



A RAND NOTE

**The Implications of Colombian Drug Industry
and Death Squad Political Violence for
U.S. Counternarcotics Policy**

Kevin Jack Riley

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Kevin Jack Riley

**Prepared for the
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy**

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PREFACE

This study analyzes the effect of drug industry and death squad political violence on Colombia, and the consequences for U.S. counternarcotics policy. It was carried out as part of a larger project, *Andean Futures: A Comparative Political, Economic, and Security Assessment*, sponsored by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. This document makes reference to another RAND publication from the Andean Futures project, *A Simple Model of the Cocaine Trade*, Michael Kennedy, Peter Reuter, and Kevin Jack Riley (forthcoming). That report analyzes the effect that source country counternarcotics policies have on the production of cocaine. In addition, Gordon McCormick of RAND has produced two reports on political insurgency in Peru, the latter under the Andean Futures project: R-3781-DOS/OSD, *The Shining Path and the Future of Peru*, 1990; and R-4159-USDP, *From the Sierra to the Cities: The Urban Campaign of the Shining Path*, 1992.

This research was conducted in the International Security and Defense Strategy Program within RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff.

SUMMARY

Drug-related violence and death squad murders, which are often organized and financed by the drug trade, pose a grave threat to the political system in Colombia. An analysis of the political violence in Colombia shows that combined the two groups have the ability to terrorize the entire spectrum of the Colombian political system, from the local to the national level, from peasant farmers to the Office of the President. Additionally, the data used to analyze the violence show that patterns of political violence change in response to government policies. When the government increased its counternarcotics efforts in 1989, the trade responded with an attack against political authority. When the government redoubled its efforts in 1990 and launched an attack on the leading traffickers themselves, the drug lords responded with an even bloodier attack and widened it to include civilian targets. Ultimately, the traffickers and the government reached an accord in late 1990 under which leading cartel members surrendered to authorities in exchange for lenient treatment, including a guarantee against extradition. The effect of the government-cartel settlement on the level of death squad activity, however, has been negligible when the effect is measured in terms of the number of deaths attributed to the death squads. Indeed, death squad activities were not addressed at all in the bargaining process. As a result, the level of death squad activity has continued to climb, even while the level of drug industry violence has subsided according to the data collected.

This pattern of political violence poses a problem to U.S. counternarcotics policy on Colombia. Existing U.S.-supported and Colombian counternarcotics programs not only do not reduce the amount of cocaine produced, they can contribute to increases in the level of drug-related political violence. Although an increase in violence may in some respects be an indication that policy is successful, the Colombian government's inability to combat the violence works in the opposite direction to limit the amount of policy success the state can endure. A more effective strategy would be to focus U.S. policy on longer-term objectives, such as maintaining democratic institutions in Colombia, and secondary counternarcotics objectives, such as strengthening the Colombian political system's ability to address violence. Such a reorientation of policy necessarily entails acknowledging the effect of death squads in Colombia and helping the country develop a strategy to combat them. If policy is not reoriented to better address Colombia's primary interest in combating all types of political violence, the United States may find Colombia increasingly hesitant to support costly counternarcotics programs, thereby undermining U.S. ability to pursue regional objectives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Note would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of RAND colleagues. First, I must thank Jennifer Duncan for the outstanding work she did in compiling the database used in this study. Her organizational and data analysis skills were indispensable to completing this study. In addition, Milinda Cush provided Jennifer with invaluable assistance; her efforts ensured that the data were ready on time. Thanks are also due to Karen Gardela for helping Jennifer and me locate data sources.

Finally, I would like to thank Jennifer, as well as James Chiesa, Bruce Hoffman, Charles Kelley, Gordon McCormick, and Michael Rich for sharing their comments on earlier versions of this Note, and Patricia Bedrosian for the outstanding editing work she did on short notice. Let me add that although the Note benefited immensely from their insights, any remaining errors are solely my own.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence dominates daily life in Colombia. Indeed, by any measure of nations not at war, Colombia is one of the most violent countries on earth. Last year, Colombia recorded over 20,000 murders, thousands of kidnappings and bombings, hundreds of "disappearances," and countless other acts of brutality. Moreover, these acts affect much of the nation, from the largest cities to rural and agricultural regions. That a strong democratic tradition survives in the face of this onslaught is testimony not only to the strength and resilience of the political structure in Colombia but to the peculiar nature of the political violence. Historically, bloodshed in Colombia has been a byproduct of the democratic process. Although in some cases the violence is the result of clashes between the state and revolutionary ideologies, more often the mayhem is grounded in left-right political divisions that demarcate traditional political camps. Much of the carnage in Colombia today is a continuation of this historical pattern, but with a new twist. Previously, factors such as disputed elections and political assassinations have precipitated prolonged periods of violent conflict in Colombia. But the impetus for much of the violence this time is not the traditional clash between Liberal and Conservative party values or the struggle by leftist groups to have their revolutionary demands addressed. Rather, the political violence that threatens Colombia today is, paradoxically, a function of Colombia's, indeed perhaps Latin America's, single largest economic success over the past quarter century: the production of cocaine.

Though Colombia has long been a violent society, the traffickers have directly increased the bloodshed in three ways. First, drug trafficking itself is an inherently violent industry. Second, they responded to the left's use of kidnapping and extortion by reviving the idea of self-defense units¹ and transforming them into death squads in a perverse attempt to cleanse society of undesirable influences and gain support from those who feel vulnerable to attack from insurgent groups. Third, they have responded to government counternarcotics policy with a visible and intense campaign of intimidation and terror.

¹Various referred to as private armies, paramilitaries, *sicarios*, and self-defense groups. The definitions are not always kept distinct. *Sicarios*, for example, refers to almost any hired killer, whether associated with a death squad or not; *sicarios* are motivated by money, not ideology. Self-defense groups and private armies are legal in Colombia, and indeed, have a history that stretches back many decades. The term "death squad" most directly refers to the ideology-based killings that are running rampant in Colombia today, and the Colombian Army objects to the use of the term "paramilitary" in connection with these killings, since paramilitary technically refers to civilian units trained by the Army for civil defense and other purposes. In terms of contemporary usage, however, all terms are interchangeably used to refer to ideology-based violence in Colombia.

Though similar in terms of their consequences—death and destruction—these campaigns are distinct in their targets and implications. Combined, the drug trade and the death squads form the core of political violence in Colombia that threatens the state's political authority.

The organized response to the guerrillas, originally intended to put an end to the kidnappings and extortion of cartel members, gradually mutated into the formation of numerous death squads² and a systemic purge of radical, leftist, and other "deviant" social elements. Though other groups in Colombian society are complicit in death squad killings, including ranchers and dissident military, security and police personnel, the drug traffickers play a key role in the continuation of these activities. It is this campaign of terror, which is much less visible than the highly publicized assassinations of government officials, that touches the lives of most ordinary citizens. Through their shadowy alliances with conservative elements and their bankrolling of operations, the traffickers have succeeded in exacerbating the latent left-right schism in Colombian society.

In contrast, the drug lords' campaign of terror against the mainstream political elites seems designed to intimidate state officials into ignoring or implicitly supporting the drug trade. Chief among the traffickers' objectives has been to put a halt to extradition.³ At other times, however, the drug lords indicated that they would quit the business in exchange for amnesty or other political and legal considerations. Whatever their ultimate political goals, the drug lords have moved strongly to intimidate and corrupt the system. At times they have taken their terror beyond the state to the public, as was the case in 1990 when government officials moved to restart the process of extradition. The cartels responded with a campaign of public terror that was uncharacteristically divorced from the usual efforts at direct intimidation of public officials.

Combined, the traffickers' purge of leftists and their crusade for business autonomy represent the assertion of a bloody political philosophy. The cocaine traffickers do not have a revolutionary agenda comparable to the guerrillas'. Instead, their agenda is one of acceptance, and much of the violence perpetrated in Colombia, whether against the left or the government, marks attempts to forcefully integrate themselves into the existing Colombian political structure. The political structure is, and has been, populated by the Colombian elite. Historically, it has not been a system that worked for the population at large, but rather for powerful interest groups. Although national officials were willing to look the other way in the early stages of the drug industry, even taking campaign contributions from the traffickers, they were reluctant to bestow upon them an air of political

²According to Youngers (1989), more than 140 had been identified as of 1992.

³See Lee (1991) for more on the traffickers' demands in negotiations.

legitimacy. As the violence and the international scope of the drug industry grew, the ruling elite's reluctance to embrace the drug lords has solidified. Not dissuaded, the traffickers have turned to more indirect routes. They are buying land, running cattle ranches, investing in the media, and operating national sports teams, and in the countryside they are organizing the "protection" of local rancher, farmer, and merchant interests and the "cleansing" of society. Through amnesty or through intimidation, they want their business practices forgiven or ignored. In effect, they are trying to establish themselves as rightful participants in the Colombian democratic tradition. Along the way, they have revived a long-standing struggle between the left and right, engendered a political culture that is extraordinarily dangerous to virtually all Colombians, and contributed to the creation of an environment that threatens the stability and functioning of the Colombian state.

The traffickers alone, of course, are not responsible for the violence in Colombia. Many of the self-defense units, or death squads, operate independently of the drug industry. Other forms of violence plague Colombia as well. The guerrilla movements continue to claim lives, kidnap victims to raise revenues, and bomb targets to underscore revolutionary agendas. Colombia also has a tremendous problem with common crime. Most of the murders in Colombia are divorced from politics and ideology and are rooted in more prosaic matters such as business and personal relations. Murder has become an accepted way of resolving disputes, and hired assassins, or *sicarios*, will do the job for as little as ten dollars. There were more than 20,000 murders recorded in Colombia last year, for an annual rate of about 60 per 100,000 population, or four times the rate in the United States.⁴ These problems, while acute, are only a backdrop to the larger issues of the narcotics-directed and death squad threats to the Colombian state.

NARCOTICS AND DEATH SQUAD THREAT TO THE COLOMBIAN STATE

Although violence in Colombia is widespread and perpetrated by groups up and down the political spectrum, the largest challenge, both potential and actual, to the continuance of Colombian state authority comes from the drug traffickers and the death squads that the traffickers support. Despite the toll they have inflicted upon Colombian society, the traffickers have popular draw, and this appeal challenges that of the state and probably surpasses that of the revolutionaries. Because of their size and resources, the drug terrorists and death squads pose three challenges to the Colombian state. The first is the industry's effects on institutions, or more generally, the structure of the political climate in Colombia. Related to the groups' influence on the structure of the political system is their impact on

⁴See the beginning of Section 3 for more on the homicide rate in Colombia.

other forms of political violence in Colombia. And finally, the first two challenges to the Colombian system constrain both Colombian anti-terrorism and U.S. counternarcotics policy.

Structure: The cocaine traffic and death squad killings have had a tremendous impact on the institutions in Colombia, from the corruption of the judiciary and assassination of presidential candidates to public acceptance in rural areas where their activities have driven up land prices and provided security against guerrilla forces. Perhaps the most important consequence is that the government appears increasingly unable to stop the violence, deepening the gap between the public and the government.

Other forms of political violence: One consequence of the government's inability to control the level of political violence in Colombia is that the society is increasingly lawless. Nonpolitical homicides, among the highest in the world, are in part encouraged by the weakness of the government in the face of political challenges. Similarly, the success the traffickers and death squads have enjoyed can increase guerrilla perceptions that the government is inept and that a revolution is required.

Policy constraints: Constrained by limited public resources, the Colombian government must choose its counterterrorism policy carefully. Pursuit of the traffickers and the death squads might open up avenues for guerrilla activities; focusing on the guerrillas might speed the decay of the political system. U.S. counternarcotics policy complicates the situation by providing the Colombians with resources that are not easily reserved solely for counternarcotics use.

The balance of this Note is devoted to exploring the structural and policy implications of drug industry and death squad political violence. The first step in analyzing the implications of drug trade and death squad political violence is to describe and characterize the dimensions of the problem. Section 2 places contemporary political violence in its historical context, details the evolution of the drug trade, and summarizes the formation of death squads. Building on this base, Section 3 begins the process of interpreting drug industry and death squad political violence in Colombia by finding underlying patterns in the political violence and assessing their impact on the political structure. Finally, Section 4 places political violence in the context of policy choices, particularly those affecting U.S. counternarcotics strategies.

RESEARCH ISSUES, METHODOLOGY, AND SOURCES

To explore the effect of political violence in Colombia, RAND constructed a database of violent incidents from open sources. This database contains records of nearly 2,000 politically motivated homicides in Colombia for the period 1986-1991. This figure undoubtedly errs on

the low side. First, the database purposefully excludes political homicides carried out by Colombia's four main guerrilla groups. Although these groups contribute to the atmosphere of violence in the country, they are not as important as the drug industry and the death squads for three reasons.⁵ First, the guerrilla groups attract primarily fringe support because of the revolutionary agendas and redistributive ideals they espouse. This contrasts sharply with the drug industry and the death squads, which appeal to much broader social bases through appeals to mainstream economic and social causes, including "cleansing" society of "deviant" elements and protecting commerce, particularly in rural regions, from interference. Second, the guerrilla groups have been in existence for decades and still do not, nor are they likely to, seriously challenge state authority.⁶ In contrast, the drug industry has continued to accumulate resources and has grown to wield tremendous influence over the state and society in a relatively short period of time.⁷ Finally, the radical groups themselves, as well as their collaborators and suspected sympathizers, have become the targets of violence at the hands of the drug trade and the death squads.

A number of authors have theorized about the effect of violence on the viability of the Colombian state and the potential effect of counternarcotics policy on drug industry violence.⁸ One purpose of this study was to see if the existing patterns of violence in Colombia are consistent with the anticipated effect of policy on violence. A second purpose was to see if there were any trends in the fabric of violence that had heretofore gone unnoticed, but which bear on the stability of the state. To detect the underlying structure and trends in political violence, the database needs to be rich in details other than simply the number of murders. Information on tactics, targets, and location, for example, are critical to interpreting the meaning of the violence. Moreover, since there is an interest in how

⁵A number of sources point to the death squads as responsible for the majority of politically motivated killings, including *The Killings in Colombia: An Americas Watch Report* (1989); *Colombia Besieged: Political Violence and State Responsibility* (1989); and Youngers (1989).

⁶Among the reasons why the guerrillas do not, and probably will not, pose a threat to the stability of the state are: They lack internal cohesion, they have not been able to assemble a popular urban base, they suffer from a changing popular image, they do not have a theory of victory, they do not have a unifying charismatic leader, and they have not developed a strong base among the various disaffected classes in Colombia. Gordon McCormick (1990, 1992) cites these as necessary factors to posing a credible threat to the state in his works on Peru. Observers of Colombia, including Bruce Bagley (1988), discount the threat posed by the guerrillas for similar reasons.

⁷Both the drug industry and the death squads emerged strongly in the early 1980s. Of course, both groups have roots extending much further back than the 1980s. Both groups, however, enjoyed advantages over the guerrillas that made their success predictable and that ensure future prominence which the guerrillas cannot expect. See *The Killings in Colombia*, pp. 3-8, for more debate on the relative importance of the two groups to the increase in violence in Colombia. See Section 2 of this Note for more on the historical development of the two groups.

⁸Bruce Bagley (1988, 1987/1988), and *Drugs and Latin America: Economic and Political Impact and U.S. Policy Options* (1989).

conditions have changed over time, as well as how they might evolve in the future, it was important that several years of data were available.

In light of the constraints outlined above, the database used in this study was compiled from *Control Risks Information Services* reports. *Control Risks* is a consulting firm that provides its clients with analyses of the risks from political violence and instability. *Control Risks* compiles its information from open sources, including press and media accounts. In addition, however, the company maintains a network of local contacts who provide information from other sources. *Control Risks* was chosen over several other potential sources, including RAND's database on international terrorist incidents, because only the *Control Risks* reports offered the combination of detail, several years of data, and information on both domestic and international incidents.

This database probably contains 5 percent to 10 percent of all terrorist acts committed by drug lords and death squads in the 1986-1991 period. For example, CINEP,⁹ a Jesuit research organization, counted 3,011 politically motivated homicides in 1988, as compared to this dataset's 316. That is the bad news. The good news is that not only does the dataset contain sufficient observations to detect underlying trends in political violence, it is also unlikely to be any more biased than the data on which other estimates are based. All known estimates of political violence in Colombia are compiled from open sources. Only the *Control Risks* reports, however, provided enough information to go beyond simple tabulation of deaths. A complete listing of all political violence is impossible to obtain, then, because many instances are never recorded.¹⁰ Although the data points represent an unbiased sample in that they were not deliberately sought out or collected with any known bias, they are not a randomly selected set of observations from the set of all politically motivated homicides in Colombia. Given the experience that *Control Risks* has at collecting data on political violence, the database is, however, a good sample of *recorded* incidents of political violence in Colombia.

⁹Center for Popular Education and Research, in Bogota.

¹⁰According to DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional Estadística), the national statistical agency, nearly 80 percent of the criminal activity in Colombia goes unreported, *El Mundo*, August 6, 1987.

2. THE PERPETRATORS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Violence in Colombia has been around for a long time, much longer than the cocaine trade itself.¹ Civil strife shook the country from 1899-1902 in the War of a Thousand Days. This war was rooted in the Colombian political parties' attempts to prevent their competitors from participating in the political process. From 1948 to 1966 Colombians endured a much darker period in their history known as *La Violencia*. Similar to the War of a Thousand Days, *La Violencia* pitted elements of Colombian society against each other in a conflict that was loosely organized around liberal-conservative politics. The 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a potential presidential candidate of the Liberal party in 1950, sparked a riot in Bogota. Though the fighting in the capital was soon contained, bands of armed militia soon swarmed the countryside, killing thousands in the names of both the Liberal and Conservative parties. The fighting consumed more than 200,000 lives during the civil war's 18 years. In 1958 the Liberal and Conservative parties established a National Front agreement under which they alternated power through 1974, though sporadic outbursts of bloodshed linked to *La Violencia* were recorded through 1966.

GUERRILLAS AND THE ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL VIOLENCE

As a consequence of *La Violencia*, the roots of modern political violence took hold in Colombia. Four main guerrilla groups operated² in Colombia in the 1980s: FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), M-19 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*), ELN (*Ejercito de Liberacion de Nacional*), and EPL (*Ejercito Popular de Liberacion*). All of these groups have origins stretching back to the politics and issues that sparked *La Violencia*. Table 1 provides a summary description of the four main guerrilla organizations in Colombia.

Formally organized in 1966, FARC has been around longer than the three other guerrilla groups. Manuel Marulanda Velez and other members of the Colombian Communist Party's Central Committee founded the group in response to a political break with other party members. Originally, then, FARC's membership was grounded in Communist ideology. In addition, however, FARC attracted sizable support among the portion of the peasant population that had become politically active during *La Violencia*. In contrast to the Communist politics that inspired the formation of FARC, M-19 originated in a disputed

¹For more on the character of Colombian criminal activity and its role in Colombian history, see Osterling (1989), especially pp. 261-332; and Rosenberg (1991), pp. 21-76.

²M-19 dropped its armed campaign in 1989. The other groups remain active.

Table 1
Colombian Guerrilla Groups

Group	Armed Members	Status	Tactics
FARC	6,000	Offshoot <i>UP</i> ^a party legalized 1985; severed ties later. Broke numerous peace agreements.	Rural campaigns; attacks on military targets; kidnappings.
M-19	2,000	Abandoned armed struggle 1989; won national seats in 1990 elections.	Spectacular urban operations, including attack on Palace of Justice.
ELN	500	Ignored 1984 peace efforts, but entered negotiations in 1989.	Attacks on petroleum installations.
EPL	500	Participated in 1984 peace negotiations.	Maoist philosophy; endorses "long, popular war."

^a*Union Patriótica.*

presidential election. Rojas Pinilla, the former military dictator of the 1950s who assumed command in the midst of *La Violencia*, lost a close presidential election April 19, 1970. His supporters claimed it was fraud that denied Pinilla the post and announced the formation of M-19 as an armed branch of Pinilla's Alianza Nacional Popular (ANAPO) party.³ The group based its ideology on a mixture of the populism that marked Rojas Pinilla's dictatorship and nationalistic socialism of the types found in Cuba and Nicaragua. EPL started its operations with a Maoist political philosophy, rooted in the concept of a prolonged popular war. EPL was formed in 1968 as the radical Maoist arm of the Colombian Communist Party that had among its objectives rectifying perceived social and economic injustices.⁴ ELN represents the fourth variation on revolution in Colombia and its agenda again encompasses economic and social issues that fueled *La Violencia*.

At least one guerrilla group, FARC, can trace its origins back to the self-defense squads that flourished during and after the specter of *La Violencia*.⁵ Self-defense squads, promoted by the Liberal party in the 1950s, organized in the 1950s and 1960s as a method of protecting members from political and economic harassment. A typical self-defense group would count among its members local ranchers, farmers, and merchants whose activities were threatened by the political instability in the countryside. Self-defense groups gained official sanction in 1968 with passage of *Law 68*. Under the provisions of this law, defense

³Pinilla, who died in the mid-1970s, denied any connection to M-19.

⁴The Sino and Soviet branches of the Colombian Communist Party split formally in 1965. The Soviet branch, from which FARC emerged, was legalized in 1968. The Sino branch never received official recognition.

⁵Private army activity was rampant in Colombia throughout *La Violencia*. For more on the early self-defense squad and guerrilla activity, see Maullin (1973).

groups could, and did, receive weapons directly from the Colombian Army. Moreover, the law allowed the Army to train units of civilians in counterinsurgency operations to assist in returning conflict areas to conditions of normality. More often than not, the weapons were transferred with little or no counterinsurgency training taking place. All Colombians not subject to other military obligations were potential counterinsurgency trainees, such that, over time, significant portions of the population received access to military weaponry.⁶

FARC rapidly strayed away from a defensive posture, and soon all the main guerrilla groups had adopted attack strategies as a method of operation. Though the guerrilla groups have never posed a strong threat to the national government, they have been able to cause severe regional disruptions. During 1966-1968 FARC conducted raids on military installations and facilities that yielded the rebels large caches of weapons, ammunition, and other military materiel. The 1975 kidnapping of the Dutch consul in Cali netted the organization one million dollars. In addition to the kidnappings, FARC received support, both financial and material, from the peasants in the areas it occupied. Today, FARC maintains a strong presence in Antioquia, Boyaca, Caqueta, Cauca, Cundinamarca, Huila, Meta, Santander, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca departments. In contrast, with some 2,000 militants at its peak in the mid-1980s, M-19 has focused on urban operations. Moreover, M-19 has exhibited a tendency to execute highly visible if not flashy operations. Its first act of national significance was the theft of Simon Bolivar's sword from display in the national hero's villa. In 1980 the group seized the embassy of the Dominican Republic and occupied it for two months. Their most infamous act occurred in 1985, when M-19 invaded the Palace of Justice in Bogota. In the ensuing attempt to liberate the court from guerrilla control, over 100 people, including 11 members of the Supreme Court, died. One of M-19's last spectacular operations was the 1988 kidnapping of former presidential candidate and Conservative party leader, Lava Gomez Hurtado. He was released several months later when the government agreed to meet with M-19 representatives to discuss a national dialog with guerrillas. Of the two smallest groups, ELN and EPL, only ELN has executed large-scale acts of national consequence. Operating primarily in the rural sections of Santander, Antioquia, Cauca, Bolivar, and Norte de Santander departments, ELN attacks on oil pipelines over the last decade have caused losses totaling in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

As the guerrilla groups made progress toward amassing regional strength and influence, and as *La Violencia* died out, the self-defense groups that remained shifted their focus to protecting their members from the guerrilla groups. Throughout the 1970s the self-

⁶This is hardly the only source of weapons in Colombia. See *Connection between Arms and Narcotics Trafficking* (1989) for more on this subject.

defense groups remained committed to defense, largely avoiding offensive operations. The confluence of several factors in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, gradually caused the self-defense groups to shift tactics away from defense and toward preemptive attacks against the guerrilla groups, eventually earning them the sobriquet "death squads."

The drug industry is central to the self-defense units' transformation into death squads. Leaflets dropped at a Cali soccer match in 1981 heralded the transition from self-defense from guerrilla attacks to death squad attacks against the rebels. The group making the announcement was MAS, or *Muerte a Secuestradores* (Death to Kidnappers), which had the avowed intent of putting an end to kidnappings and extortion of cartel members and associates by guerrillas. Over the next three months, MAS claimed more than 100 assassinations in retribution for M-19's kidnapping of the sister of a cartel member. She was released unharmed in February 1982.

In addition to crossing paths through kidnapping and extortion, the drug lords and the guerrillas also had contact because coca cultivation and drug processing took place in regions of the country that were rebel strongholds. The guerrillas attempted to capture the benefits of the cocaine trade by "taxing" drug industry output, a cost the traffickers tolerated when cocaine commanded sky-high prices in the early 1980s, but which they increasingly chafed against as prices in the United States declined.⁷

The formation of MAS unleashed a force that gradually coalesced in the countryside against the guerrillas. By the mid 1980s, tensions in rural parts of Colombia were running high. The rebels disrupted farming and ranching operations, even while negotiations with the government continued. The negotiations culminated in the political recognition of FARC's political arm, *Union Patriotica* (UP), in 1984.⁸ UP candidates won several mayoral positions in the 1988 elections.⁹ The combination of political recognition and significant electoral victories threatened the local interests of ranchers and merchants who felt harassed by the rebel groups. Meanwhile, the drug traffickers were tiring of paying taxes to the guerrillas for the right to produce drugs in rural areas and were looking to invest some of their ill-gotten gains in the countryside as a way of gaining a foothold on the ladder of political legitimacy. Civilian, as opposed to drug industry, involvement in death squad activity emerged as the drug lords attempted to buy farm and ranch land in the same areas

⁷*The Threat of Narco-Terrorism in Latin America and Implications for the United States* (1988), p. II-6.

⁸FARC later broke the truce, resulting in an end to the cease-fire and a formal split between FARC and UP.

⁹Before 1988, mayors were appointed by national or department officials; see Hanratty and Meditz (1990), p. 212.

where guerrillas and ranchers' self-defense squads were already battling for control. An alliance between the self-defense squads and the drug lords soon formed based on their mutual opposition to guerrilla politics and their desire to protect their respective economic interests. Buttressed by the drug lords' proclaimed intent of cleansing society, landowners and other groups of people began to move beyond defensive actions, into offensive or preemptive strikes against perceived enemies.

THE DRUG MAFIA

The origins of Colombia's involvement in cocaine trafficking stretch back to Castro's takeover of Cuba in 1959. Pre-Castro Cuba was a gathering place for wealthy North and South Americans. Castro's uprising displaced Cuban drug traffickers who scattered throughout Latin America and the United States. It was from the Cubans that the Colombians also learned the manufacturing process from cocaine.¹⁰ The Colombians themselves, however, brought vast experience and assets to drug production. First, Colombia sits atop key marketing routes, particularly to the United States. The United States, the largest drug-consuming society in the world, is relatively close to Colombia. In fact, the distance from Bogota to Miami is shorter than the distance from Los Angeles to Miami. The Colombian coast is porous, with numerous developed ports and shipping facilities. Colombia has been a strong participant in international trade with products such as coffee, flowers, and oil. All these factors contributed to the physical ability to exploit the growing cocaine market in the United States. Second, the Colombians have a long history of smuggling. Export duties and price-fixing arrangements for primary exports such as coffee, and import duties on most consumer goods, have fostered an environment in which smuggling is an accepted economic practice. Moreover, the families involved in smuggling these items tend to be part of the elite, lending an air of authority and legitimacy to their illegal operations. Third, the Colombians already had organizational expertise accumulated from their participation in the marijuana trade. Valuable equipment, personnel, and skills such as transportation routes, money laundering facilities, and market contacts survived even as the Colombian government successfully slowed down marijuana production in the northern part of the country.

The collapse of the Colombian marijuana trade might have been the end of the story, were it not for the emergence of a number of factors that contributed to the development of the cocaine market. Beginning early in the 1970s, demand for cocaine in the United States started creeping upward, primarily because federal counternarcotics policies were making

¹⁰*Drug Control: U.S.-Supported Efforts in Colombia and Bolivia* (1988), p. 16.

other drugs such as LSD harder to find. In prior decades, cocaine had been an exotic drug available only to the wealthy and socially elite. It was a popular drug, for example, among many in the movie industry in Hollywood. Gradually, however, the drug began to develop a more mainstream clientele.

While demand for cocaine was undergoing rapid change, so was the supply. The visionaries of the cocaine industry, Carlos Lehder chief among them, recognized that marijuana was not a high-revenue drug relative to its bulk. Cocaine on the other hand, provided huge amounts of revenue relative to its weight. The early participants in cocaine production recognized and exploited this fact by developing the necessary production and export capacity.¹¹ Because the cocaine market in the United States outgrew the Colombians' ability to supply it using mules, or individuals who transported small quantities, the Colombians also orchestrated a revolution in transportation. They developed a sophisticated network of transportation modes, transshipment points, and couriers that allowed them to move the drug to the United States and elsewhere in huge quantities. Finally, in a short period of time they were able to increase the industry's productive capacity to meet the rising demand.

Medellin emerged as the center of the Colombian cocaine trade when its textile industry collapsed and thousands of Colombians headed to New York City in search of employment in the garment industry.¹² The expatriate population provided ready access to the large U.S. market.

The rest of the transition from marijuana to cocaine was therefore relatively easy. Many of the traffickers involved in the cocaine trade had also been involved in marijuana export. They had the equipment, such as planes, landing strips, and networks for distribution largely in place. Colombia being among the most economically developed nations in Latin America, the traffickers also had a ready supply of the chemicals they needed. Moreover, the cocaine drug lords moved quickly to solidify the market for their product, exploiting the fact that authorities were primarily concerned with marijuana and virtually oblivious to the developing cocaine problem.

Through the early part of the 1980s the Medellin "cartel"¹³ controlled most of Colombia's cocaine exports, facing little competition from other comers. At the retail end, however, particularly in U.S. cities such as Miami and New York, the smaller Cali cartel

¹¹For several accounts of the development of the cocaine markets, see Gugliotta and Leen (1989); Eddy et al. (1988); Mermelstein (1990); and Levine (1990).

¹²For more on the collapse of the textile industry, see Morawetz (1981).

¹³The Medellin and Cali groups do not qualify as cartels, at least according to the strict economic definition. The term, however, has stuck.

chose to challenge Medellin's dominance. The result was bloody street battles that raged in the United States, lasting through early 1982.¹⁴ From the beginning, Medellin chose a more aggressive stance, constantly challenging state authority and developing strong intimidation tactics. Cali, on the other hand, remained out of the public spotlight, operating primarily through non-violent means, such as bribery and surreptitious ownership. All the drug-related assassinations of major public officials have been attributed to Medellin.

In 1989 and 1990, the Medellin cartel engaged in bold attacks against the Colombian government in an effort to prevent its members from being arrested and extradited.¹⁵ The terror campaign, which began in August 1989 and lasted through October 1990, took the lives of numerous public officials and civilians. It is difficult to overstate the level of violence in the country during this period.

The August 1989 assassination of probable Liberal party presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan marked the onset of this bloody period. Galan posed a threat to the traffickers because of his hard-line anti-drug stance and his support for extradition. The traffickers left little doubt that theirs was a multi-front effort to cow the political system. Hours before the assassination of Galan, the traffickers killed Colonel Valdemar Franklin Quintero, one of the Colombian military's most outspoken drug opponents, and two days before the Galan assassination, the industry murdered Carlos Valencia Garcia, a magistrate with a strong public anti-narcotics record. Over the course of the next year the traffickers bombed the offices of one of Colombia's most important newspapers, *El Espectador*, attacked DAS (Colombia's equivalent of the FBI) chief Miguel Maza Marquez, and killed two more presidential candidates. No sector of the government proved immune to the attacks, including the judiciary. Conditions, in fact, were so dismal in the courts that judges staged a strike to demand increased protection in the aftermath of an October 1989 cartel assassination of a magistrate.

The murders sparked strong public outrage, and the Barco Administration moved quickly in response to the killings.¹⁶ The government's decision to respond to the traffickers' attacks combined with the traffickers' refusal to back down led to a prolonged period of violent trafficker attacks against government and civilian targets. In November 1989, a bomb planted by the drug industry exploded on an Avianca Airlines flight, killing more than

¹⁴See Gugliotta and Leen (1989) for a full description.

¹⁵Section 3 of this Note analyzes the correlation between government policy and trafficker violence.

¹⁶The legislative components of the response are discussed in later sections of the Note.

100 people. In another brazen act, the traffickers exploded a bomb in front of DAS headquarters, killing more than 60 people.

In September 1990 the government announced that traffickers who surrendered would be treated with leniency and would not be extradited. Ultimately, a number of key traffickers complied with the terms of the program, and drug-related violence died down.

Cocaine production has generated huge profits for the traffickers. The tremendous profits associated with cocaine meant that the traffickers had to do something with their money. Although much of it was laundered and invested overseas, the traffickers were Colombians at heart, and ultimately wanted to develop a stake in their home country. Thus, the drug barons began to invest significant amounts of cash in Colombia itself. Since 1980 the traffickers have bought over 1,000,000 hectares of land, equivalent to almost 5 percent of the total productive amount available.¹⁷ But the traffickers also began to seek something more than investment opportunities. They sought legitimacy, and at times they put their tremendous wealth to use in pursuit of that goal. Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez Orejuela, of the Cali cartel, used to own Grupo Radial Colombiano, a prominent Colombian radio network. Pablo Escobar used his wealth to build public housing in Medellin, an example of largesse that his newspaper *Medellin Civico* covered in great detail. He also succeeded in getting elected as an alternate delegate to the House of Representatives.¹⁸ Carlos Lehder, who taught followers of his *Movimiento Latino Nacional* that they were part of a master race, published *Quindio Libre*, a newspaper known for its opposition to extradition, for a short time.¹⁹ Incongruously, Lehder also made donations totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Liberal party.

To understand the impact of the cocaine industry on political violence in Colombia, it helps to understand its size. Cocaine is a mighty force in the Colombian economy. In 1989, cocaine, up through the wholesale export stage, generated on the order of \$1.5 billion of Colombia's GNP, equivalent to nearly 5 percent of legal economic activity for the same year.²⁰ Most of the value-added, however, is created after the product is shipped out of Colombia. By the time the cocaine is retailed in the United States, the price has increased by a factor of 25 or more, and a small cadre of Colombian cocaine professionals associated with exporting and marketing in the United States has reaped untold billions more in profits.

¹⁷Reported in *Colombia Besieged*, p. 65.

¹⁸Alternates are selected in case the delegate is incapacitated. Eventually, Escobar was exposed as a trafficker through the efforts of Justice Minister Lara Benilla and he resigned. Lara Bonilla was later assassinated.

¹⁹Eddy et al. (1988), p. 174.

²⁰Kennedy, Reuter, and Riley (forthcoming).

Cocaine's contribution to the Colombian economy, then, is likely to be several times more than \$1.5 billion, perhaps on the order of \$5 billion. In contrast, Colombia's largest legal export, coffee, generates \$2-\$3 billion of the country's GNP annually.

The cocaine trade employs, directly and indirectly, over 200,000 people in Colombia, making the industry one of the single largest employers in the country. Moreover, unlike Bolivia and Peru where drug employment is concentrated in lower value-added and lower-skill jobs like farming, cocaine production in Colombia is concentrated among the higher-paying, higher-skill processing jobs. In some sense, cocaine production in Colombia is akin to professional, middle-class vocations like pharmacy, retail, and management.

By one estimate, the traffic costs the Colombian economy over \$1 billion per year in economic losses, police, intelligence and military operations, and repairing the physical damage to the economy.²¹ This estimate, however, is only a fraction of the trade's true cost. Unmeasured are the effects of bribery, corruption, and intimidation, of the contribution that the drug trade makes to the lawless atmosphere, or of the manner in which the drug trade supports other types of political violence in Colombia. The insidious effects of the drug trade are everywhere manifest, from judges who strike for higher pay and more protection, to a macabre lesson of market economics where a contract killing can now be obtained for as little as \$10.

The police and the armed forces have already been discussed. Although they are among the strongest of Colombia's counternarcotics institutions, they are only part of the effort against cocaine. At the other end of the spectrum are the courts. Their members are poorly paid, unarmed, and not well-protected. Moreover, they face an overwhelming workload and a Byzantine system based on the Napoleonic Code. Under this system, the judges have latitude to decide cases on the basis of individual interpretations of laws, rather than on accumulated legal precedents. For the right price, a law can be interpreted virtually any way the defendant wants it to be.

Colombian justices face a number of other daunting circumstances as well. Although they have little direct investigative capabilities, Colombian judges head the criminal investigations associated with their cases. If they cannot cajole the police or other authorities into coming up with the evidence, the case will either be dismissed because of a lack of evidence, or investigated by the judge himself. Rare, however, is the judge who is willing to pursue narcotics investigations without police support. In Colombia, court cases do not proceed before juries, or even in open courtrooms where the prosecution witnesses are

²¹Brooks (1990).

arrayed against the defendant. Rather, they take place in the judge's chambers, with only the judge, prosecutor, defendant, and the defendant's attorney present. Out of the public eye, many judges are easily corrupted or intimidated.

Colombians have reason to be pessimistic about their legal system. According to government statistics, the vast majority of crimes go unreported. Perhaps as many as 90 percent of the crimes that occur in Colombia never reach the police or courts. Of the small fraction of crimes reported, only 1 percent lead to conviction and sentencing, yet the legal system cannot keep pace even with those. Each year the courts receive perhaps half a million cases, and, though estimates vary, it is generally believed that the nation's judges still have between one and two million cases to adjudicate. The penitentiary system can only accommodate around 12,000 prisoners, less than the number of *murders* recorded in one year.

THE DEATH SQUADS

The revelation of MAS, the drug industry's original death squad, to the public is significant for a number of reasons. The traffickers' pronouncement marked a clear break between guerrilla and drug ideology by signifying that the drug lords would not cower before the rebels, regardless of what the state chose to do. More important, as the traffickers sought integration into mainstream society, and as the state proved unable to provide its citizenry with protection, the traffickers were able to use death squad activity as a bridge to members of Colombian society. The traffickers, using their resources, their organizational expertise, and their weaponry, led or financed the formation of numerous paramilitary groups now in operation. To ensure that the killers were adequately prepared for the tasks at hand, the drug mafia supported a number of training centers, literally schools where people were trained in the art of murder.

Currently, the level of rightwing activity in Colombia is high. Table 2 lists a number of recent death squad massacres. By the government's own count, at least 2,000 people are members of death squads. Although that number might not seem high in comparison to the guerrilla groups' membership, what distinguishes the death squads from the guerrilla groups is that many have the backing of an exceptionally powerful client, the drug lords, and the complicity of a military and police structure that frequently looks the other way. There are numerous documented cases of death squad collusion with individual military officers. More generally, a number of death squad attacks simply could not have occurred without implicit police or military support. In addition to conveniently ignoring many instances of death squad activity, the military was able, until 1989, to transfer army-issue weapons to private

Table 2
Drug Industry Ties to Death Squad Massacres

March 1988: Twenty-two farmhands in the Uraba banana region were executed in a massacre reportedly financed by drug lords. Local military authorities are accused of ignoring the massacre. All those killed were suspected leftists.

April 1988: Gunmen, apparently searching for guerrilla representatives, murdered 38 people in Segovia. This attack was attributed to the same people who carried out the Uraba massacre and was financed by a local drug lord and landowner who feared repercussions from local union activities.

April 1988: In Cordoba Department, more than three dozen revelers at an Easter Sunday celebration in a pro-EPL village were killed. Authorities suspect former trafficker Fidel Castaño of organizing the attack to protect his and other ranchers' land holdings from EPL harassment.

November 1988: A death squad attacked in Segovia, Antioquia, using machine guns and hand grenades, killing 37 suspected guerrillas and leftists. Six others were killed in related attacks in a neighboring village. This violent spasm was apparently sparked by the fact that the leftist UP won several local elections, including the mayoral spot. Authorities suspect Fidel Castaño of financing the attack.

NOTE: Table compiled from reports in *The Killings in Colombia*; *The Manchester Guardian*; and *Latin American Weekly Reports*.

parties under Law 68. The Barco Administration rescinded this long-standing agreement in an effort to reduce the amount of weaponry available to the squads.

The emergence of MAS proved to be one of the first confirmations of drug industry involvement in politically motivated killings of guerrillas. It is far from the only link, however. Links between the drug industry and death squads generally fall into one of three broad categories: finance, training, or logistics.

In terms of financial support, the drug industry's ties to the death squads is well-established. Reports by defectors from death squad activities detail drug mafia financing of assassin schools, operations, equipment, and housing.²² The most spectacular report emerged in 1988 when a defector revealed that the drug trade hired Israeli and British mercenaries to operate death squad training schools.²³ There are frequent reports that massacres²⁴ carried out in the region are financed by local drug lords (see Table 2). Rancher

²²Colombia was swept by the revelations of Diego Vifara in 1988 when he defected from a death squad and provided an insider's look at operations. For an account of his stories, see *Colombia Besieged*, pp. 74-76.

²³Robinson (1989). The article refers to a report released by Colombia's security force, DAS. See also *Latin America Weekly Report* (WR-89-15), April 1989, p. 10, for a version of the story published in Colombia in *El Espectador*.

²⁴A massacre is defined as a multiple murder with four or more victims.

Fidel Castaño, a former trafficker who has used his drug industry earnings to buy land in Antioquia and Cordoba Departments, has been implicated in a number of massacres,²⁵ including the Segovia and Easter Sunday massacres listed in Table 2.²⁶ The primary motivation behind these atrocities appears to be the desire to lessen the influence the guerrillas have in regions where the traffickers are buying land and settling.

The financial support the traffickers supply is closely tied to the training they provide. The narcotics-death squad tie is strongest in the agriculturally rich regions of the Middle Magdalena Valley and Cordoba and Antioquia Departments. Police have raided assassin schools in Meta Department where documents linking the schools to the drug dealers have been found. Also, published DAS reports have clearly established the link between the schools and drugs.²⁷

Finally, in terms of logistics, the drug industry represents a potent organizing force. Much as the cartels were successful in making cocaine an international commodity, they have succeeded in making death squads a national product. More than 140 death squads are known to exist across the country, and they are concentrated in the regions where the traffickers have moved in and purchased land, including the agriculturally rich regions of the Middle Magdalena Valley, and Santander, Boyaca, and Antioquia Departments. Some death squads, such as *Muerte a los Revolucionarios del Nordeste Antioqueno* (Death to the Revolutionaries of North East Antioquia), attach their political objectives to local issues; others such as *Amor a la Patria* (Love for the Fatherland) assume appellations with more national sounding aspirations.²⁸ According to available information the death squads operate in every part of the country.²⁹

The drug industry has ample resources to assist in building and executing such operations, and according to information gathered on massacre cases, these resources are crucial to mounting massacre operations. According to Americas Watch, which investigated a number of incidents in *The Killings in Colombia*, a local drug figure organized and subsidized the Easter Sunday dance as a means of gathering the leftists in one place so that they could be more easily attacked.³⁰ Moreover, many of the massacres involved equipping and transporting dozens of killers over hundreds of miles. Here again, the drug lords, in

²⁵*The Killings in Colombia*, p. 72.

²⁶Castaño's father was kidnapped by guerrillas. Castaño paid the ransom, but his father died while still in captivity. Guillermprieto (1988).

²⁷DAS reports are referenced in both *Colombia Besieged* and *The Killings in Colombia*.

²⁸*The Killings in Colombia*, pp. 64-68.

²⁹The database, for example, records death squad murders in all but a few departments. Annex 2 in *Colombia Besieged* reports massacres in more than three-quarters of the departments in 1988.

³⁰*The Killings in Colombia*.

conjunction with local ranchers, are known to have provided the resources necessary to stage the operations.³¹

DAS security chief Miguel Maza Marquez, who survived a 1989 car bombing attributed to a mafia-financed death squad, linked the death squads to established drug industry intelligence resources.³² Among his claims were that drug industry intelligence networks have successfully penetrated a number of national and international security institutions such as DAS itself and DEA, and that information gleaned from these penetrations has been passed along to death squads.³³

The size and scope of some of these operations makes it virtually impossible that they could be carried out without military or police detection, indicating that the security forces sometimes choose to ignore what is happening. Only one road leads into Segovia, for example, and it passes directly in front of an Army installation. Army troops responded to the Segovia massacre, however, only after the killers had passed the installation again on the way out of town.³⁴ Such complicity has been documented on a number of occasions, leading to a number of accusations against military officials.³⁵ Despite the frequent charges of military involvement, prosecution of military personnel is rare.³⁶ In one of the best known cases, officials named 59 military personnel in an investigation of MAS activities, yet failed to achieve any indictments.³⁷

³¹See *Colombia Besieged* and *The Killings in Colombia*.

³²Maza's claims are noted in his report on death squads, "Private Justice," Bogota, November 1988 (as cited in *The Killings in Colombia*).

³³*The Killings in Colombia*.

³⁴*The Killings in Colombia*, p. 65.

³⁵*The Killings in Colombia* reports that many of the largest massacres in Colombia involved military complicity. *The Killings in Colombia* include the results of investigations of a number of prominent cases where military officials were reportedly involved. See also *Question of the Human Rights of All Persons Subjected to any Form of Detention or Imprisonment: Question of Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances* (1989).

³⁶According to *The Killings in Colombia* and *Colombia Besieged* the civil courts often cannot obtain jurisdiction or indictments and the military courts are typically reluctant to pursue the cases. As a result, military suspects frequently evade prosecution.

³⁷"Death Squads Take up Total War Call," *Latin American Weekly Report* (WR-88-46), November 24, 1988, p. 2.

3. INTERPRETING POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Colombians, particularly males, kill each other at an extraordinary rate. On a per capita basis, Colombians killed each other at an annual rate of 66 per 100,000, approximately four times the rate of Americans (see Figure 1).¹ Moreover, Colombia's homicide rate was 17 times greater than Italy's despite the fact that Italy similarly confronts substantial problems with organized crime and terrorism. The murder rates for some of the largest cities in Colombia surpass the national rate.² When only males are considered, murder surpasses infectious and parasitic disease, all forms of cancer combined, and heart attacks as the leading cause of death. Indeed, for the age group 25-34, no cause of death for males approaches the toll that homicide takes.

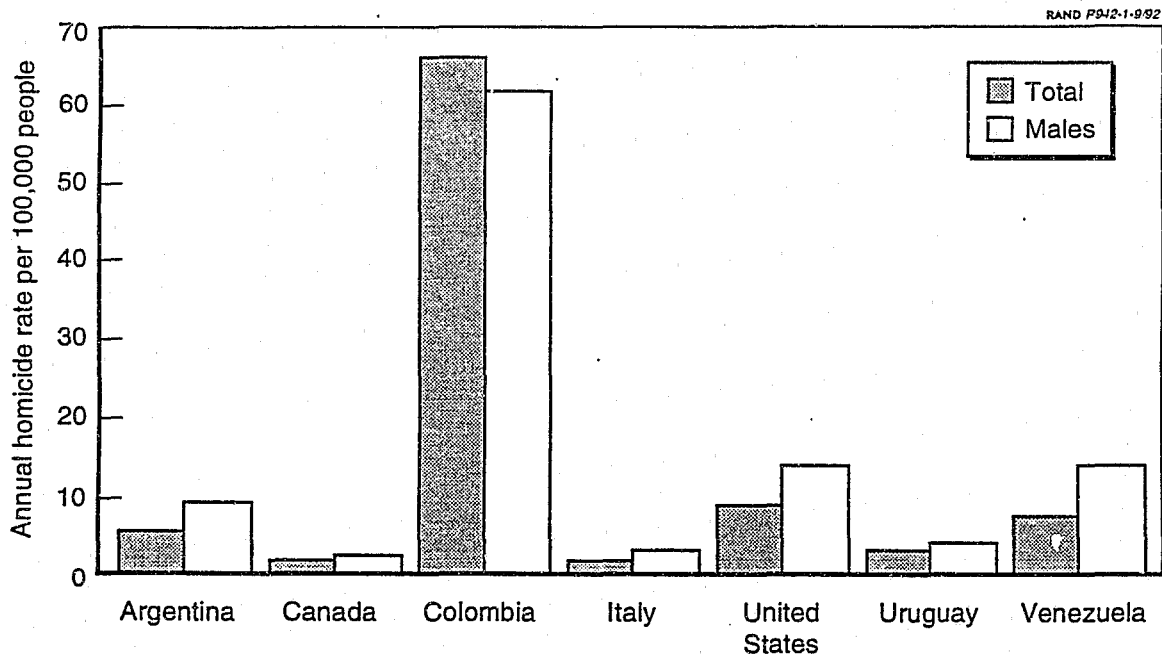


Figure 1—Annual Homicide Rates per 100,000 Population

¹In Figure 1, the total homicide rate for Colombians exceeds the male rate, implying that females have a higher homicide rate. In fact, the total number is derived from 1990 data, and the male homicide rate from 1984 data. The male homicide rate for 1990 would undoubtedly exceed the 1990 total figure shown. World Health Organization (1991).

²There are reports that Medellin, for example, occasionally records more than 50 murders a day, and averages 15 a day, which implies an annual rate of about 250 per 100,000 residents.

Violent death in Colombia comes about for many reasons. Despite the tremendous problems with political persecution in Colombia, however, as few as 10 percent of the deaths are politically motivated. The remaining homicides in Colombia—more than 15,000 per year—are criminally motivated. Despite the low percentage of political homicides, these deaths are the key to the political violence that is disrupting the country. By definition, political homicides entail murder of another human being because of his or her political beliefs. The rate that such homicides occur in Colombia has the potential to chill political expression and disrupt civil liberties. For example, the Colombian court system is clogged with a backlog of cases, not only because of the sheer volume of violence that occurs in the country, but because the court system has been intimidated from pursuing prosecutions in violent crimes. Numerous reports have related the ways in which judges are threatened and murdered for their political views, and others have documented the virtual gridlock in the Colombian court system. In 1989 Colombian judges staged a short strike to protest the lack of protection. The intimidation is not limited to the judiciary. In newspapers across the country, articles about the drug industry do not carry bylines out of fear that the drug lords will seek retribution against the authors. Where intimidation and murder are not a problem, corruption is. Reputedly 80 percent of the police in Bogota receive payments from the drug industry in exchange for protection and other services.³

As a result of the violence and corruption, the political system is in increasing disarray. On a number of the occasions that Colombians have moved to reject the political status quo of traditional political leadership, and support hard line anti-narcotics candidates, they have been rewarded with more public bloodshed. The most notable case was the assassination of probable presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan. As a result of such violence, and with more than 70 percent of the population lacking faith in the congress, nearly 66 percent lacking it in the president, and 52 percent in the courts, the turnout in Colombian national elections hovers around 50 percent.⁴

In short, political violence in Colombia adversely affects the political structure. The database used in this study contains records for 741 violent incidents resulting in 1,991 homicides between 1986 and 1991.⁵ From this pattern of death, a story begins to emerge. This picture, while by no means complete, nevertheless offers some instruction regarding

³Chepesiuk (1989).

⁴Millett (1990).

⁵Instances where mass graves were unearthed during the survey period are omitted, since there was no reliable way to determine when the homicides occurred. If these were included the homicide estimate for this database would rise to nearly 2,500.

political conditions in Colombia. The patterns of this violent behavior and the consequences are discussed in the subsections below.

A NATIONAL THREAT

The hazy alliance between the drug traffickers and the paramilitaries results in a unified, national threat to the Colombian state. At the national level, the drug traffickers represent the most serious challenge. According to the information contained in the database, of the national government figures that have been assassinated, most were killed by the drug industry. This pattern is of course consistent with the fact that national officials pose the primary threat to drug operations. Meanwhile, the death squads attack most frequently at the local level. Table 3 shows the distribution of attacks among levels of government for the drug industry and the death squads.

It is difficult to convey how thoroughly the drug industry has attacked the national political structure. Since 1981, the drug lords have murdered more than ten members of the Supreme Court, prominent media officials, including the editors of two of Colombia's most important newspapers, *El Occidente* and *El Espectador*, Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, Attorney General Carlos Hoyos Jimenez, police anti-narcotics commander Colonel Jaime Ramirez Gomez, and three presidential candidates. That is just a partial list of successful assassinations. There are dozens of other instances where the traffickers failed to kill their target, or kidnapped and later released the victim to send a message. For example, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of Colombian Ambassador Enrique Pareja Gonzalez in Hungary. Andres Pastrana, son of a former president, was kidnapped and released, as were the daughter of former president Turbay Ayala, and the editor of *El Tiempo*. There have been few arrests and prosecutions in these cases.

The assassinations of national authorities are concentrated in the largest cities, an intuitive result since nationally prominent people tend to live and work in urban areas.⁶ Combined, the cities of Medellin, Bogota, and Cali experienced over 90 percent of the recorded murders of national authorities. These cities and their surrounding departments⁷ are important not only to the drug trade but also to the seat of government counternarcotics

⁶Beyond the issue of whether the database is representative of political violence in Colombia, there may be a tendency to over-record urban terror incidents relative to rural incidents. Urban terror attracts more attention because it is proximate to larger portions of the population, closer to major media outlets, and more likely to involve people of national prominence, and so for all these reasons, there may be a bias toward recording urban incidents in any database.

⁷Bogota is considered a special district. It is almost surrounded by Cundinamarca Department but it also shares short borders with Huila and Meta Departments.

Table 3
Assassinations Among Levels of Government

Level of Target	Drug Traffickers	Death Squads
National	83%	3%
Departmental	—	10%
Local	17%	87%
Total	100%	100%

efforts. Medellin serves as both the financial and cultural capital of the drug trade, and much of the processing and trafficking takes place in the outer regions of the surrounding Department, Antioquia. Bogota is home to the national government, including anti-drug institutions such as DAS, the Supreme Court, and the national police.

In contrast, death squad murders are concentrated at the local and departmental levels. Unlike the drug lords, the death squads less frequently attack security personnel, judges, and legislators, and more frequently attack local officials such as mayors, union heads, and party leaders. *Union Patriotica* members have been repeatedly targeted for assassination and claim to have lost more than 1,000 party members since the party formed in the mid 1980s.

Although many death squad murders occurred in urban areas, a significant number also took place in rural departments. The database contains records of death squad murders for every department except Amazonas, Choco, and Vichada. Large towns such as Monteria and Cartago in rural departments witnessed a large number of death squad killings, often with multiple victims. In fact, in many regions the rural idyll has been replaced by an air of armed occupation. The military, the guerrillas, the drug lords, and the death squads often go hand in hand. Typically, the military will maintain a presence in an area in an effort to rid the region of guerrilla influence. In April 1988, for example, President Barco placed the Uraba region of Antioquia under direct military control. In a familiar pattern, as regions become increasingly militarized, many farmers and peasants flee. Death squad members and cartel members accumulate the land from the fleeing peasants and distribute it back to cooperative peasants. In some cases the armed forces and police look the other way as the death squads wage their own battle against the rebels. In other cases the drug barons clash directly with the guerrillas over the control of territory, and in still other cases the drug lords and the death squads arrive before the military and provide the peasants with protection from the rebels.

The difference in victim patterns between the drug lords and the death squads is consistent with each group's objectives. Each group attacks the opponent it fears most. In the case of the drug lords, any danger to them comes from national-level politicians who hold the power to extradite them, seize their assets, or otherwise disrupt the drug trade. The actual operation of the drug industry itself involves limited interaction with local authorities, because the traffickers make some effort to conceal their operations in isolated regions, and since federal authorities are often in charge of counternarcotics operations.

In contrast, death squads have comparatively little interaction with federal authorities, as their operations are ostensibly based on protecting local interests from guerrilla and other disruptive forces. It is radical local politicians who support the union causes, guerrilla organizations, and the like that threaten the interests of ranchers, landowners, and businessmen. Eliminating local authorities that consort with these enemy groups, therefore, is a high priority as part of a larger effort to stabilize and clean up the countryside. There may be another, more sinister reason why the death squads relatively rarely attack federal government targets, although this explanation is speculative at this point. It may be that national-level government authorities, particularly the military, present in the areas where death squads operate tacitly endorse death squad objectives. If federal government efforts to address the issue of death squads expand, it may be that they will increasingly become targets of death squad assaults. One such death squad preyed on court members investigating the activities of a local death squad operating under the guise of a cattlemen's association.⁸

These attacks erode the political structure from top to bottom in a number of ways. In areas where the government maintains a strong presence, primarily the cities, it appears weak and ineffective, incapable of protecting its citizenry against attack.⁹ At the national level, institutions such as the judiciary frequently succumb to corruption and intimidation, reinforcing the impression that the traffickers operate with impunity and further alienating the people from the political process.¹⁰ And whereas the government is losing political capital among the primarily urban segments of the nation where the drug lords dominate, it is unable to accumulate political authority in areas where the death squads operate. In areas where the government's presence is weaker, the death squads may assume the role of local authority to the extent that they are able to protect the local populace against left-wing

⁸This case is summarized in a subsequent section of the Note.

⁹Indeed, *Americas Watch* describes the government's inability to control the violence as an "abdication" of responsibility (p. 6).

¹⁰Millett (1990).

guerrilla threats. Thus, large segments of the rural population remain isolated from the political system and state authority.

TARGETS AND TACTICS

Overview

The level of political violence has grown dramatically since 1986 (see Figure 2), cutting across social, economic, and political lines. Politics-based homicides grew over 500 percent between 1986 and 1990, despite the commitment of billions of dollars to combating the problem.¹¹ Even though the number of homicides is down from its peak in 1990, the 1991 figure remains substantially higher than the 1986 toll.

These deaths cut a wide swath through Colombian society. Of the almost 2,000 killings included in the analysis, many involved prominent Colombian officials including, as mentioned before, presidential candidates, a minister of justice, and an attorney general. The violence is correctly perceived as an attack on the political structure of Colombia. But the violence is also an attack on ordinary people. Policemen, security officers, union activists, and people with sympathies for the political left all died in great numbers throughout the latter half of the decade. The subsections below discuss the patterns and the

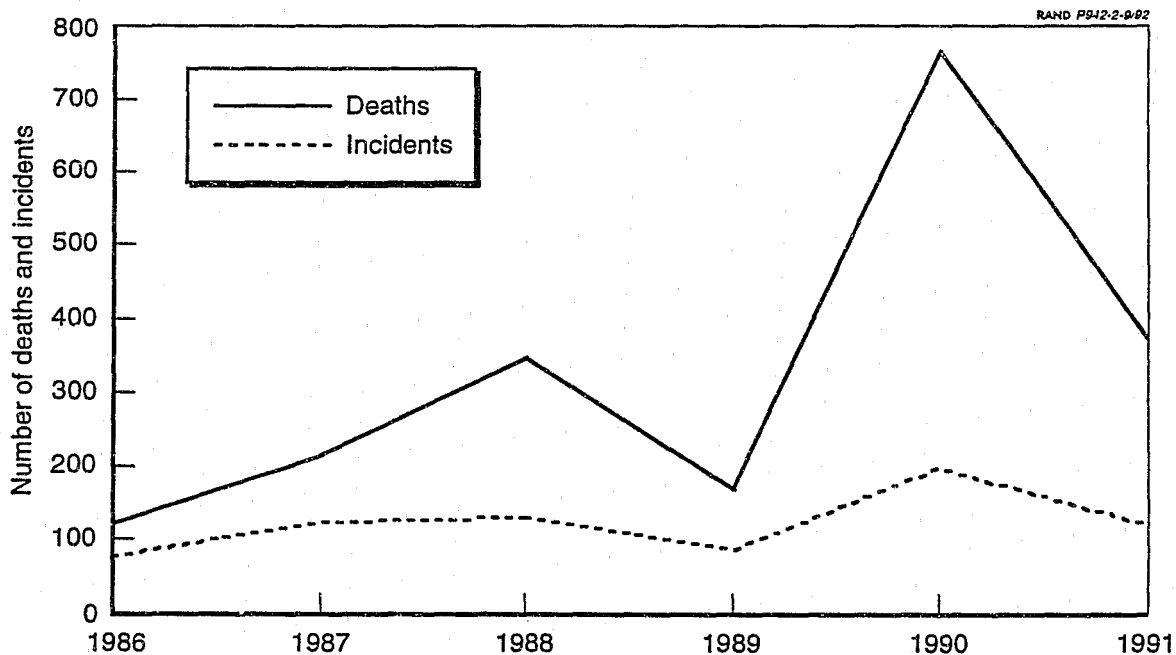


Figure 2—Politically Motivated Homicides in Colombia, 1986–1991

¹¹Brooks (1990).

effect of the violence on the civilian and government sectors of Colombian society. In some cases, the targets have changed over time; in other cases the tactics used have evolved.

Civilians

Figure 3 shows that civilians constitute a high percentage of politically motivated homicides, nearly as many as the combined categories of government officials. According to the records in the database, politically motivated murders of civilians in recent years greatly exceed the levels recorded in 1986 and 1987, a change that is primarily attributed to the increasing activity of death squads. For 1990 and 1991 the civilian murder totals were 361 and 200, respectively; in 1986 and 1987 they were 3 and 20, respectively.

The death squads are by far the most important factor behind the rise in civilian murders (see Figure 4). Again taking numbers from the database, the death squads are responsible for more than 90 percent of the murders of civilians. Civilians' share in the total of death squad murders has climbed over time, from less than 5 percent of the total in 1986, and less than 15 percent in 1987, to around 60 percent for 1990 and 1991. One probable explanation for the change in the pattern of killings by death squads may be that as they began to get organized in the countryside in the early part of the 1980s they sought to eliminate high-profile local targets, but that as they became more established in the latter half of the 1980s and the early part of the 1990s, their better organization and intelligence

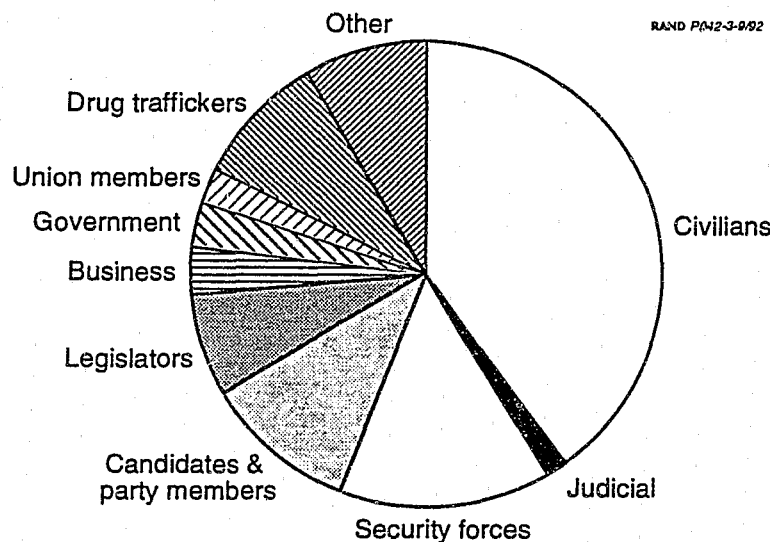


Figure 3—Victims of Politically Motivated Homicides

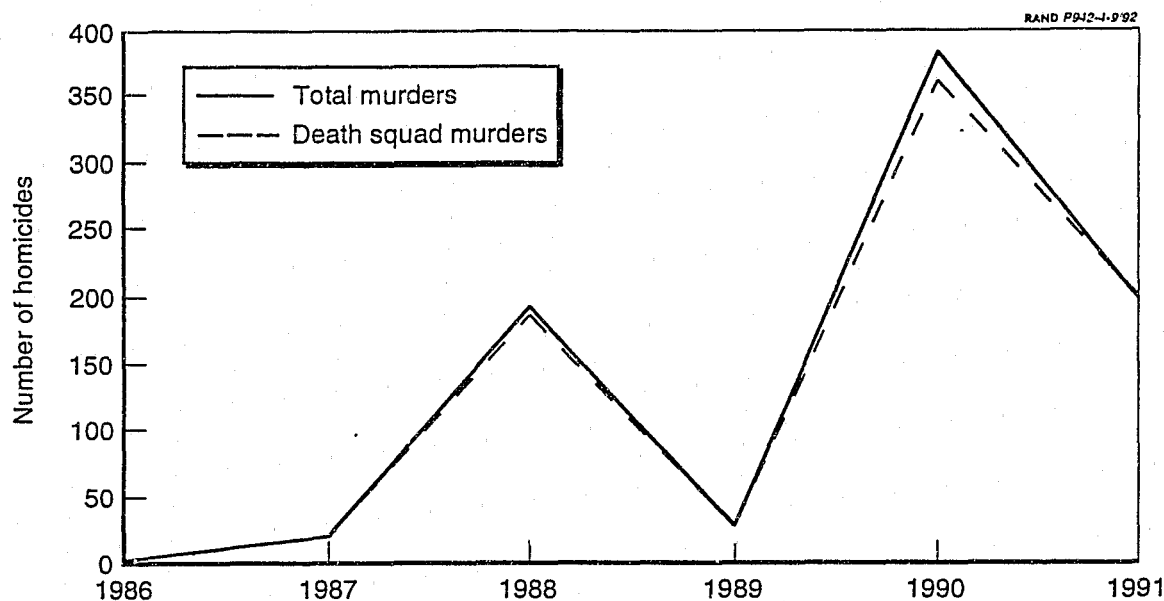


Figure 4—Total and Death Squad Murders of Civilians

allowed them to attack less-visible targets—civilians who were suspected of sympathizing with rebel causes. Each year, approximately 85 percent of the civilian deaths occurred in massacres.

The number of massacres has been moving upward (see Figure 5). The massacres, many of which have resulted in 20 or more deaths, take considerable planning and resources. In terms of logistics, the killers must be transported to the village, and, presumably, must be supplied with an escape route. Indications are that for some of the bigger massacres, local military and police leaders had to be co-opted or coerced into ignoring the slaughter, placing yet another organizational demand on the killers. The killers also need weapons, and, of course, they need some information on who their targets are. The ability to carry out massacres at such a high absolute rate, and at a high rate relative to the total number of people killed, is an indication that the death squads are becoming a more organized, institutionalized force. The number of massacres fell only in 1989, the year in which legal and law enforcement attention was briefly focused on death squads.

In contrast to the death squads, the drug lords are responsible for only about 6 percent of the civilian death total. Yet here again, there has been a significant change in tactics. Prior to 1989 the drug industry rarely killed civilians. Indeed, according to database figures, the drug lords killed few civilians from 1986 to 1990. Before 1990, civilians were rarely caught in the cross-fire of the drug lords and the government. In many respects, the

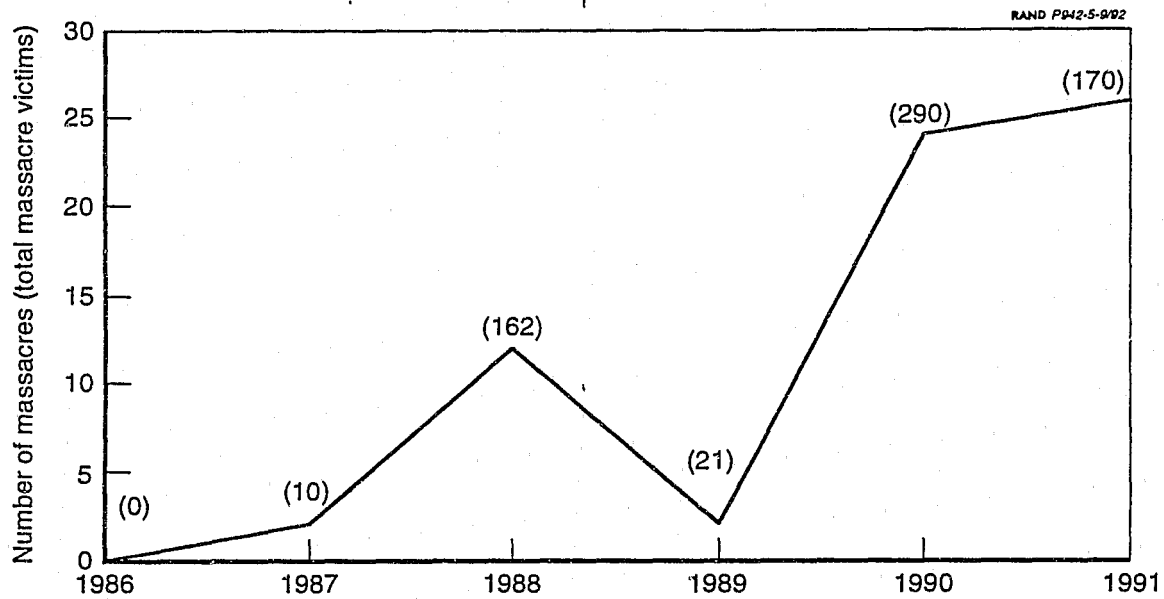


Figure 5—Death Squad Massacres, 1986–1991

traffickers worked hard to forge links with the civilian public as they relied on their support, or, perhaps, indifference, as a shield against government pressure. Some cartel members, chief among them Pablo Escobar and Carlos Lehder, cultivated public support by embarking on public works and housing projects. Others bought national sporting teams, or protected segments of the population from guerrilla attacks. In 1990, however, the drug industry started claiming civilian victims in larger numbers. This change was not an incidental byproduct of increased drug industry killings, but rather a tactical move on behalf of the traffickers to terrify the public into pressuring political leaders to support drug industry objectives. The subsection below, entitled *Correlation with Policy Changes*, will discuss the motive behind this shift in targets in more detail.

Government Personnel

Whereas death squad killings have primarily involved civilians, drug industry murders have primarily focused on government personnel. Over half of the traffickers' victims are government officials of one sort or another. Among government personnel the most frequent target has been security agents, including DAS, police, and military personnel. Judges are the next most frequent target, followed by legislators. The vast majority of drug-related homicides of security personnel came during April, May, June, and July 1990, for

during this period the Medellin Cartel offered a bounty of up to \$8,000 for every policeman and counternarcotics officer killed. Before and after the bounty period, security officers were not explicitly targeted, but rather appeared to have been killed in the line of duty. Drug lord murders of judges also stepped up in response to the government's crackdown on cartel activities, particularly the resumption of extradition. The cartel murdered four judges in November-December 1989 in an effort to get the judiciary to suspend extradition and void the emergency decrees.

A clear pattern also emerges from looking at the government victims of death squad massacres. An earlier section of this report showed that most death squad victims were local, rather than national, politicians, and these local positions were not catalogued separately. The database was used, however, to track the party affiliation of local candidates and elected officials, and a tabulation of this information reveals that the death squads most frequently target politicians from the left (see Figure 6). FARC's offshoot *Union Patriotica* party claims that over 1,000 of its members have been killed since the party's formation in 1985. According to the information contained in the database, the vast majority of these killings can be tied to death squads. In fact, the death squads have killed more members of UP than they have killed of the Liberal, Social Conservative, and M-19 parties combined.

The murder of UP party members peaked in 1988, the year in which direct election of mayors began. UP party candidates won several elections, a fact that triggered the outburst of violence against the party that year. A total of 41 UP party members were killed in the

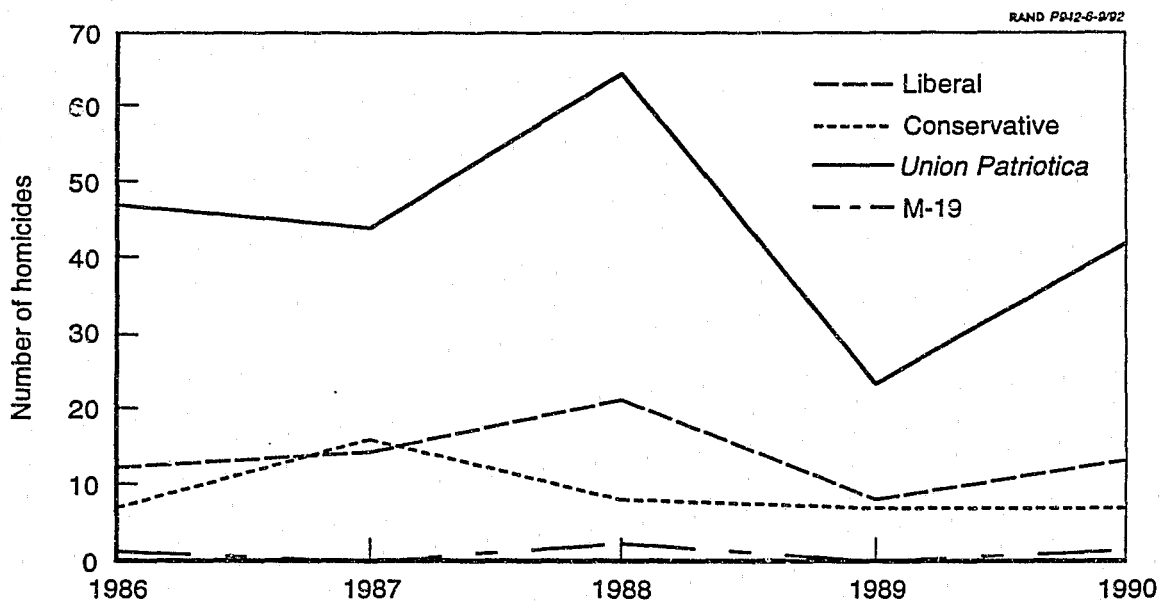


Figure 6—Party Membership of Homicide Victims

five months immediately after the first mayoral elections, an amount equal to two-thirds of the average yearly total. Moreover, a look at the numbers in the database shows that a total of 239 death squad murders occurred in the five months after the elections, more than 15 percent of the 1986-1991 total.

COLOMBIAN POLICY

Colombia places the issue of drug trafficking in a much larger context of political violence. According to *El Espectador*, one of Colombia's most influential newspapers, the public's overwhelming concern is with terrorism and violence, followed by employment and the economy.¹² Drugs and drug trafficking ranked third but trailed the first two concerns by a significant amount. The problems of drug trafficking, guerrilla violence, and death squad activities are inextricably linked in Colombia, and Colombian public opinion often varies substantially as to how to approach the problem. At times, the public has strongly favored the idea of negotiating with the traffickers, while at other times the support for this idea is markedly less strong. Public opinion on this subject has varied, but as recently as November 1989, almost two-thirds of Colombians surveyed favored negotiating a truce with the traffickers.¹³ A later poll, conducted in February 1990, showed that over 50 percent of the population favored negotiations.¹⁴

Public support for negotiations is strong, in part, because the forces arrayed against the drug traffickers and death squads have not been sufficient to end the violence. Colombia spends about one billion dollars a year combating the drug trade, and the government has frequently resorted to imposing a state of siege in an effort to control violence.¹⁵ Under Colombian law, both the police and the military may be used on counternarcotics assignments, and the one billion dollars is used to finance both institutions' efforts.¹⁶ In 1987 the Directorate of Anti-Narcotics, with approximately 2,200 personnel, was formed. These agents receive a maximum two-year assignment to minimize the risk of corruption. Among the tasks the directorate can assume are counternarcotics patrols, base defense, and establishment of road blocks. Combined, the various state security units have 49 aircraft of their own, of which 20 are fixed wing and 29 rotary wing. In addition, the U.S. State

¹²*El Espectador* survey reported in *New York Times*, August 12, 1990.

¹³*New York Times*, November 4, 1989, "Colombia Turns Drug War into a Long Chase."

¹⁴ABC News-Washington Post-Harris poll, February 8, 1990.

¹⁵Brooks (1990). According to Hanratty and Meditz, portions of the country have been under a state of siege for most of the past 30 years.

¹⁶The police operate under the Ministry of Defense. Colombia maintains approximately 87,000 police personnel and 140,000 military personnel.

Department has loaned the Colombian government one airplane and two helicopters and has donated five and seven craft, respectively. The U.S. Department of Defense has donated 12 helicopters, and Colombian security forces have confiscated 14 fixed wing aircraft and 2 helicopters from traffickers.

In 1988, President Virgilio Barco Vargas directed the military to assume a larger role in counternarcotics operations, a job the military leadership was reluctant to undertake until the 1989 assassination of Galan. The Army now has the lead role in insurgent zones and is also the lead agency where no police capability exists. The Navy is obligated to defend the Colombia shoreline and sea passages, the Marines Colombia's internal waterways, and the Air Force air routes in and through the state. In terms of arrests and interdictions, however, the military's role remains relatively small. DAS has the job of coordinating international intelligence for Colombia on narcotics.

The Barco government also set up special courts to deal specifically with, among other things, politically motivated violence in an effort to circumvent the weak court system. A law enacted in 1988 broadly defined terrorist and political violence activities, giving authorities a broader mandate to arrest and try individuals for "crimes against the constitution." Also in 1989, the government revoked a long-standing legal provision that allowed the Army to transfer arms directly to civilian self-defense units, many of which, it was feared, were actually death squads.

Since 1984 the traffickers have offered to negotiate with the government on at least four occasions.¹⁷ The substance of the offers has consistently revolved around abandoning the drug trade and turning over assets in exchange for leniency, amnesty, or other types of favorable treatment from Colombian authorities. The United States has consistently opposed the idea of negotiating with the traffickers, and Washington's opposition contributed to the collapse of the first three offers. In September 1990, the Colombian government broke new ground by proposing an offer on its own terms, precipitating the drug lords' fourth offer in November of that year. Though several iterations of terms were still to be conducted, a number of leading drug traffickers, including Fabio, Jorge Luis, and Juan David Ochoa, turned themselves over to authorities. Later, in 1991, Pablo Escobar also surrendered to authorities and remained in custody until his escape in mid 1992.

CORRELATION WITH POLICY CHANGES

As the pace and scope of political violence in Colombia have changed, so too have government policies intended to address the problem. A comparison of the level of political

¹⁷Lee (1991).

violence to policies affecting the perpetrators of the violence shows that in some cases, not surprisingly, government attempts to control the mayhem lead only to more violence. At other times, however, government policy changes, while perhaps not *reducing* the level of violence, do not, at least, seem to breed more violent responses.

The analysis in this section begins with a summary of major government policy changes regarding political violence, the drug industry, and death squads. Table 4 presents these policy initiatives, including a brief discussion of elements, in chronological order. The subsequent parts of this section then compare the patterns in political violence to government policy changes.

Much of the increase in drug-related violence recorded over the past six years has been in response to the policies erected against the drug trade. Figure 7 shows two surges in drug trafficking violence, July 1989 to January 1990, and March 1990 through October 1990. Other periods show occasional peaks in drug-related murders, but the level of violence does not approach the carnage of the two main periods.

The pattern of drug-related killings correlates well with the most important changes in Colombian drug policy. From the time the Supreme Court first ruled against the enabling legislation of the extradition treaty in 1986 through the court's September 1988 rejection of extradition under existing Colombian laws, the traffickers had little worry of ending up in a U.S. court. The advent of the presidential election cycle, however, opened a national debate on the drug industry, extradition, and Colombia's role in combating cocaine production. Many candidates not only took strong public stands against the drug industry because of the corruption and intimidation it caused, several took stances in favor of resuming extradition. One such person was the Liberal party's Luis Carlos Galan. Galan strongly opposed the influence the drug lords maintained and supported extradition. The traffickers viewed with alarm his emergence as a potential candidate. Calling themselves the *Extraditables*, and proclaiming that they opposed extradition, the Medellin cartel murdered Galan as a warning to other candidates to leave the issue of extradition alone.

Galan's murder, however, provoked public outrage and prompted swift government action. In Colombia, the government implemented a series of emergency decrees that gave the government the power to extradite drug kingpins, detain them for longer periods of time without filing charges, and seize their assets without a court conviction against the individual. Moreover, to strengthen its campaign, the government posted rewards that reached \$625,000 for the capture of Pablo Escobar and Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha.

Table 4
Government Policies Affecting Political Violence

Date	Policy
December 1986	Supreme Court invalidates enabling legislation of extradition treaty.
June 1987	Supreme Court declares re-signing of extradition treaty illegal. Government attempts extraditions under existing Colombian laws.
January 1988	Broad anti-terrorist law decreed. Public Order Courts created to deal specifically with terrorist and politically related crimes.
March 1988	Electoral reform gives municipalities power to select mayors.
May 1988	Colombian President authorizes use of troops against drug traffickers, but involvement is minimal. The Supreme Court rejects use of existing laws to extradite traffickers; extradition orders against the heads of the trafficking syndicates revoked.
September 1988	The Barco Government outlines provisions of a peace plan with the guerrillas. An indirect dialog with the traffickers also begins as the traffickers make a settlement offer.
January 1989	GOC and M-19 agree to a truce; Cauca Department declared neutral zone. Directorate of Anti-Narcotics begins Operation Primavera, a crackdown on cocaine production facilities.
April 1989	President Barco voids the portion of Law 68 that allowed the military to transfer arms to civilians. The move is backed by the Supreme Court two months later.
Mid 1989	Presidential candidates begin to emerge, including Luis Carlos Galan for the Liberal party. He is strongly opposed to the traffickers and supports extradition.
August 1989	President Bush announces the Andean Initiative and supplies Colombia with millions of dollars of emergency assistance. President Bush's act follows the assassination of Galan. GOC announces emergency decrees that allow for extradition via administrative process, longer detention without formal charges, and seizure of traffickers' assets. Focus on individuals departs from previous focus on interdiction. Rewards are posted for the capture of Pablo Escobar and Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha. By March, 15 traffickers are extradited.
December 1989	Gacha is killed by police forces during an attempt to arrest him.
January 1990	The government suspends extraditions in response to the traffickers' declaration of a unilateral truce, but otherwise rejects the terms of the traffickers' settlement offer.
March 1990	Extradition provisions are resumed as the cease-fire with the traffickers falls apart.
September 1990	The new Gaviria government announces a formula for negotiation with the traffickers. It is based on lenient penalties in exchange for surrender on government terms. The proposal also includes a guarantee against extradition in exchange for a confession of all crimes.

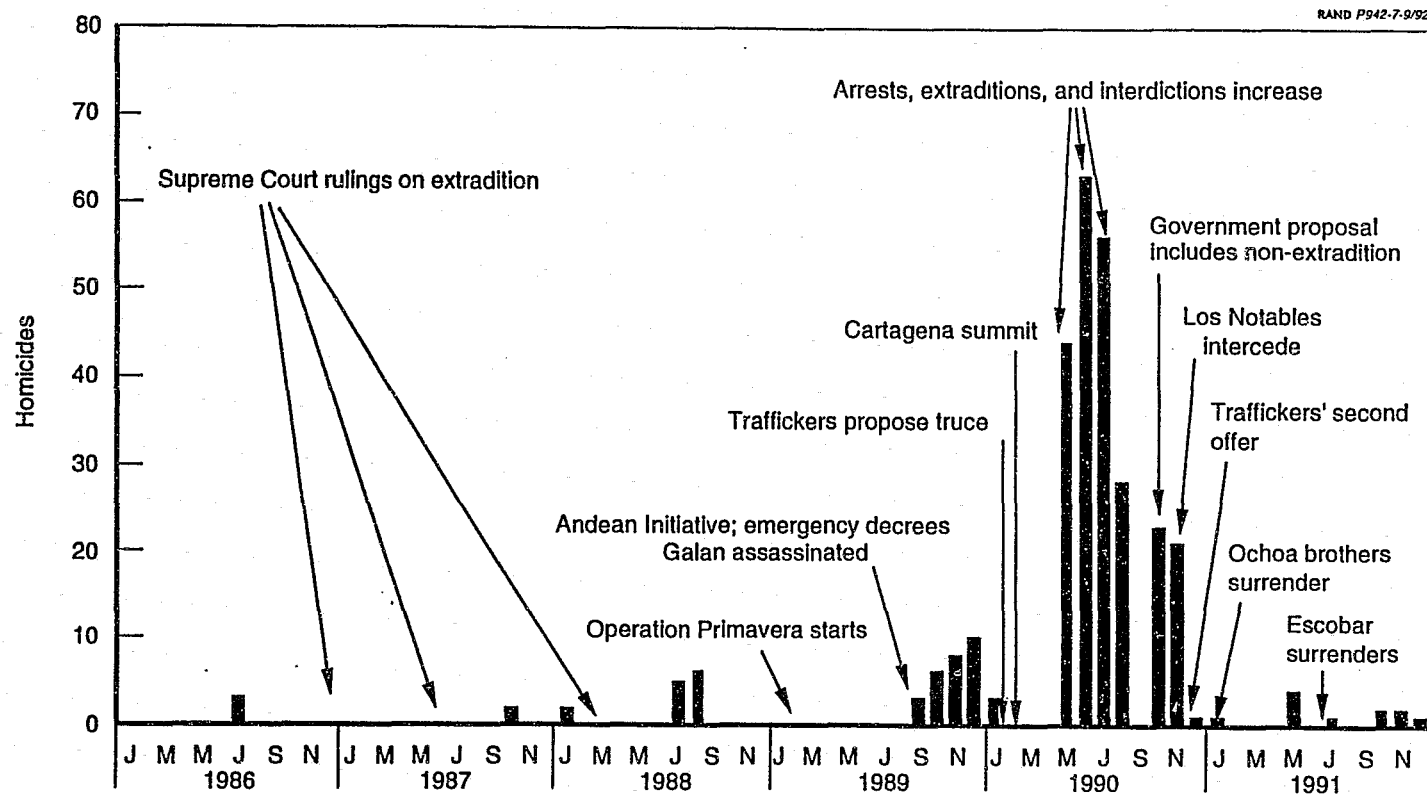


Fig. 7—Drug Industry Murders, 1986–1991

The emergence of a political climate more hostile to the traffickers in August 1989, and the subsequent emergency decrees imposed after Galan's murder, mark the first policy shift to which the traffickers responded with a marked increase in violence. Unlike previous law enforcement strategies, which concentrated on interdiction and seizing the tools of production, the emergency decrees turned the focus to the capture, arrest, and even extradition of individual traffickers. Previous interdiction-based strategies such as Operation Primavera (see Table 4 for timeline and Figure 7 for pattern of violence) do not correlate with increases in drug-related violence.¹⁸ For the traffickers, interdiction itself is simply a cost of doing business, and the operations have virtually no effect on production or profits.¹⁹ The individuals likely to be caught in interdiction-based campaigns, like Operation Primavera, are low-level functionaries because production facilities, not high-level personnel, are the targets of such operations.

The spike in drug-related violence represents the drug trafficking industry's reaction to first the threat and then the reality of extradition, and to a shift in law enforcement strategy that began to emphasize seizing assets and targeting individuals for arrest over attacking and destroying production and distribution facilities.²⁰ From August 1989 to January 1990, drug mafia violence climbed as the traffickers sought to turn the policies around through intimidation. Numerous public officials and prominent citizens were assassinated or kidnapped. In December 1989, police forces killed one of the most wanted traffickers, Rodriguez Gacha, in a gun battle, and shortly after that incident, in January 1990, the *Extraditables* declared a unilateral truce and proposed a peace settlement with the government.

A period of calm followed the declaration of truce as the government suspended extraditions. In the text of their announcement of the cease-fire, the traffickers vowed to end their involvement in trafficking and to turn over weapons and processing sites, in exchange for concessions from the government on constitutional and legal issues.²¹ The government, however, did not embrace the offer, but also did not resume extraditions. In March 1990,

¹⁸For more on the interdiction-based nature of Operation Primavera, see *Stopping the Flood of Cocaine with Operation Snowcap: Is It Working?* (1990), pp. 73-75.

¹⁹Kennedy, Reuter, and Riley (forthcoming).

²⁰For more on the shift on Colombian strategy, see *Stopping the Flood of Cocaine with Operation Snowcap: Is It Working?* (1990), pp. 74-79; *United States Anti-Narcotics Activities in the Andean Region* (1990), especially pp. 10-16; *Review of the International Aspects of the President's Drug Control Strategy* (1989); and *National Drug Control Strategy: A Nation Responds to Drug Use* (1992).

²¹The concessions sought were not specified in the communiqué. See "Text of Communiqué Issued by Extraditables," FBIS, *Latin American Daily Report*, January 18, 1990, for a translation of the traffickers' January 17, 1990, announcement. In previous settlement offers, the traffickers had sought changes in the extradition treaty and amnesty for crimes committed previous to any agreement.

leftist presidential candidate Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa was assassinated in an attack blamed on the drug traffickers.²² In response to the assassination, the government resumed extraditions.

The March 1990 resumption of extraditions marks the second clear spike in drug-industry violence. This surge in drug-related assassinations was even more pronounced than the first, resulting in many more drug-related deaths than the August 1989-January 1990 period. The most relevant factors to the upsurge in violence were the state's continuation of extraditions, and the security forces' dogged pursuit of leading traffickers.

In September 1990, at a point when the violence associated with the traffic had been very high, the government announced a new willingness to negotiate with the traffickers. This move was in line with public opinion surveys showing that in November 1990, 60 percent of the public favored amnesty for the traffickers, and 80 percent would accept one as a cabinet member on the condition that they abandon their violent tactics.²³ The government offered promises of leniency and a guarantee of trial in Colombia as opposed to extradition to the United States, and secure incarceration before trial, in exchange for relinquishment of assets, voluntary surrender, confession of crimes, and assistance in tracking and locating the materials of the industry. Throughout this period, the government was assisted by a group of distinguished Colombian officials known as *Los Notables*, who periodically acted to keep communication between the government and the traffickers open.²⁴ The traffickers countered with their own offer in November 1990, and shortly afterward a number of key traffickers, including three members of the Ochoa family, surrendered. The government kept its offer open and in mid-1991, Pablo Escobar surrendered as well.

At first glance, then, the counternarcotics policies implemented by the Colombian government, starting with the Andean Initiative and the emergency decrees, might seem effective. Several key traffickers surrendered, and the level of political violence attributed to the drug traffickers has fallen drastically. In fact, however, it is extremely unlikely that drug-related homicides would have escalated as they did if the government had not begun to

²²Hanratty and Meditz (p. xxxii) report Ossa could have been a target because of his leftist political views rather than his stance on narcotics policies. Ossa, for example, opposed extradition. The Colombian government blamed the Medellin cartel for the assassination. Ossa's *Union Patriotica* compatriots, however, blamed a rightwing death squad. Nevertheless, the Colombian government used the assassination, in part, to justify resumption of extraditions.

²³Lee (1991), p. 237.

²⁴*Los Notables* were Alfonso Lopez Michelsen (former president); Misael Pastrana Borrero (former president; son kidnapped in 1989); Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala (former president; daughter kidnapped in 1990); Monsignor Mario Revollo Bravo (First Archbishop of Colombia); and Diego Montana Cuellar (leader, *Union Patriotica*).

base its counternarcotics policy on the objective of arresting, prosecuting, and extraditing key cartel personnel. In addition, it is not at all clear that drug *production* was at all affected by the settlement reached. Production fell in the short run, but returned to full capacity within several months. Some who surrendered, such as Pablo Escobar, were apparently able to run their enterprises from behind their self-financed, custom-built prison walls;²⁵ others who surrendered were simply replaced by those who remained outside. Equally important, the government's counternarcotics efforts tended to focus on the Medellin cartel, and left the Cali cartel, which does not resort to violent tactics against prominent targets with the frequency Medellin does, virtually untouched.²⁶ Consequently, Cali has been able to step in and assume the commanding role once enjoyed by Medellin.

The failure to cripple the drug industry also left the main financial and organizational mechanism behind the death squads intact. Despite the toll taken by drug-related violence in Colombia, death squad activity remains the more potent concern in terms of sheer numbers of deaths. According to database statistics, death squad murders occur approximately five times more frequently than drug-related murders. Of course many, if not most, death squad killings are in some way connected to drug world resources. The drug traffickers train, house, support, and outright participate in many death squad murders.

Figure 8 shows the relationship between death squad activities and changes in counternarcotics policy. Several items stand out. First, death squad murders were increasing from 1986 to 1988 at a time when drug industry killings were low because of Supreme Court rulings voiding extradition. In that death squad murders are not subject to extradition, it seems logical that the killings would be unaffected directly by the rulings. Instead, it also points to a death squad industry that became increasingly established at a time when its patron, the drug industry, faced a less intense law enforcement threat.²⁷

A second pattern in the relationship of death squad killings and counternarcotics policy is the fall in the number of death squad killings from January 1989 through the end of that year, which coincides with the implementation of Operation Primavera, but a huge burst in death squad murders that parallels the largest rise in drug industry murders in

²⁵Colombian authorities reported that Pablo Escobar was known to have contracted several murders and conducted drug operations from inside his prison. Ironically, Escobar claims that he feared official attempts to limit his abilities to run his drug empire would also have led to his physical harm, and thus his escape was justified.

²⁶Medellin is implicated in all the major assassination cases; Cali is not.

²⁷The evidence linking the drug industry to the death squads cited elsewhere in this Note tends to support this point. The drug industry began accumulating significant amounts of land in the countryside around 1985. The links began to emerge in 1987 and 1988, and at the time they were revealed they were on the order of one or two years old. Thus it appears that the traffickers used this period to begin their efforts to stabilize and clean up the rural areas in which they settled.

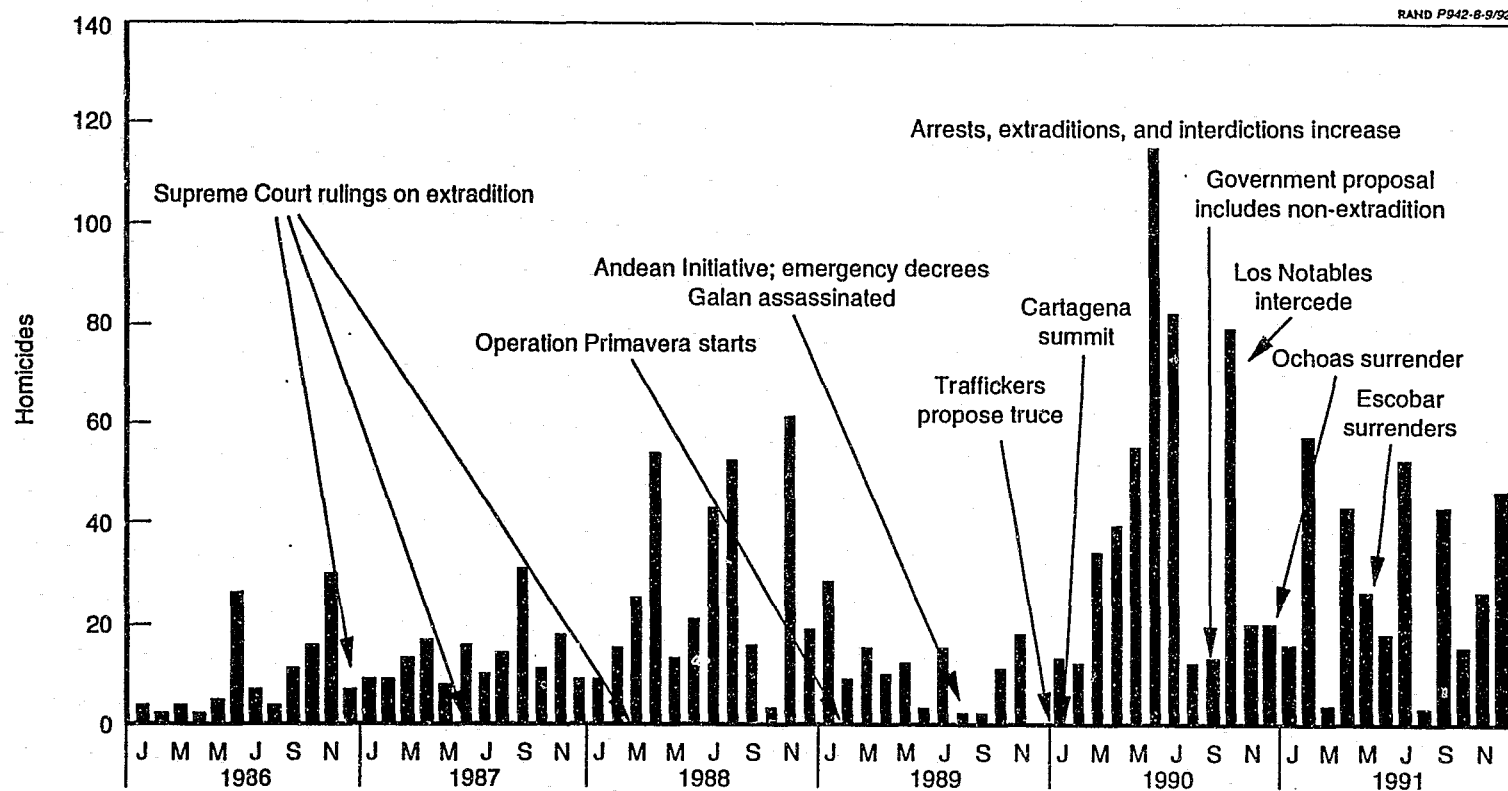


Figure 8—Death Squad Murders and Counternarcotics Policy

1990. Whatever caused the lull in death squad activity for most of 1989 had been overcome by 1990, so that even the government-trafficker agreements, which succeeded in quelling drug industry murders, did nothing to quiet the death squads. Even the surrender of the Ochoa brothers and Pablo Escobar did not contribute to a calming of death squad activities. The pattern of death squad killings in comparison to counternarcotics policy indicates that the death squads may have used the 1986-1988 period, a time when the drug industry was virtually unchallenged, to grow in conjunction with the drug trade, and the 1990-1991 period to institutionalize their operations so that they were immune to changes in counternarcotics policies.

Although attempts to control the drug trade did not seem to have any beneficial spillover effects on the state's ability to control the death squads, the Colombian government also implemented a number of policies to attack the death squads more directly (see Table 4). The antiterrorist statute of 1988, and the public order courts created in that same year, were tools in part aimed at the death squads. Additionally, when President Barco voided the section of Law 68 that allowed military weapons transfers to civilian groups, he was attempting to limit the amount of weaponry that fell into the hands of death squad members. Throughout much of this period, however, the government maintained a dialog with the death squads' main targets, the guerrilla groups, resulting in the integration of M-19 into the political system. The mere fact of the negotiations and the gains the guerrillas have made, have undoubtedly angered the people behind the death squads.

Figure 9 looks at death squad murders in relation to changes in government policy that affect the death squads or their most frequent targets, the guerrilla groups and their liberal followers. The implementation of the public order courts and the antiterrorism statute in January 1988 had little effect on the level of death squad violence. In fact, the volume of killings *increased* for several months after the changes, and the courts themselves became targets for harassment. The public order judges have been credited with bringing the facts on some of the most egregious cases to light, and in one of the most notorious death squad cases, members of a public order investigative team were killed.²⁸ It was a public order judge that documented the link between ACDEGAM, a cattlemen's association in the Middle Magdalena Valley, and death squad killings. A total of 12 public order court employees associated with the ACDEGAM case were assassinated shortly after the group's tie to death squad activity surfaced.

²⁸*The Killings in Colombia*, p. 105.

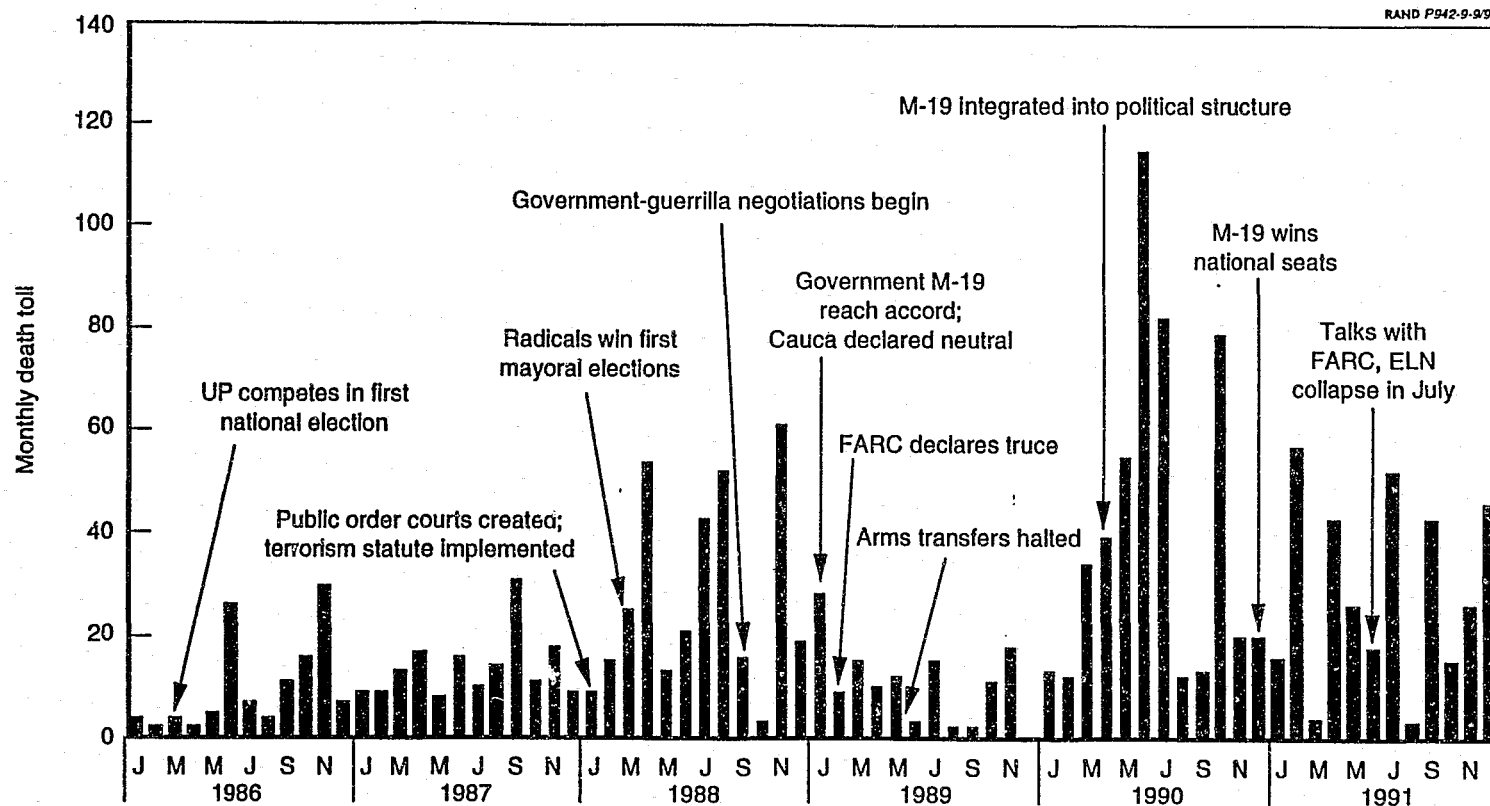


Figure 9—Death Squad Murders and Government Policy

There is a noticeable spike in killings after the March 1988 mayoral elections in which UP candidates won several contests. The elections not only provided the death squads with sitting mayoral targets, but helped identify villages and towns as sympathetic to leftist and guerrilla causes. Another upsurge in killings coincides with M-19's late 1989 abandonment of its guerrilla cause and its participation in 1990 elections.

The only noticeable lull in the pattern of death squad murders appears at the same time the Barco Administration moved to prevent the military from transferring weaponry to civilians. It is unlikely that a lack of weapons is responsible for this period of quiet. Rather, this period was a time when death squads were generally under a great deal of scrutiny. A death squad defector caused a national sensation by describing a training school in Puerto Boyaca. Also, in January 1989, as described above, a group of court employees was killed by a death squad. In April of that year the government formed an advisory committee to investigate methods of controlling the death squads, a top military commander was relieved of his post in Puerto Boyaca, having been implicated in the violence of the region, and several reform decrees directed at the death squads were passed.²⁹ The country's attention to death squads, however, rapidly waned in the face of national elections in 1990, and the drug industry's subsequent attack on the political system.

THE SPECTRUM OF POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

In the current environment of political violence in Colombia, there is a range of possible outcomes. Few of these outcomes are pleasant. At one end is the potential for authoritarian rule, or the formation of a police state; at the other end, there is the possibility of a "narcocracy" or narcotics-dominated government. The set of possible outcomes is outlined below.

Authoritarian Rule

Frustrated by the continued inability of the government to quell the violence, the armed forces or the police could take it upon themselves to assume authority. Colombia has had extremely stable civil-military relations throughout most of its history. Nevertheless, there are strains in society that may threaten that stability, including continued failure of the government to provide protection, increasing economic and social pressures, increasing mobilization and urbanization, and fading memories of Colombia's most recent bout of mass unrest, *La Violencia*. Such an event is likely to be triggered by a combination of factors, such as another assassination of a high-ranking official and widespread drug and death squad

²⁹*Colombia Besieged*, pp. 83-86.

violence, in conjunction with substantial agreement among key government actors (executive, legislative, and military) that more drastic steps are needed. Among the factors that have prevented this scenario from developing to date is the tension between the executive and the military that is grounded in frequent reports of military complicity in human rights abuses and the contribution that the last experience with authoritarian rule made to political violence.³⁰

Narcocracy

In this scenario, the drug lords obtain sufficient sway over institutions to, in effect, run the government. An extreme form would be actual high-level trafficker involvement in the government, such as occurred in Bolivia in the early 1980s. The critical element that appears to be lacking, however, is the willingness by the drug lords to assume responsibility for running the state; thus this form of administration is unlikely. A milder form of narcocracy, under which high-ranking officials are complicit in the drug trade, could evolve over time, although state authorities appear remarkably impervious to this corruption. The mildest form of narcocracy, where the lower levels of government are riddled with corruption, or intimidated into ignoring the drug trade, already exists.

Institutionalized Violence

The state may well be bordering on this outcome. The difference between the narcocracy and institutionalized violence is one of relative emphasis. The former would be molded to assist the operation of the drug economy, while the latter would emphasize the moral obligation of cleansing Colombian society. Certainly political violence has been a prominent feature of Colombian history, and there is little hope that it will abate in the short run. There is hope, however, over the medium to long run, of preventing the system from decaying even more and in particular of preventing military and police abuses of human rights from becoming institutionalized. Some steps that would assist in preventing this outcome are outlined in the concluding sections. The transition from the mild form of narcocracy to institutionalized violence will come if the traffickers sustain their interest in a cleansing campaign, or if the death squads accumulate the resources to operate independently of the drug industry.

In addition, there remains a fourth possibility: a Colombia that sheds its history of political violence by gaining control over, or reaching compromise with, the drug industry and the death squads. Such an outcome is not beyond the realm of possibility given the

³⁰See Maullin (1973) and Osterling (1989) for more on this period in Colombian history.

government's history of negotiating with rebel groups, the success that M-19 has enjoyed since it was integrated into the political system, and the government's past willingness to negotiate with the traffickers.

The most important condition that would have to be satisfied for this outcome to be realized is reducing death squad murders. Given the level of drug industry involvement in the death squads, this naturally means taking the drug industry into consideration. The Gaviria government succeeded in shutting down drug industry violence, which it greatly inflamed by virtue of its 1989-1990 counternarcotics policies, by negotiating a weak settlement. The traffickers were willing to give up killing civilians and government officials in the name of the drug trade in exchange for turning over some assets and the right to reside in custom-built prisons. In other words, the pact to end the violence revolved around each side, the traffickers and the government, compromising over the operation of the industry, drugs. An agreement that involves compromise over the death squads' vocation will be extremely difficult to obtain, because the article of commerce is the killing of Colombian citizens on a scale many times larger than that perpetrated by the drug industry.

The settlement process, if there is to be one, with both the traffickers and the death squads, will have to be more comprehensive than the 1990 agreement with the cartels. Among the critical loose ends left by the 1990 agreement were how to ensure that the drug lords who surrendered also relinquished control of their empires, how to track the assets and physical infrastructure of the trade, and how much about the structure and membership of the trade a trafficker would have to reveal to qualify for leniency. Still, given the drug industry's level of control over the death squads, an agreement is possible, but it would have to be much tighter to ensure that the commerce in killings completely ended. Hence, the government would need full accountings of the training and financing mechanisms behind the death squads, an avenue to address the issue of weaponry, and a means of providing the former death squad members with protection. Although the analogies are not perfect, Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador have all reached accommodations with rightwing death squads over the last decade.³¹

³¹The chapters on Chile and Argentina in Diamond et al. (1989) outline the establishment of democratic rule in the two countries. In all three cases the military institutions were deeply involved in the commission of the atrocities. Lowenthal and Fitch (1986) introduce this aspect of the problem. Finally, Lowenthal (1991) discusses the role the United States has in the democratic process in Latin America.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

U.S. POLICY IN COLOMBIA

U.S. counternarcotics assistance to Colombia is centered around reducing the production and export of cocaine by funding programs designed to disrupt trafficking operations, strengthen Colombian political will to combat drug trafficking, target high-level traffickers for arrest and prosecution, and provide economic assistance to promote alternatives to the drug industry.¹ The vast majority of U.S. assistance is dedicated to improving the law enforcement environment in Colombia, from intelligence to operations planning, and from equipment procurement to operations and maintenance. A number of U.S. agencies provide assistance to Colombia, though the State Department, through its Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, is responsible for coordinating counternarcotics policy across U.S. agencies operating overseas. In addition to its coordination task, the State Department also assists the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in planning operations and monitors the national police's use of U.S. equipment. The Department of Defense assists in counternarcotics operations by providing training, detection and monitoring information, and logistics support. DoD also supplies military equipment to Colombian military and law enforcement units engaged in counterdrug operations. Since the 1950s, the Defense Department has provided equipment and training to the Colombian military, a role that rapidly expanded after the implementation of the Andean Initiative. With the National Defense Authorization Act of 1989, DoD assumed the lead role in detecting and monitoring drug traffic into the United States that used aerial and maritime lanes throughout the Caribbean Basin. Some of DoD's assistance to the Colombian National Police is filtered through the U.S. Ambassador and his country team. As a matter of policy, however, DoD personnel are not permitted to accompany Colombian nationals on counternarcotics field operations.

The Drug Enforcement Administration is the other major U.S. participant in counternarcotics policy in Colombia. The agency's primary mission is to work with the national police directly in counternarcotics operations. DEA agents routinely assist in planning operations and accompany Colombian officials on law enforcement raids.

¹See *National Drug Control Strategy: A Nation Responds to Drug Use* (1992) for more on how source country programs fit into national strategy. For more on source country strategy itself, see, *Andean Strategy* (1991); *U.S. International Drug Policy, Multinational Strike Forces, Drug Policy in the Andean Nations* (1991).

Colombia receives narcotics assistance through seven funding and equipment channels (see Table 5). The first two funding sources, Sections 506(a)(1) and 506(a)(2) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, provide the president with the authority to draw down existing military stocks or services in support of other nations in an emergency or for special purposes such as counterdrug support. President Bush invoked this prerogative in 1989 after the assassination of the leading candidate for the Liberal party presidential nomination Luis Carlos Galan. The United States supplied \$65 million in such emergency support under section 506(a)(1) in 1989 and an additional \$20 million under section 506(a)(2) in 1990. The third major avenue of assistance is the Foreign Military Financing Program. According to the International Narcotics Control Act, section 3, the United States can use FMF to provide assistance to Colombian military and police forces. The primary difference between Section 506 and FMF assistance is that the former is taken from existing military stocks and the latter may be supplied through regular contracting procedures. Export-Import Bank loans provide another avenue for Colombia to obtain large amounts of equipment and supplies.

Table 5
Major U.S. Aid Channels to Colombia
(\$ millions)

Funding Source	Colombian Recipient			
	Military	Programs Funded	Police	Programs Funded
Section 506(a)(1)	47.2	Vehicles, aircraft, boats	10.8	Helicopters; weapons
Section 506(a)(2)	17.0	C-130 aircraft, spare parts, training; patrol boats	3.0	Ammunition
Foreign military financing	38.8	Radar center; training of Army strike companies; upgrade Marine river assault capabilities; spare parts, weapons, training, aircraft for Air Force	10.0	UH-1 spare parts, support, training
Export-import credits	84.0	Blackhawk helicopters and support	0	
Section 481	—		10.0	National Police Project aimed at disrupting traffickers, judicial protection, public awareness programs
Other	2.8	Upgrading intelligence system	6.2	Upgrading intelligence system; helicopter ammunition and weapons
Total	189.8		40.0	

Until it was modified in 1991, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 provided the president with the authority to guarantee up to \$200 million of Export-Import Bank loans for the purchase of counternarcotics-related equipment. Although the Colombian National Police are not barred from receiving assistance under the above programs, neither are the programs set up explicitly to assist police, as distinct from military, efforts. Instead, section 481 of the Foreign Assistance Act is used to direct counterdrug assistance to foreign countries. This program, administered by the State Department, is the largest dedicated to improving foreign police counterdrug capabilities. Other programs also supply limited amounts of assistance, primarily to the military.

Together, these assistance programs provided Colombia with \$229.8 million in 1990.² Moreover, these funds constituted the vast majority of assistance delivered by the United States to Colombia during that period. Of this money, over 80 percent went to the military, the balance to the police (see Table 5).

Although U.S. aid to Colombia is intended for use in combating drug trafficking, current legislation allows this aid to be used against insurgents in cases of documented collusion with the traffickers.³ Dedicating resources exclusively to counternarcotics trafficking, especially in areas where drug trafficking and insurgency overlap, would be virtually impossible. In addition, however, the dual use of assistance is permitted because of perceived "relationships" between the drug industry and the insurgencies.⁴ Provisions allowing the use of counternarcotics funds against the death squads do not exist. To ensure that the funding assistance is applied to the primary objective, counternarcotics, and to ensure that the military and police do not engage in human rights violations, the United States requires that monitoring policies be implemented. The State Department, for example, monitors assistance to the national police under an agreement that allows inspection and audit up to three years after a project's end, requires tracking of all items highly susceptible to misuse or that have a value exceeding \$25,000, and mandates the annual completion of a monitoring plan. A similar program is being developed to monitor all military assistance to Colombia. The Department of Defense does not currently have its own formal monitoring program.

The concern about potential misuse of U.S. assistance is not unwarranted. The *Washington Office on Latin America* and *Americas Watch* have reported on actual and

²From the August 1989 announcement of the Andean Initiative through September 1990; net of administrative and transportation charges.

³*Drug War: Observations on Counternarcotics Aid to Colombia* (1991), p. 19; "The Drug War: Counternarcotics Programs in Colombia and Peru" (1992).

⁴*Drug War* (1991), p. 19.

potential problems associated with aid to Colombia. Intelligence and communication networks, for example, lend themselves to both drug and insurgency operations, and weapons and ammunition intended for drug operations may also find their way into counterinsurgency uses and not violate U.S. law. One of the most spectacular cases linked Colombian Army helicopters, purchased with Export-Import Bank credits, and Colombian military personnel, to the murder of several dissidents. Other reports have repeatedly tied Army helicopters to attacks on civilian housing and other acts that have endangered public safety.⁵

There is no indication, however, that U.S. equipment has been used in the majority of incidents in which Colombian military and police officials have been implicated in human rights abuses.⁶ Moreover, there is no evidence that Colombian security forces routinely or systematically violate human rights, nor is there evidence that the government condones such tactics.⁷ There is, however, ample evidence that individual police, military, and security personnel have perpetrated human rights violations, including murder and torture, amounting to de facto individual collusion with the traffickers and death squads.⁸ The military are frequently accused of looking the other way during, or failing to respond to, obvious death squad attacks on civilians and villages. Finally, there is substantial concern that cases of human rights violations by security forces are not adequately prosecuted, in part because the institutional mechanisms in place are insufficient.

THE TASK AHEAD: FINDING COMMON GROUND

The conclusion of a dialog between the government of Colombia and the drug traffickers marks a divergence of Colombian and U.S. interests. The negotiations marked the willingness of Colombian authorities to pursue counternarcotics policies independent of

⁵*The Killings in Colombia*, pp. 36-42.

⁶*Colombia Besieged* (1989); *The Killings in Colombia* (1989). A condition of counternarcotics assistance to Colombia is that its security organizations do not engage in organized systematic violations of human rights standards.

⁷The fear of such consequences from military aid is never far removed from the surface in the drug-producing nations. Bolivia, for example, is extremely leery of U.S. insistence on involving the Bolivian military in counternarcotics efforts. Bolivia has endured over 180 military coups in the last 170 years and is fearful that increasing military involvement in counter drug efforts will harm civil-military relations. Bolivia does not now suffer from extensive guerrilla or drug violence, but the fear is that deeper military involvement in counternarcotics efforts will increase the level of civil unrest. See Youngers (1991). In Peru, the situation is even more dire. The state is under attack from the guerrilla organization the Shining Path. Both the Shining Path and the drug trade have deep peasant roots in Peru. The Peruvian military, whose job it is to address both of these issues, has an abysmal human rights record. Moreover, attacks on the drug trade tend to reinforce the Shining Path's image as protectors of the peasants. Nevertheless, much of the U.S. aid to Peru is also military. See McCormick (1990).

⁸*Colombia Besieged* (1989), pp. 70-76; *The Killings in Colombia* (1989), pp. 79-90.

the United States. The United States played a very small role in the negotiations, primarily because there was little indication that Washington was interested in an agreement.

In addition to being left out of the government-drug trade negotiations, the United States has accomplished little with respect to its primary objective of reducing the production and export of cocaine. Bluntly stated, this objective is not attainable. Evaluations of the structure and recuperative powers of the cocaine industry show that interdiction-based narcotics strategies, the kind the United States supports in Colombia, do little, if anything, to limit the amount of drugs reaching markets over the long run.⁹ Moreover, in some cases, the implementation of counternarcotics strategies, such as the mid 1990 focus on capturing the leading Medellin cartel members, actually led to dramatic increases in the level of drug industry violence without any consequent permanent reduction in cocaine production, or permanent incapacitation of the drug industry. The emphasis on military and law enforcement solutions, and on narcotics issues almost exclusively, leads to the neglect of policy areas where U.S. and Colombian interests more closely and consistently intersect. Colombia and the United States share long-term interests in promoting and sustaining democratic institutions in Colombia and generating regional economic growth. Without a healthy economy, and without strong democratic institutions, the United States will not have a basis for cooperation with the Colombian government.

The opportunities for effective Colombian-U.S. cooperation are far from over. First, only a few traffickers turned themselves over to authorities, and drug trafficking continues in Colombia virtually unabated. There have been allegations that even those who turned themselves in, such as Pablo Escobar, who recently escaped, have not discontinued directing trafficking operations. Therefore, the United States has an interest in ensuring that if another drug settlement is to be reached it is durable and effective. Pablo Escobar's escape highlights another area where U.S. and Colombian interests overlap: the strength of Colombian institutions. Unless Colombian political entities can ensure that the terms of any agreement are upheld, negotiations become a moot point. Finally, there is little evidence that the agreement with the drug traffickers did anything to reduce the political violence associated with the death squads. Therefore, to the extent that the Colombians are interested in addressing this problem, and to the extent that they will need foreign assistance to do so, they have an interest in cultivating a solid working relationship with the United States.

⁹Kennedy, Reuter, and Riley (forthcoming); Reuter et al. (1988); Cave and Reuter (1988); and Crawford et al. (1988).

It is in this environment that U.S. counternarcotics must operate. The key to finding an appropriate policy is to locate the common policy ground so that both Colombian and U.S. needs are met. Casting aside the focus on interdiction and reducing the flow of cocaine would allow the United States to pursue its other long-term interests in Colombia. The highest priority is ensuring that Colombia remains a democratically based state that does not devolve into any one of the three types of government outlined above. In addition, however, the United States has an interest in ensuring that the traffickers receive the harshest criminal sanctions possible under the terms of the agreement, that any agreement contain strong provisions for monitoring the assets and operations of those who surrender, and that those who surrender be forced to reveal information about the structure and operation of the cartels.

Given that the primary U.S. counternarcotics objectives cannot be obtained, the focus on drug-related assistance and programs is superfluous, and a re-orientation of aid toward a program with a broader scope is appropriate. The key features of a new policy would be to acknowledge that:

- Political violence, rather than drug trafficking itself, is the main threat to the Colombian state, and curbing the violence is the state's primary objective;
- Pursuit of secondary counternarcotics objectives necessarily entails assisting Colombia in its efforts to curtail non-narcotics political violence;
- Colombia can succeed in stemming the violence, and thus the United States can attain its secondary counternarcotics objectives, only if the Colombian political structure and Colombian institutions are adequate to the task.

In short, the emphasis should be on how to prevent further entrenchment of political violence and how to protect the political system from the consequences of this bloodshed, rather than on how to shore up the political system against the narrower repercussions of drug trafficking. While Colombia, with the benefit of U.S. assistance, has made tremendous strides in expanding intelligence systems and networks, in training and equipping security forces, and in steeling the court system against attack, these changes are intended primarily to augment counternarcotics strategies and do little to address the larger problem of societal violence. However, these same resources used in the battle against drug trafficking are needed to combat drug industry and death squad violence. Along these lines, policy options range from providing assistance in drafting new anti-violence legislation, increasing levels of intelligence assistance and directing support to the special terrorist courts, to loosening

restrictions on using U.S. equipment and assistance against death squads. The objective should be to assist Colombia in its battle against political violence first, because only if the Colombian state survives the assault of political violence will it be able to be an ally against cocaine. To continue the emphasis on drugs at the expense of developing a comprehensive political violence program only diminishes the prospects for future progress on all bilateral issues.

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