



Adjunct Professor of International Affairs

October 3, 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR: **COLONEL MIKE MEESE**
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CC: **COLONEL CINDY JEBB**
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SUBJECT: After Action Report—General Barry R McCaffrey USA (Ret)
 Adjunct Professor of International Affairs---USMA
 VISIT COLOMBIA 23-26 September 2007

1. PURPOSE: This memo provides an independent strategic and operational assessment of security operations, the drug situation, the national economic situation, and human rights challenges in Colombia in support of US Southern Command. Be glad to provide Faculty Seminar and Cadet Class AAR on this report during this Semester or at your convenience.

2. SOURCES:

A. Colombian Officials and Visits:

- 1.) **President Alvaro Uribe Vélez:** Private one-on-one Meeting. Also private briefing by President's team.
- 2.) **Minister of Defense, Mr. Juan Manuel Santos:** Briefings by Minister of Defense and senior staff.
- 3.) **High Presidential Counselor for the Social and Economic Reintegration for the Groups in Arms, Mr. Frank Pearl:** Private Dinner at Ambassador's Residence.
- 4.) **Vice Minister of Exterior Relations, Mr. Camilo Reyes:** Private briefing.
- 5.) **Vice Minister of Defense for Politics and International Affairs, Mr. Sergio Jaramillo:** Private Monday working lunch meeting.
- 6.) **Vice Minister of Defense for Strategy and Planning, Mr. Juan Carlos Pinzón:** Private dinner Sunday evening.
- 7.) **Minister of the Treasury and Public Credit, Mr. Oscar Ivan Zuluaga:** Private Dinner, Tuesday evening, Hotel Porton de Bogota.
- 8.) **Mayor of Pitalito, Gladys Canacué Medina:** Visit to Pitalito, Huila. One-on-one Meeting. Visit to APROFRUSA and Altos de Magdalena Community Center.
- 9.) **Commander General of Colombian Armed Forces, GEN Freddy Padilla de León:** Meeting - Colombian Campaign Plan Overview.

- 10.) **Deputy Commandant of the Colombian Armed Forces, ALMD David Rene Moreno:** Meeting - Colombian Campaign Plan Overview.
- 11.) **Commanding General, Joint Task Force Omega, BG Alejandro Navas:** Joint Task Force – Omega Session.
- 12.) **Commandant– Counter-narcotics Brigade (BRACNA), BG Luis Alberto Ardila:** Field visit and briefings senior leaders.
- 13.) **Chief J3, MG Gilberto Rocha:** Meeting - Colombian Campaign Plan Overview.
- 14.) **Chief-of-Staff JCS ALM David Rene Moreno:** Meeting - Colombian Campaign Plan Overview.
- 15.) **Inspector General, MG Eduardo Behar:** Meeting - Colombian Campaign Plan Overview.
- 16.) **United Nations Resident Human Rights Coordinator, Mr. Bruno Moro:** Briefings by Mr. Moro.
- 17.) **Leader of Joint Integral Counter-Narcotics Action, Jesus Alberto Bejarano:** Meeting - Colombian Campaign Plan Overview.
- 18.) **Director of Joint Operations, Juan Antonio Rairán:** Meeting - Colombian Campaign Plan Overview.
- 19.) **Colombian Commission of Jurists. Ms. Ana María Díaz:** Meeting - Human Rights Group/NGOs.
- 20.) **(Acting Commander) Sub-director National Police. BG Rafael Parra:** Meeting with Senior Staff, Colombian National Police.
- 21.) **Ministry of Exterior Relations Coordinator – US and Canada, Dr. Patricia Cortes Ortiz:** Private Meeting with President Uribe.
- 22.) **War College Director, BG Edgar Ceballos:** Colombian War College – Address to students of all courses. Met with Director one-on-one.
- 23.) **Advisors of the High Agency for the Peace -- Mr. Eduardo González, Mr. Alejandro Albarracín, Ms. Liliana Beayne:** Peace Commissioner Meeting.
- 24.) **Colombian Business leader. (R&O General Manager) Mrs. Angela Orozco:** Private Dinner, Tuesday evening, Hotel Porton de Bogota.
- 25.) **APROFRUSA (Association of Fruit Growers of Southern Huila):** Field visit to Fruit Growers Cooperatives.
- 26.) **Altos de Magdalena Community Center (Displaced Persons – Refugee Camp):** Built with USAID assistance by and for a community of 140 displaced families.

B. US Officials:

- 1.) **Ambassador Bill Brownfield, US Ambassador to Colombia:** One-on-One meeting at Ambassador's Residence. And Colonel Kevin Saderup--- the Military Group Commander.
- 2.) **Six hour Country Team Briefing upon Sunday Arrival– MILGP, Counter narcotics effort, NAS & POL Officer:** POL/MIL Scene Setter Brief led by Colonel Kevin Saderup and Ms. Cassandra Carraway. NAS Overview led by Mr. Perry Holloway.

- 3.) **Defense Attaché, COL Wilkens:** Country Team Working Breakfast with Ambassador's Team.
- 4.) **Deputy, Office of Regional Affairs, Mr. Tally:** Country Team Working Breakfast with Ambassador's Team.
- 5.) **Director, Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS), Mr. Holloway:** Country Team Working Breakfast with Ambassador's Team.
- 6.) **Mission Director, US Agency for International Development (USAID), Ms. Liliana Ayalde:** Country Team Working Breakfast with Ambassador's Team.
- 7.) **POL Counselor, Mr. Creamer:** Country Team Working Breakfast with Ambassador's Team. Private Dinner at Ambassador's Residence.
- 8.) **USAID, Deputy Director for Alternative Development, Mr. Jason Girard:** Field Visits -- USAID Alternative Development Project; Pitalito, Huila.
- 9.) **USAID Deputy Mission Director, Ms. Susan Reichle:** Field Visits -- USAID Alternative Development Project; Pitalito, Huila.
- 10.) **MILGP Deputy, COL Chris Skinner:** Private Dinner, Tuesday evening, Hotel Porton de Bogota.
- 11.) **Economic Counselor, Mr. Lawrence Gumbiner:** Country Team Working Breakfast with Ambassador's Team. Private Dinner, Tuesday evening, Hotel Porton de Bogota.

3. THE BOTTOM LINE:

A. VIOLENCE:

Since 2001, Colombia has accomplished dramatic and major improvements in: the reduction of violence-- both murders which are the lowest in 20 years (murders 28,837 in 2002 down to 17,479 in 2006)--- and kidnappings which are down by 80%; the economy has improved immeasurably in terms of GDP growth, the reduction of unemployment and the increase of foreign investment; 45,000 members of the Armed Illegal Groups which have plagued poor Colombia have been demobilized as these three principal threat organizations (AUC, FARC, ELN) have lost nearly all political credibility (13,761 desertions from all terror groups); and the human rights situation of the common people has dramatically changed for the better.

B. LEADERSHIP:

President Uribe has immense popularity in the country (75% favorable ratings) based on his visibility, competence, and credible hands on leadership. He was re-elected in May 2006 for a historical second term with 62% of the vote. This Harvard and Oxford educated lawyer is believed to be disciplined and ascetic in his lifestyle. His senior governmental team have accomplished near political miracles in using public office to: successfully negotiate with internal illegal criminal groups to minimize the trauma of Colombia's 42 year old bitter internal war (acts of terrorism are down 63% during his term in office) ; promote reconciliation of demobilized elements; open internal travel and road networks (for the first time in modern history ALL the major roads are now open for civilian travel); modify the legal system to move jurisdiction of human rights abuses to the civil courts; appointed the first civilian (woman) to head the military justice system; defused much of the international tension with the erratic and authoritarian Venezuelan regime; enhanced the effectiveness of the counter-drug campaign--- eliminated 66% of the opium production in the country; and engaged the wealthy sectors of the country to provide a \$3 billion + investment tax to increase the capacities of the nation's security forces.

C. SECURITY FORCES:

The Colombian Security Forces have dramatically increased in numbers (256,167 Police and Army total in 1998 prior to Plan Colombia--- to 395,293 in 2007), air mobility, training, leadership, and tactics. A small US (500+) military and civilian personnel Military Group provides training and liaison support. The US Plan Colombia provides 9% of the Colombian defense budget. The Colombian National Police are now for the first time in Colombia's modern history back as a law enforcement presence in all of the nation's 1,098 municipalities. The Army is increasingly composed of professional soldiers (conscription to be ended) with immeasurably better training and discipline. The Army is the most popular institution in the country (73%) --- except for the free press (75%). By contrast the AUC are at 1% favorable, the ELN at 4%, and the FARC at 3 %.

D. THE ECONOMY:

The Colombian economy has improved dramatically with GDP growth in excess of 8% compared to (-) 4.2% in 1999 the year prior to the initiation of "Plan Colombia." In two years inflation has dropped from 4.9% to 4.55%. Unemployment has dropped from 18% to 11.4% with 1.6 million new jobs in the formal economy. Foreign investment is returning—GE as an example will now come back to Colombia. Colombia is the fourth largest market for US goods in South America and bilateral trade between Colombia and the US has expanded by 70% in the past decade and is the same level as Russia. US exports to Colombia are up 29% in Jan-April 2007 alone. The US has a huge trade surplus with Colombia---with non-energy trade up 134% Jan-April 2007. The US provided \$156 million in FY07 economic and social aid.

E. THE CRIMINAL DRUG THREAT:

The illegal drug situation remains a major challenge to Colombia with continued huge levels of production of cocaine which fuels terrible levels of drug criminal violence, addiction, corruption, arms smuggling, and distortion of the economy. 90% Of the cocaine consumed in the US comes from Colombia. If the massive illegal money from the drug criminal groups was stopped---Colombia would see a wave of relief and recovery from the problems that beset the people. The statistics of drug production are in some dispute with UN and CIA numbers showing radically different pictures. My own determination is that cocaine production in terms of area under cultivation is probably down by a third--- but much more wide-spread, with multiple crops (as many as six a year), and with much better organized FARC control and support of cultivation. In 2006 they eradicated 210,000 hectares of cocoa and for the first time had record breaking seizures and number of HCL labs destroyed. However, the drug growers now respond with clever and aggressive defensive tactics to aerial spraying which has dramatically diminished the effectiveness of our aerial spraying program. (They put absorbent chemicals on the leaves and then wash off the plants---they also cut the leaf part of the plant off immediately after spraying and then regenerate a new crop from the undamaged plant). Colombia has extradited more than 525 major drug kingpins during the Uribe administration---by far the most extraditions in history from any foreign country.

F. THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION:

The human rights situation has improved immeasurably during the President Uribe tenure. Violence against union members was down to 25 incidents in 2006 with a new Fiscalía Human Rights Unit to investigate labor violence. Political homicides fell by nearly 70% in the first term ---driven by sharp drops of 82% in murders committed by paramilitaries and 63% reduction in deaths by the FARC/ELN. Complaints received and open against the Security Forces have dropped dramatically from 1.14 % of the Force in 1998 to 0.04% in Jan-June 2007. Significant Colombian, US, and NGO aid helped alleviate the misery of more than three million (1.8 million registered displaced persons.) internal refugees---the second largest displaced population after Sudan. There is an aggressive and privately owned free press. There is complete academic and cultural freedom of expression. (Limited by threats and acts of violence by illegal armed groups.) Women are widely represented in public office--- and the law requires that 30% of appointed government positions be held by women. Several thousand human rights and civil society NGO's are registered in country. Local human rights groups have far reaching influence. The National Human Rights Ombudsman reports to the Inspector General. The Vice-President coordinates the Presidential Program for Human Rights. Both the Senate and the House have human rights committees.

G. THE MISERY INDEX:

Colombia remains a terribly dangerous, impoverished, and frequently unjust society. The illegal armed groups commit constant violent criminal violations. 48% of the population is impoverished. (Less than \$500/month for a family of three.) There is some level of continuing insubordinate military collaboration with criminal groups. Prisons are overcrowded, insecure, and detainees are abused. There is continued corruption in government driven by drug money and FARC infiltration of all governmental agencies. Millions of displaced persons live in unhygienic conditions with huge levels of unemployment and lack of access to health care and education. Human Rights Groups are harassed and their workers murdered. Indigenous persons are discriminated against and their land taken illegally. There is terrible intimidation of the judicial system and the press. The 14,000 armed FARC and 2,000 armed ELN hold thousands of child soldiers--- and murder off-duty police and Army, teachers, journalists, union members, religious leaders, candidates for public office, and conduct political murders. Investigations of military and police extra-judicial killings and other crimes against the people proceed with glacial resistance. The prisons are overcrowded with 62,000 held in a 52,000 prison capacity. The 14,000 prison guards are poorly trained. The prison system is inadequately funded and prisoners are poorly fed and lack water and access to health care. There is widespread under-employment, hunger, and addiction in the rural areas in particular. The Human Rights Organizations still do not have sufficient access or leverage with governmental officials. Armed robbery and other violent crimes are common in major Colombian cities particularly in Bogota. High levels of drug production produce criminal conduct which acts as a blow torch on democratic institutions.

4. THE WAY AHEAD:

A. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COOPERATION:

The US should continue to provide substantial economic and political support to the Uribe administration to include the current level of \$600 million in annual resources. We should not micro-manage this support but instead primarily unite behind Colombian initiatives and thinking in the remainder of President Uribe's three years in office. He must be allowed to continue to exercise Colombian leadership and initiative in pursuit of the current "PLAN CONSOLIDATION". Peace in Colombia is within short-term grasp. It would be a shameful US political misjudgment if we hobble Colombian democratic leadership given their track record of such brilliant success in the past seven years. Our current levels of ANNUAL support for Colombia are THREE DAYS of the US expenditure rate in Iraq. Colombia is an independent, free market, democratic, long-standing ally—with a functioning and determined national police and armed forces—with a huge and growing trade relationship with the US. Colombia is an example of successful US foreign policy at work which has been generated and supported by a bi-partisan Congressional majority for the current and past US Administrations. We must in my view pass the FREE TRADE AGREEMENT for Colombia this coming year. It will benefit the US economically. It will lower unemployment in Colombia by 2% and sop up even more de-mobilized illegal fighters. It will decrease the motivation of hunger to produce thousands of illegal drug cultivators.

B. SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW:

We must vigorously support continued improvement in the human rights arena. This should be a continued focus of the US Embassy and we should encourage and support the United Nations in particular (as well as the missing OAS) and other NGO's in their important work. The US AID effort in Colombia is grossly under-funded. Literally millions of internal refugees live in abject misery and hunger with little hope for the future. This is one of the most pressing humanitarian disasters in the world largely caused by the violence of the drug criminal enterprises and internal terrorist groups---and deserves significantly increased support. We should target financial support to the Colombian government for the management of the Reconciliation Process to absorb FARC/AUC/ELN fighters on their re-integration process into Colombian society. We should encourage and support the Trade Union movement in Colombia which is tiny (less than 5% of the workers), threatened, and which is needed as a counter-balance to other intimidating forces. We should continue to support President Uribe's extradition of major drug criminals to face the US justice system. This is a huge assist to reducing impunity and violence against the people and democratic institutions.

C. AIR MOBILITY FOR SECURITY FORCES:

Make no mistake ---the key difference that US financial and military support has made in the past eight years is funding, training, maintaining, and managing a substantial increase (total rotary wing assets 260 aircraft) in the helicopter force available to the Colombian Police, the Army, the Air Force, the Counter-drug forces, and the economic development

community. The country is huge—as big as Texas and California combined. 48 million people. No roads in the Texas-size eastern part of the nation. The majority of the people live along the Andean Ridge where ground corridors can be severed. Much of the Caribbean and Pacific coastal economic transportation is along thousands of kilometers of rivers and small streams and ditches. (12,000 kilometers of navigable rivers). Because of these helicopters ---the Police have been able to re-establish the rule of law in small and remote places. The Army can respond to threats to the police. Government officials can establish presence in the nation’s political Departments. Human rights and aids workers can move about the huge country. The FARC and ELN have been placed at risk of sudden attack—and small elements of the Security Forces have the logistics support to get out in the remote regions and re-establish government presence. Ground drug eradication teams can be inserted and protected in their work. Colombia is a poor country and could not have created this helicopter force without US assistance. We must not tamper with this successful formula until the end of the Uribe Administration. If we do we risk UNRAVELING the enterprise.

D. THE COUNTER-DRUG CAMPAIGN:

The massive production of cocaine in Colombia (possibly 700+ metric tons) is a major threat to the nations of the region as well as the United States. It brings addiction, violence, corruption, extortion of the oil and agricultural companies, kidnappings, and distortion of the economies of the region and the US. Only 1/10th of 1% of the land area of Colombia is under drug cultivation. It represents only 5% of GDP. 70% is grown in the vast and under populated south and south-west regions. (5% of the population). This is not a Colombian problem---this is an international problem. Our support for Colombia is smart US foreign policy. We may well wish to re-examine this strategic threat in cooperation with Colombian authorities. Ground eradication may increasingly be the smart tactic to confront more widespread cultivation (for example in Colombian national parks) ---as well as the clever, well-funded, and more sophisticated multiple criminal organizations that produce and move the drugs. US funding should support this ground eradication effort and preserve the scarce Security Forces for protection and offensive missions. However, there will be a continued significant need for aerial eradication in the coming three years to pinpoint remote cultivation and operate at high elevations.

5. SUMMARY:

It was a real honor to see the progress being made in Colombia to establish the rule-of-law, eliminate drug production, and improve the safety and economic well-being of the Colombian people. We have an extremely competent, experienced, and courageous diplomatic, US AID, and military mission in Colombia --- Ambassador Bill Brownfield and Colonel Kevin Saderup USA are superb.

The Colombian political, military, human rights, diplomatic, economic, and police leadership is really superb. In a general sense, they have turned around the disastrous situation of 1998 and created a momentum of greater security, justice, and economic well-being. These are some of the most admirable people I know in the international community. Great courage and wisdom characterize their leadership. They deserve our continued support. It is their dedication and ingenuity and blood that has created this growing sense of opportunity which has replaced the national despair I encountered in 1998 thru 2001. We serve our own interests by standing behind this remarkable leadership of a nation at war -- which is three flying hours from Miami.

Look forward to de-briefing you and the department faculty and cadets at your convenience.

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