

Understanding Colombia Series

US FUNDING TO COLOMBIA

In Brief

- Much of US monetary assistance to foreign countries is contingent on the country's human rights record ("Leahy Amendment" of 1997).
- Plan Colombia was proposed by President Pastrana as a plan to create peace and initiate development; instead, the US-funded package has focused on the military and police.
- The Andean Regional Initiative, like Plan Colombia, allocated hundreds of millions of dollars in aid directed mainly at the Colombian security forces.
- Plan Patriota marked a change in US assistance to Colombia because its goals were overtly counterinsurgency instead of anti-narcotics.
- Plan Colombia II was proposed by the Colombian government in 2007.
- US funding to Colombia changed notably in FY2008, when a Democratic Congressional initiative increased the proportion of social and economic aid to 40% from the previous 20%.

Background

United States assistance to Colombia has historically been directed at two general areas: the international narcotics trade and national security. By focusing assistance packages around these two components, US aid has failed to positively impact Colombians economically and socially. This pattern continues today. It is estimated that Colombia receives \$600-\$700 million in aid from the US annually.



One of the many Blackhawk helicopters granted by the US to the Colombian armed forces.

(Web Photo)

Important Facts

"Leahy Amendment." In 1997, the US Congress passed a bill stating that US counter-narcotics assistance to any foreign military is contingent on that institution's human rights record. In other words, the "Leahy Amendment" prohibits US assistance going to a military unit that includes individuals who have committed human rights violations, are not being investigated, tried, or punished. This amendment, though not frequently used, has been invoked in the case of Colombia in the past. In January of 2003, for instance, the US cut off funding to Colombia's Air Force when it was reported that the command did not cooperate with authorities who were investigating the 1998 Santo Domingo massacre. Still, the Leahy Law is often interpreted by the government as stating that one individual in a unit that violates human rights does not exclude the entire brigade from receiving aid, thus lessening the law's strength.

Plan Colombia: President Andrés Pastrana first introduced the idea of a "Plan Colombia" in 1998 when he mentioned the possibility of having a "Marshall Plan for Colombia." The objective of Pastrana's Plan Colombia was to contribute to the achievement of peace through investments that produce the social, cultural, and economic transformation of the critical zones of the conflict, guaranteeing the preservation of the environment. The Plan Colombia that President Clinton signed into law, however, was completely different. In July of 2000, the US government passed legislation that allocated more than \$1.3 billion in assistance to Colombia and various US anti-drug agencies over the next two years. 80% of this aid was directed to the Colombian military and police; only 20% of money derived from Plan Colombia went to economic and social initiatives.

The Andean Regional Initiative: The Andean Regional Initiative (ARI) was proposed by the Bush Administration in 2001 as a "three-legged stool" of eradication, military assistance, and alternative development. However, like Plan Colombia, the ARI was heavily focused on the military (63% in the case of Colombia). The House of Representatives passed the proposed legislation, largely intact, in July of 2001. Congress approved \$782 million for the ARI in FY2002. Nearly half of all ARI funds were allocated to Colombia for aerial eradication of coca, alternative development, logistical support, hardware, training for the Colombian Army's counter-narcotics battalions and the National Police, economic programs, and judicial reform. The remainder of the funds were divided amongst the region's other six nations – Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, and Brazil.

Plan Patriota: In early 2004, the Colombian national government began a campaign against the guerrilla forces in the southern part of the country. This program, like Plan Colombia, was supported by Washington in lending logistical support and military intelligence help, and included nearly 20,000 Colombian soldiers. Plan Patriota marked an important shift in US policy in terms of aiding Colombia, because it was a rupture with Washington's solely anti-drug objectives that had guided its relationship with Bogotá previously. Moreover, it is apparent that many civilians became casualties in this US-funded program. For instance, General James Hill – the former head of the US Army's Southern Command – stated that the campaign began "with an attack on rural areas where local peasant farmers support the FARC."

US funding in FY2008: In financial year 2008 (FY2008) the US Congress approved a foreign aid bill of \$545.6 million for Colombia. \$421,981,757, or 77.34% of the total, was allocated solely for military and police assistance; the remaining \$ 123,618,243 (22.66%) was directed at social and economic spending. This 57%-43% split between military and economic assistance, however, is inaccurate. The yearly Foreign Operations bill is supplemented by additional military funding through the Defense Department budget bill. When this is taken into account, the overall aid to Colombia in 2008 was 65% military.

US funding in FY2009: The 2009 State Department Foreign Operations bill allocates \$547.05 million in aid to Colombia. 55.8% of this package would be directed to the Colombia's military and police. In addition to this, another sum of money will go to Colombia's security forces separately through the Defense Department's budget. It is most likely that the military-economic split will closely reflect the aid Congress provided to Colombia in FY2008.

Impact of US aid to Colombia: The US continues to be the largest national donor to Colombia; as such, it bears a great responsibility. Unfortunately, US assistance to Colombia has historically been severely lopsided. For example, of August of 2006, for every \$1.00 spent to help an internally displaced person, about \$50.00 went to help a demobilized ex-Paramilitary combatant. US aid continues to be heavily focused on the military, security, and anti-narcotics, while assistance provided to economic and social concerns in the country is severely insufficient.

"US assistance to Colombia is [a] flawed policy: 80% of funds have gone for military assistance and been eaten up by coca eradication. Only 20% of funds have gone to social and economic programs. These programs are what build local economies and communities and provide alternatives to coca production. This distribution of assistance is not a recipe for permanent coca eradication. It's not a recipe for peace. It's a recipe for disaster." (-Representative Farr)

Take Action!

Write a letter or call your US Congressmen/women asking them: (1) to make all US aid to Colombia contingent upon human rights conditions, (2) to make the support for social and economic development the core of US funding, and (3) to further decrease the funding of the Colombian armed forces. To find the address and phone number of your senators and representatives, please visit www.congress.org

For More Information

Center for International Policy
www.ciponline.org
Witness for Peace Colombia
www.witnessforpeace.org/colombia.html
Peace Brigades International Colombia
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