

Introduction

For several decades, Colombia has been at the epicenter of the U.S.-led “war on drugs.” At various points in its history, Colombia appeared to be on the verge of becoming a narco-state as drug lords, such as Pablo Escobar, roamed free and could virtually do whatever they wanted. Drug traffickers killed many Colombians and used other tactics, such as bribery and extortion. The U.S. wanted to stop drug trafficking in Colombia, which continued despite the death of Pablo Escobar and the collapse of the Medellín and Cali cartels.¹ In 2000, President Clinton signed into law Plan Colombia, providing the Colombians with billions of dollars in aid to combat drug trafficking. Plan Colombia has been one of the most exhaustive drug packages ever passed. This work provides a critical analysis of Plan Colombia, which sought to reduce the cultivation, trafficking, and production of drugs by 50 percent.² Despite spending more than \$8 billion, Plan Colombia failed to achieve its drug objectives: drugs remain cheaper and more readily available than ever before.³

This work examines the origins and outcomes of Plan Colombia from 2000 to 2012, using the theoretical concepts and methodological tools drawn from international relations theory and comparative politics to examine the critical junctures and evolution of Plan Colombia from its initial approval in July 13, 2000, by the U.S. Congress through its implementation from Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002), Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010), until the Juan Manuel Santos administration (2010–April 2012).

While much has been written on the formation of Plan Colombia, not a single work exists that examines Plan Colombia from begin-

ning to end. Critics might question why policymakers, analysts, and academics care about Plan Colombia. In other words, what relevance does Plan Colombia have today? Anybody who reads the news recognizes that Mexico, not Colombia, has become the epicenter and focus of the war on drugs. This work argues that Plan Colombia is crucial for understanding why the violence has shifted to Mexico. In some sense, Mexico appears to be the Colombia of the 1990s. In addition, the lessons from Plan Colombia can be applied to other areas today that are experiencing large levels of organized crime and violence as a result of drug trafficking (for example, West Africa).

We must first briefly examine why studying Colombia is necessary for policymakers and academics. Colombia is a critical case in the U.S.-led war on drugs for six reasons.

1. Colombia has been a longtime security threat dating back to the cold war before the emergence of drug trafficking in the country.
2. During the 1970s and beyond, the country became and remains today deeply entrenched in drug cultivation, processing, and trafficking, thus presenting new post-cold war security concerns for the United States.
3. Colombia constitutes a microcosm of the failures and successes of the U.S.-led war on drugs.
4. Colombia is located in an important strategic area because it borders the Panama Canal and Brazil, which is a major economic power in the region. Security challenges that transpire in Colombia, therefore, can threaten trade and prosperity for the region.
5. Colombia remains the principle ally of the United States.
6. Colombia is a democracy and Washington does not want its allies to become anti-democratic.

Organization of the Book

This work provides an exhaustive examination of Plan Colombia from beginning to end, which no other work today does. It is organized around several key puzzles or questions that subsequently each become chapters. The concluding chapter analyzes the notion of whether Plan Colombia should be used as a model for other countries. Should policymakers and politicians take the core concepts of Plan Colombia

and apply them to other countries such as Mexico and Afghanistan? In other words, it seeks to answer the “so what?” question, exploring the lessons of Plan Colombia, and determine what analysts should learn from this case. This is something that the United States has failed to do as it continues to implement the same failed strategies again and again.

Puzzle One: Origins of Plan Colombia

Beginning in 1995, the U.S. government decertified Colombia and the Ernesto Samper administration three consecutive years for failing to comply with the requirements set forth by the United States. In July 2000, during the Andrés Pastrana administration, the U.S. Congress approved and President Clinton signed into law a bill designed specifically to assist Colombia combat drug trafficking.⁴ This initiative is known as “Plan Colombia.” The first puzzle seeks to analyze and examine what transpired between 1995 and 2000 that led to the creation and signing of Plan Colombia into law by the United States. Why did President Clinton sign Plan Colombia into law and provide the Colombians with billions of dollars in aid after decertifying the country three consecutive years?⁵

Puzzle Two: From Drug Trafficking to Narco-Terrorism

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists fundamentally changed U.S. foreign policy, as the Bush administration focused on the “war on terrorism,” thereby subordinating the war on drugs to the war on terrorism. President Álvaro Uribe was inaugurated as the new president of Colombia on August 7, 2002. From the beginning of his presidency, Uribe had very different goals and objectives than his predecessor. Specifically, Uribe sought not only to combat drug trafficking within Colombia but also what he referred to as “narco-terrorism.” Why did the discrepancies evaporate between the United States and Colombia? Why did the United States accept the new strategy Uribe designed? How is it that the less powerful country, Colombia, was able to set the agenda?⁶

Puzzle Three: Beyond Plan Colombia

By the end of the decade, President Bush (2009) and President Uribe (2010) ended their respective presidential terms. Toward the end of the Bush administration and the beginning of the Obama administration, the United States has reduced its aid to Colombia. How did the Colombians perceive and evaluate Plan Colombia in terms of its

successes and failures? Were the initial goals of the United States and the Colombians achieved? If so, how were these goals achieved? Why did the policies change from Uribe to Santos?⁷

Puzzle Four: Theory and Method

In the aftermath of the transition, Obama pledged to support Colombia. In reality, he has sought to desecuritize⁸ Colombia as a major security issue and priority for the U.S. government. Why did the United States cut funding to Plan Colombia and attempt to desecuritize Colombia? How have efforts been made to desecuritize Colombia? Have Obama's efforts been successful?

Methodological Approach and Techniques

Colombia is an important case because it lies at the epicenter of the U.S.-led war on drugs and has been a major security concern for the United States. This work uses diachronic analysis to examine the critical moments of Plan Colombia.⁹ This book is not a complete history of Plan Colombia, but it does focus on the critical junctures. Plan Colombia provides scholars and policymakers with various important lessons for other countries. Obviously, a single-case study has some limitations, such as the ability to draw generalizable theories that can be tested in other countries. Comparing Colombia to other cases could be a fruitful research topic. On the other hand, multiple case studies complicate the research design because one has to answer several important questions with regard to the justification of cases chosen. For instance, which countries are chosen and why? Does the researcher compare countries based on most similar or most different cases? How does one avoid issues such as selection bias and selecting on the dependent variable? In sum, this book does not use multiple case studies, but rather focuses on key moments or critical junctures in Colombia, which has been and continues to be a crucial country for drug production as well as trafficking.¹⁰

In terms of methodological techniques, this endeavor adopts process tracing to examine the critical junctures of Plan Colombia. Process tracing enables researchers to evaluate and determine the causal mechanisms. This work also draws on both primary and secondary sources to examine the critical junctures of Plan Colombia. This project, for instance, analyzes research from both U.S. and Colombian government documents. The Government Accountability Office and United Nations (UN) reports, in particular, have been consulted and provide a plethora of information with regard to coca cultivation and overall trends in drug trafficking.

In addition, this work uses techniques from constructivism, primarily the analysis of speech acts by authoritative figures to trace the desecuritization process. This project consulted interviews from newspapers, speeches, and other documents and examined the statements made by key leaders, such as President Obama. This work, however, does not use content analysis, which is another methodological technique constructivists use, which requires extensive numerical analysis of content, such as the frequency in which an issue appears in a newspaper.¹¹

This work also uses other qualitative methods, such as open-ended interviews with various experts, such as academics and government officials involved in policy formation and research and who are experts in each stage of the process and formation of Plan Colombia.¹² Open-ended interviews, using the snowball technique, provide the interviewee with the opportunity to answer questions and provide useful insights into Plan Colombia.¹³ The individuals selected for interviews are from Colombia and the United States, which provides a methodologically sound sample of individuals who can present the entire picture of Plan Colombia. Each person interviewed was an expert in U.S. foreign policy toward Colombia or the war on drugs as well as the internal armed conflict in Colombia. The goal was not to survey and interview the people in Colombia, but rather to interview policy experts and scholars who would provide keen insights into Plan Colombia.¹⁴

Levels of Analysis

This book analyzes the origins of Plan Colombia and its evolution over time and uses process tracing to analyze Plan Colombia and the various key moments. In essence, this work analyzes U.S. foreign policy toward Colombia. Foreign policy lies at the dividing line between international relations (IR) and comparative politics. Laura Neack emphasizes the importance of “levels of analysis” and the need to distinguish between the levels of foreign policy.¹⁵ The first level of analysis is theories of grand strategy because a theoretical approach is essential for understanding the long-term goals of a state, as well as the formation of Plan Colombia. IR theory, in particular, has been prone to these debates among contending theories and paradigms. In addition to realism and liberalism, soft constructivism also has explanatory power in terms of its ability to explain the perceptions and social constructions of the United States and Colombia.¹⁶

Theories of grand strategy alone are insufficient, and, therefore, this book employs various techniques and approaches from comparative politics to examine the internal dynamics and politics

that impacted the formation and evolution of Plan Colombia. In other words, comprehending and analyzing the formation and evolution of Plan Colombia is impossible without examining the role of key institutions, such as the executive branch and Congress. This book not only examines the role of three U.S. presidents (Clinton, Bush, and Obama) and three Colombian presidents (Pastrana, Uribe, and Santos), but also examines the role of the U.S. Congress and how it helped impact the formation and evolution of Plan Colombia during these critical junctures.¹⁷

Midrange theories demonstrate that scholars cannot understand U.S. foreign policy and drug trafficking in Colombia without examining the internal dynamics within a country. Comparative politics requires one to have in-depth knowledge of the culture, history, and institutions within the state apparatus. Some of the following questions need to be examined: how do the institutions function? How is a policy made? Who are the actors involved in policymaking? What are the “rules of the game”? What institutions are involved in the policymaking process?¹⁸

Theoretical Approach

This book consciously adopts an eclectic theoretical approach. Today, the world in which we live is more complicated than ever, and in order to understand such a complex world, scholars need to employ different tools in order to explain events that occur. For IR scholars, IR theory is an important tool for understanding these phenomena and events that have transpired. Some individuals, particularly those outside of academia, believe that IR theory does not have much explanatory power and is merely an intellectual exercise among those in academia. In *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, John Mearsheimer quotes Paul Nitze who played a major role in foreign policy during the cold war era. Nitze wrote that “most of what has been written and taught under the heading of ‘political science’ by Americans since World War II has been . . . of limited value, if not counterproductive, as a guide to the actual conduct of policy.”¹⁹ Nitze’s statement suggests that theory has little use in the “real world” and does not have any explanatory power. Instead, politicians and individuals who participate in the policymaking process should use their experiences, information analysis, and common sense when designing a policy or making an important decision. Mearsheimer responds to such critics of IR theory stating: “This view is wrongheaded. In fact, none of us could understand the world in which we live in or make intelligent

decisions without theories. Indeed, all students and practitioners of international politics rely on theories to comprehend their surroundings. Some are aware of it and some are not, some admit and some do not; but there is no escaping the fact that we could not make sense of the complex world around us without simplifying theories."²⁰ Therefore, to understand the formation of Plan Colombia and how it evolved over time, this book applies IR theory as a lens or framework to explain this complicated case. IR scholars often use one theory or paradigm and fail to use other theoretical perspectives to explain their question. This work argues that scholars selectively choose those points that support their position while ignoring things that contradict it, which is a form of selection bias.²¹ This is not the correct method to conduct social science research. In an interview at the University of California, Berkeley, Harry Kreisler asked Robert Pape whether he would classify himself as a realist. Pape responded that he does not like to label himself and believes that scholars should use the appropriate theories necessary to analyze and answer a question.²² This is the practice that scholars should be engaged in, as opposed to finding cases that explain why their particular theory of choice has more explanatory power or relevance. The use of examples to justify the value or explanatory power of a particular theory is improper social science research. Critics of an eclectic approach argue that the paradigm or theory one uses determines the type of questions asked.

Neorealism

Neorealism has explanatory power in terms of its ability to explain state-to-state relations between Colombia and the United States. Realism clearly indicates that the United States has geostrategic goals, and that Colombia played a role in the grand strategy of the United States. Washington, for instance, viewed Colombia as a pillar of democracy and a crucial ally for its foreign policy in the region. Colombia also is a vital country for security in the region because it borders Venezuela, Brazil, and the Panama Canal. Security in Colombia, therefore, is a major priority in order to ensure stable trading zones. In addition, neorealism explains how a powerful country, such as the United States, can use its power to alter the goals of a policy. Realism also has several hypotheses regarding agenda-setting and how power impacts bilateral relations between a strong state and weaker power. According to realism, the hegemonic state, the United States in this case, will use its power to dictate the terms and conditions and dominate the agenda-setting process over the less powerful country. Therefore, the

less powerful country will not be able to set the agenda and will be required to follow the orders of the hegemonic actor.²³ However, does the weaker country have the ability to set the agenda and maintain relative autonomy, contradicting realist logic? Realism has important contributions with regard to alliance politics. Realists argue that countries either balance against a power or bandwagon. According to realist logic, Colombia, a staunch ally of the United States, should join forces with the United States. This hypothesis will be tested in the subsequent pages.

Realism, however, has various other shortcomings in its ability to explain Plan Colombia. One serious shortcoming of neorealism is that it focuses on states as the unit of analysis and ignores other actors, such as drug traffickers. Bagley and Tokatlian argue that “in fact, multiple subnational and transnational actors are involved in this international industry, most of whom operate outside, if not in direct defiance, of national authorities through the hemisphere.”²⁴ Bagley and Tokatlian also stress the importance of the market, whereas realists underestimate the importance of globalization and market forces. Even though they are illegal, drugs should be viewed as any other commodity in a legal market. Drug traffickers, therefore, will continue to supply drugs if the demand for such commodities continues to exist and the potential to earn money remains.²⁵

Liberalism

Liberalism has various strands that are useful and help explain the formation, implementation, and evolution of Plan Colombia. The first strand of liberalism focuses on interdependence and helps explain the economic linkages that exist between Colombia and the United States, which is something that realist scholars have neglected. The relationship between the two can be characterized as one of asymmetric interdependence, as opposed to one of complex interdependence. Colombia is heavily reliant on the United States as a trade partner. In economic terms, Colombia only accounts for less than 1 percent of overall U.S. trade. That being said, Colombia is an important energy producer of coal and oil. Trade, however, is not the only indicator of economic interest because the United States has significant investments within Colombia.²⁶

Liberalism is useful because it focuses on the economic linkages and highlights the asymmetric relationship between the United States and Colombia. The weaker countries, in this case Colombia, do have a degree of relative autonomy.²⁷ The greater the degree of independence

that the weaker power has increases the ability of the weaker power to negotiate on certain issues. Interdependence is not only a tool of the hegemonic power, but the weaker actor, Colombia, can use interdependence to obtain various goals and concessions from the hegemonic actor. In other words, interdependence, when used correctly, can be an effective mechanism to extract or obtain certain resources.

The second strand of liberalism is referred to as neoliberal institutionalism and, as the name suggests, emphasizes the importance of institutions to promote cooperation, coordination, promote efficiency, and decrease transaction costs.²⁸ This type of liberalism is useful for understanding the attempts to institutionalize Plan Colombia. Said differently, the United States sought to construct a model of security between Colombia and the United States under the auspices of Plan Colombia that was institutionalized in this liberal sense. The institutionalization process enabled the United States and Colombia to increase connections between the two countries and promote cooperation and collaboration. For instance, the U.S. ambassador played a major role in Colombian relations and such cooperation could not have occurred without the institutionalization of Plan Colombia.²⁹

Constructivism

Soft constructivism focuses on perceptions and the social construction of issues, such as national security priorities. Constructivism helps explain how the elites in Colombia and the United States perceived each other. Such perceptions help determine the nature and intensity of interactions. From a U.S. perspective, some individuals perceived Colombia as a failed state. From the Colombian perspective, Colombian elites believed that they needed the United States as an ally in order to receive the necessary support to combat drug trafficking and the various internal actors. Constructivism also clearly demonstrates that the United States was not only concerned with its national security interests but also the electoral dynamics within the United States. The Republicans challenged Clinton during his presidency, and Gore during his presidential campaign, arguing that they were not tough enough on drugs. The Democrats felt obligated to respond and prove that they were not “soft on crime.” In addition, Washington perceived Colombia as a thriving democracy in the region, which also helped support U.S. values. In terms of hypothesis testing, constructivists would hypothesize that countries can collaborate despite different perceptions and social constructions as long as countries can find common linkages and grounds for cooperation.³⁰

Lessons and Analytical Contributions

After analyzing the various critical junctures or key moments of Plan Colombia, this work will end with several policy recommendations that will make a significant contribution to the field. The empirical analysis of Plan Colombia is the first subject addressed in the policy recommendations suggestions. Determining whether Plan Colombia has achieved its objectives and can be defined as a success can be measured empirically. Statistical analysis, for instance, provides estimates about the number of hectares of coca produced in Colombia. This work calculates the money spent on drug trafficking and examines empirically whether drug production has increased or decreased. The initiatives to combat the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) also can be empirically studied as the number of FARC members operating within Colombia can be estimated, as well as the revenue that illegal armed groups earn from illegal activities such as drug trafficking.

The second major policy recommendation is titled analytical recommendations and addresses the notion of autonomy. How does Colombia help scholars understand various IR concepts such as alliance politics? What does the Colombia case suggest for scholars of international relations and policy experts regarding the relations between hegemonic powers and weaker actors?

Finally, the third policy recommendation addresses the notion of lessons. What are the conclusions or lessons that can be drawn from Colombia? What does Plan Colombia teach scholars and policymakers about drug trafficking?