The FARC's Best Friend: U.S. Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s

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ABSTRACT

The strengthening of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) during the 1990s was an unintended consequence of a series of tactical successes in U.S. antidrug policies. These included dismantling the Medellín and Cali drug cartels, interdicting coca coming into Colombian processing facilities, and using drug certification requirements to pressure the Colombian government to attack drug cartels and allow aerial fumigation of coca crops. These successes, however, merely pushed coca cultivation increasingly to FARC-dominated areas while weakening many of the FARC's political-military opponents. This provided the FARC with unprecedented opportunities to extract resources from the cocaine industry to deepen its long insurgency against the Colombian state. The Colombian experience demonstrates the importance of creating a more sophisticated understanding of how lootable wealth can exacerbate civil wars.

Sweeping through the isolated, remote jungle settlement of Las Delicias, Putumayo, approximately 400 revolutionaries armed with grenades, mortars, and machine guns overran a remote outpost of the Colombian armed forces on August 31, 1996, killing 54 soldiers and leaving dozens more missing or kidnapped (Rabasa and Chalk 2001, 42). Over a span of 24 hours, parallel offensives raised the count to 73 military and police casualties. These surprise attacks, the strongest in nearly four decades of civil conflict, vividly demonstrated the deepening of the challenge from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to the government. By the end of the decade, the FARC had consolidated its position as the strongest guerrilla movement in contemporary Latin America, doubling the size of its army to between 15,000 and 20,000 soldiers while simultaneously expanding its political and economic power to nearly half of Colombia's territory (Echandia 1998; Vargas 1999; Ferro and Uribe 2002; Richani 2002).

The FARC's revitalization during the1990s appears as a stark anomaly in the region, considering how the spread of liberal democracy and withdrawal of international assistance to formerly Cold War–era guerrilla groups has shattered the ideological and financial base that has traditionally fueled revolutionary upheavals. Globally, the FARC today is one of the strongest Marxist insurgencies in a world where ethnic and religious divisions have generally replaced the ideological combat of the Cold War as a central nexus of conflict in contemporary civil wars. How has the FARC, facing the limitations that have challenged the viability of left-wing insurgencies throughout the world, so effectively reinvigorated its armed campaign to become an increasingly serious threat to the Colombian government?

Official accounts label the FARC a "narcoguerrilla" movement whose success can be explained simply as a consequence of its increased participation in the drug trade (U.S. Department of State 2000, 2002). Such explanations find an echo in academic literature depicting rebellion as a "quasi-criminal activity" designed to extract rents from natural resource exports (Collier 2000). This article argues that this perspective holds a kernel of truth. The FARC's growth during the 1990s cannot be understood without an analysis of how changes in the political economy of the cocaine industry in Colombia created new opportunities for the FARC to strengthen its forces.

This new political economy literature on "greed-driven" rebellions (Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Collier 2000), however, cannot fully explain the character of the Colombian civil war. It cannot identify the origins of an insurgency that has recently celebrated its 40th year in existence (Pizarro 1991). Nor can it explain the longstanding ideological vision of the FARC or its social base among some sectors of the Colombian rural proletariat (Vargas 1998a; Ferro and Uribe 2002). For our purposes here, it also cannot fully account for how the peculiar character of coca as a raw material export shapes the opportunities available to combatants in civil wars.

Coca is subject to a global prohibition regime dominated by the United States. This regime means three important things for the political economy of natural resources and civil war. First, the prohibition of this resource is what gives it its extraordinary value. If coca were legal, it might not provide sufficient "lootable" wealth that could be appropriated by combatants in civil wars. Second, this regime makes it extremely difficult for governments to appropriate directly the profits associated with drug cultivation, because doing so would make them pariah states in the international community. Therefore, nonstate actors generally capture most of the profits associated with the cultivation of illicit drugs. Third, the coercive military and police activities of the United States and its allies often determine which set of private actors in which countries benefit the most from the drug trade. As the United States focuses its prohibition efforts on one set of actors or countries, the profits of the drug trade shift to other actors and countries.

This last element is the most crucial for this study, because while Colombia probably earned as much from participation in the cocaine industry during the 1980s as it did during the 1990s (Thoumi 2003, 146–52), structural changes in that industry allowed the FARC to extract substantially more resources from that industry during the 1990s than it could before.

This study argues that the strengthening of the FARC was an unintended consequence of a series of tactical successes of U.S. antidrug policies during the 1990s. The United States experienced considerable success in dismantling the Medellín and Cali drug cartels, interdicting coca being flown from Peru to Colombian processing facilities, and using drug certification requirements to pressure the Colombian government into attacking drug cartels and allowing for the aerial fumigation of coca crops. The destruction of the Colombian drug cartels, however, dismantled the most powerful military opponents of the FARC in many regions and decreased the ability of drug-trafficking operations to resist paying taxes to the FARC as part of the price of doing business. The successful interdiction of coca being flown from Peru, combined with the disruption of the drug cartels' transnational supply networks, increasingly pushed coca cultivation into the areas of Colombia where the FARC had long had a significant presence. This shift in production provided the FARC with unprecedented opportunities to tax the drug trade. Meanwhile, aerial fumigation may have deepened Colombian coca workers' support for the FARC against a government that was threatening their health and livelihood. All of these unintended consequences of successful U.S. antidrug policies worked together to provide the FARC with unprecedented opportunities to strengthen its decades-long insurgency against the Colombian state during the 1990s.

An examination of the literature on raw material exports and civil war, and a discussion of the unique character of the linkage between lootable wealth and civil war in countries that export illicit drugs, will establish the background for this study of how those unintended consequences benefited the FARC.

Illicit Drugs and Civil War

The recent growth of insurgencies fueled by "blood diamonds" in Africa, opium in Asia, and coca in South America has encouraged scholars to examine more closely the relationship between "lootable wealth" and civil war. Most of this work initially questioned whether these wars are driven by "greed" or "grievance." Economists at the World Bank produced one of the most influential early studies of this issue, arguing that rebellion is driven by "greed" and should be considered a form of "organized crime," which "generates its income from extortion" (Collier and Hoeffler

2000, 3). They found a consistent relationship between primary commodity exports as a percentage of gross domestic product and the onset of civil war over the period 1960–99. This occurred, they argue, because primary commodity exports are an ideal target for extortion; production cannot be easily moved to a safer location to avoid predation.

In contrast, explanations that focus on "grievance" argue that the inequitable distribution of resources, displacement of local communities, and environmental degradation that often accompanies the exploitation of raw materials generate considerable opposition to the firms, communities, and governments that benefit from the export sectors. This opposition is often reflected in the swelling ranks of insurgent movements (Klare 2001).

Increasingly, research is moving beyond the greed versus grievance dichotomy to argue that raw material exports affect civil wars primarily by shifting the balance of power between governments and insurgents. Some natural resources reduce the effectiveness of states in their wars against insurgents. Fearon and Laitin (2003), for example, argue that oil wealth is related to the onset of civil war because such wealth systematically undermines state capacity. Other natural resources can increase the resources available to insurgent movements. Thus, Ross (2004) finds that the presence of particular types of raw materials lengthens the duration of civil wars by providing resources that allow the weaker parties in wars, usually insurgent movements, to strengthen their capabilities.

Ross (2003) also points to three characteristics of natural resources that shape the ability of insurgent movements to take advantage of them: lootability, obstructability, and legality. The more capital- and skill-intensive the extraction of raw materials becomes, the more difficult it is for insurgent movements to provide the security guarantees that firms will require to invest in the development of such resources. Conversely, the more lootable resources are, or the easier it is to extract and transport resources with small teams of unskilled workers, the easier it is for insurgents to benefit from the production of such resources in territories they control. Ross argues that as a general rule, easily obstructable resources, such as oil that must pass through a lengthy pipeline, can allow insurgents to strengthen their capabilities through extortion. If insurgents control resources that are difficult to obstruct because of their high value-to-weight ratio, such as alluvial diamonds or illicit drugs, the capabilities of insurgent movements should be enhanced.

Snyder (2003) builds on Ross's final point. The illegality of illicit drugs makes it extremely difficult to create stable public-private partnerships to manage the industry. Any state that formally embraced cocaine or heroin production would become a pariah in the international community. Even those who built informal public-private partnerships for the extraction of illicit drugs would be subject to attacks by the international community for the corruption of their political system. Therefore, private actors are likely to control illicit drug industries, and governments are likely to face extraordinary external pressure to attack those private actors.

Thus, among primary product exports, coca is among the most likely to benefit insurgent movements. It is relatively easy to loot because it can be extracted and transported by small teams of unskilled workers. The ease with which private actors can enter the market makes it more difficult for the state to control production directly, compared to oil or minerals that must be deep-mined. The high value-to-weight ratio for the finished product makes it difficult for governments to obstruct the transport of cocaine.

These physical characteristics of coca as a commodity, however, are much less important than the global political and legal context in which it is produced and distributed. Coca is a valuable resource worth looting because it is illegal. The global prohibition regime for cocaine makes the market for this product unlike those for legally produced goods. Even though peasant producers and local processors receive only a small proportion of the profit from the cocaine market, the illegality of coca means that they reap substantially more from producing this commodity than from any other crop. This, in turn, provides greater opportunities for insurgent movements to extract significant resources than they have for other agricultural commodities; if not from cultivators, then from those who purchase and process the commodity.

To fully understand the relationship between coca and civil war, therefore, we must examine the global prohibition regime against cocaine and the antidrug policies of its leader, the United States. Decades of research on U.S. drug wars have demonstrated that U.S. antidrug policies have only a limited impact on the amount of illicit drugs reaching the U.S. market. The profits to be earned are so immense that drug traffickers usually find ways to supply the market regardless of how many resources the United States puts in place to slow the tide. The "balloon effect" guarantees that as cultivation is eradicated in one country or region, it merely reappears in another country or region. As some trafficking routes are closed down, new ones are opened up (Bagley and Tokatlian 1992; Stares 1996; Bertram et al. 1996; Clawson and Lee 1996; Andreas 2000; Leogrande and Sharpe 2000; Carpenter 2003).

The balloon effect means that while U.S. antidrug policies are unlikely to reduce the amount of drugs that enter the U.S. market over the long term, they can have a huge impact on the distribution of profits from the drug trade. Those policies can choose who will benefit through their choices of which actors to attack in the drug war. The selection process works both among and within countries, suggesting the following arguments.

- The more intently the United States focuses on a particular source country, the more likely it is that drug production and profits will shift to other countries. This shift is likely to increase the intensity of armed conflict in the new source countries.
- The more intently the United States focuses on a specific source country, the more difficult it is for governments in that country to work out informal public-private partnerships, and the more likely it is that private armed actors will benefit disproportionately from drug profits.
- The more intently the United States focuses on a particular set of private actors in a particular country, the more likely it is that other actors will derive profits from the drug trade. Two sets of armed actors are crucial players: criminal organizations and insurgent movements. If the United States focuses its attacks on criminal organizations, then insurgent movements benefit. If the United States focuses its attacks on insurgent movements, criminal organizations will be strengthened. U.S. policy can even select within each category: attacking one criminal organization can empower others; attacking one insurgent group can strengthen other insurgent groups.

Colombia provides an excellent case for understanding these dynamics because excellent scholarship already exists on the paradoxical nature of U.S. antidrug policies in the Andes and on the relationship between coca and civil war in Colombia. No study, however, has fully connected those literatures by systematically linking U.S. antidrug policies to the war.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the FARC is now driven by greed rather than grievances. Officially inaugurated in 1964, the FARC existed long before the advent of the cocaine industry in Colombia (Pizarro 1991). Therefore, the greed argument related to illicit drugs cannot explain the origins of the movement. The FARC is still a campesino-based, revolutionary organization bent on achieving national power and building some form of socialist system in Colombia (Vargas 1998a, 1999; Molano 2000; Ferro and Uribe 2002). Although money extracted from the drug industry ensures that the insurgents are increasingly well cared for, the FARC still does not pay its leaders or soldiers formal salaries (Ferro and Uribe 2002, 90). These are not characteristics one would expect to find in a purely greed-driven rebellion. There is some evidence that the dramatic increase in coca financing has made it more difficult for the FARC to control its rapidly expanding organization and to ensure that new members are receiving proper ideological formation, but it is not clear that these developing trends are important for understanding the FARC's increasing strength during the 1990s (Ferro and Uribe 2002, 57–62; 81–87).

Grievances related to the coca industry, in contrast, may indeed have strengthened the FARC. One of the central antidrug policies pushed by the United States is the eradication of coca fields. This has clearly engendered significant opposition to the Colombian government among coca growers, which may have driven some campesinos to turn to the FARC for protection.

For the most part, however, it can be argued that illicit drugs and U.S. antidrug policies have shaped the Colombian civil war by shifting the balance of power among the combatants. The destruction of the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia during the early 1990s benefited the FARC in several ways. The Medellín cartel had developed powerful paramilitary forces during the 1980s, which had decimated the FARC's political front, the Patriotic Union (UP), and challenged its military forces in many regions of the country. The dismantling of the Medellín cartel severely weakened what had been a powerful military opponent of the FARC. The Cali cartel and the more decentralized criminal networks that replaced it found it more prudent to pay taxes to the FARC than to fight.

The destruction of the cartels, furthermore, contributed to the shift of coca cultivation from Peru to Colombia, because the decentralized criminal networks found it easier to gather their raw materials from local producers. This increased the FARC's opportunities to tax the industry. The successful disruption of air transport of coca from Peru to processing facilities in Colombia also abetted that shift.

During the 1970s and part of the 1980s, the United States was sufficiently disengaged from Colombian politics that local government officials were able to work out a variety of informal public-private "understandings" for the management of the cocaine industry. As Colombia became the focal point of U.S. antidrug policies, however, it became increasingly difficult to sustain these relationships, which U.S. policymakers and many Colombians condemned as corrupt. Any evidence of public collaboration with drug traffickers could lead to significant punishment by the United States. This was demonstrated especially in the U.S. "decertification" of Colombia in 1996–97, during the Ernesto Samper administration, as the United States cut off some aid to Colombia after determining that it was not sufficiently cooperative in fighting the drug war.

The Destruction of the Medellín Cartel

On August 18, 1989, assassins killed Liberal Party presidential candidate Luis Galán, the first of three presidential candidates to be murdered before the 1990 presidential election. President Virgilio Barco responded by going to war against Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel. An elite police unit, the Search Block, was created to launch a massive manhunt. Millions of dollars in assets belonging to cartel members were confiscated. More than 20 cartel members were captured and extradited to the United States under an emergency decree.

Government forces killed José Rodríguez Gacha, the second most important figure in the Medellín cartel, in December 1989. Pablo Escobar responded by launching an urban bombing campaign that killed hundreds of civilians, an assassination campaign against Colombian police units in Medellín, and a rash of kidnappings of family members of the Colombian political and economic elite.

The United States was an active participant in the battle against Pablo Escobar. Less than a month after Galán's murder, U.S. President George H. W. Bush unveiled his Andean Initiative, which called for a major increase in U.S. military assistance to the governments of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia to fight their wars against drug traffickers (Bowden 2001, 64–65; Bagley and Walker 1994). The United States sent $65 million in emergency counternarcotics assistance to Colombia in the immediate aftermath of Galán's death (up from the budgeted $11.5 million). Military, economic, law enforcement, and DEA assistance increased under the Andean Initiative from $22.8 million in fiscal year 1989 to $134.9 million by 1991 (Crandall 2002, 35). In 1989 and 1990, the United States worked closely with the Colombian police and armed forces in their efforts to apprehend Escobar and dismantle the Medellín cartel, providing crucial training, equipment, and telecommunications intelligence information to Colombian authorities (Bowden 2001, 70–87).

After nearly two years of unsuccessful struggle, newly elected President César Gaviria negotiated an agreement in June 1991 in which Escobar would agree to turn himself in, plead guilty to a single charge, and spend several years in a luxurious jail of his own construction. When the Colombian public learned of the Escobar's luxury "prison" and the lax conditions of his incarceration (he routinely spent time at soccer matches and nightclubs in Medellín), public outrage provoked a government effort to take control of the prison, which led to Escobar's escape in July 1992. The government responded by sending the Search Block back into the field to apprehend Escobar and destroy the Medellín cartel, this time with the assistance of members of the U.S. Delta Force as trainers and a clandestine paramilitary group that called itself *Los Pepes*, People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar (Bowden 2001, 139–59). In December 1993, the Search Block killed Escobar. By the end of that year, the Colombian government, with U.S. assistance, had effectively destroyed the Medellín cartel.

The destruction of the Medellín cartel did not, in and of itself, fundamentally transform the political economy of cocaine in Colombia.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, most coca was cultivated in Bolivia and Peru and shipped to Colombia for processing, transportation, and distribution to the U.S. and European markets. Because of its illegality, the vast majority of the profits of the cocaine industry are reaped in the transportation and distribution phases, which the Medellín cartel dominated during the 1980s (Thoumi 2003). As Medellín withered under the government's offensive of the early 1990s, an alternative cartel based in Cali increasingly took over responsibility for the transportation and distribution of Andean cocaine. Indeed, the Cali cartel was an ally of the Colombian government in its offensive against Escobar's organization (Bowden 2001, 167–200). The shift from Medellín to Cali eventually would have very important implications for the FARC.

As Escobar and his allies amassed billions of dollars during the 1980s, they invested in millions of acres of prime cattle-grazing lands, becoming a major part of Colombia's agrarian elite in a short time (Vargas 1998b; Richani 2002, 117–19). The FARC attempted to extract taxes from the new landlords using techniques it had successfully used with the existing landed elite: threatening retribution if those elites refused to pay, or kidnapping for ransom. Instead of paying the FARC, however, the new landlords, led by Rodríguez Gacha, created powerful paramilitary forces that attacked the FARC and its civilian allies in the Patriotic Union (Gugliotta 1992, 113; Restrepo 2001). In 1988 alone, approximately two hundred leaders of the UP were assassinated. By the early 1990s, the murder of more than three thousand UP mayors, municipal council members, senators, and presidential candidates had effectively wiped out the UP as a viable political actor (Vargas 1998a).

During this same time, paramilitary groups pushed the FARC almost entirely out of the Middle Magdalena Valley, where it had maintained a strong presence since the 1960s (Clawson and Lee 1996, 186–90). Paramilitary groups challenged the FARC throughout rural areas in northern Colombia, including Antioquia, Córdoba, Uraba, Puerto Boyaca, and Meta (Richani 2002, 122–24).

Thus, the FARC, which had roughly 3,600 combatants in 32 fronts in 1986 (Vargas 1999), grew somewhat by the end of the decade, but its battles with the paramilitary groups and its inability to extract taxes from the cartel members limited that growth. The killing of Rodríguez Gacha in 1989 and the subsequent destruction of the Medellín cartel weakened these paramilitary forces during the early 1990s, which allowed the FARC to reestablish itself in areas from which it had been excluded during the 1980s. Indeed, the FARC launched a major offensive in the Middle Magdalena Valley in 1990, in the midst of the government offensive against Escobar (Clawson and Lee 1996, 100). By the end of the 1990s, the FARC had built eight fronts in the Middle Magdalena Valley and had strengthened its presence throughout areas that had been dominated by paramilitary groups during the late 1980s (Ferro and Uribe 2002, 52).

The Medellín cartel had declared war on the Colombian state, as well as on the FARC, and had been defeated. The Cali cartel was determined to avoid making the same mistake. Its leaders kept a lower profile. Where Medellín had forged right-wing paramilitary forces to attack the FARC, Cali avoided creating its own overt paramilitary armies (Clawson and Lee 1996, 190). This meant, at least, that the Cali cartel did not engage in armed warfare against the FARC. At most, it meant that Cali was willing to pay the taxes the FARC tried to impose on the cocaine industry. Thus, the extraordinary success of U.S. antidrug policy represented by the destruction of the Medellín cartel provided the FARC with an important opportunity to expand its power, because it removed one of its principal political-military competitors in the Colombian countryside. The FARC was thereby able to increase its forces to approximately 7,000 combatants in 60 fronts by 1995 (Vargas 1999, 7).

The Cali Cartel and Coca Cultivation

In June 1994, Ernesto Samper, candidate of the Liberal Party, narrowly defeated his Conservative challenger, Andrés Pastrana, by 50.41 percent to 48.06 percent of the popular vote. Immediately after the election, "narcocassettes" were released to the press. These tapes contained a conversation between two Cali drug lords, the brothers Miguel and Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, alleging that they had donated several million dollars to the Liberal Party campaign. The contribution represented an attempt to forge an informal public-private partnership to manage the cocaine industry. The Cali cartel would use cocaine profits to pay for politicians' electoral campaigns if those officials, once elected, would acquiesce to the cartel's control of the industry or, if the state pursued prosecution, at least guarantee light prison sentences in Colombia rather than extradition to the United States.

The outrage generated by the allegations on the narcocassettes made it impossible for President Samper to embrace any such understanding with the leaders of the Cali cartel. Instead, Samper was compelled by domestic and international pressure to enact a hardline drug policy that would ultimately transform Colombia's political and economic landscape in the FARC's favor. By pushing the Samper administration to dismantle the Cali cartel, the United States once again increased the FARC's ability to extract resources from the cocaine industry.

The release of the narcocassettes triggered a corruption scandal that would plague the Samper administration throughout its four-year term. By 1997, a dozen members of Congress, the attorney general, and the defense minister had been jailed. The president was tried by Congress and acquitted on grounds that he had no knowledge that drug money had entered his campaign, although most Colombians doubted that this was true (Thoumi 2003, 211–14). The extraordinary political fallout from this scandal is somewhat surprising, given that drug money had long played a crucial role in funding political campaigns in Colombia (Thoumi 2003, 219–27). The reaction partly reflected a growing domestic consensus that the corruption of the political system by drug money was no longer acceptable. The Cali cartel's contributions may have been decisive in a very close electoral campaign; this also partly explains the reaction (Thoumi 2003, 225). The Samper administration might have contained any controversy over the campaign contributions if the narcocassettes had not been released. In this context, it is crucial to note that it was an employee of the U.S. government, Drug Enforcement Administration agent Joe Toft, who released the tapes to the press (Bowden 2001, 272). Thus, an agent of the U.S. government triggered the crisis that would make it impossible for the Samper administration to reach an informal understanding with the Cali cartel for the management of the cocaine industry.

In the months following the release of the narcocassettes, the U.S. government put enormous pressure on Samper to place the Cali cartel leaders behind bars, and also to carry out an aerial fumigation campaign in southern Colombia (Crandall 2002, 101–42). Much of this pressure emanated from the U.S. Congress, as the new Republican majority, especially Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Jesse Helms, decided to make an issue of President Bill Clinton's weakness in fighting the drug war (Crandall 2002, 105, 112). In 1995, the Clinton administration symbolically expressed its discontent with Samper by failing to certify that Colombia was sufficiently cooperative in fighting the drug war. Clinton issued a national interest waiver, however, which allowed the United States to continue granting all forms of assistance to Colombia. That assistance, which had risen to more than $100 million annually in the early 1990s, had been cut to $30 million by 1995 (Serafino 2001, 32). This cut in aid reflected both a general reorientation of U.S. antidrug policies under the Clinton administration and U.S. displeasure with President Samper. In 1996 and 1997, President Clinton decertified Colombia without a national security waiver, excluding Colombia from a variety of assistance programs not directly tied to counternarcotics efforts. In 1996, Samper became only the second democratically elected leader to be denied a visa to visit the United States.

The Samper administration responded to these pressures by acting decisively to break up the Cali cartel. Launching an all-out campaign to capture the cartel's leaders, in May 1995 Samper sent three thousand soldiers on a drug lord mansion raid, successfully confiscating a multitude of computers and cellular telephones believed to be integral to the syndicate's communications network. Simultaneously, thousands of "wanted" posters appeared, offering up to US$1.7 million for the apprehension of any of the seven men believed to be the cartel's elite. By August, six of these fugitives were behind bars, including the infamous Rodríguez Orejuela brothers.

With its international assets frozen and its ringleaders in jail, this series of arrests marked the demise of the Cali cartel and provided evidence of the success of the U.S. drug certification process in compelling target states to adopt more vigorous antidrug policies. The more Samper did to fight drug trafficking to "prove his enemies wrong," according to his high commissioner for peace, Daniel García-Peña, the harder U.S. officials pushed him to do more (Crandall 2002, 114).

An unintended consequence of this successful policy was that it allowed the FARC to extract more resources from the cocaine industry. The decapitation of the Cali cartel left a power vacuum soon filled by both small-scale competitors and Cali "lieutenants" well trained in the techniques of narcotics trafficking. Learning from the jailed Cali leaders' mistakes, a line of loosely connected midlevel professionals, many involved in the tasks of money laundering, recordkeeping, and information processing, stood ready to adopt a subtler approach to the business. The breakup of the cartels left the drug industry's increasingly diversified entrepreneurs without the capacity to import mass quantities of coca leaves. According to Bagley, "You've got a much more decentralized situation with a lot more actors, well over 100, and that has increased demand . . . they don't have the capital or the equipment to fly coca in from Peru or Bolivia" (quoted in Rohter 1999). Thus the transformation of the drug business into an increasingly fragmented and small-scale industry made it substantially more vulnerable to taxation by the FARC (Thoumi 2003, 135–36).

These constraints were compounded dramatically by Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori's decision in 1994 to have Peru's armed forces shoot down planes that transported coca from Peruvian fields to Colombian drug labs (Kay 1999). The full implementation of this policy was postponed until the middle of 1995, first because the U.S. Defense Department decided not to use U.S. radar and reconnaissance capabilities to identify suspect aircraft, due to legal liability questions; and later because of the Peru-Ecuador border conflict, which monopolized Peruvian attention in late 1994 and early 1995. By mid-1995, however, the Peruvian air force had shot down several drug planes, sending a message to traffickers that transporting Peruvian coca to Colombia would be an increasingly costly and dangerous enterprise (Clawson and Lee 1996, 228–30).

This change occurred at precisely the same time that the Cali cartel was being replaced by smaller-scale operations, which lacked the capital to reconstruct the extensive transportation networks of the big cartels. Coca prices collapsed in Peru, declining by 90 percent between November 1994 and July 1995 (Clawson and Lee 1996, 138–39). Thus, the simultaneous destruction of the Cali cartel and the Peruvian attacks on air transport led to a dramatic shift in coca cultivation from Peru to Colombia during the latter half of the 1990s, as the new players in the drug industry developed cheaper and more accessible sources of coca.

As table 1 indicates, only about 20 percent of the region's coca was grown in Colombia in 1993. By the end of the decade, cultivation had quadrupled, and Colombia was growing nearly 75 percent of the region's coca. Most of Colombian coca cultivation is concentrated in the southern provinces of Caqueta, Guaviare, and Putumayo, which are longtime FARC strongholds (Richani 2002, 95; Ferro and Uribe 2002). The movement of coca cultivation to FARC-controlled areas dramatically increased the FARC's ability to tax the entire industry.

Since its inception, the FARC's social base has been peasants in rural areas of recent colonization, especially southern Colombia (Pizarro 1991). The FARC has protected these groups from appropriation of their land by large landowners and has compelled the landlords to pay fair wages. As these peasants have turned to coca cultivation over the past decade, either on their own lands or by working on coca plantations, the FARC has continued this tradition, using its forces to compel narcotraffickers to pay market prices for coca leaves and labor (Richani 2002, 70–73). It has instituted a progressive taxation system in the coca-growing regions, exempting some peasant small producers and coca workers from paying taxes but charging roughly a 10 percent tax on large coca plantations and on all aspects of the local industry, including the production of coca paste and cocaine from coca paste, the import of processing chemicals, and the transport of coca by air out of the region.

During the 1980s, the FARC collected most of its revenues through kidnapping and extortion. During the 1990s, taxes on the cocaine industry generated an increasing proportion of the FARC's revenues. Estimates of the percentage of the FARC's roughly $500 million annual budget that comes from taxation of the coca industry range from 40 percent to 70 percent (Thoumi 2003, 104–6; Richani 2002, 64). In recent years, the FARC appears to have deepened its participation in the cocaine industry by encouraging increased coca-growing activities in areas it controls, suppressing intermediaries, forcing the monopolization of coca leaf purchases, building landing strips on the group's own property, and constructing its own coca paste factories (Suárez 2000, 600; Ferro and Uribe 2002, 97).

The implications for the FARC have been immense. Being able to regulate coca production and sell protection to the growers, the rebels have found a powerful niche in a market offering extraordinary prosperity for an insurgent movement. The FARC's narcotics-based income is

Table 1. Estimated Annual Coca Cultivation (in hectares)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Peru	108,800	108,600	115,300	95,659	72,262	58,825	52,500	40,200	37,900
Bolivia	49,597	49,158	54,093	55,612	52,826	49,621	38,799	22,253	19,900
Colombia	40,493	49,610	59,650	72,800	98,500	101,800	165,746	183,200	TBD

Source: U.S. Department of State 2002

perhaps the single most important factor that has allowed the group not only to survive, but also to intensify its armed campaign in the 1990s.

U.S. pressure to conduct aerial fumigation of coca crops strengthened FARC's rural coca-growing social base. In response to U.S. pressure, Colombia launched a major aerial fumigation campaign against coca fields, eradicating more coca fields in 1994 than in the previous four years combined. By 1995, it had expanded this program to fumigate nearly 25,000 hectares, roughly one-third of Colombia's coca fields (Clawson and Lee 1996, 219). The Samper government's counternarcotics policies antagonized relations with Colombia's rural population, lending political ammunition to the FARC. By the mid-1990s, the growth of Colombian coca production was providing jobs to hundreds of thousands of peasants, a trend that irreconcilably conflicted with the Samper government's need to appease the U.S. government's calls for aerial eradication. Paralleling the 1996 increase in FARC attacks, approximately two hundred thousand laborers dependent on coca cultivation staged a series of demonstrations and work stoppages (often met with violent repression) to protest fumigation efforts destroying both legal and illegal crops (Molano 2000). These FARC-supported demonstrations provide the strongest evidence that the FARC has been able to garner some support among campesinos as a result of the government's eradication policies. The continuation of those policies, which inevitably raised the production costs for rural peasants, only further eroded the national government's credibility. Vargas observes,

> The government's failure to adequately address illicit crop cultivation contributes to civilian support of the guerrillas. Settlers in the area view the guerrillas as the only response to the attack on their lives and livelihood through aerial fumigation of coca and poppy fields and judicial proceedings. The government's perception of illicit cultivation as solely a source of funding for the guerrillas, and not also as the only means of support for large sectors of the peasant population, contributes to social conflict and polarization. (Vargas 1999, 7)

How much aerial fumigation has increased popular support for the FARC is unclear. Such policies have certainly decreased the popularity and legitimacy of the state in coca-growing areas, but not all those who have become disenchanted with the state have turned to the FARC. Indeed, the FARC's efforts to restrict the growth of independent groups in civil society and to disrupt alternative development schemes in areas it controls have limited its popular support in many areas (Vargas 2003).

Thus, by the mid-1990s, successful U.S. antidrug policies had managed to destroy one of the FARC's principal military-political competitors, expand substantially the resources the FARC could extract from the cocaine industry, and alienate hundreds of thousands of Colombian campesinos in FARC strongholds. As the FARC took advantage of these opportunities to expand its power, U.S. assistance to Colombia reached its lowest level since the 1980s. The United States provided only $30 million to $38 million in assistance per year in fiscal years 1994 to 1996. U.S. aid did not reach 1990's level of over $100 million again until fiscal year 1998 (Serafino 2001, 32). Partly as a consequence of declining U.S. assistance, Colombian defense spending was reduced to 1.8 percent of GDP in 1994, the lowest figure in the 1990s (Richani 2002, 129). During this time, Colombia's armed forces, which had settled into a comfortable containment strategy in relation to the FARC, found themselves unprepared to meet the challenge of the new, more powerful insurgency (Richani 2002, 37–58). The Colombian armed forces would not gain the resources, equipment, and skills necessary to turn the tide against the FARC until the new millennium. By that time, the FARC had more than doubled its forces from 1995 levels to more than 18,000 combatants, operating throughout the country (Richani 2002, 74).

No Longer the FARC's Best Friend

Today the FARC is the principal target of a massive, U.S.-financed counterinsurgency campaign. In fiscal year 1999, the United States expanded its assistance to Colombia to $317 million. The following year, the Clinton administration unveiled Plan Colombia, in cooperation with Colombian president Andrés Pastrana, and provided nearly $1 billion to Colombia in 2000 alone. The George W. Bush administration continues to finance this war at the rate of roughly $750 million per year (CIP 2004). Although the Clinton administration emphasized that this aid was aimed primarily at capturing drug traffickers, the Colombian police and army units that received the aid did not draw meaningful distinctions between counternarcotics and counterinsurgent operations. They saw these missions as fundamentally fused in the war against the FARC. In 2002, the United States formally stopped insisting that counternarcotics assistance not be used for counterinsurgency war, as the war against the FARC became one front in the broader war on terror (Isacson 2003).

Plan Colombia has been criticized for its overreliance on military solutions and aerial eradication to fight drug trafficking and its failure to include sufficient economic development assistance to win the "hearts and minds" of Colombian campesinos. Many observers fear that a U.S. embrace of an increasingly brutal counterinsurgent war unlikely to achieve a decisive victory will lead to a Vietnam-style quagmire while having no significant impact on the price and availability of cocaine in the United States (Isacson 2003). These critiques have merit. Indeed, the continued use of aerial fumigation and the violence of the counterinsurgency war could continue to strengthen the social bases of the FARC.

Nevertheless, the war is inflicting considerable costs on the FARC and reducing its ability to extract resources from the cocaine industry to sustain its war efforts. While decisive victory is unlikely, Plan Colombia arguably will succeed in blunting the FARC's growth and reducing its power. This is consistent with the logic of the argument in this study, which suggests that the principal impact of U.S. antidrug policies on civil wars is to shift the balance of power among combatants based on whom the United States decides to punish, or not to punish, for participating in the drug trade.

While the FARC has been the most recent principal target, the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC) has been a principal beneficiary. A coalition forged in the mid-1990s by Carlos Castaño partly from the paramilitary groups that were severely weakened by the attacks on the Medellín cartel, the AUC has grown from a couple of thousand fighters to a well-equipped and trained national force of nearly 15,000 soldiers, with a budget in excess of $100 million (WOLA 2002, 7; Richani 2002, 123–24). Although the AUC raises considerable money by extracting protection rents from legitimate businesses, approximately 80 percent of its resources are derived from the cocaine trade (Richani 2002, 109). As with the FARC, the majority of these resources are derived from taxes imposed on actors in all parts of the industry. While the FARC is still largely an insurgent organization that engages in criminal activity to advance its political agenda, the AUC represents a fusion of paramilitary and criminal organizations, which makes it difficult to discern the precise combination of criminal greed and political agenda that drives the group.

The growth of the AUC partly reflects the same dynamics and opportunities that generated the FARC's growth during the 1990s. To a large extent, however, the AUC has grown by seizing coca-producing territory controlled by the FARC and another leftist insurgent group, the National Liberation Army (ELN). This territorial expansion has taken place in cooperation with elements of the Colombian armed forces as part of a coordinated counterinsurgency campaign (Vargas 1998b; Human Rights Watch 2001). The AUC expanded into southern Colombia in the late 1990s in the wake of President Pastrana's decision to remove Colombian troops from a large zone as a good faith gesture to jump-start peace negotiations with the FARC, a decision opposed by many in the armed forces (Vargas 2003).

The military units that have been working with the AUC to defeat the FARC are increasingly trained and funded by the United States. Thus the U.S. decision to focus its antidrug efforts on funding a counterinsurgency campaign to defeat the FARC has helped generate a powerful new player in the cocaine industry. The U.S. toleration of the alliance between the AUC and the Colombian military has allowed the AUC to benefit from the drug trade with relative impunity. While it would be extremely difficult to argue that the United States intended to strengthen the FARC during the 1990s, it is not as surprising that the United States would support a right-wing paramilitary group fighting leftist insurgents. The United States often at least tacitly supported such groups while bankrolling anticommunist counterinsurgency wars in the past. The expansion of the AUC's reach in southern Colombia has clearly blunted the FARC's growth. U.S. policymakers have welcomed such an outcome, even if they have been uncomfortable with the brutal tactics used by the AUC to achieve it. Thus it is more difficult to make a case that the strengthening of the AUC was an unintended consequence of U.S. antidrug policies.

In many ways, the May 2002 election of President Alvaro Uribe represents the pinnacle of the AUC's power. Some suggest that Uribe has ties with AUC leaders that go back to his days as a young politician in Medellín (Contreras and Garavito 2002). AUC leaders claim that its partisans were elected to a third of the congressional seats contested just before the presidential election. Uribe's Plan Patriota has pushed an unrelenting hard line and an intensification of the counterinsurgency war against the FARC. Peace talks with the FARC were cut off. Meanwhile, Uribe raised the AUC to the formal status of combatant in the civil war and initiated peace talks with the paramilitaries. In December 2003, nearly a thousand AUC fighters formally laid down their arms in what Uribe billed as the first step in a peace process that would lead to a full demobilization of the AUC. In the summer of 2004, safe havens for the AUC were established, where troops would congregate for eventual demobilization. In August 2004, AUC leaders were invited to speak to the Colombian congress.

The George W. Bush administration has been a strong champion of Uribe's policies of "democratic security" and has continued the high levels of military assistance initiated by the Clinton administration. It has been uncomfortable, however, with the AUC and Uribe's peace negotiations with the paramilitaries. On September 10, 2001, the United States officially labeled the AUC a terrorist organization, giving it the same status as the FARC and ELN. In September 2002, the U.S. Justice Department indicted AUC leaders Castaño and Salvatore Mancuso on drug charges and asked the newly inaugurated President Uribe to extradite them to the United States for prosecution. In May 2004, the Justice Department demanded the extradition of six paramilitary leaders on drug charges, and U.S. ambassador William Wood complained that the peace process with the AUC did not seem to be "in favor of peace, but rather in favor of drug traffickers" (Mitchell 2004). When the paramilitary leaders spoke to the Colombian congress, Wood described the appearance as "scandalous": "It's curious that in the Congress there was a meeting yesterday between those who make the laws every day and those who break them every day. I don't understand that" (*Notisur* 2004).

As of this writing, the United States has been unwilling to back up this rhetoric with significant aid sanctions or conditionality targeting the Colombian government. As drug traffickers like Don Berna Murillo replace more political leaders like Castaño in the AUC hierarchy, however (Murillo is rumored to have had Castaño assassinated), the situation may seriously strain the Bush administration's relationship with the Uribe government. In this context, it is unclear how much longer the U.S. government will continue to be the AUC's "best friend" by tacitly accepting its drug trafficking in return for participation in the counterinsurgency war against the FARC. As the United States increasingly targets both the FARC and the AUC, the policy may lead to a strengthening of more purely criminal organizations in the cocaine industry, albeit the more circumspect, decentralized networks of the contemporary era rather than the major cartels of the 1980s.

CONCLUSIONS

Many analysts have argued that the war on drugs has been a strategic failure. It has not reduced consumption in the United States, nor has it lowered the price of the final product on U.S. streets. There is no clear relationship between the amount of resources expended on the drug war and the reduction of drug use in the United States. But the Colombian experience demonstrates that this strategic failure has not been for lack of tactical successes, especially in the early 1990s. The U.S. government demonstrated that it was willing and able to make the fight against drugs the highest priority in its relationship with a state that had historically been a strong ally and trade partner. It successfully pressured that government to dismantle the strongest drug-trafficking cartels in the Americas. U.S.-supported aerial interdiction helped to reduce coca cultivation in Peru, the country that had been the number-one coca producer in the world. The United States bankrolled the eradication of tens of thousands of hectares of coca in Colombia through aerial fumigation. Yet all these tactical successes did not bring strategic victory. Instead, they helped breathe new life into a decades-long civil war in Colombia. Today the FARC possesses unprecedented resources to prosecute its war against the Colombian government. Successful U.S. antidrug policies played a crucial role in making this possible.

The Colombian experience clearly illustrates the need to construct a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between raw material exports and civil war. This case demonstrates that it is not the presence or absence of such resources that fuels such wars but the political and economic organization of the extraction of such lootable wealth. U.S. antidrug policies make it extremely difficult for the Colombian government to forge a durable public-private partnership for the management of the cocaine industry. This is likely to make war a constant of Colombian political life for the foreseeable future, if not against the FARC, then against other actors, like the AUC, that take advantage of the opportunities provided by a new set of ephemeral successes, even if those successes might push the FARC back to the low-level insurgency that it had sustained before the 1990s.

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