9/11, the Bush administration classified it into the wider “War on Terror” (Chernick, 2002).

It seems puzzling that, despite the apparent failure to bring about intended effects, the U.S. maintained their drug control policy strategy throughout decades. Why is it that the U.S. continued to pursue this strategy and pour military aid into Colombia? Could it be that the officially stated motives are just a mask for the actual geopolitical agenda or for the broader aim of fighting terrorism? If so, this could mean that the so-called “unintended consequences” of U.S. drug control policy in Colombia were not unanticipated by the U.S., but in fact very much in line with their actual aims and hence accepted side effects. Otherwise, why would the U.S. stick to this strategy for decades?

This leads me to the following research questions: how did the U.S. reason about and justify the “War on Drugs” in Colombia, despite its apparent failure to accomplish intended goals? How can U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia be explained from a theoretical approach to international relations theory, and what are its “unintended consequences” on the social and political fabric of Colombia?

In the following, it will be argued that only a combination of realist, liberalist and

constructivist perspectives can fully account for the U.S.'s foreign policy towards Colombia within the context of the "War on Drugs". In contrast to the common understanding of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, which portrays domestic concerns about drug production originating in Colombia as the driving factor of U.S. policy, this thesis will show that the explanation is more complex. The U.S. has various – and sometimes competing – reasons and justifications for its involvement in Colombia, and hence no single approach or explanation can fully account for either the shape of their foreign policy in the context of the "War on Drugs", or for the fact of its preservation and ongoing justification.

From a neorealist perspective, U.S. involvement in Colombia as part of the "War on Drugs" can be best explained based on geopolitical strategy theory. From this view, a stable Colombia is of great interest because of its oil and natural resources. Moreover, from a realist perspective, the U.S. views the illicit drug problem through a national security lens, which shapes its actions and reactions accordingly, and results in a highly militarized approach. On the contrary, from a liberalist point of view, the U.S. is involved in Colombia because it wants to strengthen the Colombian democracy and secure human rights, which is in fact in line with the officially stated rhetoric of Plan Colombia.

From a constructivist perspective however, the explanation is more complex: the emphasis lies on the social construction of the drug problem and the "War on Drugs", which legitimized and justified U.S. involvement in Colombia through the creation of a public discourse and made a heavily militarized approach to the issue seem natural, necessary and inevitable. In that which follows I will argue that the three approaches need to be used complementarily in order to account for U.S. involvement in Colombia, and that the constructivist perspective is indispensable in the explanation of the preservation of the drug policies, despite their apparent failure to achieve intended goals.

Subsequently, a short outline will be presented of the history of Colombia's conflict with relation to the drug war. The second chapter will provide an overview of U.S. foreign

policy towards Colombia, and presents the three approaches realism, liberalism and constructivism in order to account for it. The focus will lie on the latter, which highlights the power of the public discourse created, and the implications this has on the justification of the U.S. Drug War in Colombia. Chapter three will examine the consequences of the shaping of U.S. drug control policies on the social and political fabric of Colombia and present the resulting “unintended” consequences of Plan Colombia. It will be shown and concluded that the so-called unintended consequences which result from the failing drug control policies are unintended but anticipated – they depict unwelcome but accepted side-effects which are foreseen but traded off against intended consequences; and are in fact in line with U.S. motivations and intentions as part of the broader “War on Drugs”. The social construction of the Drug War and its necessity made it possible for the U.S. to stick to its heavily militarized approach as part of Plan Colombia despite its apparent failure to achieve intended goals.

Chapter One – Colombia: A Historical Background

According to Human Rights Watch, Colombia has the worst human rights record in the Western Hemisphere and is arguably its most dangerous country (Human Rights Watch, 2001). With severely increasing homicide rates each year, Colombia has the highest homicide rate in the Americas and each day an average of fourteen people are victims of political violence or death in combat (Livingstone, 2003: 29). Furthermore, Colombia is the “kidnapping capital of the world” – until today (Reid, 2001) – and there are nearly two million forcibly displaced people and hundreds of thousands of Colombian refugees in surrounding Latin American countries. On a regular basis, people are “disappeared”, tortured, kidnapped, and massacred. Two million people have fled their homes since 1985 and the rate of international displacement is rising. In the year 2000, 317,000 people have abandoned their homes (Ibid.). Human rights workers, activists, journalists and government investigators are frequently attacked and assassinated, and extrajudicial killings and impunity for criminals and human rights violators are common (Barry, 2002: 175). More than 50,000 people have died in political violence since 1980 and the death rate is rising. In 2001 there were 18 politically-related deaths a day (Livingstone, 2003: 29).

Today, according to the U.S. Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) – which released its newest Colombia Crime and Safety Report in 2013 – Colombia continues to be rated “high” for terrorism, residential crime, non-residential crime and political violence³. According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), a human rights group, 6,067 people were killed as a result of “socio-political violence” in the 12 months to September 2000 – which depicts an increase of almost 50 percent compared with the previous 12 months (Reid, 2001: 2). Furthermore, violence caused by infighting between drug cartels

³ OSAC, 2013 retrieved from <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=13972>

and gangs has drastically increased urban displacement in Colombia since the beginning of the century (Alsema, 2013)⁴. According to *Codhes*, an NGO focusing on displacement in Colombia, expulsions forced by illegal armed groups have gone up 425 percent since 2000 (Ibid.). After 50 years of conflict, and with the FARC⁵ turning 50 years old this year, Colombia today is engaging in the so-called Havana talks as part of the ongoing step by step peace process (Isacson, 2014). According to Human Rights Watch (2014)⁶, despite these first cautious steps towards peace, Colombia's internal armed conflict continues to result in serious abuses by irregular armed groups, including guerrillas and successor groups to paramilitaries. More than 5 million Colombians have been internally displaced, and upward of 150,000 continue to flee their homes each year, yielding the world's second largest population of internally displaced persons (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Ballvé, 2009).

Colombia's history of 50 years of internal armed conflict is rooted in a period of intense nationwide strife known as *La Violencia*. As noted above, human rights violations historically have occurred in the country as a result of internal social and political conflicts. Accordingly, the internal factors of these conflicts must be examined in order to understand how the external factors of the drug trade and the "War on Drugs" have "acted as catalysts to create a human rights disaster" (Barry, 2002: 168). In the context of *La Violencia*, between 1947 and 1953 around 300,000 Colombians died during armed clashes between the two main political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives. Eventually broadening into a wider social conflict, *La Violencia* was a struggle of a very personal nature and encompassed "acts of astonishing violence between people who had known each other their whole lives" (Kirk, 2003: 25) committed in the context of struggles over land rights, municipal rivalries, and

⁴ <http://colombiareports.co/cali-crime-statistics/#>

⁵ The FARC (spanish: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) is an irregular military organization which is involved in the continuing Colombian armed conflict since 1964. The group came into existence through communist peasants, who instinctively distrusted the central government and the large landowners. Today they are (together with the ELN) the largest guerrilla organization of the country (Barry, 2002).

⁶ See Human Rights Watch World Report 2014 on Colombia at <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/colombia>

political fortunes. It was a violent clash about land, pride, vengeance and control (Ibid.). Violence declined following the 1953 military coup and the declared dictatorship, and six years later the civilian elite regained formal control under the power-sharing agreement between the two main parties alternating presidency called ‘National Front’ (Barry, 2002: 169). Before this agreement expired in 1974, it was characterized by corruption, complete lack of legitimacy and high abstention rates (Kirk, 2004). Meanwhile the exclusion of other groups from the political process had fuelled the development of several insurgent guerrilla movements. Two groups are still engaged in armed insurrection against the Colombian state: the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN⁷ (Army of National Liberation). The guerrillas portray the Colombian government as a violent “false democracy” which lacks complete legitimacy. Hence, in their eyes an armed struggle against the state is not only a rightful means to oppose and overthrow the government, but also the only means available (Barry, 2002).

With the growth of the illegal drug trade between 1972 and 1982, a new and often violent social group arrived on the national scene: the cocaine mafia. Initially, the guerrillas and the drug lords cooperated: the former controlled many of the coca growing regions while the latter managed much of the cocaine production and subsequent trafficking. However, this informal alliance soon collapsed, when the leaders of the Cali and Medellín drug cartels⁸ started investing their new found wealth in property, such as large cattle ranches, which placed them decidedly in the ranks of the guerrillas’ traditional enemy (Barry, 2002). Hence, in order to fight the guerrillas and their sympathizers, the new narco-landowners soon began

⁷ The ELN (spanish: Ejército de Liberación Nacional), similar to the FARC, is an armed group involved in the continuing Colombian armed conflict, which has existed since 1954. It is the second of the two major guerrilla groups of the country next to the FARC, and advocates a communist ideology of Marxism (Barry, 2002).

⁸ The Cali and Medellín drug cartels were the two main cartels in Colombia from the 1970s until the 1990s. They are named after the cities Cali and Medellín and were each other’s main rivals and amongst other things deeply entrenched in drug trafficking, bribery, money laundering, arms trafficking, kidnapping and murder.

to organize their own paramilitary armies (Leech, 1999). This led the Colombian Armed Forces to work closely with the paramilitary forces in order to fight the guerrillas together. Today it is the conflict between this trilogy – the Colombian Armed Forces, the paramilitaries, and the guerrillas – that is the principal internal motor of violence in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Government security forces, well trained by the U.S. government through the “War on Drugs” and Plan Colombia specifically, work directly with the paramilitaries to eliminate guerrillas and sympathizers under the justification of eliminating the “narco-guerrilla threat” (Molano, 2001). Paramilitaries terrorize civilians in order to undercut support for leftwing guerrillas and horrific massacres have been carried out to instil fear in the rural population. According to Livingstone (2003: 29), “this war has created a humanitarian catastrophe”.

United States’ drug policy: Plan Colombia

In order to evaluate U.S. reasoning and justification of its “War on Drugs” in Colombia, one has to take into account the U.S. history of intervention in Latin America. Throughout the past, the U.S. has intervened in any country in the hemisphere in order to protect its political and economic interests. In fact, the U.S. has intervened in Latin America more than 80 times (Livingstone, 2003: 171). Moreover, the U.S. has also held a strong presence in Latin America with regards to indirect involvement, by means of training and funding, for example when it came to “friendly dictators” of the 1930s throughout the 1970s. U.S. forces trained counterinsurgency battalions and its intelligence services waged dirty tricks campaigns against the civilian left, in order to destabilize every left-leaning regime in Latin America (Ibid.). During the 1980s for example, the Reagan administration prompted an illegal war in Nicaragua, funded death squads in El Salvador and supported military governments in Guatemala in a war that claimed 200,000 victims (Ibid.).

Since World War II, Colombia has received generous military aid from the U.S. In the

late 1960s, it was the fourth largest recipient in Latin America, and in the 1970s and 1980s it was in third place. Colombia's virtual monopoly on the export of cocaine destined for the U.S. since the early 1980s made it the prime focus of U.S. international narcotics interdiction efforts on subsequent years (Crandall, 2008: 1). During the 1990s Colombia received more military aid than all other Latin American countries put together (Livingstone, 2003: 181) and it was also the period when Colombia rose to the top of the list of priorities for U.S. policy makers. The crisis in Colombia had deepened, criminal violence increased, the country became the world's leading cocaine exporter, and the guerrilla war – previously limited to rural areas and poor city suburbs – was now spreading to every part of the country. In 1990 military aid to Colombia increased to a record high of US\$73 million (Ibid.: 184).

Despite Colombia's intertwined internal conflict, according to Barry (2002: 171) it has been this immense amount of funds and weapons provided through U.S. Drug War policies that has fuelled the motor of violence and expanded its historical conflict into disastrous proportions. Starting with President Nixon's declaration of the "War on Drugs" in 1971 when drugs were designated as "public enemy number one", the U.S. counter-narcotics programs became more and more militarized throughout the years. President Reagan enforced the supply-side orientation⁹ and initiated the recruitment of Customs, FBI, ATF, IRS, Army and Navy personnel into the Drug War (Crandall, 2008). The militaristic enforcement focus of the Drug War was kept throughout the G.H. Bush and Clinton administrations with the aim to further intensify it, and in 2000 the major military aid package "Plan Colombia" was introduced.

Plan Colombia was proclaimed as the most ambitious campaign against drug trafficking in history (Livingstone, 2003: 147). The Plan involved six years of heavily militarized aerial fumigation of illegal crops, and the U.S. contribution was to give Colombia

⁹ The supply-side approach strategy that the U.S. is pursuing focuses on wiping out drugs at their source or seizing them in transit. The objective is to decrease their availability in the United States by causing drug prices to rise and thus discouraging some percentage of potential buyers (Youngers and Rosin, 2005:8).

its biggest ever military aid package, making the country the world's third largest recipient of U.S. military aid after Israel and Egypt. Originally, the Plan was designed by Colombia's then President Andrés Pastrana, who was elected in 1998 on a platform that pledged control of the drug trade as well as a negotiated end to Colombia's forty years of conflict (Youngers & Rosin, 2005: 106). Pastrana initially designed Plan Colombia "as a policy of investment for social development, reduction of violence and the construction of peace" (Posso, 2000: 167). Pastrana emphasized the need for social investment directed towards small growers of coca to counter their lack of economic alternatives, and hoped for the international community – especially the U.S. – to make essential monetary contributions to his Plan. And indeed, the U.S. was very much in favour of this idea. However, over time Plan Colombia was "fundamentally altered to reflect U.S. analysis and priorities" and the new, U.S.-dominated version understated and minimized the need for development to the benefit of military aid (Youngers & Rosin, 2005: 106). The U.S. soon related the drug problem to the FARC, who during Pastrana's administration controlled or operated freely in 40-60 percent of Colombian territory, where much of the country's coca was produced. Around U.S. \$200-400 million of the FARC's income was believed to come from its involvement in drug trafficking and the profit resulting from the FARC's taxation of illicit drug production (Ibid.). They tax the coca paste trade in the areas they control and this levy has become their most important source of revenue after kidnapping (Livingstone, 2003: 129). The drug income rendered the FARC more and more powerful and helped financing its improved military capacity.

In the U.S. this development was viewed with growing concern. President Clinton's "drug czar", General Barry McCaffrey, declared that "we have an emergency situation in Colombia and it requires a broad-gauge response which may require additional resources" (Youngers & Rosin, 2005: 106). This resulted in the revival of assistance to Colombia's armed forces and Plan Colombia as it is known today. The new version of the Plan had as its officially stated mission to "assure order, stability, and compliance with the law; guarantee

national sovereignty over territory; protect the State and the civilian population from threats by groups in arms and criminal organizations; and break the links between these groups and the drug industry that supports them” (Ibid.: 107). Pastrana’s original Plan Colombia as published in May 1999 makes no mention of drug trafficking, military aid, military action or fumigation (Livingstone, 2003: 147). Its main focus was on achieving peace and ending violence. Nevertheless, the Plan’s new focus was explicitly counterdrug and implicitly counterinsurgency, it was never discussed in the Colombian Congress, and 75 percent of the U.S.’s monetary aid went to the armed forces and the police – and most of that to the military (Youngers and Rosin, 2005). Drug trafficking and strengthening the military aid were its main preoccupations. It was only after the events of September 11th that its counterinsurgency mission became explicit, as part of the global “War on Terror”, which will be explained more in detail further on. Under the following president, Alvaro Uribe, Plan Colombia was distanced even more from Pastrana’s original version, which was highly welcomed by the U.S.

Even though the Colombian government and the U.S. claimed evident success of Plan Colombia – for example as seen by apparent decline in coca production due to the aerial fumigation strategy – preliminary achievements were not sustainable. Firstly, even the sharp reductions in 2002-2003 did not bring coca cultivation down to the 1998 level and Colombia remains the largest coca-growing country in the world (Youngers and Rosin, 2005; Bagley, 2001). Furthermore, what has been witnessed instead of actual meaningful decline of coca cultivation is the so-called “balloon-effect”: when coca production has declined in one geographic area, it has increased in another (Youngers and Rosin, 2005: 113; Pencey and Durnan, 2006: 99). This does not only hold for Colombia internally, but also affects its neighbouring countries. Moreover, due to aerial spraying of coca fields in certain areas, coca cultivation has spread throughout the country. In other words, the provinces in which coca was known to be cultivated actually rose from 12 to 22 between 1999 and 2002 (Ibid.: 114).

This is in line with research by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODOC), who reports “a high degree of mobility of coca cultivation, both within and across department boundaries” and furthermore even sharp increases in coca cultivation in 10 provinces (UNODOC, 2003: 17) .

It is recognized widely that America’s drug war fails to achieve its stated ends (or manifest functions), and that “failed methods are then pursued more vigorously, while effective ways to reach the stated goals are rejected” (Chomsky, 2000: 81). It is therefore pertinent to ask what the drug war is all about; and maybe even to conclude that in fact, it might be the case that the drug war *is* achieving its goals and not failing – otherwise, why would the U.S. government stick to the Plan and continue in pursuing it? As Chomsky (2000: 81) claims, “one might debate the [U.S.] motivations, but the consequences [...] seem reasonably clear.”

In the following chapter, the U.S. military force strategy in Colombia will be analyzed from three perspectives – liberalist, realist and constructivist – in order to account for how the U.S. legitimized, justified and reasoned about its necessity despite its apparent failure to achieve intended goals.

Chapter Two – The U.S. “War on Drugs” in Colombia – A theoretical approach

“When we view the world, we are looking through different sets of lenses and these lenses are organizing our concepts”. – Holsti, K. (1995: 5)

The purpose of the following theoretical approach is to organize the driving factors of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia into models which help to structure this very complex issue. By this means, three different approaches to the contemporary international arena will be outlined – realism, liberalism and constructivism with an emphasis on the latter – in order to understand U.S. motivations and reasoning within their “War on Drugs”. These approaches are viewed as complementary rather than competing, and it will be argued that only a combination of them can fully account for the U.S. involvement in Colombia’s drug war; and that the social construction of the situation plays a vital role in justifying the heavily militarized approach despite its apparent failure.

The Realist Approach

Realists believe that power is the currency of international relations, and international politics is synonymous with power politics (Dunne et al., 2007). The international arena is an anarchical, self-help system, a “brutal arena where states look for opportunities to take advantage of each other” (Mearsheimer, 1994). In a system where there is no higher authority that sits above the great powers – which are the main actors in the realists’ account – and where there is no guarantee that one will not attack another, it makes eminently good sense for each state to be powerful enough to protect itself in the event it is attacked. In other words, states are “trapped in an iron cage where they have little choice but to compete with each other for power if they hope to survive” (Dunne et al., 2007).

Cultural differences and distinctions in regime types are ignored in the neorealist

perspective on international politics, because it is assumed that the international system creates the same basic incentives for all great powers. Thus, states are seen as “black boxes”: they are alike, except in terms of power. Power is based on the material capabilities that a state controls, and the balance of power is mainly a function of the tangible military assets that states possess (Ibid.). National security and state survival are the values that incite the realist doctrine. Security is traditionally understood as state security, and governments have used this to justify taken actions in apparent defence of the nation-state. In this context, security definitions are closely linked to a state’s defence of sovereign interest by military means (López, 2000: 11). National interest precedes moral norms and is moreover the final factor in evaluating and assessing foreign policy (Jackson and Sorensen, 2003: 68).

Colombia fluctuates between the fifth and the tenth largest foreign oil supplier to the U.S. In fact, 35 percent of Colombia’s export revenues in 2000 were from exports to the U.S. (Dunning and Wirspa 2004: 10). From a neorealist perspective, U.S. involvement in Colombia under the “War on Drugs” is best explained based on geopolitical strategy theory. Geopolitics can be understood as a variant form of realism in the study of the international political arena and is the study of the effects of geography on international politics and international relations (Devetak et al., 2012: 492). Looking at Colombia through geopolitical lenses, the U.S. is interested in a stable “neighbourhood”, because this has an impact on U.S. access to Colombian oil and natural resources. Moreover, a destabilization of Colombia also directly affects bordering Venezuela, another large oil supplier of the U.S. And in fact, U.S. state officials and private sector representatives have argued that attacks on energy and infrastructure in Colombia, which are a common thing within the context of the countries’ internal conflict tied to the narcotic industry, pose a threat to a key source of U.S. oil supplies. Hence, from a realist point of view, this provides the U.S. with a legitimate argument for increasing military aid to Colombia, given that the government supports U.S. relations. Furthermore, according to Tickner (2003: 2), the drug issue has been Washington’s most

strategic objective in Colombia since the mid-1980s. This is in line with President Reagan's declaration of illicit drugs being a "lethal threat to U.S. national security", which led to a militarization of the drug problem (Ibid: 20). From a realist perspective then, the U.S. views the illicit drug problem through a national security lens, and this shapes its actions and reactions. Moreover, it also directly affects Colombia: the country is pressured into doing the same, namely militarize its own counter-narcotics strategy and in this way cooperate with the U.S. in the fight against terrorism (Ibid.)

Nevertheless, Colombia does not seem to fit the traditional realist security threat, as it is very unlikely that Colombia will wage a war against the U.S. – in terms of power the U.S. is clearly predominant. But notwithstanding of the non-traditional security threat posed by the drug problem itself, the U.S. primarily applied military methods when reacting to it – in other words, they applied traditional realist methods which are a natural means as a response to a traditional realist security threat. This seems rather paradox and it appears that Colombia as a security threat fits rather the neo-liberalist perspective, as will be argued in the following.

The Liberalist Approach

The central concern of neo-liberalism is how to achieve cooperation among states and other actors in the international system (Dunne et al., 2007). International cooperation occurs when states "adjust their behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others" so that "the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating realization of their own objectives" (Keohane, 1984: 51). According to neo-liberalists, international institutions play a fundamental role in the daily activity of contemporary global politics, as do institutional arrangements consisting of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations. Like structural realists, neo-liberalists consider states to be unitary, rational actors who dominate world affairs and who make decisions based on a cost-

benefit analysis of possible choices. However, unlike realists, liberalists assume that “collective benefits may be obtained through the greater application of human reasoning” (Dunne et al., 2007: 117). Moreover, policy makers can create and reshape institutional structures in order to more effectively obtain collective actions.

A liberalist view on the U.S. “War on Drugs” would claim that, the fact that the core of Plan Colombia was a militarization strategy characterizes the way in which the U.S. governments throughout the years have “seen the drug problem through the lens of national security policy” (Tickner, 2002: 4): drugs are seen as a threat to the United States coming from outside its borders, an enemy against which a war must be waged. And in fact, in 1986 President Ronald Reagan, through the National Security Directive 221, declared that illicit drugs constituted a lethal threat to the U.S. national security. The liberalist approach explains the U.S. involvement in Colombia for this reason, because it accounts for a broader definition of the realist “security threat”. Whereas for realists a security threat is understood in military terms, liberalists widen the security agenda (Buzan et al., 1998) and would claim that drugs pose a threat to America’s health and result in an increase of crime. In their view then, non-military threats are an important element of insecurity in today’s international arena; hence drugs do pose a security threat to the U.S.

Furthermore, a liberalist perspective would argue that the U.S. is involved in Colombia because it wants to strengthen Colombian democracy and secure human rights. And in fact, this is part of the officially stated rhetoric of Plan Colombia. The officially stated U.S. objectives are “to support the Colombian government’s efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions, promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, foster socio-economic development, address immediate humanitarian needs, and end the threats to democracy posed by narcotic trafficking and terrorism” (Simons, 2003)¹⁰. Furthermore, President George W. Bush claimed in 2002 that the U.S. is “working to help Colombia defend its democratic

¹⁰ <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/21203.htm>

institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and to provide basic security to the Colombian people” (President George W. Bush, NSS, 2002). In a liberalist view, these objectives would be secured through cooperation and peace initiatives. However, as argued earlier, the approach applied by the United States is a militant one. It seems then, that the U.S. is applying a realist approach in order to achieve liberal objectives. This could lead to the conclusion that both approaches by themselves are not sufficient to account for U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Might it be that a rational approach is not enough, because interests and problems are partly shaped by more abstract things such as social interaction? In contrast to the traditional realist view, it might be that states’ objectives and interests are not a priori, but can instead change in the process of interaction with other states. In other words, interests are not fixed but instead emerge out of social relations between actors and communication, which define the reasoning process by which states define their interests and objectives in the international arena (Wendt, 1994). Could a constructivist approach – and its focus on language and ideas in understanding state’s behaviour – serve as a complementary theoretical perspective to explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia?

The Constructivist Approach: complementing the explanation of U.S. foreign policy

From a constructivist point of view, international relations is a social construction (Dunne et al., 2007). International life is social and agents and structures are co-constituted. A constructivist analysis moves away from the emphasis on states or threats as given and objective phenomena, and instead focuses on how identities, actions, and human suffering are a product of human interaction in the social world. Constructivists highlight the importance of norms, rules and language in this context and emphasize the social dimension of international relations. Thus, the focus of a constructivist approach lies on how actors engage and interact with one another, how they define themselves and others and how this shapes the boundaries

of the world within which they act (Ibid.).

This approach implies that nothing can be called objective. A constructivist would criticize realism and liberalism for failing to account for how states acquired their current identities and interests, as they see them as so-called “black boxes” who are the same on all levels except in terms of their power share. A constructivist would claim that state interests are not exogenous to interaction (Wendt, 1994). Instead states are the dynamic results of the social processes that constitute their existence and furthermore, it is perceptions of their own and others’ identities that shape their behaviour in the international arena.

Concerning the study of national security, constructivism focuses on the influence and impact of identity and culture on security policies and actions (Jackson and Sorensen, 2003). Constructivists agree with realists that it is national interests that often are the driving forces behind states’ foreign policy, but state interests are relational and result out of social interaction. They are defined in the context of internationally held norms and understanding about what is appropriate and hence cannot be derived merely from calculations of interests (Finnemore, 1996). The key structures in the state system are inter-subjective, and state identities and interests are constructed by social structure and not given exogenously to the system by the human nature of domestic politics (Wendt, 1994: 385).

According to Kubáľková (2001), foreign policy is an identity-making tool that sets up boundaries between self and other, and defines the national interests in the process. The concept of “othering” is crucial in this context, as it allows a state to define its own identity (what it is) and the identity of the other (what it is not). In this way, two groups are constructed: enemies, which constitute the “other”; and allies, which constitute the positive identification of what comprises the self.

This procedure of “othering” can also be found in the U.S. depiction of its “War on Drugs”, which is portrayed as a struggle against the drug enemy constituting a threat to U.S. national security. From a constructivist perspective, one has to rethink the way the drug war is

seen and understood by adding a social layer to International Relations' (IR) analyses. The societal aspect and its role in the conflict are emphasized in order to explain and interpret given occurrences and events. From this view, despite the failure of U.S. counternarcotics policy, U.S. governments continued to insist upon its preservation, by making use of a legitimizing discourse (Guzmán, 2001). According to Mutimer (1997: 194) "a problem is not presented to policy makers fully formed but is, rather, constituted by actors in their discursive practices". Hence, the image of a security problem is practically established – and this shapes the interests states have at stake in the problem and consequently also the forms of solution that can be pursued in order to resolve it (Ibid.).

This process can be linked to the idea of securitization, which according to the 'Copenhagen School' of IR characterizes the procedure in which – by making use of speech acts – an issue is labelled as "security issue" and therefore removed from the realm of normal day-to-day politics: instead it is portrayed as an "existential threat" which justifies and even demands for certain (extreme) measures in reaction to it (Williams, 1998: 435). In other words, the securitization of issues, and hence public discourses, clearly has political effects. For example, it can cause an "emergency mobilization of the state" (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998: 8) which leads to a situation of exception. How security is defined induces what is considered as insecurity, and hence as risk or threat. According to the 'Paris School' of IR, the field of security is among others determined by the discursive ability to produce an image of the enemy with which the audience identifies (Bigo, 2000). Systems of meaning are created which then allow or even demand for certain measures. In the case of Colombia, as a result of the social construction of the drug problem in the U.S., the "War on Drugs" in Latin America and the resulting justifying public discourse, U.S. military and police aid in the region has risen significantly to rival economic and social aid. Public opinion was shaped, and the problem portrayed and constructed in such a way that a heavily militarized approach seemed necessary and indispensable.

A claim to a threat, such as in the context of the “War on Drugs”, has to be accepted by a certain audience, for example by U.S. citizens and politicians. This refers back to the above mentioned social (or societal) layer of IR. It is the social construction of the threat and the resulting legitimizing public discourse, that forms this layer and that leads the audience to support extreme measures in fighting this threat. In the context of the War on Terror this discourse has always been a very emotional one – and this also holds for the “War on Drugs”. The claimed threat is often treated as an issue of security though reference to a threat to identity and its related values and norms (Huysmans, 2000). This makes the claim very powerful and appealing to the audience’s emotions. In the U.S., starting in the 1980s, one could witness what Reinerman and Levine (1997: 49) called the “crack scare”: media and politicians were literally engaged in an “antidrug crusade”, which succeeded in making many Americans even more fearful of crack (cocaine) and other illicit drugs. Cocaine was portrayed as “supremely evil” and “the most important cause of America’s problems” (Ibid.: 51). *Time* called crack “the Issue of the Year” (September 22, 1986: 25)¹¹, and the words ‘plague’, ‘epidemic’ and ‘crisis’ had become routine when describing the drug situation the U.S. was facing. President Bush’s “drug czar” Bennett claimed, as part of his National Drug Control Strategy, that “crack is responsible for the fact that vast patches of the American urban landscape are rapidly deteriorating” (Bennett, 1989 as cited in Reinerman and Levine, 1997: 49) – a clear appeal to American’s identity, values and sense of security. In the same year, Bush claimed that cocaine was “turning our cities into battle zones and murdering our children” (Ibid.). Without a doubt, by means of this discourse on drugs, media and politicians shaped public opinion about narcotics and the problems resulting. The appeal towards citizen’s emotions and American identity, and the link to national security rendered the legitimizing discourse for a fight against drugs very powerful.

Furthermore, a constructivist would argue that U.S. policymakers have constructed

¹¹ View at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601860922,00.html>

Colombia and the illicit drug problem in such a way that it fits into their global “War on Terror”. In contrast to the realist and liberalist perspectives elaborated on above, which focus on security as an objective condition, constructivists claim that security can be analyzed as an inter-subjective phenomenon, or in other words, as a social construct (Miniotaite, 1999: 10). In the context of the U.S. drug war, this refers to the fact that a public discourse was created of ideas about Colombian groups as international terrorist groups that are threatening the entire Andean region, and hence a security threat was created through discourse. In fact, speeches and official U.S. governmental documents often portray the ELN, the FARC and the AUC¹² as international terrorist groups, often labelled “narco-terrorists” with a global reach (Livingstone, 2003: 200).

Before the term narco-terrorism emerged, the U.S. based their justification for their “War on Drugs” on the so-called “narco-guerrilla” rhetoric. This referred to the fact that, whereas the Colombian conflict began as an ideological conflict between the two main guerrillas formed in the context of the Cold War (the FARC and the ELN), its nature changed when these armed groups found the resources for expansion in narco-trafficking. The link made between the guerrilla groups and the illicit narcotics industry was used by the U.S. as basis for the merger between the notions of crime and war, and hence between antidrug and counterinsurgent policy strategies in Colombia. Furthermore, this line of reasoning offered for another meaning to the “War on Drugs”: the U.S. counterdrug policies would result not only in the reduction of a threat to U.S. national security, but also in peace in Colombia (Viana and Viggiano, 2011:14). This approach changed again in nature in the aftermath of 9/11, when the term “narco-guerrilla” was inflated to “narco-terrorism”.

The term “narco-terrorism” perfectly represents the merger of the “War on Drugs” (*narco*) and the War on Terror (*terrorism*). Since the events of September 11th, these two wars have found common ground in countering the threat of narco-terrorism, and hence combine

¹² United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (spanish: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia)

two threats that have traditionally been treated separately. This also meant that the traditional separation of narcotics and terrorism counter-measures and agencies has gradually faded since 9/11 (Björnehed, 2004: 313). The concept of narco-terrorism stems from an understanding that the two phenomena of drug trafficking and terrorism are interconnected and hence, that a “coordination of anti-drug and anti-terror policy can be used, and is necessary, to effectively deal with both threats” (Ibid.: 305). According to the United States Drug Enforcement (DEA)’s definition of the concept, “narco-terrorism may be characterized by the participation of groups or associated individuals in taxing, providing security for, or otherwise aiding or abetting drug trafficking endeavours in an effort to further, or fund, terrorist activities” (Hutchinson, 2002: 1). The term was first used to describe campaigns by drug traffickers using terrorist methods, such as assassinations, kidnappings, and the use of car bombs, against anti-narcotics police in Colombia and Peru (Calvani, 2004). A narco-terrorist then refers to individuals such as the drug lord Pablo Escobar from the Medellín Cartel and other members of the cartels or criminal organizations, whose actions were defined as “the attempts of narcotics traffickers to influence the policies of government by the systematic threat or use of violence (Björnehed, 2004: 306). The incident of the hijacking by the FARC of an Avianca airplane in February 2002, was also used by the U.S. in order to portray the guerrillas as terrorist groups, and helped them justify the need for a military approach against them (Viana and Viggiano, 2011).

The application of the narco-terrorism concept to Colombia thus affected the way the drug problem was viewed and tackled in response to this. While originally the underlying policy for Plan Colombia emphasized its “effort to provide for Colombia’s intensifying counter-drug effort” and the U.S. abstaining from “support[ing] Colombian counter-insurgency efforts” (Blörnehed, 2004: 319), this changed in the aftermath of 9/11: the clear separation of drugs and terrorism was blurred and the “War on Drugs” in Colombia became engulfed in the War on Terror. Speaking to ABC TV on September 23, Secretary of State

Colin Powell claimed that Colombian insurgents were “terrorists with a global reach” who posed a threat to U.S. interests (Colin, 2001, as quoted in Livingstone, 2003).

Taking it even a step further, U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson in one of her speeches compared Colombia’s armed groups to Osama bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda and claimed that the U.S. was “concerned by the use of the demilitarized zone as a base for terrorist acts”, that “the United States must do more to combat terrorism in Colombia” and that “Plan Colombia remains the most effective anti-terrorist strategy we [the U.S.] could design” (Patterson, 2001 as quoted in Livingstone, 2003: 200). In this context, it was very common to evoke Colombian armed groups as an example when trying to show that the anti-terrorist crusade conducted by the U.S. was not merely confined to Islamic organizations (Rojas, 2006). Powell also claimed in 2002 that “it’s terrorism that threatens stability in Colombia. And if it threatens stability in Colombia it threatens stability in our part of the world, in our neighbourhood, in our backyard. And I think that’s something that should be of concern to us” (Powel, 2002, as quoted in Livingstone, 2003: 201). The picture is created that drugs and terror go hand in hand and cannot be separated from one another and hence the U.S. should not focus on one without the other: the “twin evils” of narcotics trafficking and terrorism “represent the most insidious and dangerous threats to the hemisphere today” (Livingstone, 2003: 173).

Thus, a constructivist would explain that drugs became a security issue to the U.S. through the use of language in form of the narco-guerrilla/ narco-terrorism rhetoric, and this had an impact in legitimizing U.S. military presence in Colombia. This is an interesting approach, which can be linked to Buzan et al. (1998: 24), who claims that sometimes an event or a problem can be presented as an existential threat without necessarily being of such nature. He argues that by defining an issue as a “security” threat, state representatives formally declare a sort of emergency condition which justifies whatever means necessary to block this threat (Ibid.). Since the U.S. emphasized the drug trade as the “new, exceedingly

dangerous threat to national security” (Carpenter, 2003: 47) and the entire situation as the “narco-terrorist threat to American security” (Ibid.), such a state of emergency was declared and portrayed in a very persuading way, which then again legitimized taking appropriate actions to counter this threat. Once narcotics were repeatedly claimed to represent a threat to U.S. national security, “the deployment of military resources in the strategy combating drugs was seen as a natural course of action” (Viana and Viggiano, 2011: 10). The image of “drugs as a security threat”, and hence the securitization of the problem as explained above, also helped gain support for U.S. military presence in Colombia among politicians who were initially against such measures. Given the potential for congressional opposition, driven mainly by the concern that the assistance package would lead the U.S. into “another Vietnam”, the Clinton administration wisely presented Plan Colombia as being primarily an antidrug effort necessary in the name of national security protection (Crandall, 2008: 123). From this view, a militarily heavy intervention was portrayed as the necessary means and justified the financial assistance of the Colombian military with an amount of US\$519.2 million out of the total of US\$860.3 million¹³ (Crandall, 2008: 128).

It seems then that the legitimizing discourse was very much needed for the justification and implementation of the “War on Drugs”. But as has been shown previously, Plan Colombia has been an overall failure in achieving its intended or manifest functions. Instead it has resulted in immensely devastating “unintended consequences”, or latent functions, which Giddens (1993: 765) defines as “consequences which result from behaviour initiated for other purposes”. But as de Zwart (2013: 7) claims, unintended consequences can be either anticipated or unanticipated. Sometimes unintended consequences are anticipated, but accepted, as they may be perceived as the “unwelcome side-effects that were foreseen but traded-off against intended consequences – efficiency gains” (Ibid.: 10). De Zwart

¹³ Within the budget of US\$860.3 million, only US\$ 3.0 million were dedicated to the peace process, US\$ 5.0 million to human rights and US\$ 68.5 million to alternative development. This shows the disproportionality of U.S. funding (Crandell, 2008:128).

furthermore argues, that “the distinction between manifest and latent functions rests on the presence or absence of actors’ intentions” (Ibid.: 12). Could it be the case that the resulting “unintended consequences” of the U.S. Plan Colombia – which will be discussed in detail in the next Chapter – were not unanticipated, as they are in line with actual U.S. motivations, intentions and goals for the region? In this light, Plan Colombia’s collateral damage would be seen as anticipated side effect, accepted and permitted because it is traded off against the actually intended effects. Those unintended but anticipated consequences are not designed or generated spontaneously, but instead better characterized as “permitted outcomes” (De Zwart, 2013: 23). As explained by means of the constructivist perspective on U.S. foreign policy in Colombia, the legitimizing discourse, the social construction of the drug problem and its portrayed threat to national security, allowed the U.S. to stick to its militarized version of Plan Colombia, despite the fact that it was failing with respect to its officially stated aims. Hence, the question is not why the U.S. government failed to anticipate the unintended effects (or latent functions) of its drug policy strategy, but instead why given the foreseen risks, they chose to proceed with it anyway, and how they were able to justify this. The constructivist approach explains this. In the following chapter, the so-called unintended consequences of Plan Colombia will be elaborated on more extensively.

Chapter Three: The “Unintended Consequences” of Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia was proclaimed as the most ambitious campaign against drug trafficking in history (Livingstone, 2003: 147). It involved six years of heavily militarized aerial fumigation of illegal crops; and the U.S. turned Colombia the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid after Israel and Egypt. But the impact and the collateral damage of the U.S. drug control policies on human rights and the political and social fabric of Colombia is as real as its failure to achieve intended consequences. In fact, the U.S. “drug-control initiatives have contributed indirectly to social dislocations, corruption, militarization, abuse of human rights and a general disregard for human decency” (Tullis, 1995: 140).

“Through the 1990s, Colombia has been by far the leading recipient of U.S. military aid in Latin America, and has also compiled by far the worst human rights record, in conformity with a well-established and long-standing correlation” (Chomsky, 2000: 62). The EU, several NGOs and a number of scholars have accused the Plan of being “overly militaristic and misguided” (NACLA Report in the Americas, 2000). Furthermore, the empowerment of the Colombian government by the U.S. through Plan Colombia is questionable in the sense that in this way, it supports an institution with a deplorable and very well documented human rights record. Barry (2002: 175) claims that it appears that under the pretext of national security, the “War on Drugs” in Colombia has become a “dirty war with U.S. military and financial support”. Once again, the U.S. is deeply embroiled in a human rights tragedy of enormous proportions in Latin America. According to the author, Plan Colombia was guaranteed to make a bad human rights situation in Colombia – and worse.

Officially *Plan for peace, prosperity and the strengthening of the state*, according to U.S. governments, Plan Colombia was “an integrated strategy to meet the most pressing challenges confronting Colombia today – promoting the peace process, combating the

narcotics industry, reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society” (Haugevik, 2004: 25). Moreover, some of the main elements included “a judicial and human rights strategy to reaffirm the rule of law and assure equal and impartial justice to all Colombians” and “economically feasible environmental protection activities to stop the dangerous expansion of illegal cultivation” of drugs”; a “human development strategy to [...] guarantee [...] adequate education and health, to provide opportunities” to every Colombian; and a “peace strategy that aims at a negotiated peace agreement with the insurgency on the basis of territorial integrity, democracy and human rights, and which should strengthen the rule of law and the fight against drugs throughout the country” (‘Plan Colombia’ as cited in Livingstone, 2003: 151).

Despite aiming at these honourable goals, there is no doubt about the fact that Plan Colombia has been an overall failure in achieving them (Livingstone, 2003; Chomsky, 2000; Oehme, 2010). And as mentioned above, through a careful social construction of the conflict and the resulting “threat to national security”, the U.S. has nevertheless been able to justify and preserve its strategy with regards to Colombia’s drug war. According to Barry (2002: 174), the “relationship between the country’s [Colombia’s] human rights crisis and the drug war is by no means a coincidence – the drug trade and the international policy attempts to limit or stop it altogether are a main cause of human rights abuses in Colombia and have empowered the actors most implicated in committing these abuses”. In the following, the effect of the above described shaping of international policy on the social and political fabric of Colombia will be examined, in order to reveal the “unintended” consequences of U.S. drug policy in the country – which might have been very well anticipated and accepted side effects for a greater goal.

The central strategy of Plan Colombia was the aerial fumigation strategy, aiming at the destruction of illicit drug plantations. Within this strategy, the plantations are sprayed with

toxic chemicals¹⁴ by U.S. funded airplanes, conducted by the police unit called the Colombian Antinarcotics Directorate (DIRAN), with the U.S.'s embassy Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) in Bogotá funding technical support, herbicide, fuel and spray aircraft. Plan Colombia showed an immensely rapid expansion of aerial fumigation: from 2000 through 2003, the U.S.-backed fumigation program sprayed herbicide on more than 380,000 hectares of coca, which equates to more than eight percent of Colombia's cultivable land (Youngers and Rosin, 2005: 113). Unfortunately, this strategy has not only proven to be ineffective in terms of fighting coca, poppy and marijuana cultivation; it has also proven to be counterproductive and resulting in immense collateral damage (Youngers and Rosin, 2005; Bagley, 2001; Gaviria, et al., 2009).

First of all, despite the fumigation efforts, Colombia remains the largest coca-growing country in the world, and drug cultivation has generally not been brought down overall. Instead, as mentioned earlier, what is witnessed is the so called "balloon effect" – when coca cultivation has declined in one area, it has increased in another (Youngers and Rosin, 2005: 113; Pencey and Durnan, 2006: 99). This holds not only internally for Colombia, but also concerns its neighbouring countries.

Secondly, the collateral damage of the aerial fumigation strategy has taken on dramatic proportion. It has destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of peasant farmers who lack viable economic alternatives to producing illicit crops, and has endangered their health and the environment in severe ways. The additive "Cosmo-Flux 411F" contained in the toxic sprayed pesticide, made the liquid stick to the skin of humans and animals, causing deep burns and welts. Not long after the beginning of the spraying, the Putumayo Public Health Department in Colombia received 4,883 health complaints from three affected municipalities

¹⁴ The pilots spray a chemical mixture whose active ingredient is glyphosate, a non-selective systemic herbicide that kills most plants and trees if a sufficient dose is applied. The mixture applied in Colombia is manufactured by the St. Louis-based Monsanto Corporation and consists of a glyphosate formulation, water and a surfactant, Cosmo-Flux 411F, which increases the effectiveness of the herbicide (Youngers and Rosin, 2005:113).

(Livingstone, 2003: 160). Complaints were, amongst others, diarrhoea, vomiting, rashes, boils, respiratory problems, fever, fainting and skin and lung infections. Furthermore, studies show that 178,377 animals had been reported dead, including cattle, horses, pigs, dogs and fish; and that only 12 percent of the 7,282 hectares sprayed contained coca plants (the rest was pasture, food crops, and uncultivated land) (Ibid.).

Alternative development agreements in 2000 promising aid for voluntary eradication have failed too: more than two years later, “only 21 percent of the aid for food security projects had been delivered, and only 24 percent of those participating in social pacts had received all of a portion of the promised aid” (Marsh, 2004: 22). This lack of implementing promised aid programs has left many farmers extremely sceptical towards U.S. involvement and the Colombian government, who have both failed in providing aid once their subsistence had been eradicated. Therefore, they are reluctant to voluntarily eradicate their coca, as this basically implies their demise. Furthermore, even families who had voluntarily signed manual eradication pacts with the government – and had switched to producing alternative crops – had their farms sprayed anyways (Livingstone, 2003: 160). In other words, according to Higuera (2001), “it is hard to understand how the authorities can continue releasing resources from the national budget to carry out various alternative development and coca-substitution projects, only for them to be damaged by indiscriminate chemical fumigation”. The national ombudsman of Putumayo concluded after the first year of Plan Colombia that “the fumigation and intensification of the conflict had caused a ‘humanitarian crisis’ in Putumayo (Livingstone, 2003: 160).

According to the State Department, the eradication of illicit crops is a necessary and urgent means in the fight for national security and against the narco-trafficking. Official rhetoric states that the fumigation program is designed to avoid harm to humans and other crops, and officials claim that herbicide spraying is carefully targeted and done only under conditions that minimize spray drift (Youngers and Rosin, 2005: 118). It does not take a

genius to understand that nevertheless, side effects are enormous. Herbicide spray drift is probably a major cause of the overall environmental and health damage, as they drift up to 200 meters feet downwind from their targets (Ibid.). Although in theory there exists a procedure to compensate small farmers whose legal crops are destroyed by spraying, in practice this has not worked out.

This results in increasing numbers of guerrilla or paramilitary supporters, as the farmers join them out of economic necessity. Statistics on the movement of people out of fumigated regions are shocking, and all coca-growing areas reveal very high levels of forced displacement of population (UNODOC, 2005 and 2012). For example, fumigation was the major cause – next to the ongoing armed conflict – of the displacement of 17,000 people from Putumayo in 2001, as the aerial eradication program deprived them from their subsistence income derived from coca and threatened their very existence. Colombia's nongovernmental Council for Human Rights and Displacement estimates that in 2001 and 2002 alone fumigation led to the displacement of 75,000 people nationwide (Marsh, 2004: 26). With this, Plan Colombia has as its target the weakest and most socially fragile link of the drug chain – the production by peasants, settlers, and indigenous people – and contributes largely to the human rights catastrophe of the country (Chomsky, 2000: 74).

Not only has Plan Colombia fuelled large scale displacement in the country; it has also contributed to the shifting of power relations within Colombia's internal war (Pencey and Durnan, 2006: 102). For example, the aerial fumigation strategy has indirectly caused increases in support for the guerrillas or paramilitary forces, and hence also increases in (political) violence and civilian killings. According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists' report of 1999, the rate of killings had increased by almost 20 percent over the preceding year and that the part attributable to the paramilitary groups had risen from 46 percent in 1995 to almost 80 percent in 1999. Moreover, there had been a 68 percent increase in massacres in the first half of 1999 as compared to 1998, predominantly attributed to the paramilitaries

(Chomsky, 2000: 65). Moreover, the destruction of the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia during the early 1990s benefited the FARC in several ways. Even though the demolition of the two biggest cartels of Colombia was experienced as considerable success, it also meant the dismantling of the most powerful military opponent of the FARC in many regions. Furthermore the destruction of the Cali and Medellín cartels meant a shift of coca cultivation from Peru to Colombia, because the decentralized criminal framework found it easier to gather their new raw materials from local producers. This increased the FARC's opportunity to tax the drug trade industry and expand its power. One can therefore claim that the strengthening of the FARC was an unintended consequence of U.S. antidrug policies during this time period (Pencey and Durnan, 2006: 97).

The U.S. drug policies in Colombia are furthermore questionable, as they empower the Colombian military forces, which have an extensive record of human rights abuses. Plan Colombia “primarily support[s] the social forces that control the government and the military/paramilitary system, and that have largely created the problems by their rapacity and violence” (Chomsky, 2000: 74). It has in this way intensified the war and undermined the peace process (Thoumi, 2002). By supporting the Colombian government and its military, the U.S. is indirectly contributing to the human rights crisis of Colombia, by providing training and military hardware for Colombian military forces for their paramilitary allies – the main human rights abusers of the country. Aerial fumigation strategy has indirectly caused increases in support for the guerrillas or paramilitary forces, and hence also increases in (political) violence and civilian killings. The great majorities of the atrocities committed, such as massacres of unimaginable horror, mass civilian killings, extrajudicial killings, and public violent mutilations, are attributed to the paramilitary forces, which are closely linked to the military (Chomsky, 2000: 65; Kirk, 2004). According to Human Rights Watch (2000) the Colombian military, which is supported and greatly strengthened by the U.S. through Plan Colombia, maintain an intimate relationship with death squads and the paramilitary forces,

and either take part in their massacres directly, or fail to take action and hence purposefully enable the paramilitary groups to achieve their exterminating aims. As a matter of fact, the U.S. is sponsoring all of this and hence there is no doubt that they share a great deal of responsibility with regards to Colombia's situation then and today.

Conclusion

Within the scope of this thesis it has been shown that through the social construction of the “War on Drugs” and the securitization of the drug problem, the U.S. has portrayed the conflict in such a way that seems to justify all means necessary in order to fight the “security threat” at hand – even when this meant supporting corruption and large scale violence; and despite the fact that the approach does not bring about intended (and officially stated) consequences. Starting in the 1980s with the explosion of crack cocaine and its related violence in the U.S. and President Reagan declaring drugs as “national security threat” in 1986, the Drug War in Colombia has from its very initiation been portrayed as natural and indispensable, which led to a highly militarized approach to the “problem”. As has been shown, the constructivist perspective explains this process. Through the narco-guerrilla – and later on the narco-terrorism – rhetoric as part of the wider “War on Terror” – the U.S. was able to create a public discourse which legitimized their military presence in Colombia – disregarding any of the fatal “unintended” consequences. The drug problem was portrayed as security threat which justified taking extreme measures in order to fight it.

However, the Plan has not only been a failure in achieving officially stated goals, it also resulted in a vast array of devastating “unintended” consequences on the social and political fabric of Colombia, such as large-scale forced displacement, corruption, militarization, abuse of human rights, increase in political violence, environmental and health dangers, the shifting of power relations in Colombia’s internal war and a resulting increase in violence and civilian killings. The collateral damage of the aerial fumigation strategy has taken on dramatic proportion. Within Plan Colombia, the U.S. provides explicit support for the Colombian Armed Forces and also knowingly provides support indirectly to paramilitary forces and hence the main human rights violators in Colombia (Barry, 2002: 181).

Nevertheless, there appears to be a broad consensus in Washington that human rights atrocities are an acceptable price to pay for drug supply control. It seems to be the case that the so-called unintended consequences were very much anticipated by the U.S. governments throughout the years, and rather seen as accepted side-effects traded-off against intended consequences. Hence, the question is not why the U.S. government failed to anticipate the unintended effects of its drug policy strategy, but instead why given the foreseen risks, they chose to proceed with it anyway, and how they were able to justify this. As has been shown, the created legitimizing public discourse explains this.

Moreover, it seems to be the case that in fact these “unintended consequences” are actually in line with U.S. motivations and intentions as part of the broader “War on Drugs”. And indeed, when President Clinton decided to waive nearly all of the strict human rights conditions Congress had placed on Plan Colombia, General McCaffrey defended this decision by claiming that “you don’t hold up the major objective [drug supply control] to achieve the minor [human rights]” (McCaffrey as quoted in Barry (2002: 181). This perfectly shows that the consequences of Plan Colombia – the “minor” – were maybe unintended, but not unanticipated and on the contrary very much expected and accepted as part of the major aim to fight – and win - the “War on Drugs”.

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