International Drug Interdiction: The Narcotisation of United States–Colombia Relations

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Abstract: This article examines how narcotics came to be at the centre of US Foreign Policy in Latin America as of the latter half of the 20th Century. The central role of narcotics, referred to as narcotisation, is evident in the case study of US–Colombia relations. It is argued that through the securitization of narcotics, the US adopted a national security stance and sought to impose its supply side policies through coercive diplomacy and militaristic means. The article critically examines this realist approach coupled with the market-based logic of supply and demand, and highlights fundamental flaws which caused more debilitating effects than positive results in drug supply reduction. Despite the mobilization of considerable resources, the policies are largely ineffective, and US–Colombia relations continue to be narcotized.

Keywords: Securitization; Drugs; Narcotics; Latin America; Colombia; Foreign Policy

Narcotic drugs have become the defining feature of contemporary US-Colombia relations. Over the past forty years there has been cooperation between the two countries to reduce the supply of drugs from Colombia and their transit into the United States. A cursory glance at the recent publication on Colombia by the Congressional Research Service reveals that among the US policy focus and concerns are: Colombia and Global Drug Trends
('Colombia’s prominence in the global production of cocaine and heroin');\textsuperscript{1} Colombia and Regional Security; Plan Colombia and the Andean Counterdrug Program; US–Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement. The issue of drugs remains at the core of US-Colombia relations, since the first agreement on aid transfer to Colombia, in the international War on Drugs, was inked in 1973.

Crandall gives an insightful assessment of the preponderant role of the War on Drugs in the relationship between the two countries during the latter half of the Twentieth Century, especially as the Cold War drew to a close and the US redirected its focus from anti-communism to combating the escalating drug abuse within its borders. This problem was especially prominent among the alienated populations in American society. In fact, according to Johan Hari, the problem of addiction was not so much linked to the chemical effects of the drugs; rather, people became addicted to drugs as a result of their social contexts. The more they were disconnected from the rest of society, the more likely they were to develop an addiction to drugs if they consumed them.\textsuperscript{2} This reflects the Weberian anomic theory of deviance, especially since the argument here is that the marginalization of ethnic minorities and immigrants predisposed them to socially deviant practices—in this case, drug abuse and addiction. However, ignoring this reality, and framing the issue as a supply-side problem rather than as a demand-side one allowed policy makers to turn their attention to interdicting entry of illicit drugs into US territory, and to curtailing supply by targeting the production lines.\textsuperscript{3}

The War on Drugs was declared during Nixon’s presidency. Colombia became the primary supplier of drugs to the US and this made the country a priority for international drug interdiction policies. As cocaine production rivaled marijuana in Colombia, cooperation efforts coalesced around extradition, militarization and eradication. Extradition treaties were signed and military aid increased exponentially, thereby typifying the militarization and narcotisation that came increasingly to characterise US policy towards Colombia.\textsuperscript{4} The War on Drugs thus became a national security issue for the US government, which ensured compliance by putting in place a system of certification. This essentially meant that those countries that were certified as non-compliant in their anti-drug efforts would become ineligible for foreign aid and they would also lose US support in multilateral institutions and fora. Consequently, relations fluctuated between cooperation and
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antagonism as the US placed considerable pressure on successive Colombian governments in the 1980s and 1990s.

The narcotisation of US–Colombia relations was made possible through the securitization of drugs, thus shifting it to the domain of high politics. Narcotisation as an analytical concept is understood as the linkages between narcotics and all other aspects of foreign relations, including aid and trade. Therefore, whereas it may be argued that the war on drugs was more central to security policy, and that relations between Washington and Bogota flourished in other areas, the extent to which issue linkages were made with narcotics amounted to an irrefutably dominant position of the latter in the relationship. As will be demonstrated, policies were framed along the supply-side logic because, through securitization, actors were guided by a realist paradigmatic framework which perpetuated a flawed definition of the problem and which therefore perverted the proposed solutions. There was a certain path dependency in the US drug policy—a policy which seemed to be ‘addicted to failure’.5

The War on Drugs was consequently founded on fundamentally flawed premises, and the results have been disproportionate to the material, social, political and human costs of waging it. In fact, according to Riley: ‘No nation has paid a higher price for its cooperation with the United States in the war against cocaine than Colombia’.6 Diplomacy became synonymous to finding willing governments that would acquiesce to US dictates in terms of drug control policies, and where they were ‘uncooperative,’ Washington pulled out the ‘big stick’. Bogota found itself in an asymmetrical relationship, having to constantly placate the US with policies that coincided with their objectives, despite their deep flaws.

This paper explores how the drug problem was socially constructed as a security threat by US authorities, and how this contributed to a flawed supply reduction policy response which targeted production in Latin American countries—especially Colombia. The first section examines the realist paradigm which informed the US stance on drugs. It demonstrates how the securitarian discourse became entrenched in the policy cycle, and made supply reduction the only policy to be pursued. Then, it discusses the role of incentives and coercion in the evolution of relations between the two countries. The paper further argues that the law of supply and demand was a misleading perspective on the drug problem, and that this rendered supply reduction efforts ineffective. The subsequent section presents a cost-benefit analysis
of the War on Drugs, examines the strategies employed, and evaluates the outcomes. It submits that there have been a range of debilitating social and environmental effects, and that the War on Drugs has weakened Colombia’s democratic institutions. Ultimately a re-evaluation of supply side policies is proposed, as well as a more purposive approach to developing alternatives.

SECURITIZATION AND THE REALIST PARADIGM

The constructivist school of thought purports that whereas human beings seek objective realities, ‘reality’ is subjective, socially constructed and intersubjective. This question of subjectivity versus objectivity has long plagued the study of security with theorists exploring whether threats to security are objective and independent of the perceptions of actors, or whether they are subjective and are therefore intricately linked to perception. It was the Copenhagen school of international studies that sought to tackle this divide and develop what would later be called securitization theory.

The seminal work in securitization theory was Security: A New Framework for Analysis which was authored by Jaap de Wilde, Ole Waever and Barry Buzan. This work followed in the grain of ‘Securitization and Desecuritization’ written by Waever in 1995, as well as Waever’s earlier work Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe. Securitization is the process by which an issue is labelled by an actor as a security issue, thus moving it out of the political sphere and into the security sphere. Security issues are not objective and external. Actors participate in determining them and in socially constructing them.

Security is a question of survival, and securitization involves presenting an issue as posing an existential threat to some aspect of a state or to the survival of the state itself. Securitization therefore takes a particular issue outside of the political domain by articulating it as a high priority issue which requires urgent action using extraordinary means. In this process, actors identify a security issue by pointing to the threat that it poses to what is called a referent object. A speech act: that is, the act of declaring an issue as a security issue is considered to be performative. The referent object may be the State, social stability, jobs, national identity, or culture. Securitization is about the utterance—saying it is a security issue makes it a security issue, once the securitizing
actor rallies a consensus of threat among the population, thus legitimizing urgent and extraordinary responses.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus the main focus of the securitization theory is the articulation of an existential threat towards a referent object, created by a securitizing actor and accepted by an audience in order to justify actions that are outside the normal, political procedure. This process has been evident with the question of international narcotics interdiction and the role it assumed in US Foreign Policy in Latin America.

Although the ‘War on Drugs’ became a Foreign Policy issue as illicit drugs were securitized, the social construction of the security threat was first evidenced in US domestic policies on drugs. Illicit drugs were considered a scourge to society, and a threat to social values and social stability. Recognizing the linkages with crime and violence, the US assumed a punitive approach to drug use from the early 1900s. Interestingly, the levels of criminality associated with drugs could have been linked to the very fact that its criminalization caused the development of a black market. This market, which fell outside the reaches of public regulation, was often protected or regulated by turf wars and settling of accounts in parallel, underground ‘systems of justice’.\textsuperscript{14} This assumed link between criminality and the illegality of drugs was not absent from policy discussions in Washington. However, such positions were silenced or ostracized. For example, Surgeon General Elders, in 1993, suggested that studies should be carried out on legalization as a possible means of curbing drug-related crime. Not only was she side-lined by President Clinton and his advisors, she was also dismissed in 1994.\textsuperscript{15} It is argued that ‘the assumptions and logic of the drug war paradigm inhibit fundamental re-evaluations of the strategy’,\textsuperscript{16} since they present predetermined ways of thinking that shroud the fundamental flaws of the policy, and rule out possible alternatives.

Therefore, the punitive paradigm became deeply entrenched in the policy process through ‘protracted political struggles that set the agenda for an increasingly impoverished and narrow public debate’.\textsuperscript{17} The political and institutional dynamics which helped to frame these policies ranged from political aspirants seeking election or re-election, to presidents seeking public approval, or to bureaucrats seeking to increase funding for their agencies or departments. Drugs and drug-addiction were not viewed as a public-health problem requiring intervention and treatment.
Rather they were framed as criminal and therefore requiring law enforcement and punishment.

Not only were the punitive measures misguided in their conceptualization, but they were also misdirected in their application. The African-American and Latino communities were ready targets for law enforcement officers seeking to snuff out the illicit drugs industry. This led to an almost institutionalised discrimination in the war on drugs. Prisons became crowded with African-Americans and Latinos who were held for participating at various levels of the drugs network, while others lost their lives as a result of the hard-line response from law enforcers to drugs and drug-related violence—whether they were users, dealers or traffickers. In fact, Meyers argued that many African Americans believed that national drug policies seemed to have had a deliberate goal of eliminating ‘a superfluous pool of already marginalized segments of the black population,’ and that these policies ‘are the moral equivalent of genocide.’

Of course, following this punitive logic, the US would also launch an all-out War on Drugs’ outside of its shores—a war which was as misguided as the domestic approach. Already in 1988, Bagley was heralding that the war on drugs had been a policy failure:

> the key reason lies not in inadequacies of leadership, resources, or implementation … but rather in the deficiencies and distortions embedded in the underlying premises or conceptual paradigm upon which the entire anti-drug campaign has been based: “realism”.

Essentially then, the real problem was the assumptions which realism informed, and the faulty policy recommendations which arose from such assumptions. A realist perspective applied to the drug war was unable to appreciate the magnitude and complexity of the drugs problem.

Tickner further supports this idea, arguing that the

> ‘drug war” was largely the product of a realist worldview that tended to interpret the drug problem through the lense [sic] of national security, leading to the use of coercive diplomatic measures designed to elicit cooperation on the part of host countries.

As Bagley also highlighted, US drug control strategies have largely followed a realist paradigmatic framework. A framework whose fundamental assumptions include:
(1) the predominance of the state, conceived as a unitary, rational actor; (2) the existence of anarchy ... the need for states to recur to self-help tactics; (3) the stratification of international objectives between “high” politics (considered to be those pertaining to the strategic-military realm) and “low” politics; and (4) the strict separation between domestic and international politics.21

It is these assumptions which informed the hard-line stance which the US took in its anti-drug policies, with repressive and prohibitionist strategies for combating ‘the enemy.’ Another key realist assumption here is the idea that in order to guarantee cooperation, the best tool available to the US would be external pressure exerted through coercive diplomacy.22 This corroborates Neumann’s thesis that one of the main causes of ‘policy incoherence’ in the War on Drugs, was to be found at the point of problem definition in the policy cycle. According to her analysis, there was a dominant paradigm which was punitive, militaristic and coercive in dealing with drugs and drug policy.23 This permeated the discourse in Congress as the US sought to define the problem in terms of security—both as an issue of national security on its side (thus making it a matter of high politics) and as a compromise of security on the Colombian side (because poor security was what resulted in territorial expansion of some guerrilla movements for example). Here we see securitization at work. In fact, it has been argued that Presidents during this time were more likely to gain support if they sought stiffer sanctions rather than pragmatic reforms.24 This is because the War on Drugs rhetoric caught on in the political and social spheres, indicating that it had been successfully securitized. That means there was audience buy-in: political leaders, bureaucrats, the media, and the electorate were convinced that illicit drugs were a real threat, and that the source of the threat was overseas.

Consequently, although there was a poor degree of effectiveness as regards US antidrug policies, US policymakers seemed blinded to these facts, and continued pushing the same kinds of policies. When Bill Clinton tried to breathe new life into the drug policy and to focus more on the demand side, he was faced with staunch criticism for going against the tried and tested supply-side policies. It didn’t matter that these policies had failed, were failing, and were projected to fail.

This suggests that parallel to the initial guiding realist paradigmatic framework which caused the problem to be defined
along very flawed lines, there seemed to be an entrenched belief that tough rhetoric, coercive diplomacy and a firm stance in the would ultimately bring victory. Some four decades later, this is perhaps farther away than it has ever been, despite the billions which have been spent, despite the advances in detection technology, despite the potent fumigation chemicals, and despite all the tough rhetoric and ‘carrot and stick’ diplomacy (with, of course, many more ‘sticks’ than ‘carrots’). Nevertheless, it seems that drugs are a permanent feature of US-Colombia relations, and that the fundamental policies remain the same.

THE ‘NARCOTISATION’ OF US–COLOMBIA RELATIONS

It may be argued that US–Colombia relations were always asymmetrical and whether they were amicable or antagonistic depended largely on the latter’s readiness to cooperate with—and buy in to—the policies of the former. During the Cold War, Colombia was a willing partner in US anticommunism, especially since it too was battling with the communist guerrillas which had been wreaking havoc since La Violencia in the 1940s. This dominant theme in Washington’s Latin American policy would take a sharp turn as this Cold War stance became less relevant, while a new ‘peril’ was taking over the US—drugs.

This problem was not new to the US, but it took on considerable importance during Nixon’s election campaign, and would become of paramount importance during his presidency. In fact, he proclaimed in September 1968 that illegal drugs were ‘a modern curse of American youth’ and that he would ‘take the executive steps necessary to make our borders more secure against the pestilence of narcotics.’ Colombia had the unenviable position of being one of the leading suppliers of marijuana to the US, and this supply was spurred on by the increasing demand in the US ‘market.’

Despite the fact that Colombia was still struggling to control its leftist guerrillas, Washington shifted its focus from the ‘red danger’ to drug interdiction. They intended to prevent all narcotics from crossing the US borders, and this meant stopping the supply at its source. If source country governments—Colombia in this case—were ready to cooperate, all the better, but if they were unwilling, they would be compelled so to do as Washington prepared itself for the kind of coercive diplomacy characteristic of war.
Framing the Problem: The Law of Supply and Demand

As several authors point out, key to the US antidrug policy was the notion that the problem was not an internal one but an external one. Therefore, whether or not the demand was high for narcotics in the domestic market, the real engine behind the industry was seen to be supply from abroad.\(^\text{28}\) It was in accordance with this logic that the objectives of policy were formulated. US policy-makers would aim to decrease the supply of drugs through crop eradication and interdiction, and this they hoped would directly impact the prices of narcotics. Higher prices, based on the law of supply and demand would logically lead to significant declines in drug consumption domestically. *Ceteris paribus*, a decline in supply increases the price and causes supply to fall. This paved the way, then, for the War on Drugs to be fought not on US soil, but in supply countries, chief of which was Colombia.

Throughout the century, there was a tendency to blame other countries for the drug problem. The arrival and subsequent abuse of opium was pinned to Chinese immigrants; Blacks were blamed for the scourge of cocaine; and Mexican immigrants were singled out for having brought in marijuana. It was convenient therefore to pinpoint Colombia as being one of the principal causes of the proliferation of narcotics in the US—after all, production and trafficking were firmly anchored there. ‘Blaming foreigners’, as Falco notes, ‘for America’s recurring drug epidemics provides convenient if distant targets for public anger that might otherwise be directed toward elected officials’.\(^\text{29}\) Following this logic, declaring a War on Drugs may have been another move to placate electors by demonstrating that the government was taking a serious stance on the issue, while at the same time it served as self-exoneration since drug control was framed not as an internal problem, but rather one which source countries should be addressing. It may even have served to distract the US public from the fiasco which the Vietnam War was fast becoming.

Whatever the case, this perceived link between foreigners and drugs prompted the US government to use diplomacy, coercion, money, and even military force to stop drugs entering the country. Therefore they identified drugs as a threat to their national security, and accordingly took ‘high politics’ measures in response.
Drug Diplomacy – ‘Cooperate with us or else...’

Antidrug aid formally entered US-Colombia relations in 1973 with the signature of a bilateral agreement allowing for aid transfer as part of interdiction efforts. As drugs became a more important domestic issue for the US to the point of becoming a ‘national security priority’, Antidrug aid formally entered US-Colombia relations in 1973 with the signature of a bilateral agreement allowing for aid transfer as part of interdiction efforts. As drugs became a more important domestic issue for the US to the point of becoming a ‘national security priority’, so too did it take on an increasingly preponderant role in US foreign policy towards Latin America in general, and Colombia specifically. This was followed by increasing pressure from Washington on Bogota to put in place antidrug policies that were often unpopular in Colombia, contrary to government objectives, and perhaps even counterproductive and ineffective in curtailting the burgeoning narcotics industry. As will be demonstrated,

Where Colombian governments braved autonomy and rejected Washington’s demands, they were made to bear the brunt of the superpower’s coercive diplomacy.

Even though the agreement for antidrug aid transfers were signed in 1973, it was not until the late 1970s that Bogota made an assertive move to crack down on drug traffickers, under the presidency of Turbay (1978–1982). By this time, Colombia was irrefutably the number one producer and exporter of marijuana, producing an annual average of 10,000 tons in an industry which comprised some 50,000 small farmers. Turbay authorized surveillance flights to scope out not just areas of production, but also to monitor the coasts to ascertain the points of departure of the drugs to be exported. He also fired up the aerial eradication machinery which meant indiscriminate aerial fumigation in areas where illicit drugs were being cultivated.

Furthermore, he enlisted the army in the War on Drugs, and dispatched over 10,000 troops to participate in crop eradication efforts and in interdiction. They seized marijuana ready for export; they destroyed plants in the fields; and they confiscated boats and aircrafts which were thought to be used for trafficking. As will be further demonstrated in this paper, these efforts may have had short term results, but they did not put a sustainable dent in the narcotics industry. In fact, production increased and would later
diversify as coca production gained momentum in Colombia and cocaine exports climbed. This period of cooperation however, gave rise to one of the major, though controversial, tools of US international interdiction efforts in Colombia: extradition. In 1979, Bogota and Washington signed an extradition treaty. While the former welcomed the latter’s enthusiasm to partner with them in the War on Drugs, this particular legal instrument would incite even greater violence in Colombia (including direct targeting of government institutions), and it would be at the root of tensions between Colombia and the US for the next two decades.

Oscillating between Cooperation and Antagonism

Over time, as Colombian governments gradually sought to distance themselves from US demands, Washington increasingly resorted to coercive diplomacy. As Crandall puts it:

>[V]irtually all bilateral issues became dependent on the drug issue: if Colombia wanted good relations or support from the United States on a certain issue, it was clear to all that it first had to be perceived by Washington as cooperating in the war on drugs.  

Betancur (1982–1986) was the first President to be defiant. He raised the issue of sovereignty with reference to the extradition treaty, and he initially refused to enforce it. Immediately there were calls in Congress to ban imports of flowers from Colombia. This did not cause relations to sour for too long, however, since by 1984 he would give in to the requests after his Minister of Justice was assassinated for the role he played in a major crackdown on a cocaine lab. Betancur would develop a deep relationship with Washington, and during his presidency, the ‘carrots’ multiplied: counternarcotics-related assistance moved from USD $2.49 million in 1978, to $11.5 million in 1987.

Ronald Reagan further intensified the rhetoric on drugs and with it the corresponding interdiction efforts. In 1986, his administration issued National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 221, on Narcotics and National Security which outlined that '[t]he expanding scope of global narcotics trafficking ... threatens the national security of the United States'. The issue was explicitly framed as a threat to national security, and signalled that as a matter of high politics, it would be dealt with accordingly, meaning essentially that more stringent measures would be taken against
recalcitrant partners. As Youngers and Rosin describe it, the US often used its economic and diplomatic leverage to ensure cooperation, especially since countries such as Colombia were in a situation of dependency vis-à-vis the US as regards aid and the need for trade agreements.38

Following this period, tensions between the two countries increased as both the Barco (1990–1994) and the Gaviria (1986–1990) administrations sought to re-evaluate US supply-side approaches to the War on Drugs. The former was very critical of this, and constantly called for Washington to balance supply-side policies with demand-side alternatives. In essence, he argued that it was futile to try to reduce supply without also trying to reduce demand. This created some tension, and the US government was further incensed by the fact that, at the time, when Medellin Cartel leader Pablo Escobar was arrested, the Colombian Supreme Court outlawed extradition. As for Gaviria, there was a clear divergence between his policy priorities and those of Washington. He aimed to reduce drug-related violence and terrorism, while the US aimed to reduce cultivation and production of coca and cocaine. According to Neumann, this period represented a shift from full cooperation in counternarcotics to a reconciliation of internal pressures (terrorism, corruption, armed conflict) with external demands (extradition, certification, aerial fumigation of illicit crops).39 Nonetheless, Gaviria’s administration succeeded in dismantling the Medellin Cartel even though Washington was still dissatisfied that it relaxed its onslaught on the Cali cartel after this ‘victory’.

During this time, the Bush administration further stepped up the rhetoric, and continued with supply-side policies, believing that ‘[t]he cheapest way to eradicate narcotics is to destroy them at their source’.40 In Colombia, violence had also taken a new turn, with clashes between guerrillas and cartel-sponsored paramilitary movements. These developments precipitated greater US interest and involvement in Colombia, as it seemed that politics and drugs were becoming increasingly interwoven. The US went as far as to position an aircraft carrier off the coast of Colombia to assert its resolve in interdicting drugs at the source. This resolve softened when Clinton came to office, however, as he sought to refocus attention on the demand-side, and therefore on domestic issues. As Crandall points out, he significantly reduced the budget for drug interdiction even though this was short-lived. By 1994 Republicans controlled both houses of Congress, and brought the drug war back to the fore.41
The Samper Administration: Exemplar of US ‘Bad Neighbour Policy’

Samper took over the Colombian presidency (in 1994) at a point where Washington’s growing mistrust and discontent with Gaviria and his acerbic criticisms of antidrug policy had caused significant souring of bilateral relations between the two countries. A change of government was welcomed by the US, and it appeared willing to overlook both allegations that Samper had received support from the cartels, and also the fact that he had previously lobbied for drug legalization. The idea was that the US would sweep the allegations under the rug if Samper took a relentless and firm stance on drugs. This, however, increased the asymmetry between Washington and Bogota, since Samper found himself in a vicious cycle of constantly having to placate the US with more stringent counternarcotics measures while Washington’s ‘big stick’ loomed and struck several times during his presidency.

According to Crandall, Samper was ‘forced to do more on the drug war issue than had any of his predecessors’ so that he could maintain some semblance of good relations with Washington. The massive efforts he carried out were sporadic and perhaps directly related to big policy decisions by the US. Chief among these would be the decertification of Colombia as a compliant country in the war on drugs, as well as the revocation of President Samper’s visa. As more evidence came out about his possible links to the cartels, Washington ramped up the pressure on him for yet stiffer antidrug measures.

In 1995, Colombia failed the certification test and was only granted a national interest waiver. This process was introduced by the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, with a 1988 amendment. In essence, it meant that if countries were considered to be non-compliant in their War on Drugs efforts, and were thus de-certified, they would be ineligible for foreign aid and would lose US support in international multilateral institutions. This became Washington’s ‘stick’ against Colombia—or even against Samper himself—as anti-Samper sentiments grew in Washington despite his resolve to tackle the cartels, and reduce the supply of drugs.

It did not seem to matter that the Cali cartel had been dismantled by the end of 1995: Colombia was still de-certified in 1996, thereby cutting off critical aid even as it was intensifying its efforts in the War. In the same year, Washington would revoke the Colombian President’s visa on the grounds that there was new
evidence of his involvement with the cartels, but also, on the unsaid basis that he had been promoting policies which the US judged to be contrary to its objectives.\textsuperscript{43} The seemingly paradoxical treatment of Samper’s presidency had its roots not only in the allegations and subsequent investigation of corruption and presidential campaign financing by cartels, but it was also motivated by the fact that, as a legislator, his position on drugs had been one of support of legalization.

Washington recognized that it was in a position to strong-arm Samper, given that the cards were stacked against him. His compromised reputation could easily be exploited in this regard. In fact, as one official at the US Embassy in Colombia explained, they “moved the goal post back” to see how far [they] could push Samper.\textsuperscript{44} After fourteen months of investigating the corruption allegations against Samper, Colombia’s chief prosecutor formally filed charges against the President in February 1996.\textsuperscript{45} This meant that the investigation was turned over to a congressional Accusations Committee whose findings and subsequent rulings would either exonerate Samper, or impeach him. However, despite what US Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gelbard described as ‘substantial evidence’ pointing to the soliciting and receipt of over $6.5 million by the Samper campaign, from known drug traffickers,\textsuperscript{46} the Colombian Congress voted to exonerate him of these corruption charges. Washington had already assumed a less passive stance towards the scandal, and to demonstrate its disappointment with this new development, it revoked the Colombian president’s visa. This could have been an attempt to cement his fate by adding to the disparaging effects of the corruption charges. As Crandall argues, US policy during this period seemed to be geared at bringing down the President himself.\textsuperscript{47} Thus the visa revocation may have sought to thwart his support and possibly have him removed from the presidency by other means, since the impeachment had fallen through.

Increasingly, Samper was sidelined as the US officials carried out their operations through direct contact with General Serrano, the head of the Colombian National Police. Colombia would again be de-certificated in 1997, resulting in the suspension of antidrug funding. Counternarcotics-related assistance had reached $126 million by 1991, but this fell to $16 million in 1995 and then $13.6 million in 1996 and 1997 respectively.\textsuperscript{48}

By the end of Samper’s presidency in 1998, the US had begun to re-evaluate the acrimonious relationship that had developed
between the two countries, despite both Colombia's eagerness to fully participate in interdiction efforts, and Samper's personal efforts which went as far as to lobby for a constitutional revision in order to allow extradition. This would set the stage for a more conciliatory stance from Washington, but certainly not a change in the centrality of drugs in its Colombia policy. Of course, lobbying also played an important role in the subsequent softening of policy, as arms manufacturers had seen significant declines in potential sales to Colombia because of the de-certification. Whatever the motivations, Washington was about to undertake the most ambitious and comprehensive assault on drugs in Colombia, and it would mobilize considerable financial resources to do so.

‘Plan Colombia’—New Framework, Old Policies

Starting under the Pastrana Administration (1998–2002), Plan Colombia was launched as a new initiative which would transform relations, and significantly boost financial support. This plan, which was fundamentally geared at supply interdiction, included other components such as the promotion of economic and social recovery, institutional strengthening and seeking political—instead of military—solutions to Colombian conflicts.49

At this point, Bogota became the largest recipient of US aid in the Western Hemisphere, and the fifth largest in the world, receiving over $3.3 billion between 2000 and 2004. Only 18 per cent of this went to non-military uses, such as promoting social and economic justice.50 Clearly, then, the main focus of the Plan was the reduction of illicit narcotics and the improvement of security in order to do this more effectively. The problem continued to be framed as a supply-side issue, and Colombia once more became a ‘partner’ in War because of Pastrana’s willingness to cooperate and to help in redeeming Washington’s image through the inclusion of the ‘soft side’ of the Plan.

Cooperation once more flourished between the two countries as Plan Colombia went into high gear with efforts to reduce coca cultivation, including aerial eradication, and proposals for alternative development.51 President Alvaro Uribe, who served consecutive terms from 2002–2006 and 2006–2010 found particular favour with Washington as he implemented policies that were conducive to supply-side interdiction, and as he continued to push the Plan aggressively. In 2007, the government of Colombia launched the ‘Strategy for the Strengthening of Democracy and
Social Development 2007–2013’, a more comprehensive project which sought to remedy the shortcomings of Plan Colombia as well as to continue to pursue objectives which had not yet been attained. The Uribe administration further signed the US-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2009, which would accord ‘the United States access to seven military facilities in Colombia to conduct joint counternarcotics and anti-terrorism operations over a 10-year period’. However, the Colombian Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional. Plan Colombia therefore represented a renewed commitment, on both sides, to stamp out narcotics at their source, and it demonstrated that once governments complied with the conditions of international interdiction outlined by Washington, they would be treated as welcomed partners in the war on drugs.

The *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* for 2012 illustrates that US-Colombia relations are still narcotised. It outlined that:

> The United States recognizes that it has a “shared responsibility” to assist nations struggling with drug production and trafficking ... Counternarcotics assistance to the CNP [Colombia National Police] and military includes support for a range of interdiction and eradication operations.54

The report further lauded the Santos administration (2010+) for its efforts in supply reduction resulting in a number of advances, including a 14 per cent drop in cultivation in 2010 through eradication efforts.

Paradoxically, the report pointed out that, despite these lauded reductions, Colombia remained one of the world’s largest producers and exporters of cocaine. In fact, in a 2010 study, the Department of Justice’s Cocaine Signature Program reported that 95.5 per cent of the cocaine seized in the US, based on the samples it captured, originated in Colombia. Thus we’ve seen how a securitized issue such as narcotics came to dominate US relations with Colombia—essentially narcotizing their foreign policy. Despite a fluctuating relationship between the two countries, the US ensured compliance with their drug policy either with incentives or with coercion. Essentially waging a war on the supply of drugs also meant putting pressure on any country or actor within a country who stood in the way. This brings us now to examine the overall effectiveness of the narcotised Colombia-US
relations in achieving the objectives of international drug interdiction.

THE ‘WAR ON DRUGS’: HIGH COSTS, LOW BENEFITS

A policy mix characterised largely by supply suppression and extradition has resulted in high social costs for Colombia, and it has further resulted in a stalemate in the War on Drugs. Analysts point to a ‘policy failure,’ or even an ‘addiction to failure’. The Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy, in its 2009 report, argued that prohibitionist policies coalescing around production eradication, disruption of drug flows and on the criminalization of consumption have not resulted in the expected reduction in drug supply:

Colombia is a clear example of the shortcomings of the repressive policies promoted at the global level by the United States... Colombia implemented all conceivable measures to fight the drug trade in a massive effort whose benefits were not proportional to the vast amount of resources invested and the human costs involved. Despite the country's significant achievements in fighting the drug cartels and lowering the levels of violence and crime, the areas of illegal cultivation are again expanding as well as the flow of drugs coming out of Colombia and the Andean region.

Clearly, then, the resources which have been pumped into the War have been disproportionate to the meagre results. According to the 2008 GAO report on Plan Colombia, just over $6 billion had already been disbursed but drug reduction goals had not yet been met. By 2013 this figured was at over $9 billion. In the following sections we will assess supply reduction policies with a view of demonstrating that the overall effect on production was not as significant as anticipated, and that contrastingly the social and environmental damages were considerable. We will also explore how core strategies such as militarization, extradition and certification perversely affected the civilian political system in Colombia. This should lead us to question the overall effectiveness of international drug interdiction policies which depend heavily on the reduction of drug production and supply.
The Fatal Flaws in Supply Reduction Policies

The logic behind US drug control policy followed the law of supply and demand—scarcity would drive up prices thereby decreasing domestic demand. As Youngers and Rosin point out, however, the price of cocaine and heroin have been at all-time lows for some time, despite decades of eradication and interdiction efforts. When they were writing—in 2004—cocaine and heroin were considered to be ‘readily available,’ while consumption trends were ticking upwards for powder and crack cocaine.62

Furthermore, suppression has fostered the development of a more ruthless class of drug entrepreneur. It did not help that US policies lacked legitimacy in supplier countries, because of their one-size-fits-all nature, and a sense that alien standards were being imposed.63 For Bertram et al, the problem starts with the very criminalization of the trade, because this intrinsically fosters black markets which in turn leads to a logic of self-reproduction. The existence of a black market generates high profits—thereby encouraging participants to enter the industry—and, in doing so, promotes corruption because of the amount of money involved.64

On this reading, attempts at reducing supply will be ineffective because the illegal nature of the trade renders it so lucrative.

The failure to reduce production is further compounded by challenges in interrupting the supply chain. Significant resources are mobilized to police the transit zones as most drugs go either by ship or plane. However, high and low altitude smuggling planes are difficult to monitor, and it is challenging to monitor the more than 5000 large ships transiting the eastern Pacific Ocean and over 1000 transiting the Caribbean daily. As for border control, in the 1990s, US Customs were checking only about 3 per cent of the near 9 million containers entering US territory.65 Moreover, the seizure rate in 2001 was only 10 per cent, meaning that 90 per cent of drug exports made it past borders.66 Such a level of seizure has little effect on street prices, which have been stabilized since falling in the 1980s and 1990s.67 According to Carpenter, international interdiction was little more than hype without substance: it is extremely difficult to enforce and it is largely ineffectual.68 Supply of narcotics to the U.S. market continued to be robust despite the considerable resources which were mobilized to counter this.
The Effects of Eradication and Crop Substitution

'The drug trade', as Youngers and Rosin argue, 'is more like a balloon than a battlefield—when one part of a balloon is squeezed, its contents are displaced to another'.69 This captures the evolution of the drug industry in Colombia: eradication efforts did not result in an overall reduction in output, and policy-makers continued to overlook the underpinning reason for this fact; production was cheap and relocation was easy. In fact, as Carpenter argues, eradication was ineffective because it would raise the price of coca and would therefore mean greater income for the farmers. In any case, farmers would only agree to voluntary eradication if the compensation was better than this price.70 It should also be noted that despite the touted reductions, the hard statistics put forward by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the US government display major discrepancies in the accuracy of data collection and analysis methods: 'In 2008 the UNODC figure for Colombia’s potential cocaine production was 61% higher than [sic] that of the USG [United States Government].'71

A further issue is that eradication is often ineffective because of the nature of drug production: it requires little skill and capital for start up, and the crops are easily replaced when destroyed.72 When Colombia mainly produced marijuana, eradication measures—including fumigation—did not prevent its export growth to the US. In fact, there was barely a dent in supply because it was relatively easy to replant a field after the plants were destroyed by the military, and it was also relatively easy to relocate production to another area which was not yet targeted by the authorities.

Moreover, interdiction and eradication efforts evidenced the law of unintended consequences or the ‘hydra effect’,73—causing production to shift from one area to another, or causing a shift in the particular drug that producers specialized in. Not only did the crackdown on foreign marijuana result in the expansion of domestic producers in the US, but it also resulted in a shift in smuggling from the more bulky marijuana, to a more readily concealable drug—cocaine.74 Colombian traffickers followed suit, and turned their attention to coca and cocaine, as marijuana eradication efforts were intensified. This was not only an attempt to diversify narcotics production, but also a direct side effect of eradication efforts in the neighbouring cocaine producing countries—Bolivia and Peru.75 In fact, this is how drugs came to be at the centre of armed conflicts in Colombia, as many of the
cultivated areas were located in territories controlled by guerrilla groups that capitalized on this opportunity for a new source of income. In short, Colombian traffickers seized the opportunity to enter the cocaine market, and in a stark illustration of the ineffectiveness of eradication measures, just over a decade after diversifying to cocaine, Colombia became the leading supplier to the US, and after over four decades of eradication, the country tops the list of global suppliers. These measures therefore resulted in the perverse effects of the spreading and diversification of production.

Marijuana and coca production became itinerant: even as the total area of land cultivated declined, supply grew, due to greater yields from fertile farmlands, and the manufacture of more potent drugs consumed in smaller quantities. From 1984 to 1994, coca production almost doubled despite increased efforts to eradicate supply. Cocaine prices fell in the 1980s and 1990s and never rebounded even when the quality (purity) improved. In fact, cocaine prices fell by two thirds, even though purity was up to 60 per cent by the 1990s compared to 7 per cent in the 1980s. Low prices are, therefore, indicative of a robust supply.

More recently, despite significant resources being mobilized for crop reduction, the UNODC in its 2015 report indicated that in the period 2013–2014, the potential production of cocaine in Colombia increased by 52 per cent, and the total area of production—which was still thought to be on the decline—increased by some 44 per cent over the same period. Against this backdrop, the Colombian government finally took the decision to pull the plug on aerial spraying in May 2015, especially since the World Health Organisation (WHO) had recently declared that the chemical used in spraying is possibly carcinogenic. The New York Times headline in announcing this decision, fittingly captured governmental positions on the issue: ‘Defying US, Colombia Halts Aerial Spraying of Crops Used to Make Cocaine’. Thus, despite overwhelming evidence that this strategy is not yielding desired results, and is potentially harmful to the environment and human life, powerful forces in the US still support it.

Socio-economic and Environmental Considerations

There is no doubt that aerial spraying is inefficient and ineffective, as various studies have shown. Camacho and Mejia, for example, estimate that for each kilogram of cocaine which the process
manages to remove from the market, there is a staggering marginal cost of approximately $240,000.83 Others suggest that it has had very little impact on crop reduction while incurring very high costs of all kinds. For example, Mejia, Restrepo and Rozo estimate that the total cost of spraying one hectare of coca is $2,400. When one considers the overall effectiveness rate of 4.2 per cent, this inflates the cost to $57,150. Either way, they argue that the cost is still significantly greater than the value of the yield of a hectare of coca, approximated at $450 for the farmer.84 There is therefore a gaping disparity between the cost of fumigation and the potential revenues for farmers. This calls us to consider more effective ways of resolving the problem, since the exuberant costs far outweigh the modest gains. If for example the fumigation budget were diverted to funding alternative livelihoods, or even if by some stretch, money were paid out directly to farmers as an incentive to discontinue production of illicit crops, even half of the nominal cost of spraying one hectare ($1200) would still be almost three times as much as the $450 which farmers would stand to gain from each hectare of coca.

These disproportionately expensive policies bred resentment for the Colombian government among the population, because tens of thousands of small farmers participate in the illicit drugs industry. As pointed out by the United States Congressional Report on Colombia, aerial eradication has been controversial both in the United States and in Colombia. 85 Chief among the arguments of critics has been the fact that it deprives farmers of their livelihoods, especially if it is not carried out with alternative development programs. As Youngers and Rosin argue:

The United States’ insistence on zero tolerance for drug crops has led to massive forced eradication of coca and opium poppy crops, often the principal source of income for impoverished farmers. With few alternatives available, these families are ratcheted down into deeper poverty when their most important cash crop is destroyed.86

Furthermore, because of the indiscriminate nature of aerial fumigation, licit crops were also eliminated and so farmers who were not involved in the drug trade also suffered greatly from eradication efforts.

This brings into focus the environmental impact. Critics further charged that the chemicals—such as glyphosate—which were being used have unknown environmental and health effects.
Despite repeated verifications and publications by the US authorities which demonstrated that the chemicals were being used according to prescribed safety guidelines in order to minimize environmental risks, there is still a widespread perception in Colombia that these chemicals have had adverse effects on the environment. There were complaints that fumigation polluted rivers and caused the death of fish, that it damaged licit plants, and poisoned cattle. Several studies highlighted by Mejia suggest that, in addition to deforestation and pollution, there are direct risks to human health which span a spectrum from skin problems to miscarriages. As a result of this, Plan Colombia sparked massive demonstrations against its indiscriminate use of fumigation.

Brandi James also argues that it has had debilitating effects on human health, and as a result education has also been affected. Aerial fumigation results in skin rashes, dizziness, fever, diarrhoea, vomiting, and loss of appetite, and children are, of course, most susceptible to these problems. James, for example, cites a study carried out by the Health Department in Putumayo which pointed out that 82 per cent of complaints related to fumigation were of a gastrointestinal and respiratory nature, and there were statistically significant increases in reported cases of fevers, diarrhoea, and respiratory infections following aerial fumigation exercises. It is not coincidental that, over the past decade, of the 128,000 hectares of cocaine which have been sprayed annually, over half was in the Putumayo and Nariño departments. This suggests, therefore, that the population of these areas would have been heavily exposed to the chemicals, and that the causal link which James seeks to establish between fumigation and health deficiencies in this department, may very well be plausible. In addition to the physical effects, it also indirectly resulted in the deterioration of the nutritional status of children, since it destroyed licit subsistence crops as well. This has adverse effects on their ability to learn. Combined with the massive displacement of people as a result of fumigation episodes, as well as the illnesses caused by the chemicals used, this has resulted in decreased access to schools, and increased absenteeism.

It should be noted at this juncture, however, that the US did seek to pursue alternative options. In fact, in order to counter these challenges, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) sought to fund alternative development programs. However, their success was limited, not only by security concerns, but also by the mere scope of programs, which were concentrated for the most
part outside of the areas where the majority of coca is grown. So, both fumigation and alternative development programs—which seek to seduce farmers away from coca production through crop-substitution—have been largely sterile. According to Mexican scholar Maria Celia Toro, ‘[n]o agricultural product can be made as profitable as any commodity that is to be sold on the black market. The gap between the legal and the illegal crop is enormous.’

**CERTIFICATION, EXTRADITION, AND MILITARISATION: THREATS TO POLITICAL STABILITY**

The US-Colombia bilateral antidrug agenda has, then, been largely unsuccessful. Not only has there been an increase in the availability of drugs, but the extradition treaty has had the ghastly side effect of increasing narco-terrorism and narco-nationalism, while also weakening democratic institutions in Colombia. The increased participation of the military in the drug war has caused a further weakening of civilian democratic institutions in favour of the military. In essence, militarisation, certification and extradition—the three cornerstone issues in the enforcement of US antidrug policy—had debilitating effects on Colombia.

* Militarisation: A Blow to Civilian Democratic Institutions

Allegations of the history of human rights abuses carried out by the Colombian military were no secret. In fact, they were constantly at the heart of debates on the antidrug policy in the US Congress. However, even after the Leahy Amendment was passed in 1996, military aid to Colombia was not affected. There was, therefore, an increased presence of the military in the War on Drugs, which by the 1980s and 1990s, meant war against the cartels through their paramilitary groups, as well as against leftist guerrillas that had also tapped into the drug trade as a means for financing their campaigns. The end result was that the military was strengthened at the expense of fragile democratic institutions in Colombia.

Youngers and Rosin argue that Latin American governments were concerned by the increased military activity because the legacy of past military coups and massive human rights abuses lingered in the collective memory. They contend that the action of the US government was seen to legitimise Latin American security forces to take on another internal security role without sufficient mechanisms in place to ensure civilian control, transparency and
accountability. In short, the military was once again thrust into civilian law enforcement, the very issue that Latin American governments had been fighting since the 1970s. This was further complicated by the fact that the US often set up secret antidrug units within police forces and created alliances with the National Police Force. It was as a result of this that Washington was able to circumvent President Samper, by working directly with the head of the Colombian National Police.

Military cooperation increased the resources of the armed forces and strengthened their power vis-à-vis the civilian institutions. Not only did support from the US increase the legitimacy of these actors, but it also pitted them against the state, especially since in some cases they became the primary interlocutors with Washington in the War on Drugs. The military would often receive praise for their crackdowns and counter-insurgency measures, even when the government was faring badly in Washington's periodic reviews. For example, after de-certifying Colombia in 1996 and 1997, the Clinton Administration, while lambasting the Colombian presidency for lack of cooperation, praised the valiant efforts of the Police Force and segments of the military. This meant that, whereas there were strong allegations of excesses on the part of the armed forces, no sanctions were taken against them, while sanctions were being taken against the government.

**Certification: The Counterproductive ‘Big Stick’**

The certification process, which became Washington's whip to bring Colombia back into line when it seemed to be uncooperative, was a unilateral policy that was unfair and insulting. It was particularly—and ironically—counterproductive, as Colombia was de-certified and placed on a list of pariah states at a point when it was carrying what was perhaps the most comprehensive and intense onslaught on the drug war. Under the Samper regime, six of the top seven commandos of the Cali cartel were arrested, and the President constantly increased fumigation efforts and military participation in eradication. Nonetheless, at this crucial juncture, the US, in a bid to sanction Samper, de-certified Colombia for two consecutive years, thus robbing Bogota of much needed aid to build on the successes of the bolstered efforts.

Because of issue linkages, other areas, such as trade policy, were also heavily influenced by the politics of narcotics interdiction. The
establishment of a Free Trade Agreement between the US and Colombia, which had been debated in the US Congress for years, was not given the nod until 2011 when Colombian successes in the War on Drugs were deemed sufficient to warrant such a ‘reward’ from the US government. The 1996 de-certification did not only affect bilateral relations, it also had multilateral implications for Colombia. Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training, investment guarantees and trade financing for US businesses, were all cut off at the bilateral level. In addition, US representatives in international financial institutions were instructed to vote against any kind of funding for Colombia: even concessional financing from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) was blocked by the threat of a US veto.

When there was de-certification once again in 1997, the Colombian government had been celebrating significant progress. There had been record spending on the counternarcotics efforts ($1.3 billion), and this had put a significant dent into the narcotics network by eradicating crops, as well as destroying labs, airstrips and other infrastructure. The government had even put in place new laws on money laundering. However, the US used the opportunity to once again sanction the President: de-certification was justified by the Clinton administration on the premise of limited cooperation by the presidency, coupled with high levels of corruption.

The certification process, as applied by the US with regards to Colombia, was counterproductive since it robbed the latter of vital resources at a point when they were making significant advances in the war on drugs. Certification by itself therefore had no positive effect on drug eradication. Rather, it appeared as just another coercive tool which served, if nothing else, to underscore the power imbalance between both countries—an imbalance which was clearly in the favour of the US. If anything, these certification tests only embittered the relationship between the US and Colombia.

*The Wave of Narco-violence Attached to Extradition Policies*

In 1987, a Colombian Supreme court ruling declared that the ratification of the US-Colombian extradition treaty was unconstitutional. This position was further cemented when the new Colombian constitution of 1991 ‘expressly prohibited the extradition of Colombian nationals by birth’. Pressure from the US would eventually lead to a constitutional amendment in 1997,
allowing non-retroactive extradition. Given the way in which Washington pushed for this extradition treaty, and even sought to sanction Colombia for rejecting it, one could assume—somewhat erroneously—that this particular instrument was crucial to reduce the drug supply. However, Steiner shows us that a contrasting reality is what obtained, and he suggests that it has only resulted in an increase in both narco-terrorism and narco-nationalism. This thesis seems to hold true when compared with the facts. As the threat of extradition loomed, instead of acting as a deterrent to traffickers, it incited a great deal of violence on their part, in order to send a strong message to the government that they did not support this policy and would continue to wreak havoc in Colombia until it was revoked.

A telling example of the kind of violence it prompted was the 1985 seizure of the Palace of Justice in Bogota by the M-19 guerillas who held over 500 people hostage. In the crossfire between them and the military, 50 hostages were killed, including 11 of the 24 Supreme Court justices along with civilians and most of the commandos. It is alleged that this act of terror was undertaken under a $1 million dollar contract between the M-19 and the Medellin cartel as a reprisal for the declaration by the justices that they supported the extradition treaty. Attacks on State officials, including members of the judiciary, law enforcement officers and politicians, became a mainstay of the narcotics-politics-guerillas-interdiction melee. A 2004 review of Plan Colombia revealed that, despite reductions, homicide rates were still high, and Colombia topped the list of global kidnapping hotspots despite recording a significant decline.

The wave of violence continued into the 1990s, as the Medellin cartel took aim at government institutions and officials. In 1990, presidential hopeful Carlos Galan was assassinated. Even if the extradition policy was part of a wider strategy to dismantle the cartels, the successful dismantling of the cartels was neither attributable to extradition, nor did it represent a dent in the drug trade. As Thoumi concludes, ‘the increasingly violent reaction to this policy was totally out of proportion to the benefits it produced.’ In fact, it only served to atomize production and had no meaningful effect in reducing supply overall.

Furthermore, the high rates of crime, and the extremely violent reactions of the Cartels have had debilitating effects on the lives and livelihoods of everyday Colombians. Tens of thousands have lost their lives, rural populations struggle to maintain control of
property for which they have to pay heavy taxes levied on them by leftist guerillas and paramilitary groups, and millions have had to flee their hometowns.\textsuperscript{114} In the 2013 Report by the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Internally Displaced Monitoring Centre (IMDC), for the fourth consecutive year Colombia held the unenviable top spot in the list of countries with the most internally displaced people.\textsuperscript{115} The IDMC estimates that there are between 4.5 million and 5 million internally displaced people, while the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates are between 4 and 4.5 million.\textsuperscript{116}

Between 1993 and 2003, more than 35,000 Colombians were killed, and 82 per cent of these were at the hands of death squads operating in collusion with the Colombian military, and backed by the United States.\textsuperscript{117} Guerilla forces and paramilitary groups have rained terror on the population through killings, torture of civilians and kidnappings.\textsuperscript{118} More than 17,000 people were kidnapped in Colombia between 2002 and 2009,\textsuperscript{119} and this represented a downward trend since the number of kidnappings declined by some 88 per cent over the same period.\textsuperscript{120} Among those kidnapped were prominent legislators, government ministers, presidential candidates, businesspeople, and US contractors.\textsuperscript{121}

In addition, according to the Escuela Nacional Sindical, since 1986, as part of the ongoing violence, a union worker has been killed in Colombia every three days. This amounted to an overwhelming 2,704 cases up to 2009 as a result of paramilitary activities and extrajudicial killings. There have also been numerous cases of threats and manipulations.\textsuperscript{122}

For Steiner, this policy was only a face-saving mechanism which really had no impact on the drug trade. It served to demonstrate to the electorate in the US that Washington was ‘doing something’, while for Colombia it served to appease the US and to appear to be a willing partner. However, in terms of serving as a deterrent, extradition was a clear failure.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that, as of the 1970s, the War on Drugs took on increasing importance as the US redirected its attention from the ‘red danger’ of communism, and started to focus on the growing domestic drug problem. From the outset, this was perceived as a supply-side issue which only tough source country drug interdiction strategies could counter. This position was informed by a realist paradigm resulting
from the securitization of drugs. This continues to dominate antidrug policy and prevents policy-makers from viewing the problem otherwise, despite overwhelming evidence that the war is turning out to be a costly fiasco.

By the 1980s, relations between the US and Colombia became fully narcotised, suggesting that the entire relationship between the two hinged on bilateral antidrug relations. The asymmetrical relationship between Washington and Bogota saw the former ramping up the pressure on the latter to put in place policies conducive to the proclaimed War on Drugs. This kind of pressure would become characteristic of their relations, and depending on how willing Colombian governments were to give in to the whims of US policy makers, these relations could fluctuate between cooperation and antagonism. In fact, as was demonstrated under the Samper regime, even when governments sought to cooperate, they could face the wrath of the US if the President fell out of grace with Washington. Thus, while putting on the pressure for Colombia to assent to extraditions, the US also sanctioned its perceived lack of cooperation with de-certification.

Even though, at the turn of the 21st century, Plan Colombia seemed to breathe new life both into the relations between the two countries, and into the War on Drugs, the results from this have been similar to previous efforts—that is, they have been either unforthcoming or less than desirable. Successive attempts at reducing supply have failed, and the narcotics industry—which is now worth hundreds of billions of dollars—continues to grow. Colombia is still one of the world’s leading suppliers of cocaine, despite the enormous financial and human cost of the War on Drugs since the first agreement on aid transfer was signed in 1973. The adverse effects on Colombian society are striking, and they include: the weakening of democratic institutions, socioeconomic repercussions for poor farmers who have lost their livelihoods due to the fumigation exercises, environmental and health hazards, and an increase in violence and bloodshed.

To change the fate of the war, there needs to be a reformulation of policy, and perhaps greater focus on the demand-side rather than on the supply-side. As it stands, the current strategy is ‘fundamentally misconceived: it will continue to fail regardless of leadership, resources, or operational efficiency’. Tullis sums up quite aptly the dilemma of producer/trafficker countries like Colombia, faced with harsh antidrug policies: ‘Participating in an international drug-control regime improves their international
standing but harms them domestically’. This will continue to be the case, unless the US changes its realist outlook on the drug problem, rebalances supply-side policies with more active demand-side policies, and makes significant efforts to de-narcotise the relationship between Bogota and Washington.

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