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**Beyond Plan Colombia: the
evolution of cocaine trafficking**

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Abstract

Dall' inizio dei tempi, l' umanità ha fatto ricorso all' uso di sostanze in grado di alterare umore e percezione e più in generale il proprio stato psicofisico. Sia per scopi curativi, che ricreativi, l' uso di droghe di varia natura è legato alle più svariate popolazioni e culture.

Ad ogni modo, un distinguo è necessario. Ogni droga ha proprietà e caratteristiche peculiari in grado di renderla unica, e come accennato, un proprio humus geografico e culturale che la caratterizza. Di conseguenza, uno studio ragionato e specifico, nel nostro caso indirizzato alla cocaina, si rivela necessario al fine di comprendere a fondo i problemi che sono oggi ad essa legati. La minaccia rappresentata dalla rapida diffusione delle droghe, e in particolare dalla cocaina, è senza dubbio uno dei problemi più pressanti nell' agenda di quasi ogni governante.

Infatti, nel corso del '900, abbiamo più volte assistito a vere e proprie epidemie ed emergenze in termini di uso e abuso di sostanze stupefacenti, come ad esempio avvenne negli anni '70 negli Stati Uniti, dove la cocaina era divenuta estremamente diffusa e di facile reperibilità.

Infine, quest' ultimo secolo è stato caratterizzato dall' avvento della globalizzazione e dalla rapida evoluzione dei mezzi tecnologici disponibili, che hanno decisamente accelerato la diffusione e facilitato il trasporto di molte droghe.

Nel caso della cocaina, si può parlare di traffico a livello internazionale; un business multimilionario che rende questa pericolosa droga una vera miniera d' oro e una sfida senza eguali per i governanti di tutto il mondo.

Al fine di meglio comprendere il problema rappresentato dal traffico di cocaina e dalla sua ampia diffusione, ho deciso dapprima di concentrarmi su due aspetti: la storia della cocaina stessa e i fallimenti delle iniziative passate (primo fra tutti il Plan Colombia).

Mentre oggi la cocaina è diffusa in quasi tutto il mondo, la sua origine va cercata nelle più remote zone delle Ande, in un' area che corrisponde circa ai confini degli odierni Perù, Ecuador, Bolivia e Colombia. Proprio in questa zona, era ben conosciuta la cosiddetta "coca" una pianta le cui foglie sono caratterizzate da proprietà stimolanti ed energizzanti.

Infatti, ben prima dell' arrivo di Colombo e della scoperta delle Americhe, le popolazioni native di quei luoghi praticavano la masticazione della coca a scopi rituali, sociali e medicinali; tradizione questa che sopravvive fino ad oggi, rendendo la foglia della coca una componente molto importante della cultura locale.

Questo fattore, che potrebbe apparire scontato, è stato spesso ignorato in passato. Nella fattispecie, le iniziative intraprese nel corso della lotta contro il traffico di cocaina, hanno spesso mancato di includere e tenere in considerazione questo aspetto storico e culturale del problema. Di conseguenza, le politiche adottate hanno incluso la rimozione del coltivazione della coca fra gli

obiettivi principali da raggiungere, in quanto alla base del problema stesso del traffico di cocaina. Infatti, come vedremo, tale è stato il caso del cosiddetto Plan Colombia, che ha visto impiegare metodi estremi quali la fumigazione e lo sradicamento manuale delle piante di coca. Tuttavia, come risulterà dalla mia analisi, tale iniziativa, peccando di una certa ingenuità e di svariati problemi strutturali, non è riuscita nello scopo che si proponeva.

Inoltre, nello stesso excursus storico, ho ritenuto necessario fare alcune precisazioni sull'uso della coca e della cocaina (distinzione necessaria), spiegando come questa seconda non sia nuova alle società occidentali, in particolare quella statunitense ed europea.

Infatti, è stato circa a partire dall'inizio del '900, vale a dire oltre un secolo fa, che la cocaina ha iniziato a diffondersi nelle nostre strade e nelle nostre case. All'incirca nello stesso periodo, come spiegato, i governi hanno iniziato a varare le prime leggi e a cercare di porre un argine al problema, tentando di prevenire o limitare l'uso della droga. Proibizione, repressione e la distruzione delle coltivazioni di coca sono solo alcuni dei metodi utilizzati nel corso degli anni. Tuttavia, ad oggi, i risultati ottenuti sono stati deludenti ed i successi scarsi.

Inoltre, a partire dalla metà del XX° secolo, l'avvento della globalizzazione, la nascita dei container e un netto miglioramento della tecnologia, hanno permesso un più rapido e più efficiente trasporto di quasi ogni prodotto, droghe incluse, rendendo quindi possibile una ulteriore diffusione della cocaina e permettendo dunque ai trafficanti di avere accesso a mercati precedentemente preclusi. Il traffico di cocaina, sembra infatti essere una minaccia particolarmente reattiva e resiliente, in grado sia di rispondere alle offensive delle autorità che di adattarsi ai cambiamenti dettati dalle circostanze storiche ed economiche.

Come spiegato nel corso dell'exkursus storico, a partire dagli anni '70, visti i trend di consumo crescente fra la popolazione e le frequenti epidemie di cocaina, gli Stati Uniti decisero di lanciare la loro crociata contro le droghe, la cosiddetta "War on Drugs".

Questo conflitto, che per certi versi (si pensi all'Iniziativa di Merida), si protrae ancora oggi, culminò con la distruzione dei cartelli di Cali e Medellin nei primi anni '90. Tuttavia, a discapito dei brutali metodi utilizzati, quali estradizione, tortura ed assassinio, ciò non bastò a fermare il flusso di cocaina che dalla Colombia fluiva verso Stati Uniti ed il resto del mondo. Al contrario, la cocaina continuò a diffondersi ed insinuarsi nella maggior parte delle società occidentali.

Durante gli anni '90, la situazione del traffico di cocaina continuò a peggiorare, come pure la situazione economica e sociale della Colombia, luogo dove era prodotta la maggior parte della cocaina consumata allora.

In questo contesto estremamente travagliato, alla fine del vecchio millennio, si varò il famoso Plan Colombia, iniziativa estremamente significativa e che può essere considerata una cartina al

tornasole dell' andamento della lotta al traffico di cocaina.

Infatti, tale iniziativa vide una stretta cooperazione di Stati Uniti e Colombia, comportando un vasto impiego di uomini e risorse, per un titanico costo di circa 7 miliardi di dollari. In vista della sua ampiezza e della sua importanza, ho dunque deciso di partire con la mia analisi proprio dalla ideazione, dallo svolgimento e della conclusione del Plan Colombia stesso, al fine di poter fornire una valutazione del suo impatto sul traffico di cocaina a livello globale.

Mentre è chiaro che il Plan Colombia non ha posto termine al traffico di cocaina, i suoi effetti sulla coltivazione della coca, sulla produzione di cocaina, nonché sulla domanda e sui metodi di traffico sono visibili ad oggi e devono essere considerati al fine di sviluppare strategie più efficaci per il futuro.

Nel corso della mia analisi, non mi concentro solamente sulla ideazione e lo svolgimento del piano, o come questo si sia evoluto, bensì anche sulla legittimità e l' efficienza dei metodi impiegati, in modo da trarre preziose informazioni sullo specifico *modus operandi* in cui è consigliabile o meno intervenire nei confronti del traffico di cocaina.

Lo scopo della mia tesi è, dunque, partendo da un' analisi delle politiche adottate alla fine degli anni '90 e dalla storia della cocaina stessa, analizzare la situazione attuale del traffico di cocaina per meglio comprendere il problema e fornire risposte più efficaci e coerenti rispetto a quelle viste finora.

Nell' analizzare il Plan Colombia ho deciso di dividere in cinque parti il capitolo ad esso dedicato. In tale modo ho potuto concentrarmi sui diversi aspetti del piano, effettuando uno studio dei metodi impiegati per raggiungere gli obiettivi preposti e il grado di successo ottenuto per ciascuno di essi.

Lo studio di ognuno dei cinque punti, ci fornisce infatti informazioni differenti e che potrebbero condurci a conclusioni discordanti, in quanto il piano è stato portato a compimento con livelli di enfasi ed impegno differenti a seconda dell' obiettivo da raggiungere.

E' necessario dunque tenere a mente che ciascuno dei punti può essere considerato un successo o un fallimento se considerato singolarmente, ma bisogna comunque rapportare ciò ad una visione d' insieme del piano, di cui infatti viene alla fine effettuata una valutazione complessiva.

Attraverso un' analisi degli effetti del piano, sono stato in grado di determinare che la situazione del traffico di cocaina nel post Plan Colombia, ha continuato ad evolvere e cambiare sotto svariati aspetti, secondo l' influenza di più fattori: gli effetti del piano stesso, il continuo progresso tecnologico e i cambiamenti nell' economia a livello mondiale.

In primis, ho affrontato come il *supply* è cambiato. Nel capitolo dedicato, ho infatti considerato la situazione della produzione di cocaina e della coltivazione della coca nei paesi dell' Area Andina in

seguito al Plan Colombia, arrivando a notare come queste rimangano concentrate principalmente in Perù, Colombia e Bolivia, con dei cambiamenti di distribuzione tra i vari paesi.

Come si evince nella parte dedicata, il Perù sembra infatti avere accresciuto notevolmente la quantità di cocaina prodotta ed esportata e similmente, seppur in misura minore, la Bolivia sta producendo e coltivando più cocaina di un tempo.

Questi cambiamenti, come opportunamente spiegato, possono essere considerati come effetti collaterali del Plan Colombia. Nel corso della lotta contro il narcotraffico, l' iniziativa ha infatti comportato pratiche quali la fumigazione e l' eradicamento delle colture di coca, nonché la distruzione dei laboratori dove la coca viene processata e trasformata in cocaina. Di conseguenza, si è dato vita al cosiddetto "*Air Balloon Effect*" per cui i trafficanti hanno semplicemente optato di muovere le loro attività nei paesi confinanti, dove i controlli sono meno stringenti.

In modo non dissimile, anche la domanda di cocaina sembra essere soggetta a cambiamenti ed evoluzioni. Infatti, dopo aver analizzato la situazione relativa alla sua produzione, ho deciso di analizzare la variazione della domanda, la quale rappresenta un' altra importante variabile nel delineare la situazione del traffico di cocaina a livello globale.

Dalla mia analisi, sono emersi alcuni interessanti pattern che ci informano di cambiamenti e trend correntemente in atto e di cui è necessario tenere conto al fine di fornire risposte efficaci a questo problema.

Come menzionato precedentemente, il mercato globale della cocaina è stato sicuramente influenzato dal Plan Colombia, tuttavia, altri fattori sono da considerare, come ad esempio l' evoluzione tecnologica ed i cambiamenti economici. Nel capitolo dedicato, ho infatti spiegato come la domanda di cocaina sembri seguire una traiettoria legata all' espansione e la crescita economica, lasciando i paesi in preda a crisi e recessione e spostandosi verso quelli la cui economia fiorisce.

Infatti, nel corso delle mie ricerche, mi sono reso conto di come paesi che fino a pochi anni fa non conoscevano problemi legati alla cocaina, si trovino ora a fare fronte alle emergenze legate a questa droga. Nuove tendenze in fatto di domanda e consumo rischiano infatti di danneggiare le loro società ed insinuarsi fra i loro cittadini, espandendosi a macchia d' olio.

Tale è il caso dei popolosi paesi di recente industrializzazione come il Brasile o la Cina, che per le loro interessanti prospettive economiche sembrano attirare le mire dei trafficanti di cocaina.

D' altra parte, si può registrare una tendenza inversa per quanto riguarda il Nord America, dove gli Stati Uniti presentano un uso sempre minore di cocaina e una domanda in caduta. In linea di massima i "vecchi mercati" continuano ad esistere, tuttavia, non sono più lucrativi come

solevano essere (con l'eccezione dell'Europa, dove l'uso di cocaina appare in crescita), ma “nuovi mercati” hanno decisamente fatto la loro comparsa e sembrano essere quelli che più necessitano dell'attenzione dei governanti di oggi e di domani.

Inoltre, la situazione inerentemente all'uso di narcotici ed in particolare di cocaina in questi paesi, necessita di accurato studio e controllo, in quanto la carenza di esperienza e le limitate capacità di cui essi dispongono, li rende bersagli molto appetibili per i trafficanti, che possono così ottenere facili guadagni con un rischio relativamente basso.

Avendo considerato la situazione relativamente alla produzione di cocaina ed alla domanda della stessa negli anni seguenti al Plan Colombia, ho quindi deciso di procedere spiegando come la stessa venga trasportata e distribuita fino a raggiungere i vari mercati e quindi i suoi acquirenti.

Come già menzionato, la cocaina viene prodotta prevalentemente nell'Area Andina, mentre i suoi destinatari finali sono sparsi su tutto il globo. Di conseguenza, gli strumenti ed i mezzi che vengono utilizzati per trasportarla e contrabbandarla costituiscono una pleora estremamente variegata di ingegno e capacità tecniche in continua evoluzione.

Inoltre, i mezzi dei trafficanti sembrano essere cambiati notevolmente nel corso degli anni e anche oggi possiamo notare come la situazione sia mutevole e confermi la loro capacità di adattarsi e migliorarsi per sfuggire alle autorità e conseguire maggiore successo.

Per queste ragioni, ho ritenuto necessario dedicare un capitolo allo studio dei percorsi, corridoi e rotte lungo le quali la cocaina viene mossa, facendo inoltre un confronto tra ieri ed oggi. In quanto la tecnologia continua ad evolvere e la globalizzazione diviene sempre più pervasiva, gli strumenti a disposizione dei trafficanti si sono adattati di conseguenza.

Nello specifico, come spiegato nel capitolo dedicato, non si tratta più di un problema legato esclusivamente a corrieri, aerei o navi carichi di droga, per quanto questi mezzi restino popolari fra i trafficanti.

Il traffico di cocaina è oggi caratterizzato dall'uso di una varietà incredibile di mezzi e strumenti: torpedini, fionde, sottomarini, ultraleggeri... sono solo alcuni fra quelli utilizzati. Inoltre, in seguito alla rapida diffusione di internet negli ultimi anni e ai costi oramai ridotti dei servizi ad esso legati, il mondo delle comunicazioni è cambiato profondamente, finendo con l'interessare anche il problema del traffico di cocaina e la lotta ad esso.

Infatti, se innumerevoli sono i vantaggi legati a questa evoluzione tecnologica, altrettante sono le insidie che ne sono derivate. Nello specifico, internet risulta essere un luogo estremamente liberale, dove l'imposizione di controlli è spesso difficile e dove quasi tutto, crimini inclusi, è permesso.

I trafficanti, non hanno dunque tardato ad avvantaggiarsi di questo strumento, andando di conseguenza ad aggiungere ulteriore complessità al già spinoso problema.

Fondamentalmente, questa nuova dimensione legata all' esistenza del cyberspazio crea un nuovo spazio dove crimine e legalità si danno battaglia e dove le autorità provano a fermare la proliferazione di attività illecite quali il traffico di cocaina.

Come spiego infatti nel capitolo dedicato, in modo non dissimile a quanto avviene nell' Africa Occidentale, internet offre svariate “zone grigie” dove la scarsa presenza governativa consente a criminali di ogni genere di organizzarsi, comunicare e creare reti per la distribuzione e l'acquisto di beni e servizi normalmente considerati illegali. Armi, pedopornografia, droga... sono solo alcuni dei servizi che possono essere acquistati con pochi click e la cocaina, ovviamente, non fa eccezione. Di conseguenza, ho ritenuto necessario affrontare anche questo aspetto del traffico di cocaina in quanto, apparentemente, le rotte lungo cui essa si muove sono anche online.

Oggi giorno, i governi spendono considerevole ammontare di tempo e denaro nello sforzo, spesso inutile, di contrastare e combattere il cosiddetto “*supply*” di cocaina, andando a colpire le reti di distribuzione e i trafficanti stessi. Tuttavia, nel fare ciò, viene spesso tralasciato quest'ultimo importante aspetto legato ad internet e telecomunicazioni, dovuto all' evoluzione della tecnologia. Il traffico di cocaina è infatti un fenomeno complesso, e questi ultimi cambiamenti non hanno fatto altro che rendere la sfida alle autorità ancora più insidiosa, aggiungendo un' ulteriore dimensione. Secondo quanto da me appreso nel corso delle mie ricerche, non posso considerare un attacco diretto al *supply* di cocaina come il metodo migliore per fare fronte al problema (come menzionato, il focus dovrebbe infatti porsi sulla prevenzione e la riduzione della domanda), è tuttavia consigliabile per i governi e le autorità competenti, tenere in considerazione questa nuova variabile tecnologica, qualora essi volessero comunque intraprendere tale strada.

In seguito, mi sono dedicato a tracciare una conclusione, cercando di capitalizzare quanto appreso nel corso della attività di ricerca effettuata scrivendo questa tesi. I fallimenti del Plan Colombia, i cambiamenti nella produzione e nella domanda di cocaina, come pure i mutamenti del traffico stesso sono elementi necessari per giungere alla ricetta per ottenere, almeno parzialmente, successo nella lotta contro la cocaina.

Infine, ho deciso di analizzare il ruolo che ciascun attore aveva finora avuto nel contrasto al traffico di cocaina e le possibilità future di ciascuno di essi. Non tutti i paesi hanno le medesime caratteristiche o sono dotati delle stesse possibilità e capacità logistiche, economiche e strutturali. Ecco dunque la necessità di considerare singolarmente ciascun attore interessato.

Dal lancio della cosiddetta “War on Drugs” gli Stati Uniti hanno senza dubbio avuto un ruolo molto importante nella lotta globale al traffico di cocaina e le ultime due decadi lo hanno confermato, in primis se si considerano iniziative importanti come il Plan Colombia.

Per questa ragione, ho ritenuto doveroso spendere del tempo effettuando una breve valutazione

dell' operato statunitense, considerandone pregi e difetti, ed immaginando quale possa essere il loro ruolo nell' immediato futuro.

Similmente, ho considerato come l' Unione Europea abbia contribuito alla lotta al traffico di cocaina ed addirittura al Plan Colombia, pur tuttavia rimanendo un attore di secondaria importanza e lasciando la maggior parte degli oneri in termini di costi e logistica su spalle americane.

Tuttora, l' Unione Europea sembra più interessata ad iniziative locali e alla cooperazione con organizzazioni basate in Europa, come ad esempio Europol.

Come spiegato, esistono però anche iniziative di cooperazione bilaterale e multilaterale che coinvolgono l' Unione Europea ed alcuni paesi dell' America Latina. Nella tesi, ho infatti citato iniziative come COPOLAD, un progetto estremamente necessario al fine di aumentare la coerenza, e bilanciare l' impatto delle politiche anti-narcotici, attraverso lo scambio di esperienza, coordinazione bi-regionale e la promozione di responsi multisettoriali coordinati e comprensivi tra l' Unione Europea ed i paesi della Comunità di Stati Latino Americani e Caraibici.

Ho concluso dunque come, mentre un cambio di direzione negli sforzi statunitensi sia consigliabile, in particolar modo per quanto riguarda l' enfasi da porre sulla riduzione di domanda, piuttosto che sulla eliminazione del supply ed un accresciuto sforzo europeo sia benvenuto, il vero cambiamento debba venire dai governi Latino Americani.

Il Brasile, ad esempio, nonostante il recente rallentamento economico, sta divenendo un attore di primaria importanza in termini di capacità logistiche e peso politico, a significare un diritto ed un dovere ad essere uno dei paesi leader nella lotta globale contro il traffico di cocaina.

Inoltre, come menzionato in precedenza, la riduzione della domanda di cocaina è fondamentale per arginare il fenomeno e con politiche appropriate il Brasile potrebbe sia fornire un grande sostegno nel ridurre i flussi di droga che proteggere i propri cittadini.

Analogamente, gli altri paesi dell' America Latina, in particolare quelli dell' Area Andina e dell' America Centrale, dovrebbero migliorare le proprie capacità logistiche, lavorando al contempo sulla riduzione della domanda. Solo così, saranno raggiunti risultati duraturi nella lotta al traffico di cocaina.

Tirando le somme, l' obiettivo principale di questa tesi è contribuire allo studio del complesso fenomeno rappresentato dal traffico internazionale di cocaina, coniugando l' analisi di esperienze passate e presenti, al fine di offrire agli attori istituzionali di oggi e domani una valente fonte di informazioni.

1 - Introduction: cocaine trafficking as a global concern

Cocaine trafficking is, today, a multimillion dollar business. From the hands of Colombian farmers hidden in the deepest recesses of the Andes to the silver spoon of Wall Street businessmen; Cocaine travels around the globe following a trail of money and blood.

Despite the ages old use of coca leaves, cocaine met success in the western world only in the XIXth century, when in 1859, German chemist Albert Niemann was able to extract and isolate cocaine from coca leaves. By the 1880s cocaine was popularized by the medical community. Even the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud promoted cocaine as a tonic to cure depression and sexual impotence, even further it often prescribed it to its patients and published a few articles such as “Über Coca” (About Coke) in which he praised the “benefits” of cocaine¹

Between 18th and 19th century, cocaine acquired additional popularity, both because of the diffusion of tonics and “elixirs” and the success of the new drink Coca-Cola that actually included coca leaves as ingredient.

By 1905, it had become popular to snort cocaine and within five years, hospitals and medical literature had started reporting cases of nasal damage resulting from the use of this drug. Apparently, after a long parenthesis of almost fifty years, people started realizing the dangers related to the use and abuse of the substance. The United States, being particularly concerned with the health of their citizens as linked to the abuse of narcotics, opted in 1922 to ban the import of coca leaves under the Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act. A less than surprising fact, if we consider that two years before, in 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution went into effect making alcohol consumption illegal nationwide.

America was trying to shut its door on cocaine, in order to keep its citizens safe and healthy and avoid a disruption of its society; however, such an objective would prove impossible to achieve. In fact, prohibitions, laws and bans would prove ineffective. Over the last century cocaine kept spreading at every level of society both in the United States and abroad. Even further, the advance of globalization have allowed it to move faster and better, reaching every market in the globe.

Coca leaves are grown and processed into cocaine in the Andes, mostly in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, but from those relatively poor and peripheral countries cocaine departs via trucks, planes and ships, in order to reach the richest and most profitable markets: namely Europe and North America. No nation, however, even the poorest is spared the dangers and violence that cocaine brings. Cocaine ceased being the “rich man's drug” by the end of the 80s² when due to better distribution and excess of supply, prices started dropping.

¹Aldegheri Franco, *Excursus Storico Sulla Cocaina* Dipartimento Dipendenze ULSS-20 Verona, www.dronet.org/pdf/9.5%20Cocaina.pdf, accessed 20 September 2015

²Dwoskin Peter, *Pittsburg-post Gazette*, 12 July 1986

Following this trend of low prices and widespread availability, cocaine insinuated every society and every class, causing a plethora of problems linked to violence, crime and exploitation.

1.1 – Dangers and effects of cocaine: a multifaceted threat

Cocaine represents a serious threat to society and public health. Whether in the United States, in Europe or elsewhere the use of cocaine has become so prominent among the population that governments have to tackle the issue more directly and attempt to limit and contain the threat. Actually, as we mentioned earlier the first attempts to curtail and limit the phenomenon trace back to 1922, almost a century ago. For the first fifty years, from 1910 to 1960, such regulations that included the passing of the Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act along with social disapproval were sufficient to limit the use of cocaine to fringes of society considered “deviant” due to their behavior and occupations such as jazz musicians and elements of the underworld.³

Cocaine, after all, was expensive and not easily accessible to most people, especially those with a low income and the working class.

Cocaine today can be found at every level of our society. It can be found in the executive suite, the suburban living room for the cocktail hour, the college dorm, and the high school locker room.

The effects of cocaine on society can be seen at any level, as they are able to disrupt families, communities, and workplaces. In fact, the domestic sphere is surely one of the most affected by cocaine use, with families are torn apart by members that develop an addiction. Domestic violence and random acts of violence are surely made more frequent by cocaine or crack cocaine use. Children of regular users often find themselves in environments that are not fit to grow children, let alone offer them proper care.

Pregnant mothers who make use of cocaine expose their children to the harmful effects of the drug, even before they are born, and more often than not, parents who make regular use of cocaine are prone to acts of violence and parental abuse.

In a vicious circle, parents that make use of cocaine and drugs in general and also likely to influence their children in that sense, and disrupted families, affected by tension and conflict are likely to have at least one member that makes use of drugs.⁴

Health and public welfare are also affected by the abuse and the diffusion of cocaine. Health problems impair workplace efficiency and productive employment, making accidents more likely and casualties more frequent. While cocaine might not be the most lethal drug in commerce, it surely has a highly addictive effect, that relies primarily on psychological (rather than physical) effects, and forces the addicted users to ever increase the consumed quantity, generating what is

³Abadinsky Howard, 2013. Drug Use and Abuse: A Comprehensive Introduction, p.214, St. John University

⁴Rehab Cocaine, <http://www.rehabcocaine.com/blog/the-harmful-effects-of-cocaine-addiction-on-your-family/> accessed 20 September 2015

called “a dope fiend”. Basically, regular users have to assume ever increasing doses to obtain the same “high” they experienced at first and placate their craving for cocaine.

Regular users, as a consequence, see their health gravely compromised. Effects on the human body vary according to the different routes of cocaine administration and can produce different adverse effects. Regularly snorting cocaine, for example, can lead to loss of sense of smell; nosebleeds; problems with swallowing; hoarseness; and an overall irritation of the nasal septum, which could result in a chronically inflamed, runny nose. Ingested cocaine can cause severe bowel gangrene, due to reduced blood flow. Persons who inject cocaine have puncture marks called "tracks," most commonly in their forearms, and may experience allergic reactions, either to the drug or to some additive in street cocaine, which in severe cases can result in death. Many chronic cocaine users lose their appetite and experience significant weight loss and malnourishment.⁵

Crime and violence appear to be strictly linked to the distribution, trafficking and consumption of cocaine; however, there are many ways in which crime and drugs are related, none of them simple. First, illicit production, manufacture, distribution or possession of drugs, specifically cocaine constitutes a crime in most countries. Secondly, the presence of cocaine in the streets may increase the likelihood of other, non-drug related crimes occurring such as burglary and thievery. Thirdly, cocaine can be used to finance other illegal activities, such as in the case of the FARC, where levies on cocaine cultivation, as well as the selling of cocaine itself were used to finance the activities of the guerrilla. And fourthly, drugs may be closely linked to other major problems, such as the illegal use of guns and terrorism (or narco-terrorism)⁶

Human rights and employment levels are also affected by the trafficking and smuggling of cocaine. Depressed areas of developing countries such as the Andean Area are especially interested by these aspects. Low wages, unemployment and scarcity of resources in these parts of the globe push those who live in poverty to seek an improvement of their conditions via the cocaine business. Whether poor peasants milling coca leaves or powerful Mexican drug lords, people are attracted by dreams of wealth and prosperity linked to the traffic of cocaine. However, the reality is often much different from dreams. Impoverished peasant remain poor as they spend their lives in the deep forest of Colombia, milling coca leaves in inhuman conditions and without any kind of safety or insurance. The same applies to those who either volunteer or are forced into becoming “mules”. As they ingest huge quantities of cocaine ovules (commonly known as “bolas”), they put their lives at risk for a

⁵ Drugs Abuse Gov, <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/cocaine/what-are-long-term-effects-cocaine-use>, What are the long terms effects of cocaine use?, accessed 8 July 2015

⁶ UNODC, https://www.unodc.org/pdf/technical_series_1995-03-01_1.pdf, The social impact of drug abuse, UNODC, accessed 8 July 2015

meager wage.

Thus, cocaine only offers short lived dreams and temporary, low skilled employment, while at the same time allowing drug lords to trample human rights and exploit an already impoverished peasantry.

Considering all these premises, the dangers and threats presented by the cocaine business it is only natural for governments to take action against it. Contrasting cocaine trafficking is a necessity of prime importance both for those countries where cocaine is produced from coca leaves cultivation and those that represent the main markets, namely the United States and Europe.

2 - History: from coca leaves to cocaine

2.1 - The Coca leaf in Pre-Columbian times

In order to better understand the ongoing struggle against cocaine trafficking that interests much of the Western world, it is necessary to understand the rich and long history of coca.

The word “coca” refers to specific plants in the *Erythroxylum* family (*Erythroxylaceae*). The *Erythroxylum coca*, whose leaves are known for their stimulating properties, is no doubt different from “cocaine” an alkaloid first isolated and extracted from coca leaf by German chemist Albert Niemann in 1859.

Coca is a traditional plant, with a long history of use for its light stimulant and medicinal benefits, and a background of deep socio-cultural and religious integration.

The usage of the plant dates back to prehistoric times, before the conquest of the Incas. At the time, nomad tribes inhabited the Andes, yet, the usage of coca leaf and particularly its chewing was already widespread. The Quechua, the Aymara, and the Inca were only some of the culture that embraced the plant within their cultures, and it is probably better to speak of an “Andean culture” within which the usage of coca leaf was (and is) firmly embedded.

Further, the presence of coca extends over an area which includes Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil⁷ so that we can probably affirm its presence as typical of almost the whole South American continent, and not only limited to the Andes.

As far as religion and culture go, the utilization of coca was indeed very ample and differentiated.

Coca was (and is) one of the principal ceremonial items used in ritual offerings to the deities, for divination purposes, for protection against spirits, in the cleaning of irrigation canals, for most agricultural rites, and in times of drought or other natural disasters.⁸

⁷ Jorge Hurtado Gumucio, 1995 *Cocaine the Legend*, Accion Andina, ICORI, La Paz

⁸ Gelles Paul, Cultural Survival, <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/coca-and-andean-culture->

Coca leaves play a crucial part in offerings to the Apus (mountains), Inti (the sun), or Pachamama (the earth). Coca leaves are also often read in a form of divination analogous to reading tea leaves in other cultures.

Coca also retained its presence in popular myths and beliefs, for instance, the miners of Cerro de Pasco use it to soften the veins of ore, if masticated (chewed) and thrown upon them⁹

Further, coca leaves were also consumed for their medicinal properties, one of the first aspects to be noted by Europeans and that made the plant famous in the western world.

Traditional medical uses of coca focus on its stimulating properties, allowing those who chew the leaves to overcome fatigue, hunger, and thirst. Apparently, coca leaves mastication is quite effective against altitude sickness, a peculiarity that certainly increases the plant's fame in the Andean area, where coca is cultivated at an altitude that ranges between 500m and 2000m.

Other uses include its employment as anesthetic and analgesic to alleviate the pain of headache, rheumatism, wounds and sores, etc. which proved extremely useful as before the arrival of the Europeans, few anesthetics were available. The high calcium content in coca explains why people used it for bone fractures and because of its properties that included vasoconstriction, thus coca was used to stop bleeding and hemorrhages.¹⁰

Last but not least, its usage in Pre-Columbian times involved its nutritional properties. Raw coca leaves, consumed or infused in tea or "*mate de coca*" are rich in nutritional properties, essential minerals (calcium, potassium, and phosphorus), vitamins (B1, B2, C, and E) and nutrients such as protein and fibers.¹¹

All these uses of coca started way before the arrival of the Europeans, earliest coca leaves were discovered in the Huaca Prieta settlement c. 2500 – 1800 BC in the northern coast of Peru¹² and continue today. It is only natural to assume that coca is deeply linked to the territory of the Andes and that its uses are not only non-toxic, but also beneficial.

As a consequence it is easier to understand why the usage of the plant did not stop with the arrival of the first settlers, but further expanded its usage, becoming famous and widespread even in Europe and in the United States.

Even further, these very strong links that coca, due its history, presents with both territory and culture, entice us of how difficult and often useless attempts at eradicating its cultivation can be

the-new-dangers-old-debate, accessed 24 November 2015

⁹ Duthel Heinz, *Illegal Drug Trade - The War on Drugs*, 21 September 2011, **Books on Demand**

¹⁰ Coca Myths, *Drugs & Conflict Debate Papers* Nr. 17, June 2009, https://www.tni.org/files/download/debate17_0.pdf, accessed 20 December 2015

¹¹ James, A., Aulick, D. Plowman, T., 1975 "Nutritional Value of Coca", *Botanical Museum Leaflets*, Harvard University 24 (6): p.113-119.

¹² Dr. Jorge Hurtado, Dra. Roxana Miranda, *Coca Museum*, <http://www.cocamuseum.com/history-of-the-coca-plant/>, accessed 2 September 2015

today.

2.1 – Coca and the Western world: the arrival of the Europeans

The arrival of the Europeans had indeed a big impact on the culture and the uses of Pre-Columbian populations and the usage of coca was also invested by the changes taking place through the continent. After the discovery of the new world, two main powers struggled to gain control and influence over the newly discovered land. One was the Crown of Spain and the other was the Catholic Church, they were both extremely powerful and influential, and due to different perceptions and ideas regarding coca and its usages they often had bitter disputes.

The Crown of Spain and the first Spanish settlers rapidly comprehended the immense value and role of coca leaves in relation to the culture and the beliefs of the Andean population.

Coca, which at the time was not an object of barter or monetary exchange, was soon turned into a very precious good; so precious that its price was linked to that of gold and silver ores extracted in the mines. The reasons behind this shift can be identified with the monopoly of production and distribution soon acquired by the Spaniards and by the surge in the demand, as the locals refused to work in the mines, unless they received their ration of coca, that allowed them to resist thirst, hunger and fatigue during the long shifts in the silver mines owned by the Spaniards. This new usage, however, differed quite a lot from the traditional ceremonies. Coca, in this case, was losing its intrinsic cultural value, it was not a magical substance or an element of social aggregation, rather it was a “tool” through which Spaniards could control the workforce and exploit the local population.

The Catholic Church, as in the case of alcoholic beverages, and substance abuse in general, did not approve the usage of coca. Further, the exploitation and mistreatment of the local population was not part of the “grand dessein” of the Papacy. The locals were to be turned into good Christians, but that could not happen as long as they were treated as little more than slaves and kept under the effects of coca. In order to complete the evangelization process, coca had to be removed from the local culture along with the rich pantheon of deities natives already had.

In fact, Andean populations had a well-developed religious system, with a complex pantheon of gods and goddesses, their rituals and their ceremonies, which of course, included coca.

Within this social and religious structure, coca represented the essential glue that kept together people in the profession of their faith, thus reinforcing practiced beliefs and opposition to both political power from the crown of Spain and religious power from the catholic church.

As a consequence, the Pope decided that coca had to go. The Bishop of Cuzco in 1551 called cocaine "an evil agent of the devil."¹³ and even artists such as Don Diego De Robles declared that

¹³ Haley John, 2009, *The Truth about Drugs*, Second Edition, Infobase Publishing, New York, p. 89

“coca is a plant that the devil invented for the total destruction of the natives.”¹⁴ Of course, the aims of the church were less than spiritual or religious, and much more pragmatic. Coca represented an obstacle in the conversion of the natives and in the instauration of the catholic faith in the new world, reason why in was condemned at the first ecclesiastical council of Lima in 1551.

However, most of the Spaniards, especially the Colonial Government and those who stood to lose money or power with its elimination, vigorously opposed the elimination of the plant.

Coca leaves were essential as they allowed the exploitation of natives as labor in the mines, such as in the case of the Potosì silver mines. The mastication of the leaves allowed Indians, who were ill fed and poorly dressed, to work long hours in the damp and cold bowels of the mines, overcoming fatigue, thirst or hunger. However, the relief was only temporary and they were not protected from diseases or accidents. Mortality rates, were in fact very high and the Spaniards were even forced to import slaves from Africa to replace local laborers.¹⁵

As a side business, coca leaves bought in Cuzco for one or two pesos, could be sold in Potosì for up to 11-12 pesos; a lucrative trade, to which that of ores extraction added. It is no surprise that the attempts to outlaw the plant, supported by the church and sometimes by local governors failed.

Coca remained a stable presence in the life of Indians. It was too lucrative, too useful to Spaniards in their exploitation of land and people, and too deeply entwined with local culture to be eradicated.

2.2 - XIXth century from medicine to prohibition

Given these premises, that imply several uses and a very lucrative business gravitating around the coca leaf, one could have expected a world-wide success for the plant. However, such a thing did not happen at the time. Despite its interesting properties and the potential for commercialization, the exportation of coca to Europe, unlike cocoa, coffee or tobacco, never had great luck. Europeans appeared to have little interest in the plant and coca fell into oblivion for at least three centuries.

The rediscovery of the product traces back to 18th century when doctors and scientists finally turned their attention to it. An Italian physician, Dr. Paolo Mantegazza, praised the virtues in a very influential paper, thus reviving Europe's attention for coca.

A few years later a French entrepreneur launched the so called “Vin Mariani” the first of many tonics and elixir containing the principle of coca. The tonic was a highly reinvigorating energizer, but it only lasted a few years, as the drink turned out to be addictive. Apparently, the ethanol in the wine acted as a solvent and extracted the cocaine from the leaves - creating a compound called

¹⁴ Stafford Poole, 2004, Juan De Ovando: Governing the Spanish Empire in the Reign of Philip II, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, p.129,

¹⁵ Cook, Noble David (1981). Demographic collapse, Indian Peru, 1520-1620. Cambridge University Press. p. 237

Cocaethylene that hugely reinforced the impact of both drugs.¹⁶

In those same years, German chemist Albert Niemann extracted the alkaloid of cocaine from the leaves, creating what at the time was a powerful anesthetic. However, that usage was only one of many and cocaine would soon start being sold to the public for recreational purposes.

In fact, cocaine was gaining popularity at an alarming rate. Its consumption had grown in 1903 to about five times that of 1890¹⁷, predominately by non-medical users outside the middle-aged, white, professional class. Cocaine became associated with laborers, youths, blacks and the urban underworld. Governments, especially that of the United States, started showing preoccupation about the use and abuse of the substance among their citizens.

Mainstream media reported cocaine epidemics as early as 1894 in Dallas, Texas. Reports of the cocaine epidemic would foreshadow a familiar theme in later so-called epidemics, namely that cocaine presented a social threat more dangerous than simple health effects. Similar anxiety-ridden reports appeared throughout cities in the South leading some to declare that “the cocaine habit has assumed the proportions of an epidemic among the colored people.”¹⁸ In 1900, state legislatures in Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee considered anti-cocaine bills for the first time.

It was only in 1914, however, that the first act limiting the use of cocaine was adopted. Cocaine had become widespread among the population and legislators suddenly finally became aware that something had to be done. Quoting the exact words of Representative Francis Burton Harrison of New York who proposed the act:

*"An Act To provide for the registration of, with collectors of internal revenue, and to impose a special tax on all persons who produce, import, manufacture, compound, deal in, dispense, sell, distribute, or give away opium or coca leaves, their salts, derivatives, or preparations, and for other purposes"*¹⁹

Basically the Act aimed at regulating the situation of drugs, particularly coca leaves and opiates, through the registration and taxation of those involved in the dispensation, sell and distribution of said substances. It was not a matter of complete prohibition, cocaine was not banned per-se. Rather, having comprehended the gravity of the menace that the abuse and free circulation of these substances represented, Harrison tried to contain and limit the threat.

In fact, the Harrison Act imposed narcotics, cocaine among them, to be dispensed only under direct doctor's orders. The act only set up regulatory and licensing regime, but it surely entices us of how the feelings relatively to cocaine were changing. The Harrison Act left manufacturers of cocaine

¹⁶Independent, Drug that spans the ages the history of cocaine, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/drug-that-spans-the-ages-the-history-of-cocaine-468286.html>, accessed 15 September 2015

¹⁷ Spillane Joseph F, 2000, Cocaine: from Medical Marvel to Modern Menace in the United States 1884-1920, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA p.91

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 94

¹⁹ Legisworks, <http://legisworks.org/congress/63/publaw-223.pdf>, accessed 15 September 2015

untouched so long as they met certain purity and labeling standards. Despite that cocaine was typically illegal to sell and legal outlets were rarer, the quantities of legal cocaine produced declined very little.

It was only in 1922 with the Jones-Miller act, that prohibition began. Serious restrictions were imposed on producers and the import of cocaine (as well as other opiates) became illegal.

The use of cocaine had already become deeply embedded in American and European societies, thus paving the way for the illegal trafficking of cocaine. As prohibitionists advocated, drugs were disrupting the fibers of the American society and presented a threat to its people. The following years, however, did not see a particular success of cocaine. First, because of the invention of amphetamines during the 1930s, which had powerful stimulating effects and could be easily synthesized in any laboratory, thus replacing cocaine. Second, cultural proscriptions against the use of drugs for recreational purposes greatly reduced the appeal of cocaine and the number of people making use of it.

Cocaine came to be relegated to small groups of addicts. These people who were often poor and destitute lived far from the society standards of “decency and respectability”. Snorters, swallowers, and shooters continued to exist, yet, they were an apparently dying breed. Cocaine usage was everything but on the rise, thus it did not present an immediate and deadly threat to American society.

The attention of prohibitionist moved to easier and far more important targets. In fact, the 20s saw the banning of alcohol and the efforts of police forces turned against smugglers and moonshiners across the United States.

However, the cultivation of coca leaves never stopped and countries whose culture involved the usage of coca leaves kept growing their crops. Such was the case of Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, countries that due to their peripheral location and relatively economic irrelevance were kept safe from the long arm of Washington for at least thirty years.

However, as the 60s brought about the counterculture movement and a rising use and abuse of drugs among young people, the interest of the United States for the problem represented by drugs awakened.

2.3 - 1960s - Global concerns

In the 1960s, the global contest was rapidly changing, and during those were tumultuous years government everywhere in the world had to face political, economic and social instability.

The United States in particular, had to deal with a rather troublesome decade. The 1960s opened with the tensions of the Cuban Missile Crisis and continued with the assassination of President

Kennedy. At the same time the specter of Vietnam War was looming in the distance, and as the American deficit kept growing so did its commitment in Vietnam.

Public opinion in the United States was restless. As television and radio brought home the horrors of war, discontent started spreading over the country. The government was losing support for its actions abroad and its policies at home.

A change was indeed taking place within American society, shifting from the highly materialistic and conservative ideals of the 1950s to something entirely different and revolutionary. A movement called “counterculture” was emerging. As in opposition to the past decade, young people in the United States and the world started moving towards a different mindset, embracing new ideals and experiencing a different lifestyle.

Compliance, conformity and obedience were increasingly becoming a burden for all those who had had enough of it and were asking for a change. As people shed old values, they also adopted new ideals and morals. As a consequence, new habits and behavior were also acquired. The 1960s were the years of gender revolution, free sex and drugs abuse. Youths of any background, race and culture started populating streets and parks with colorful clothes and shaggy hair, praising the virtues of love, peace and, of course, drugs.

As mentioned above, fundamental part of the counterculture was the use of drugs and perception altering substances, that finally started spreading within most Western societies.

If the 1950s had been a decade of conservative values and social stigma as related to the use of drugs, the 1960s removed most prejudices and intolerance relatively to drugs. It is true that many still saw the phenomenon as a worrisome deviation and harshly condemned the recreational use of drugs, but the change that was taking place in the habits and culture of the time was too strong to be halted by few conservatives.

Prior to the 1960s, most people did not see drug use as acceptable behavior, nor did they believe that drug use was an inevitable fact of life. Indeed, tolerance of drug use resulted in a notable increase in crime between the 1960s and the early 1990s. Society and culture of had been changed forever and there was no going back.²⁰

With the 'flower power' of the 1960s, psychedelic drugs started spreading and being widely used. Marijuana and LSD were the drugs of choice. Young people everywhere felt the need for a change and for diversion and those drugs provided them the perfect means of socialization, integration, while at the same time offering them new ways to expand their horizons and explore the limits of perception.

In the late 1960s and 1970s the United States and most of the West were experiencing a population

²⁰Dea Gov, <http://www.dea.gov/about/history/1970-1975.pdf>, 1970-1975, accessed 17 July 2015

bulge of 16 to 25 year-olds, the celebrated baby boom of the immediate post war period. Because experimentation with illicit drugs typically occurred during these years, the number of potential new users was unusually large. Political turmoil increased the likelihood of experimentation, especially with marijuana. Pot was a cheap, double-duty drug, smoked for the high and for symbolic protest against the forces of war and segregation.²¹ Students who tried marijuana and who suffered no ill effects grew skeptical of drug abuse warnings, thus dismissing warnings and anti-drugs campaign as propaganda. Apparently, the widespread use of Marijuana was not per se worrisome or particularly harmful. After all, Marijuana is a relatively “light” drug that has limited effects both on body and mind of the users, however, the tragedy awaited in the near future.

As even more people got in touch with drugs, the interest of the young crowds started shifting to something more powerful and exciting than Marijuana.

Cocaine was about to reappear on the American market, beating any other drug in terms of popularity and revenue derived from trafficking.

2.4 – Cocaine the emergent threat

In the shift from the 1960s to the 1970s there were plenty of changes in culture and society. As the revolutionary movements ebbed out and protests placated, new trends and tendencies developed at every level of society. The 1970s contrasted with the 1960s in that they were a decade of atomization and individualism.

Communes and rural life lost their appeal, as the role of city centers increased. People would move to the rich, vibrating and sprawling metropolis, where life was characterized by luxury and excess.

The 1970s were the decade of world-wide entertainment. Disco music started spreading and American cities became hubs of pleasure and perdition. It was about time for cocaine to reappear after almost fifty years of oblivion.

Baby boomers that were attuned to the recreational possibilities of illicit substances, but so far only experienced with “light drugs” started developing a taste for cocaine, the new drug. It was subtly pleasurable, sexually stimulating, easy to use, considered to be safe and, though expensive, affordable for those with substantial allowances or good jobs. At some universities the percentage of undergraduates who experimented with cocaine increased tenfold between 1970 and 1980.²² According to Bob Colacello, the editor of Interview magazine, cocaine suddenly was everywhere' in New York City by the mid-1970s.

"It went from something people tried to hide, except among close friends, to something people took for granted, and shared openly. ... None of us thought cocaine was really dangerous, or even addictive, back then. Heroin was off limits

²¹Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, New York, Bantam, 1987, esp. Ch. 8 (p. 209).

²²Dezelsky Thomas L, Toohey Jack V and Kush Robert, 1981, 'A ten-year analysis of non-medical drug use behavior at five American universities', *Journal Of School Health*, vol. 51, pp. 52-3.

*in our crowd, but coke was like liquor or pot or poppers, fuel for fun, not self-destruction*²³

American mass media, feeding on new trends and tendencies, especially among the young and famous, increased the popularity of cocaine and helped its return. Cover stories on the drug and its (revised) history appeared in both conventional and counter-cultural magazines.

Retailers capitalized on the trend by stocking cocaine handbooks and gilded paraphernalia, symbols of sexual prowess and conspicuous consumption. Not only was the drug devoid of social stigma, it even represented a status symbol, something to be desired, consumed and displayed publicly. Cocaine spoons became most common paraphernalia. The snorting of cocaine was a common sight in any Miami's night club and as cocaine was believed to be relatively harmless, the number of addicts kept growing. Cocaine was the drug of choice of white men, especially young professional and yuppies. People doing cocaine were affluent, white, sexy and successful. Cocaine was associated with luxury, high society and a lavish life style. As a consequence, it is no wonder that little to none stigma was associated to the substance. It was not only believed to be harmless, it even had a powerful appeal, which was amplified by the role of the Medias.

Roughly at the same time, as the demand kept growing steadily, the supply of cocaine began to take form and structure. However, the well-organized international drug trafficking syndicates headquartered in Colombia and Mexico as we know them today did not exist yet.

In fact, most of the narcotics entering the United States were being smuggled by minor traffickers either individuals or independent criminal groups that had little connection between them and lacked a clear, hierarchical, well organized structure.

Colombian traffickers, at the time, were mostly involved in the cultivation and trafficking of cannabis, which had been the best selling drugs in the 1960s, when the counterculture movement with its hippies provided a steady source of demand.

In the 1970s, however, the movement gradually lost popularity and so did the use of marijuana, people either stopped smoking "pot" or did it in a more moderate way.

Also, the drug had been so popular in the 60s that many illegal producers now resided in the United States so that the need to import the drug gradually subsided. People were either consuming less Marijuana, or buying from nearby suppliers, to the detriment of Colombian traffickers. As a result of this shift in preferences and market changes the cannabis business was not so lucrative anymore. Colombian traffickers were quick to adapt. As cocaine was booming, they decided to hop on the bandwagon and take a share of the new, more lucrative business. After all, they had the perfect means and connections to become the most important players in the

²³Colacello Bob, *Holy J'rror: Andri Warhol Close Up*, 1990, New York, HarperCollins, p. 369.

field of cocaine trafficking.

Colombia, Peru and Bolivia intensified the production of coca crops, while Colombian traffickers took the lead in the processing and transportation. The business of cocaine trafficking as we know it today was taking form and Washington was finally starting to take notice of the danger. In 1971 president Nixon declared "drug abuse" to be public enemy number one. It was only the beginning of the so called "War on drugs"

3 – Troubled Allies

3.1 – The Colombian case

In order to better understand the struggle represented by the "War on Drugs" and the contrast to cocaine trafficking, we need to briefly analyze the history of the Andean area and in particular that of Colombia, a country that has often taken the lead in the production and smuggling of cocaine.

From the time of its independence in 1810 Colombia has had to face a series of serious internal problems that undermined its stability and peaceful existence: first two bloody civil wars, then the loss of the Panama Canal and ultimately the bloody struggle known as "*la violencia*"

The Colombian nation, born from the ashes of Nueva Grenada, like many other post-colonial countries lacked cultural and geographic unity. As a consequence when the nation developed and started debating the role of the church in politics as well as limits of central government power, the two parties developed identifiable and opposing political agendas. However, both the parties were controlled by an elitist, liberal and conservative party leadership.

The economic development of the country did not take place as in most of the West, with the birth of a solid urban middle-class. Newly industrialized areas and industrial clusters of ambitious, dynamic entrepreneurs did not appear or they had a very marginal role in the building of the country's economic and social structure. As a consequence, Colombia did not jump into modernity, rather, it remained confined in state of quasi-medieval backwardness similarly to many countries of Latin America that failed to industrialize and modernize.

Colombia was characterized by a lack of security, a largely agricultural economy and huge masses of poor laborers that resided in the countryside. These masses, however, had no real political representation. No one seemed to be ready to stand for them, and even further, the opposition of the ruling elite was strong to the point that the country became refractory to any economic or political change. The country was ruled by a restricted elite that favored a quasi-feudal system, where democracy had little to no space, and where violence and repression were the means of social control of the wealthy over the peasantry. This, however, was a situation that could not last forever. Over time, the dangerous caesura within Colombian society, that set elite and the masses apart,

made class struggle and social unrest inevitable.

When the populist leader Jorge Gaitan, champion of the poor, challenged the ruling elites, tensions mounted, until they reached a point of no return. On 9th April 1948, Gaitan was assassinated in what would come to be known as *Bogotazo*. The period of ensuing violence was characterized by harsh and bloody class conflict, bitter partisan rivalry, revenge, religious persecution. While the ruling elites remained safe in the urban centers, violence started spreading in the rural countryside, where the poorest part of the population resided. While the toll of deaths reached almost 200.000 victims²⁴, the government was overthrown in a 'mild' military coup in 1957 and a liberal-conservative power sharing arrangement known as the National Front was established. Despite the relatively stable compromise, democracy did little to solve the vast inequities between the classes, and proved unable to deal with a developing guerrilla insurgency that would bring more civil strife to Colombia.

Insurgent Organizations

Over the last few decades Colombia had to face widespread internal conflict. On one side the left wing insurgent guerrillas, who fought the legitimate power of the government, on the other the Colombian army and far right paramilitary groups. In the middle there were traffickers, smugglers and criminal gangs of any kind.

If we consider that the conflict traces back to the middle of 20th century, it is no wonder that the most prominent guerrilla group, the FARC, fight on the basis of Marxist-Leninist ideals. When the FARC were formed in 1964, the country was facing notable internal turmoil. The end of *la violencia* did not mean the end of social and political struggle. In fact, at around the same time the *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* or ELN was also formed. It was another armed group inspired by Marxist ideas as well as by liberation theology. Its people aimed at overthrowing the government and promoting communism across Colombia. Another communist guerrilla group, named M19, also spawned. They shared the FARC and ELN faith in communism and they contributed to the spreading chaos and violence until 1990, when the group finally demobilized.

As a consequence of the social unrest and the perceived insecurity, far right paramilitary groups were created. These groups, that partly exist today, often had ties to the government, the army and the wealthiest part of the population. They were the armed hand of the conservative, against the perceived instability of the liberals that supported communist ideas and sided with the far left.

In fact, the government supported them, as they allowed it to regain power and control over the territory, while at the same time suppressing guerrillas. Wealthy landowners exploited them to

²⁴Bushnell, David. 1993. *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*. Berkley: California University Press, p. 201

protect their interests, and retaliate against the guerrillas that often carried out kidnappings and violent actions. In the last part of the 1990s most of these groups consolidated under the United Self Defence Forces of Colombia or AUC²⁵

Further, at the turn of the millennium, as the Plan Colombia was launched, private military companies appeared on Colombian soil. These people, often called “contractors” are not part of any country national forces; rather they operate as individuals working for private companies and entrepreneurs. Thanks to their particular judicial status, these actors have often engaged in acts of violence and violation of human rights on Colombian territory, while remaining unpunished.

FARC or *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*

While the presence of Communist Guerrillas in Colombia (as well as several other Latin American countries) traces back to the beginning of the XXth century, the FARC were born only in 1964. In fact, it was in 1964 that Manuel Marulanda Velez together with other 47 members of the Colombian Communist Party (PCC) decided to form the FARC, as an answer to growing tension with the government and above all the attack on the community of Marquetalia.

Between 1964 and 1982 the FARC kept growing steadily, both in size and logistic capabilities, however, their presence was limited to rural areas and their confrontation with the law (whether police or army) was mostly in the form of small skirmishes. However, as we mentioned before the 80s were the years of the “coca boom” and during this period the FARC (from the 1982 onward named FARC-EP) were able to increase exploit the commercial success of coca to increase not only their size, but also improve their efficiency and logistics.

The FARC financed themselves via a series of different activities. They engaged in kidnapping, as well as extortion and bank robberies. However, their most important and stable source of income came from coca. The FARC were able to exploit the cultivation of the plant by imposing taxes drugs producers and smugglers.

Under the new policy, the FARC began levying a 10 percent per kilogram tax on coca base, a raw form of cocaine produced from coca leaves and chemicals that is later turned into powder cocaine in jungle laboratories. In other areas, the FARC taxed marijuana growers and farmers harvesting opium latex from poppies which is used to make heroin. The rebels also collected fees for every drug flight leaving rebel controlled areas.²⁶

If we consider that financing depended on the control of territory, it is easy to understand how the

²⁵Crandall Russell, 2002, *Driven By Drugs: U.S. Policy Towards Colombia*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers

²⁶ Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin, 2005, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 103.

struggle became even fiercer. Rebels could not lose the land they controlled, in order to keep the money flowing into their treasury. Controlling portions of land was fundamental, if the FARC wanted to impose taxes, thus financing themselves in the form of weaponry, soldiers and logistic capabilities. As a consequence the armed struggle became incredibly fierce, throwing the country in state of quasi-civil war.

If the 80s saw the expansion and affirmation of the FARC as linked to the boom of cocaine, the 90s brought about their increased role as linked to the end of the Cali and Medellin cartels. Since these two powerful organizations were broken down by the efforts of the Colombian government, the FARC were able to replace them, at least partially, in the lucrative business of cocaine trafficking.

While the FARC did not engage directly in the trafficking of cocaine, at least in the 90s, they represented the muscle that was often hired by small cartels. In fact, the FARC with their large arsenal and reliable guerrilla soldiers constituted a notable force to reckon with and proved valuable allies for traffickers.

The 90s were also the years of Fujimori's presidency in Peru. During this period, the Peruvian leader launched an offensive against drug traffickers in his country. Employing unconventional methods such as the shooting drugs loaded planes, kidnappings and assassinations²⁷ Fujimori was able to reduce the presence drug, and especially cocaine, related criminal activities. Traffickers, having to face such a strong opposition, found themselves in a fight or flee situation. Rather than fighting the law and plunging the country into a state of civil war, they simply preferred to move their activities. After all, in the thick Andean jungles, borders are extremely blurred and the most impenetrable recesses of the rugged territory become grey areas, where everything is permitted. Once again, due to the lack of concerted efforts of all the countries of the Andean area cocaine production and cultivation patterns changed according to what is called the air balloon effect. Much of the Andean coca crop shifted to the southern Colombian jungles where there was scant government presence and where the FARC held control over the territory. During the 90s the FARC underwent a great deal of change, although it was just walking along a path that had been undertaken way before. While they started as guerrilla group aiming at voicing their Marxist and Communist views, the FARC slowly became entangled in crime and illegality, which also meant their becoming a rather powerful organized armed group. While the trafficking of cocaine was not the main aim of the FARC nor the reason the group was created, it kept growing in terms of importance in their agenda. Cocaine trafficking, being such a lucrative business, allowed them to consolidate their control over the territory, exert influence over peasants and expand their

²⁷ Amnesty.it, <http://www.amnesty.it/Peru-condannato-ex-presidente-Fujimori.html>, accessed 19 August 2015

capabilities even more. However, the expansion and growth of the FARC (as well as of other armed groups) prompted a harsh response from the Government, that kept increasing its efforts and launching initiatives such as those of Plan Colombia, Plan Consolidacion and Plan Patriota.

ELN – Ejército de Liberación Nacional

The FARC, however, is not the only group that has been spreading chaos and challenging the Colombian government in the last decades. In fact, there are other groups that despite sharing common ideological basis of Marxism and Communism operate in different areas and under a different organizational umbrella.

One as such is the ELN, an armed group that has been operating in Colombia since 1964, when it was founded by its leader Fabio Vásquez Castaño.

The group has a political faith of Cuban revolutionary theory and liberation theology that proposes the establishment in Colombia of a Christian and communist regime to resolve the socioeconomic problems of Colombia. Further, the ELN started as a more politically motivated groups (if compared to the FARC) and managed for a while to stay away from drug trafficking.

Through the years, the ELN have carried out ransom kidnappings and armed attacks on Colombia's infrastructure, thus being classified as a terrorist group both by the United States and Europe and ultimately came to resort to drug trafficking to finance their activities. In fact, the group decided to shift from the risky and unstable business of kidnapping and extortion, to the more lucrative one of cocaine trafficking (similarly to the FARC).²⁸

Over the years several unsuccessful attempts at negotiating have been made. President Uribe himself in 2008 spoke with ELN spokesman Francisco Galan, reaching no agreement. Even further, following these talks, the ELN took distance from Galan positions. Dealing with the group and solving the issue of guerrilla groups in the country remains one of the most important point in the agenda of Colombian government, as in 2015 the ELN is still active and with an estimated force consisting of between 1,380 to 3,000 guerrilla fighters²⁹ which makes them less of a threat if compared to the FARC, but still a troublesome non-state actor operating in Colombia.

AUC - United Self Defense Forces of Colombia

Due to its long history of violence and civil strife, paramilitary groups are not new in Colombia. *La violencia* can probably be identified as the starting point of the violent clash between liberals and

²⁸ UNRIC, The Guerrilla Groups in Colombia, <http://www.unric.org/en/colombia/27013-the-guerrilla-groups-in-colombia>, accessed 20 August 2015

²⁹ Volckausen Taran, Colombia army claims guerrillas have lost 5000 fighters in past 2 years, colombiareports.co, accessed 1 December 2015.

conservatives and subsequently far left guerrillas and paramilitary groups. However, even though the conflict evolved over time, with several groups forming and disbanding, the violent struggle remained typical of Colombia.

Here, we shall focus on the most relevant paramilitary group active in the 90s, when Plan Colombia was launched, the AUC or *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*.

Formed in April 1997 the force represented a union of several armed groups that united their forces under one banner. The aim of the AUC was no different from that of previous paramilitary groups, its people aimed at fighting and defeating the communist guerrillas that were still active in the country, such as the FARC.

As we mentioned before, the guerrilla movement tried to expand and fortify itself in the 90s, but the answer of the AUC came rather swiftly. Soon, the umbrella organization of paramilitary groups started spreading terror across the country. Massacres such as that of Bojayà in April 2002 took place. Colombian people, both guerrilla fighters and civilians, had to face murders, kidnappings and terror tactics that threw the country in an even worse state of fear and chaos. However, despite years of terror and violence, the FARC were not defeated, even less so cocaine trafficking that due to its extremely lucrative nature was partly taken over by the AUC itself. Today, the FARC is still the largest insurgent force in South America³⁰ and a force to be reckoned with for police makers and law enforcement agencies operating in Colombia.

PMC - Private Military Companies

Another powerful actor in the violent conflict that interested Colombia in the previous decades is represented by the PMCs or Private Military Companies.

While private contractors are today rather common in many parts of the globe, where violence and instability replace the rule of law, PMCs made their appearance in Colombia only after the American involvement became evident.

In this case we can see at least two reasons behind the use of PMCs. First, Americans, whether willing to admit it or not still suffer of what may be called “Vietnam syndrome” an idiosyncratic fear of deploying troops “boots on the ground” which was surely made worse by the failure of Iraq. Second, public opinion is by far less concerned if a foreign mercenary dies, instead of an American soldier, which makes the use of PMCs preferential.

Even further, the use of contractors allowed the United States to act in a sort of judicial limbo, as the status of PMCs in international law is not yet clear.

Last, but not least, the use of foreign companies of mercenaries allowed the United States to meddle

³⁰Carpenter, Ted Galen 2003, *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs*, St. Martin's Press; 1st edition

in the problems of Colombia and play a very active role, while escaping (at least partly) accusations of imperialism and unnecessary power politics. Basically, the long arm of Washington was at least partly shielded behind the curtains of smoke represented by PMCs.

Approximately, there are twenty PMCs working in Colombia, and most of them are funded by the United States and the Pentagon. While enumerating all of them and analyzing their activities would require too much space and time, we can name a few operating within the Andean territory. Various private contractors are many and some of them are intimately connected to the circles of power in Washington, which is proved by the volumes of work they are usually commissioned by the United States government (Lockheed Martin, ARINC, Northrop Grumman, MPRI ...), but for sheer volume of business, DynCorp is the paradigm example.

One of these companies is DynCorp International, a private military contractor which receives 90% of its funding from the federal government of the United States and played an active part in the efforts to eradicate coca³¹ by spraying the lethal glyphosate mix “round up ultra” over illicit crops. As part of the Northrop Grumman group, California Microwave also played an active role in the region with a mission of surveillance and aerial reconnaissance, and the company itself came to be widely known when three of its pilots crashed in the Colombian jungle and were captured by the FARC.³²

Drawing a conclusion, PMCs have been actively employed in the war waged by the United States against cocaine, with a specific attention to their role in the eradication of coca crops via means that often bordered illegality. As a result, their presence exacerbated the conflict, adding fuel to an already burning fire and further alienating the population of rural Colombia. Not only farmers had to suffer the destruction of crops at the hand of their own government, they even had to endure the work of these foreign contractors that endangered their health and polluted the Colombian soil in the futile attempt to remove coca crops.

3.2 - The United States, cocaine and the War on Drugs

Starting in the early 1970s the United States was surely concerned with the threat represented by drug abuse and cocaine in particular. Drugs had entered American society in the 1960s and did not seem about to disappear any time soon.

The only logical consequence, when American society and integrity were menaced from within, was a strong, decisive answer.

³¹ Washington Technology, <https://washingtontechnology.com/toplists/top-100-lists/2011.aspx>, accessed 1 December 2015

³² CBS News, Part II: the Forgotten Hostages, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/part-ii-the-forgotten-hostages/>, accessed 2 December 2015

Two very important agencies already existed by the 1960s, they were charged with drug law enforcement and they were represented by the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control (BDAC) and the federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN).

In 1973, by Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1973, signed by President Richard Nixon on July 28, the Drug Enforcement Administration was established. Approximately 600 Special Agents of the Bureau of Customs, Customs Agency Service; and, other federal offices merged to create the DEA; it was the beginning of a new era for the struggle against drugs waged by United States.

The decades to come, however, would prove particularly difficult for the United States. In fact, during the 1970s the trafficking of cocaine was bound to intensify as the Colombian cartels were taking shape and powerful drug lords such as Pablo Escobar emerged.

Cocaine use was rampant in the United States and with such a steady and ever increasing demand, supply became a well-organized network of criminal associates. It was not anymore the work of few, isolated individuals but a concerted effort to grant supply to the world's biggest market for drugs, the United States.

Despite the initial message of President Richard Nixon to the Congress that included a part on “devoting more federal resources to the prevention of new addicts, and the rehabilitation of those who are addicted”³³ in the wake of the War on Drugs, this aspect received relatively little attention. Most of the resources were devoted to policing and enforcing drugs prohibition. Control over the population was tightened and even light drugs such as Marijuana came to be considered extremely dangerous, to the point that the possess of relatively small quantities could result up to 10 years of jail.

Further, one of the first initiatives launched under Nixon was the so called Operation Intercept. Border controls with Mexico were tightened to the point that the trade between the two countries came to a halt. Mexican crops directed to the United States were left to rot, with consequent economic damage for both countries and straining of their relationship.

America's new approach to countering drugs was indeed a firm answer, but the flow of drugs could not be halted. As the old routes of supply were barred, new ones kept appearing. When Cuba became communist in 1959, it stopped being a route for cocaine and cannabis trafficking but the flow of drugs did not stop. It was simply diverted elsewhere, due to what can be called a “path of least governance”. According to a very simple pattern, traffickers appear to choose as easier path, where they meet less opposition from law enforcement agencies.

Certain goods and services such as drugs, weapons or sex are as old as the history of man. No matter how hard governments work to enforce bans and prohibition the demand will persist and as

³³ Nixon calls War on Drugs, The Palm Beach Post, 18 June 1971, accessed 13 October 2015

long as demand persists, supply is likely to find an alternative route to reach the market. This appears to be true especially when important monetary interests are at stake, such as in the case of cocaine trafficking, which is a multimillion dollar business.

The United States, however, not unlike many other European countries, failed to comprehend this. Over the course of the War on Drug too much focus was placed on supply and too little on the reduction of demand. As a consequence, poor planning and policing led to the achievements of partial, if not unsatisfactory results, such as in the case of Plan Colombia

4 - Plan Colombia: the American and Colombian offensive on cocaine trafficking

By the end of the 90s, Colombia was drifting towards an ever worsening situation of social unrest, violence and widespread criminality. Apparently, the end of Cali and Medellin Cartels (in the first half of the 90s) did not mark the end or at least a huge reduction of cocaine trafficking. Rather, it prompted new actors to step up and exploit the opportunities that arose from it. In fact, as cocaine trafficking continued, armed groups such as the FARC and the ELN decided to step in and increase their role in the lucrative business.

With such a situation of turmoil and unrest, the future of Colombia was not very promising. As a consequence, the newly elected Colombian President Pastrana could not but push for the implementation of solid measures aiming at the resolution of Colombia's problems, which at the time were represented by cocaine trafficking and armed groups.

4.1 - Ideation and financing

The development of Plan Colombia started in 1999, during the mandate of the newly elected President Pastrana as a project to improve Colombian society, economy and above as a project of state building. It was initially named "Plan for Colombia's Peace" and it presented a focus on alternative development, multilateral cooperation and foreign investment. Pastrana's Plan Colombia, was originally presented as a project that did not necessarily imply the use of force and did not focus on drug trafficking or foreign military aid. Rather, when first presented, the plan However, further negotiations on the plan changed aims and means of the project. During an August 3, 1998 meeting, Colombian President Pastrana and United States President Bill Clinton discussed the possibility of "*securing an increase in U.S. aid for counter-narcotics projects, sustainable economic development, the protection of human rights, humanitarian aid, stimulating private investment, and joining other donors and international financial institutions to promote Colombia's economic growth*"³⁴

Plan Colombia still seemed to focus on development and institutional aspects, however, American

³⁴ Grayson George W. Professor Emeritus, 2013, *The Cartels: The Story of Mexico's Most Dangerous Criminal Organizations and Their Impact on U.S. Security*, Praeger, p.42

interests were bound to take control of the steering wheel.

An official document had to be created, in order to “convene important U.S. aid, as well as that of other countries and international organizations”³⁵

Basically, the solidification of the plan allowed Washington to go forward with it and finance without fear of losing control of the plan itself. At the same time, the Colombian concession allowed President Pastrana to patch up a strained relationship. In fact, under the previous administration of President Ernesto Samper (1994–1998), the two countries did not see eye to eye on several matters, thus impeding proper cooperation.

As a result of these negotiations, several changes were devised with the United States. American input, as a result, was extensive. Not only the objectives of the plan were modified to accommodate American interests, even further, the plan was not redacted in Spanish, but only in English; clear proof that the United States were having the upper hand in the negotiations and in the future control of the plan.

Several observers have criticized the final version of Plan Colombia as it was seen as considerably different from the first versions. In fact its main focuses revolved around fighting drug trafficking and strengthening the military of Colombia.

United States Ambassador to Colombia Robert White stated:

"If you read the original Plan Colombia, not the one that was written in Washington but the original Plan Colombia, there's no mention of military drives against the FARC rebels. Quite the contrary. (President Pastrana) says the FARC is part of the history of Colombia and a historical phenomenon, he says, and they must be treated as Colombians... [Colombians] come and ask for bread and you (America) give them stones" ³⁶

This original plan called for a budget of US\$7.5 billion, with 51% dedicated to institutional and social development, 32% for fighting the drug trade, 16% for economic and social revitalization, and 0.8% to support the then on-going effort to negotiate a political solution to the state's conflict with insurgent guerrilla groups. Pastrana initially pledged US\$4.864 billion of Colombian resources (65% of the total) and called on the international community to provide the remaining US\$2.636 billion (35%).

The United States supported the initiative by committing \$1.3 billion in foreign aid and up to five hundred military personnel to train local forces. An additional three hundred civilian personnel were allowed to assist in the eradication of coca. This aid was an addition to US\$330 million of previously approved US aid to Colombia. US\$880 million followed in 2000 and US\$256 million

³⁵ Villar Oscar, Cottle Drew, 2011, Cocaine, Death Squads, and the War on Terror: U.S. Imperialism and Class, Monthly Review Press p. 107

³⁶ Ottawa Citizen, Drug Sense, 6 September 2000, Ottawa, Canada, <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v00/n1323/a08.html>, accessed 20 September 2015

for 2001.

U.S. Aid to Colombia, 1996-2006 (including non-Plan Colombia aid)												
Last updated 11/11/05	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
In millions										(est)	(req)	
Military/Police	54.15	88.56	112.44	309.18	765.49	242.97	401.93	620.98	555.07	641.60	641.15	
Economic/Social	0.62	0.00	0.52	8.75	214.31	5.65	120.30	136.70	134.98	131.29	138.52	
% Military	99.88	100	99.53	97.42	78.12	97.72	76.96	81.95	80.43	83.01	82.23	

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If Plan Colombia was only the extension of previous cooperation and the improvement of the joint efforts of Colombia and the United States, it surely represented a turning point in terms of money and commitment. As we can notice in the chart, military and police aid more than doubled between 1999 and 2000.

Such an overly abundant funding in terms of military aid made Colombia the third largest recipient of foreign aid from the United States, followed only by Saudi Arabia and Israel, that due to geopolitical reasons fall in a totally different class.

If the United States was very generous in terms of military aid contribution to Colombia, it still offered little support in terms of civilian and institutional expertise. As we can see from the chart, Economic/Social aid shrunk notably in the period between 2000 and 2001, when President George W. Bush was elected United States aid went from US\$214.31 million to a mere US\$5.65 million. Basically, the initial and most fundamental components of Plan Colombia (economic and social help) as envisaged by President Pastrana not only were reduced, they also struggled to find their source of funding.

In fact, Colombia had to look for additional support from other actors. One was the European Union, a largely civilian power that often provides expertise and knowledge to countries that need it, such was the case of Kosovo when the CDSP launched the mission EULEX.

However, some would-be donors were reluctant to cooperate, as they did not appreciate the military component of the plan and the increasingly American presence in it. Also, they refrained from a long term, costly commitment in what they deemed a rather uncertain initiative.

The problems of Colombia appeared distant and not so relevant; however, that was indeed a naive assumption. In fact, Colombia's problems were (and are) a concern of Europe too, as the issue of cocaine trafficking is an ever growing threat for European society.

³⁷ Haugaard Lisa, Isacson Adams, Olson Joy, December 2005, Erasing the Lines: Trends in U.S. Military Programs in Latin America, <http://www.lawg.org/storage/documents/erasingthelines-nov05final.pdf>, accessed 26 November 2015

Finally, some European countries decided to contribute. Approximately US \$128.6 million (in one year), which was 2.3% of the resulting total was donated, but what is actually interesting is the canals through which aid flowed to Colombia.

When millions of (European) dollars reached Colombia, it was either directly or through loans and access to credit lines, and not through the framework of Plan Colombia. If European countries understood the relevance of Colombia and the magnitude of the struggle to the point of donating money, they did not agree on the means to achieve success. Particularly, they were not too confident of Plan Colombia itself and showed distrust as the United States took the lead in the project.

Quoting Connie Veillette, a European analyst in Latin American affairs "*European countries provide economic and social development funds but do not consider them to be in support of Plan Colombia.*"³⁸

Similarly to many European governments, several Latin America countries expressed their diffidence and distrust for the initiative. In fact, despite praising the success of President Pastrana many leaders, representing countries in the Organization of American States (OAS), refused to endorse Plan Colombia as they were worried by its military focus (and implied American inference in Latin America) and the potential spillover effects.

This was especially true for neighboring countries such as Brazil or Venezuela. In 2000, Gen. Alberto Cardoso Brazil's chief security adviser stated explicitly that *Plan Colombia* was a major concern: "...Our attention is dedicated to the effects it could have on Brazil, like the flight of guerillas and the transfer of (drug) laboratories and plantations"³⁹

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez was even more vocal in his opposition arguing, "*Peace negotiations are the only way to achieve a solution*" and in the same way both Ecuador and Panama expressed their concerns over the implementation of Plan Colombia.⁴⁰

Despite widespread lack of consensus, the United States continued to support the initiative, remaining the main source of funding. Even further, as the events of 9/11 unfolded two main elements pushed Latin American governments to change their minds on the matter. First, the war on terrorism started and with it rising tensions in the whole continent, Latin American governments could but voice their support for Plan Colombia as an American initiative. Second, under Bush's administration there was an increase in the aid packages to Colombia's neighbors within the framework of the Andean Regional Initiative. What could be seen as bribery, was actually the skillful manipulation of events by the United States. As many times before, the United

³⁸ Connie Veillette, (22 June, 2005). "Plan Colombia: A Progress Report" Latin American Affairs Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32774.pdf>, accessed 25 November, 2015

³⁹ Stratford, Global Intelligence, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/brazil-feels-impact-colombias-drug-war>, accessed 25 November 2015

⁴⁰ Livingstone, Grace, 2004. *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

States was able to exploit a moment of apparent weakness to influence regional and global geopolitics by economic and political means.

While the protection of Colombia's citizens should have been paramount from the beginning, 9/11 allowed greater scope for achieving that goal. In August 2002, United States legislation permitted the aid to be used more broadly than in the original measure. No longer would United States resources have to be directly tied to the drug question. Now they could be used in combating the FARC, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), and AUC—all of which were considered terrorist groups by the United States government.

This shift meant greater latitude in the ample project named Plan Colombia and a widening of the possibilities in the use of the provided funds. This, in turn, helped align Colombian realities and necessities and conjugate them with the central concerns of the United States, being security and the struggle against both guerrillas and drugs trafficking.

On the other hand, all these changes were possible due to the changes that took place within the Colombian government. 2002 was marked by the election of Colombian President Uribe that succeeded to Pastrana.

Uribe appeared on the stage of Colombian politics as a staunch enemy of drug traffickers and a loyal ally of the United States, to the point that he publicly voiced his support for the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq. Even further, drawing a parallel with Iraq, in 2003 he asked for a deployment of American troops on Colombian soil.

"¿Por qué no se piensa en un despliegue equivalente, semejante, para poder ponerle punto final a este problema, que tiene potenciales consecuencias tan graves?"⁴¹

If we consider the weight and the reach of such a statement from the Colombian President, we can easily understand how Uribe's Presidency allowed the two countries to draw closer. Even further, Uribe's hard line towards drug trafficking and total support allowed a deepening of United States intervention in internal affairs with hundreds of American advisors, over \$2 billion in military aid since 2000 and another challenge to its sovereignty.⁴²

Drawing a conclusion we can affirm that there have always been at least two captains behind the steering wheel of Plan Colombia and that the plan was subject to changes over the course of time not only due to circumstances and events, but also due to the vision and will of Colombian and American presidents.

⁴¹ El Pais, 16 January 2003, http://elpais.com/diario/2003/01/16/internacional/1042671619_850215.html, accessed 26 November 2015

⁴² Winn Peter, 2006, *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 3rd Edition University of California Press; Third Edition, p.509

4.2 – Goals of Plan Colombia

Elements of the plan

In the official document of Plan Colombia, as initially devised, there were 10 strategic elements. They represented important focuses and highlights within the plan, identifying aspects that were particularly important and thus deserving special attention. Much emphasis was posed on the economic aspects of the plan, which recur in objective 1 as well as objective 7 in the form of job creation, alternative development and revaluation of peripheral, rural and neglected areas. This in turn was supposed to be complementary part of the eradication of illicit crops, as they are often grown in these poor and backward parts of the country, where poverty is widespread and there are few to no alternatives to the cultivation of coca. Further, these same areas are also where rebel groups enforce their personal rule of law over territory and population, thriving on the scarcity of means of the people and on the scant governmental presence.

As a consequence, security and the achievement of peace also had to be at the center of the attention of Colombian policy makers, and they were high-lighted in objective 3 and objective 4, as closely linked to the problem of cocaine trafficking, and paramount to the creation of a functioning state in Colombia. Only with the achievement of peace and the curbing of violence, policy makers can think of a healthy economy and of sustainable development. As we can easily understand the two aspects, security and peace, and economic development are complementary and intertwined. However, as we will later see, they did not get the same degree of funding and attention.

Similarly, societal aspects of the plan were neglected. Objective 8 and objective 9 are about social participation and human development, which can be associated to soft power and civilian aspects of foreign intervention, two things on which both the United States, especially during Uribe and Bush presidency chose not to invest too much. Rather, emphasis and resources were funneled into military aid and what we may label as raw power in the form of weapons, training, helicopters etc... While these aspects played an important role and the training of troops was surely fundamental, both Colombian and American policy makers by devoting too little attention and resources to societal and economic aspects, failed to achieve an all-round project for long term development. Lastly, objective 5 revolves around a judicial and human rights strategy, which was merely part of façade of respectability both Colombia and the United States needed while focusing on the carrying out of military operations across Colombia. If the country had a bad record in terms of human rights, Plan Colombia surely did not improve it. As we will later see, human rights violations have been frequent with Colombian population suffering at the hand of Colombia and American forces and PMCs.

As mentioned before, one of the most important objectives for any country ever is the development

of proper economic strategy. As a consequence, the first objective envisaged in this version of the plan, revolved around the creation of employment, the improvement of the State capability to collect taxes, as well as the expansion of international trade and increased foreign investment. Not only, these objectives appear crucial if we consider the dire economic situation of Colombia by the end of the 90s, it is also easy to understand how an healthy economy can prove pivotal in the fight against crime, drug trafficking and corruption, especially when unemployment reached an all-time high such Colombia in the late 90s. By creating employment and possibilities for legal development, Colombia aimed at taking away human resource from the underworld of armed groups and drug traffickers.

As a second objective, a fiscal and financial strategy was devised. In order to restore its economic status and the prestige of its market, Colombia aimed at undertaking a series of structural reforms and austerity measures. Through these improvements, Colombia hoped to regain the favor of investors (thanks to renewed credibility) and obtain support from world financial institutions such the World Bank and the IMF.

The third objective was instead represented by the completion of the peace process with the guerrillas, which included the preservation of territorial integrity and the respect democracy and human rights. By meeting these conditions in the framework of a long lasting peace, Colombian policy makers aimed at improving the rule of law and fight back against drugs trafficking.

The fourth objective consisted in a national defense strategy. In order to maintain peace, once achieved, and restore the rule of law, Colombia needed to restructure and modernize the armed forces and the police. Following these reforms, Colombia hoped to be finally able to combat organized crime and armed group and protect and promote human rights, as well as the respect international humanitarian law.

In fact, the fifth objective is centered on a judicial and human rights strategy. With the aim of reaffirming the rule of law and assure equal and impartial justice to all, Colombia wanted to enact reforms in the field of human rights.

The sixth objective was represented by the implementation of an effective counter-narcotics strategy. By cooperating with several other countries (but especially with the United States) Colombia aimed at disrupting the links of the drug-chain: production, distribution, sale, consumption, asset laundering, precursor chemicals and arms dealing. Further, by focusing its efforts at the national level, Colombia aimed at stopping the flow of drugs and money, which represent the fuel of violence caused by traffickers and insurgent organizations.

The seventh objective was the implementation of an alternative development strategy. In order to give Colombian farmers an alternative to the cultivation of illicit crops, Colombia aimed at creating

new profitable, farming opportunities. As part of this objective, the protection of the environment was also meant to be developed, so that the rich bio-diversity of Colombia was preserved. To render these objectives feasible, the strategy included an integrated, productive projects and infrastructures, with particular attention to the regions where State presence was very low and conflict was very active. These areas that often display fragile social capital and serious environmental degradation, are those of the Middle Magdalena valley, the Macizo Colombiano and the southwest, where coca crops are often located.

The eighth objective consisted in a social participation strategy for collective awareness. While improving the economic and social situation of Colombia, the government also tried to regain accountability. In order to do so, a series of initiatives including: community involvement in anti-corruption efforts, and continued pressure on the guerrillas and other armed groups to end kidnapping, violence and the internal displacement of individuals and communities, were launched. Further, cooperation was started with local business and labor groups, in order to promote innovative and productive models in the face of a more globalized economy. In addition, this strategy sought to strengthen Colombian institutions, both formal and informal, to foster changes in the cultural patterns through which violence develops and reinforces itself. It includes the promotion of mechanisms and educational programs to increase tolerance, the essential values for peaceful co-existence, and participation in public affairs.

As ninth objective a human development strategy was devised. In order to promote efforts to guarantee, within the next few years, adequate education and health, to help minorities and vulnerable groups in Colombian society, including not just those affected and displaced by violence but also those in conditions of extreme poverty and marginalization such as farmers living in the most remote areas of the country.

Lastly, as tenth objective an international-oriented strategy was included in the plan, with the aim of confirming the principles of shared responsibility, integrated action and balanced treatment of the drug issue. As confirmed by the recent events (the peace talks being held in Cuba as well as Norway), the role and support of the international community is also vital to the success of the peace process, provided that it conforms to the terms of international law and is requested by the Colombian government ⁴³

The points listed above refer to the structure of Plan Colombia as first envisaged by Colombian President Pastrana in the official document *Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity and the Strengthening of the State*, however, as we have seen, the initial document underwent several

⁴³ United States Institute of Peace, Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity and Strengthening of State, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/plan_colombia_101999.pdf, accessed 27 November 2015

changes and not every aspect received the same degree of commitment and support.

As we have seen the initial draft of Plan Colombia contained several elements that although directly linked to the eradication of drug trafficking received little attention or were not considered of prime importance. As a consequence, United States policy makers in Washington were not completely satisfied with the structure of Plan Colombia and opted for some changes.

Basically, Washington Officers did not alter the draft, rather they opted to add an annex, in order to improve the efficiency of the plan and secure the objectives they cared the most about.

Annex I was entitled “Interagency Action Plan” and aimed at the immediate eradication of coca leaves cultivation in the Putumayo region in south-east Colombia, near the border with Ecuador, where the impenetrable territory and the scant presence of the Colombian government allowed coca cultivation and cocaine production to flourish.

Even further, the proximity of the Ecuadorian border allows illegal cultivation and production as traffickers have the possibility of crossing the border to escape capture or simply relocate production in case of problems according to the patten of the so called “air balloon effect” according to which traffickers opt to move their illicit activities where controls are harder to enforce and where scant governmental presence allow them to continue with their activities undisturbed.

Coca cultivation in Colombia in 2001



General Coca Cultivation Areas in Colombia

Source: Dea Gov⁴⁴

As we can see from the map, the green and dark green areas represent the parts of the Colombian territory where coca cultivation was particularly intense, with a density of at least above 4 hectares per square kilometer. Further, we can notice that the cultivation was concentrated in the areas of Putumayo, Caquetá and Guaviare. These regions are located in the south of Colombia, near the border with Ecuador where the rule of law of Colombian government is almost impossible to enforce and where the FARC rule over people and territory.

The FARC were able to exploit these areas, and through taxation and extortion, finance themselves obtaining between \$500 and \$600 million per year⁴⁵, thus making the so called “narcotics-terrorism nexus” reality.

Annex I main aim was solving the problems that characterized these parts of the Colombian territory, and through a swift and decisive action, inflict immediate losses to the cultivation of coca. Annex I goals included: providing alternative development, strengthening judicial systems, ensuring human rights protection coupled with a strong focus on eradication of crops and interdiction.

As mentioned before, Plan Colombia objectives changed a great deal over time. From the initial 10 objectives that focused on security, as well as on social and economic development, the project moved to 5 strategic goals

The five goals as listed in the United States version of the document are:

Goal 1: to reduce the production and distribution of illegal drugs and dismantle terrorist organizations;

Goal 2: to build and strengthen state institutions and increase the state presence throughout Colombia;

Goal 3: to improve the economy;

Goal 4: to advance the peace process;

Goal 5: to advance democratization and social development;

4.3 - Implementation and Evaluation of Goal 1: to reduce the production and distribution of illegal drugs and dismantle terrorist organizations

In order to achieve Goal 1 both the Colombian and the American government have implemented several measures. First and maybe most importantly they focused on the eradication of illicit crops,

⁴⁴ Dea Gov, <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/intel/02006/>, accessed 28 November 2015

⁴⁵ Marcella G., 2001, Plan Colombia: the Strategic and Operational Imperatives, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB29.pdf>, accessed 28 November 2015

namely, the destruction of coca leaves plantations via aerial or manual eradication.

The central premise is that money obtained through the taxation of coca crops feeds the coffers of the guerrillas, thus fueling the civil strife of Colombia. By exerting control and taxation over the territory, the FARC are able to finance themselves and obtain weaponry and logistical capabilities to carry attacks against governmental or self-defense forces.

If the flux of drug money going to the traffickers is halted or at least limited, the guerrillas lose power and capability to mount attacks. As a consequence, guerrillas with reduced offensive capabilities represent less of a threat, thus reducing insecurity. In turn the paramilitaries have less reason for being aggressive and contribute to the climate of instability, which surely makes the peace process easier.

Basically, by taking away drugs, Plan Colombia hoped to take away the guns and allow a process to achieve peace and a more efficient Colombian state.

In order to achieve this result they adopted different techniques. They focused on aerial spraying of herbicides such as glyphosate and manual eradication both, they worked to create possibilities of “alternative development”, they employed counter narcotics and interdiction operations, as well as military combat operations against insurgent and paramilitary organizations. All these efforts and initiatives were channeled towards a common goal the elimination of terrorist organizations and illegal drugs.

Implementation of Goal 1

Illicit crops reduction and eradication

In order to achieve the first goal the United States, together with Colombia, promoted the eradication and the reduction of coca crops. Attempts at achieving these results were conducted via both manual eradication and aerial spraying. The latter method is the most controversial and the one that received more attention and space in the development of Plan Colombia's initiatives. However, the idea of aerial eradication is older than Plan Colombia itself. In fact, the method was first adopted in the 1980s when cocaine trafficking was at its apex and the Colombian government struggled to contain the phenomenon, but when Plan Colombia was launched, both American and Colombian policy makers agreed to employ aerial spraying once again.

Planes flying over Colombia could be loaded with several liters of glyphosate herbicide, thus allowing them to cover a larger area of Colombian territory and hit several crop fields at once. Planes seemed faster, more reliable and more effective than manual eradication.

However, the choice to employ this method came with consequences. It is not possible to assess whether policy makers were aware of the risks represented by the Round-up Ultra mix or not, but it

is safe to affirm that several collateral damages were caused by the aerial eradication.

While this method was supposed to be characterized by high efficiency and precision, allowing to hit crops from the air with no risk, it turned out to be unreliable and costly in terms of human lives and environmental damage.

First of all, the herbicide of choice was the Round-up Ultra, a powerful chemical agent developed and produced by American Multinational Monsanto, ironically enough the same company that produced the infamous "Agent Orange" during the Vietnam War. Round Up Ultra is 14.5% surfactant, the precise identity of which has not been disclosed. Surfactants can be a significant source of toxicity of glyphosate herbicides⁴⁶

Basically, glyphosate based herbicides are highly toxic and represent a serious threat for human health, reason why they should not come in contact with the population.

In fact such is the case in the United States, where according to federal law prior warning should always be issued to farmer and their families, however, the Colombian situation was quite different. As most of these crops are illegal and cultivated in remote areas, communications and warnings about incoming air raids never existed and local campesinos were not able to move or take shelter. Second, part of the mixture sprayed over Colombia was constituted by Cosmo-Flux 411F. The label for Roundup Ultra warns that "this is an end-use product. Monsanto does not intend and has not registered it for reformulation" which clearly did not happen in the Colombian case, where Cosmo-Flux was mixed with Round-up to increase its efficiency. Further, the ingredients of Cosmo-Flux 411F have not been disclosed. Neither the U.S. nor the Colombian government has made available any studies on this additive's effects, alone or in combination with Roundup Ultra; thus there is reason to deem it unsafe for human health and there are good reasons to assume that its negative effects are being kept a secret.

Even further, both concentration and quantity of the sprayed mixture present a plethora of problems. The herbicide mixtures used in Colombia were more concentrated and were applied in greater doses than the maximum levels recommended by the manufacturer on the U.S. label. The spray mixture used in Colombia contains 44% Roundup Ultra by volume. In contrast, the U.S. label for Roundup Ultra allows concentrations of 1.6% to 7.7%. The U.S. label states that in most situations aerial application should not exceed 1 quart per acre of the formulated product, while In Colombia, the rate is almost 4 and a half times that amount.⁴⁷

While Round-up has always been billed as "safe" for mammals including humans by the U.S. State Department, there have been too many persistent reports of health related problems after fumigation

⁴⁶Sawada, Y., et al. 1988, "Probable toxicity of surface-active agent in commercial herbicide containing glyphosate," The Lancet, p. 299.

⁴⁷Roundup Ultra sample label, 1999, p.3. Section 7.1.

and incidents involving farmers and their animals to ignore.

Dutch journalist Marjon Van Royen investigated the health reports on the ground in Colombia, and found that "*because the chemical is sprayed in Colombia from planes on inhabited areas, there have been consistent health complaints [in humans]. Burning eyes, dizziness and respiratory problems being most frequently reported.*"⁴⁸

Doubts regarding the safety of chemical concoctions sprayed over Colombia were confirmed in 2001, when Colombian biologist and chemist Dr. Elsa Nivia has shown that the enhancement of toxicity by the additive could be responsible for the human health problems attributed to Roundup.

In a talk at the University of California in Davis in May, Dr. Nivia said: "*the [Roundup Ultra] mixture with the Cosmo Flux 411 F surfactant can increase the herbicide's biological action fourfold, producing relative exposure levels which are 104 times higher than the recommended doses for normal agricultural applications in the United States; doses which, according to the study mentioned, can intoxicate and even kill ruminants.*"⁴⁹

Further, the damage did not stop to people and cultivation of sprayed areas. As the powerful herbicide penetrated the soil of Colombia and polluted in its rivers and water bodies, it contaminated the environment of Colombia and its neighboring countries.

Last spring, GTZ, the German government version of USAID, lodged serious complaints against the fumigation because either consciously or due to "drift" (imprecision in spraying caused by wind and height) the fumigation was destroying the Colombian "aquiculture" project they had underwritten -- fishponds that provide protein for campesinos subsistence.⁵⁰

These collateral damages, were common occurrence in the carrying out of Plan Colombia and underline how little policy makers cared about objectives such as social and human rights, as well as alternative development, that were first listed in the original draft of Plan Colombia.

Between 1999 and 2004 the aerial eradication program sprayed over 500,000 hectares of coca, which is equivalent to more than 10% of Colombia's arable land. The spraying was carried out by a police unit known as the Colombian Antinarcotics Directorate (DIRAN) with the help of twenty-four specifically designed aircrafts. Further, most of the times these were accompanied by armed helicopters in order to protect the aircrafts against possible attacks waged by insurgent groups from the ground. However, most of the troops employed as "muscle" were not American nor Colombian. In fact, via the financing of Plan Colombia the American government opted to contract several PMCs, private companies of international contractors able to operate in a juridical limbo. DynCorp was one of the most important PMCs operating in Colombia. DynCorp, a Virginia-based company with over 20,000 employees in more than 550 locations and \$1.8 billion in annual

⁴⁸ Bigwood J. 2001, CorpsWatch, <http://www.corpswatch.org/article.php?id=669>, accessed 28 November 2015

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

revenue offered services linked to aerial reconnaissance and transportation, as well as performing aerial fumigation and search and rescue operations for the Colombian army, while receiving in exchange a US\$600 contract.⁵¹ What could be seen as less than necessary spending though, increased the security of the operators carrying out the aerial eradication activities and reduced American casualties.

Aerial eradication, however, is not the only method that has so far been used by the authorities. Manual eradication also represents a valuable tool in the struggle against cocaine trafficking and in particular in the destruction of illicit crops.

Manual eradication is a very different method and involves another approach to the removal of coca crops, as it implies human presence on the ground. Colombian troops move through the jungle to those areas where coca is cultivated (Putumayo, Caqueta, Guaviare etc...) and proceed to the manual removal of the crops. Via manual eradication the plants are uprooted and definitely killed, without damage to legal crops, thus making this method more effective than aerial fumigation.

Further, manual eradication increase governmental presence on ground, increasing the influence and the legitimacy of the Colombian government in the areas where it is adopted.

However, manual eradication comes with a price. As governmental forces operate “boots on the ground” they are more exposed to ambushes and attacks from the insurgent militias, and even further, the placement of IED and mines in the crops make these operations particularly risky for the personnel charged with the task of eradicating coca crops. Since 2009, more than 62 eradicators have been killed and 382 have been injured due to sniper attacks, mines or IEDs.⁵² Due to these risks, this method has not been employed as widely as the aerial one.

Alternative Development

Projects of alternative development are strictly linked to the eradication of coca crops. Basically, as the illicit crops are destroyed and removed, their place is taken by alternative and legal crops such as yucca, coffee, cocoa etc... However plans for alternative development present a series of problems and flaws, and are not always implemented with proper attention.

First, one should always consider the economic and political pressure that compels peasants to stick to the cultivation of coca. Guerrillas such as the FARC are very much involved in the cultivation of coca as they exploit taxation of coca leaves and take advantage of the huge profits to sustain

⁵¹ Walcott, Judith. 2003. “Spraying Crops, Eradicating People.” *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Cambridge: Winter 2003, Vol. 26, Iss. 4, 28

⁵² Isacson Adams Wola Senior Associate, 7 October 2013, Wola Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas, http://www.wola.org/commentary/time_to_abandon_coca_fumigation_in_colombia. accessed 29 November 2015

themselves and finance their struggle; as a consequence peasants are often “bullied” into cultivating coca. Further, the cultivation of coca offers incredible revenues to the peasants that take the risk and agree to cultivate it, especially when the soil is poor as in certain rural areas of the Andes. In these mountainous areas, not only agriculture is inefficient, the government is also absent giving its denizens a feeling of neglect and abandonment. With campesinos being marginalized and kept in miserable conditions, the guerrilla movements have the upper hand in deciding what should be cultivated. Even further, they gain popularity as they provide a source of income and replace the role of the state as enforcers of security and stability.

What Plan Colombia policy makers often failed to understand is that in order to succeed in alternative development and crops substitution, more efficiency, more knowledge and better infrastructures are necessary.

In vast parts of rural Colombia, especially in the far and almost unreachable areas where coca is cultivated, farmers continue to face systemic structural obstacles that prevent them from switching to legal livelihoods. They include, among others, lack of access to land, lack of titles to land, irrigation, roads, credit, technical assistance, and established markets.

As consequence the implementation of alternative development should, in most cases, be postponed or put on hold. First, Colombia needs to invest in proper infrastructures. Further, while Plan Colombia gave different priorities to coca eradication and means of alternative development. Coca crops were often destroyed overnight, leaving the campesinos with nothing but promises of crops substitution and future development.

What matters for people living in dire conditions such as those of rural Colombia is the “*hic et nunc*” meaning a stable source of income in the immediate and not alternative assistance programs that take a long time to generate a sustainable livelihood.

Attempts at addressing these problems were made through food security programs implemented by the government of Colombia and the United States in the framework of Plan Colombia. Despite their importance, they frequently did not provide sufficient income even for food replacement, not to mention covering other expenditures. As a consequence, farmers that find themselves in dire economic situations after the eradication of their crop are more than inclined to return to the cultivation of coca, while at the same time harboring resentment for governmental force responsible of their ruin. Moreover, if campesinos switch back to the cultivation of illicit crops, they will be disqualified from any further assistance. The so called “zero-coca” policy of the Colombian government, although designed to enforce a culture of legality, prevents Colombian government institutions and the United States from providing the assistance necessary for coca farmers to switch to and remain in legal livelihoods. This policy conditions all aid, including food security, technical

assistance, roads, etc., on the proven eradication of all coca in an entire area. Even if only one member of a community cultivates coca on a small plot-for any reason- the entire community is technically disqualified from receiving any assistance. A paradoxical scheme often takes place. Communities that even before the intervention of the government did not need much help, benefit from the greatest improvements in security.

Due to their relatively good economic and social conditions, these communities are least dependent on coca cultivation, thus qualifying themselves for Plan Colombia assistance. On the other hand, communities that most need that help and face great insecurity and large economic obstacles to abandoning coca are left without assistance.

Counter-narcotics and interdiction

Plan Colombia's counter narcotic strategy is strictly linked to the reform in public institutions such as the Colombian army and the national police and improvement of the judicial system.

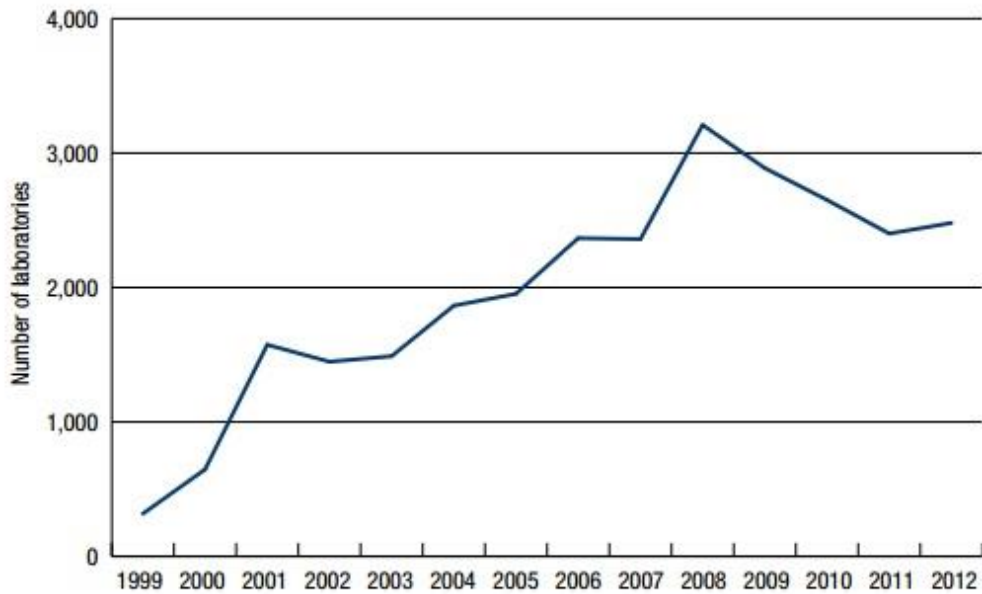
If we consider the weight that the cocaine business has in the financing of guerrillas and thus in the stability of Colombia, we can quite easily understand why policymakers more than anything else, focused on this aspect of Plan Colombia.

Halting the trafficking and smuggling of cocaine is indeed a necessary step in stopping insurgent forces and restoring stability in Colombia.

Since the launch of Plan Colombia, 1,842 metric tons of cocaine have been seized, with an average seizure rate of 27 percent of potential cocaine production. More than 27,000 cocaine processing laboratories have been destroyed.⁵³

⁵³ Mejia Daniel, An Analysis of Effectiveness and Cost, Universidad de Los Andes, Foreign Policy at Brookings, p. 2

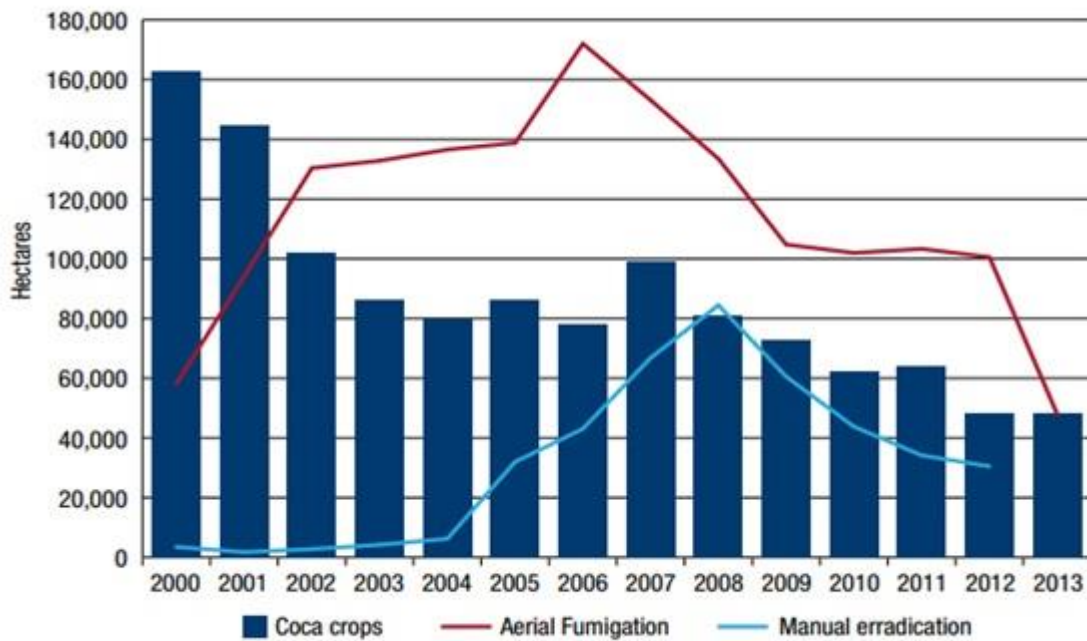
NUMBER OF COCAINE PROCESSING FACILITIES DESTROYED IN COLOMBIA, 1997-2012



Source: UNODC, 2013

As we can see from the chart, the number of laboratories seized and destroyed started skyrocketing after 2006, when after Juan Manuel Santos became minister of defense, under President Uribe, and Colombia's anti-drug strategies underwent a radical change. Santos and his team decided to put less emphasis on aerial spraying and manual eradication, methods that had proven to be risky and often problematic and focus more energy on the dismantling of the cocaine production and trafficking network.

. COCA CROPS, AERIAL SPRAYING, AND MANUAL ERADICATION IN COLOMBIA, 2000-2013



Source: UNODC, 2013

As a result, the number of hectares subjected to aerial spraying decreased from 172,000 in 2006 to 104,000 in 2009 (a reduction of 40 percent), cocaine seizures increased from 127 metric tons in 2006 to 203 in 2009 (an increase of 60 percent) and the number of laboratories destroyed increased from 2,300 in 2006 to 2,900 in 2009 (an increase of 26 percent).⁵⁴

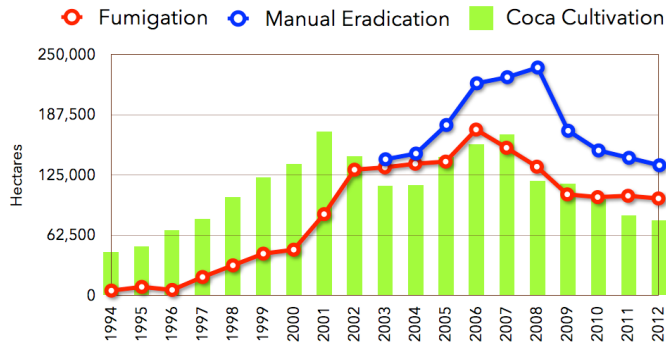
Evaluation of Goal 1 success

While manual eradication seemed promising enough, it was soon abandoned in favor of aerial fumigation. This second method, while apparently very effective in reducing the coca cultivated surface of Colombia, brought relatively negligible results and came with a high price. According to David Mejia, an economist who heads the Center for Studies on Security and Drugs at Bogotá's University of the Andes. *“For the United States, the marginal cost of reducing by one kilogram the amount of cocaine reaching its borders by attacking production is US\$163,000, whereas the same result can be had attacking trafficking for US\$3,600.”*⁵⁵

⁵⁴ UNODC, Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2013, https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/Colombia_coca_cultivation_survey_2013.pdf, accessed 29 November 2015

⁵⁵ Mejia David, Center for Studies on Security and Drugs, PDF, UniAndes.edu.co, accessed 29 November 2015

Coca Crops, Fumigation, and Manual Eradication in Colombia



Source: U.S. Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports <<http://1.usa.gov/1eAAutY>>.

A look at the cultivation numbers reveals two periods over the past ten years when coca-growing decreased substantially. The first was in 2001, when Plan Colombia started employing aerial eradication in a massive and constant way and the program was extended to other parts of the country. The Putumayo region was hit in a particularly intensive way, which brought coca cultivation to a new low.

Also, at around the same time, the failure of the peace talks with the FARCS in 2002 caused an extensive military offensive of the counter insurgency forces against the guerrillas, thus allowing the government to take control of part of the territory where coca was cultivated the most. In 2007 that the amount of coca cultivated crops started to decline again, a period that marked both the decrease of American funding for fumigation and the ever increasing use of manual eradication by Colombian forces.

While this proves that manual eradication was to some degree more effective than aerial fumigation, we should also bear in mind that the eradication of crops alone is no mean to achieve long lasting progress and development. Further, due to the so called “air balloon effect, it is reasonable to assume that cultivation might have just moved elsewhere.

Aerial eradication, not only proved expensive and largely ineffective, it also damaged the government credibility, causing it to lose prestige and alienating the already resentful Colombian population. Colombian government’s presence was already weak in many parts of the country before the beginning of Plan Colombia; however, its popularity was surely damaged by Plan Colombia development and results. As the plan offered too few possibilities of alternative development and destroyed coca crops, thus depriving many people of their only way to sustain themselves and their families, it created an image of the Colombian government as a ruthless entity that disregard its population.

This in turn, favored the FARCS and other guerrillas. In fact by exploiting the flaws of Plan

Colombia and the loss of prestige of the Colombian government, they were able to gain support and impose themselves as allies and protector of the common folk.

On a side note, according to Witness for Peace, manual eradication was often carried out in a brutal and violent way and accompanied by violence, thefts and break-ins. Colombia surely has a bad record in matters of human rights, but violations such as these are by far unacceptable for people operating for the legitimate government of Colombia.

Today, both aerial and manual eradication should not be continued. If the FARCS and the other armed groups currently involved in the peace process of the Havana Talks manage to reach a compromise and stop their armed struggle, the reduction of coca will be the next logic step.

However, if the government of Colombia plans to go ahead with its crusade against cocaine and cocaine traffickers, it should also bear in mind that a cultural component links coca to its population and territory.

4.4 - Implementation and Evaluation of Goal 2: to build and strengthen state institutions and increase the state presence throughout Colombia

One of the most important aspects of Plan Colombia, especially as the American interests started influencing the goals of the plan, was the improvement of military and police forces, while at the same time reinforcing public institutions.

The role of state presence throughout the Colombia was crucial for the success of Plan Colombia. The lack of strong government is a leading cause of Colombia's difficulties. As the presence of governmental forces in the form of public officers, army or police is scant in areas outside state control, illegal activities are allowed to flourish. The geography of the Colombia itself making things even worse. In fact, as Colombia has a rugged territory, covered by thick jungles "empty lands" beyond established state control can provide the perfect safe haven for any illegal activity. State presence is also paramount as it opens the door to efforts for poverty reduction and overall economic progress within the country. Increased state presence offers additional benefits for counter-narcotics efforts and the accomplishment of Plan Colombia goals. Security provided through government presence undermines the power and size of guerrillas which engage in illegal activities, especially in relation to the cultivation and taxation of coca crops. The greatest accomplishment of Plan Colombia has been the dramatic improvements in security in the country and the suppression of violent belligerent groups, including the FARC, the ELN, and paramilitary groups such as the AUC.

Good security is not only important on its own; it is also a necessary precondition for the success of counter-narcotics policies. Achieving effective state control of rural area such as that of Putumayo,

where coca is cultivated, is an important step toward the success of counter-narcotics policies. For all these reasons, one of the main focuses of the plan was the improvement of the Colombian Armed Forces and Police, coupled with a much needed judicial reform.

Colombian Armed Forces

The Colombian Armed Forces before the beginning of Plan Colombia surely did not provide an image of efficiency and professional standards. Their actions were, in fact, rather similar to those of the armed bands and guerrillas that terrorized the country and more often than not included grave violations of human right. Further, the defeats suffered by Colombian military forces in 1997 and 1998, at the hand of insurgent groups, convinced the government of the need to strengthen, professionalize and modernize the military.

As a consequence one of the first objectives of Plan Colombia was the training and regularization of Colombian Armed Forces, in order to achieve more professionalism and better performances and ultimately face the challenge represented by the civil struggle going on in the country between the legitimate government and non-state actors such as the FARC.

Between 1999 and 2000, around the time Plan Colombia was launched, the Colombian army had to undergo several changes with the aim of modernizing and becoming more efficient. First of all, the approach to operations was modified in order to allow more mobility and rapidity of reaction, two characteristics necessary in the struggle against the guerrillas. At the same time intelligence was also strengthened with an improvement of collection, sharing and processing of information, so that the various governmental forces could communicate and better coordinate themselves during planning and intervention.

As part of this objective, an integrated communications system was devised with the aim to integrate air power in support of ground operations.

Second, beneficiating of the American funding for Plan Colombia, the Colombian army was able to improve its capability or rapid deployment, thus creating a Rapid Deployment Force, which being supported by aircrafts is today able to deploy and quickly intervene anywhere in the country.

Third, in order to improve the employment of air power, the army focused on better integrating operations with land forces and acquiring night-vision equipment, that allows it to operate at night.

Fourth, improvements were made in the area of intelligence collection. Better training and better equipment provided the Colombian military with improved signals intelligence. Human intelligence a critical factor, remains difficult to remedy in guerrilla areas because of the guerrillas' familiarity with the terrain and network of social control. Basically, while the technological aspects of intelligence have been mastered, the social and human ones remain very problematic, especially due

to the perceived distance and enmity represented by the Colombian government. Lastly, attention was posed on making efforts to inculcate respect for human rights and customary international humanitarian law. Members of the military and the police at all levels receive an average of 90 hours a year in training in human rights and international humanitarian law⁵⁶. Further, the Colombian government brought to justice officers and NCOs accused of complicity in human rights violations, thus improving its standards of justice and respect of the law.

CNP - The Colombian National Police

As mentioned above, the Colombian Police at the time when Plan Colombia was launched, was in a dire situation. Thus, as part of the plan the CNP was also reinforced and improved in multiple aspects. Several weaknesses in size, structure and culture characterized the CNP. With about 100.000 active units, for a population of 40 million people, the CNP was severely undersized. Also, its agents received poor training and inadequate equipment, especially if we consider the necessity to collaborate with the army in joint operations against dangerous threats such as left wing guerrillas and drug traffickers. Even further, for these reasons and their poor work ethics members of the CNP often engaged in friendly behavior with the same threats they were supposed to address, causing resentment and distrust among the population to run wild.

As a consequence, one of the last actions of President Pastrana, before leaving office, was the purge of around 12.000 police officers accused of corruption.⁵⁷

Despite the problematic situation of Colombia, the CNP was able to boost its ranks from 100.000 to 150.000 units, thus registering a 50% growth in size. In addition to an increase in size, the Colombian police also raised its standard of screening and training, thus creating a better prepared and more reliable force to dispatch in the areas of Colombia where governmental presence was most scant.

Being part of the Ministry of Defense, the CNP was reformed in order to better synergize with the Colombian Army. As a consequence, most of the training received during Plan Colombia focused on tactical operations and intelligence, with the aim to allow a more efficient cooperation and better information sharing between the two. Further, thanks to the efforts of the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, a Police Air Service was created in support for aerial eradication of illicit crops. In addition, these aerial units allowed easier transportation of Colombian commandos and facilitated patrolling and drugs interdiction efforts.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Nabasa Angel, Chalk Peter, Colombian Labyrinth, The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency, RAND Corporation (July 13, 2001), p.102

⁵⁷ Anthony Forster, The President and His Plan, Jane's Intelligence Review, March 1 2001

⁵⁸ Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals were not fully met, but security has improved, U.S. Agencies need more detailed plans for reducing assistance, GAO 09 71, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 28 October 2008, gao.gov

The presidency of Alvaro Uribe, was no less involved in Plan Colombia, and after raising a war tax of US\$780 million worked on improving both army and police performances in Colombia. Initially, police reform during Uribe's Presidency aimed at improving community policing, intelligence and data collection, conflict resolution capabilities and retaking control over areas that had been lost to the FARC and the ELN. One of his most important initiative being the so called "town police" program that aimed at creating a force of partly trained citizens for limited functions, thus raising awareness and decreasing police workload.

Further in the field of intelligence sharing and collection, the CNP worked together with the Colombian army in order to develop a network of civil informants able to provide accurate information on the location of illicit activities of groups such as guerrillas and drug traffickers. Results finally arrived when in 2008 the CNP, during a much discussed raid on Ecuadorian soil was able to take down Raul Reyes, FARC's second in command

Two important pillars part of the reforms launched during Uribe's presidency were also *Plan Patriota* and *Plan Consolidación*.

Plan Patriota and *Plan Consolidación* were devised and developed with United States funding with the specific aim to fight guerrillas groups such as the FARC and the ELN. As part of Alvaro Uribe's democratic security doctrine the plan aimed at countering insurgent groups and establishing the presence of the government on the territory, thus allowing taxation and proper development of social programs.

Both plans dealt with both Colombian army and police and aimed at the reinforcement and expansion of their presence in Colombia. *Plan Patriota* and *Plan Consolidación* alike focused on the areas of Meta, Caquetà and Putumayo, which in fact are remote areas where government presence is scant and coca cultivation particularly intense: however, while *Plan Patriota* dealt mostly with retaking control over urban areas and infrastructures such as roads and railroads, *Plan Consolidación* launched an offensive in rural areas, where the FARC presence is possibly even stronger.

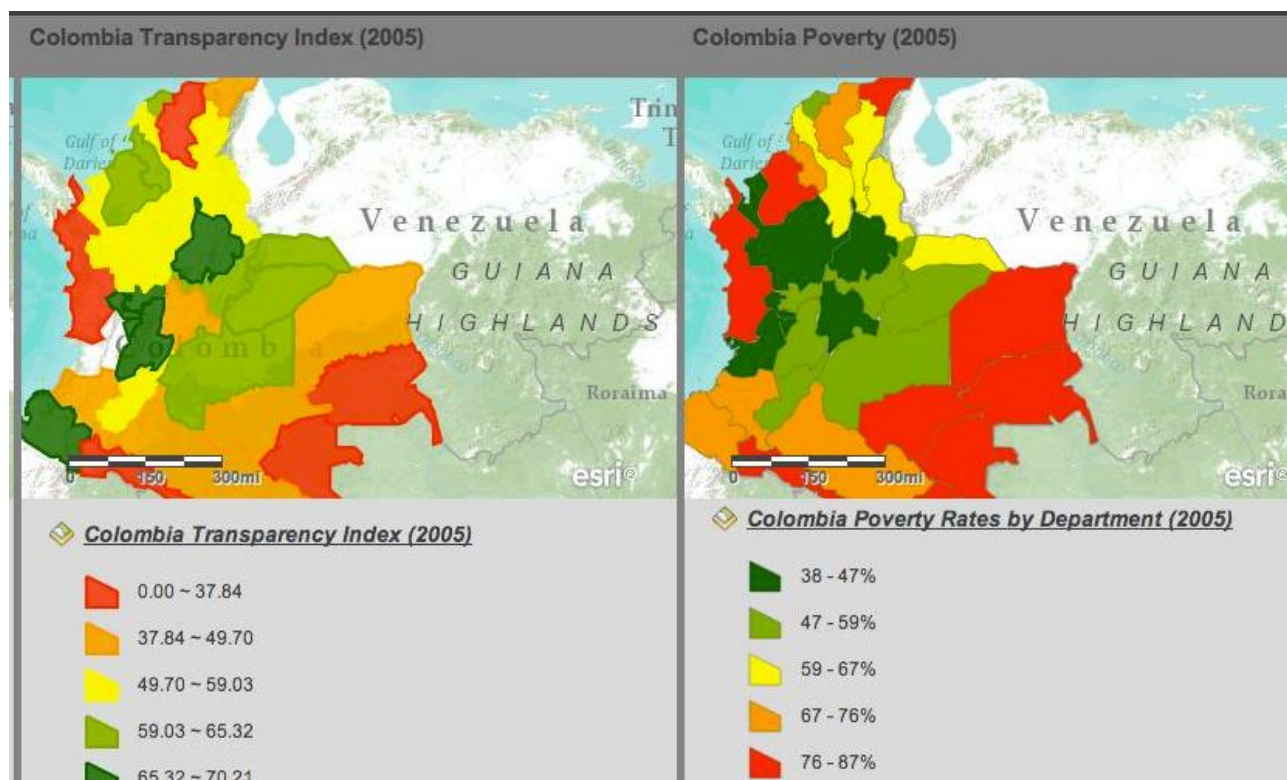
Judicial Reform

In order to achieve a long lasting progress in the state building project represented by Plan Colombia, one of the fundamental pillars was represented by the judicial reforms. Colombia, at the time of the launch of Plan Colombia had a seriously flawed judicial system, that rendered null the efforts of law enforcement agencies. While the army and the police struggled with threats such as guerrillas and traffickers, their efforts were almost never adequately rewarded. Once apprehended, criminals faced an inefficient and often lenient justice, that allowed them to resume their activities or allowed them to run their business from within the jail.

Further, the lack of transparency and frequent human rights violations in the administration of justice, provoked vast discontent and resentment among the population. As part of the ambitious aim of Plan Colombia, the United States Agency for International Development supported programs to modernize the criminal justice system, promote the respect of human rights, strengthen local government and allow a greater degree of transparency. Fundamental in order to achieve the goal was the creation of so called *casas de justicia* (justice houses) that allowed fair processes and a smoother functioning of justice in poor communities. Further, technical training and logistics support were provided in order to improve the work of judges and prosecutors.

Colombia also experienced (and experiences) high levels of corruption at every level of the state apparatus. Corruption manifested itself in various forms, including widespread financial and political corruption, patronage, and power abuse.

In terms of petty and bureaucratic corruption police officers seemed to be among those most exposed to the phenomenon. Receiving a relatively meager salary and enjoying no protection from the retaliation of traffickers, often accepted bribes. Basically, poverty seems to go hand in hand with corruption and bribery.



Source: transparency.org

According to the Transparency International Index of 2005, Colombia's rural, most impoverished areas were also those with highest corruption levels.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Transparency International, Fagan Craig, Does open data make development more accountable?

People living in rural, underdeveloped areas and facing economic uncertainty are logically more likely to accept bribery than the well-off dwelling in the urban areas. Further, corruption was so deeply rooted within Colombian society that even those refusing to accept bribes, would find themselves cornered in the so called “*plata o plomo*” system, made famous by Pablo Escobar.

Accepting a bribe was not a matter of money, but rather of life and death. However, even at higher levels, among politicians and civil servants, Colombian society was plagued by corruption. The Justice and Peace Law process has exposed corruption and paramilitary ties within the government and security forces, by which a total of 94 sitting or former parliamentarians were investigated; subsequently, 25 were acquitted and 37 convicted. Furthermore, 15 governors were investigated, 8 of whom were convicted.⁶⁰

Apparently, Plan Colombia was no silver bullet for Colombia’s corruption problems, which appear to fluctuate over time. While it appeared to produce short term results, it hardly achieved serious long term progress. Corruption levels improved by 17% between 2000 and 2003 and President Santos even contributed to this battle by launching new Anti-corruption Act of 2011 and creating a new anti-corruption office in the Presidency.

However, according to Transparency International’s 2012 Corruption Perception Index, the country received the worse score in ten years, going from 57 in 2002 to 94 in 2012.

Evaluation of Goal 2

This aspect of Plan Colombia was among those that received most money, time and attention. However, it was not a success under every aspect.

As mentioned above, the Colombian army was able to improve its performances and achieve an increased level of professionalization, while launching several campaigns against the FARC. If the developments of Plan Colombia brought about increased strife, and plunged Colombia in an even worse situation, at least for a while, they also allowed the Colombian government to reinforce itself and become more resilient to the threats of non-state actors.

The FARC and the ELN are still active and far from being defeated, however, the situation of Colombia today is by far better than before the launch of the plan.

The guerrillas seem to have lost terrain and power, and while they still engage in attacks and illicit activities, they are also taking part to negotiations and peace talks.

Similarly, Colombian institutions have managed to become more transparent and more efficient,

<http://blog.transparency.org/2012/12/13/does-open-data-make-development-more-accountable-the-case-of-colombia/>, accessed 30 November 2015

⁶⁰US Department of State (2011). Human Rights Report – Colombia.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?dliid=186502>, accessed 30 November 2015

thus allowing a better administration of justice and a renovated faith in the works of the Colombian government.

On the other hand the Judicial Reform was a partial failure.

Colombia still faces several structural flaws and corruption levels remain high. Collusion of the public and private sectors is frequent, and so are clientelism and nepotism. Remote areas of the country, near the border with Ecuador and Brazil are those most affected. Inefficiency and scant governmental presence encourage Colombians to look for alternative solutions and rely on a structure of illicit activities. Further, Colombia has been experience good levels of growth thanks to the development of its industry and natural resources, however, the lack of adequate regulation and accountability mechanisms is a cause for concern. Particularly risky is the extractive activity (mostly coal and oil) that could easily led to the so called “resource curse” affecting neighboring Venezuela, especially today, when oil prices have reached a new low. Plan Colombia is now history, however, the country cannot give up its efforts to fight corruption and improve its governance. Only through an efficient and transparent framework Colombia will achieve long term progress and development.

4.5 - Implementation and Evaluation of Goal 3: to improve the economy

In order to address the problem of cocaine trafficking and illicit activities in general, Colombia devoted Goal 3 to the economic development of the country.

By reducing unemployment, which at the time of Plan Colombia floated at around 20%, and improving its economy through growth in private sector, industry services through governmental as well as international financial aid, Colombia hoped to offer its citizens a path into legality.

As mentioned before, corruption as well as illegality thrives in situations of poverty and marginalization. Similarly, campesinos often engage in the cultivation of coca crops because of the lack of alternatives. An agricultural and inefficient economy, with few infrastructures and little competitiveness did not offer them any possibility to improve their situation, illegality being the only alternative.

Logically, the construction of jobs, alongside roads, railroads and the extension of the electric as well as running water network, was one of the most important aspects of the plan.

Finance

As it often happens in the case of developing or newly industrialized economies, Colombia decided to employ the help of international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. In addition to this, foreign direct investment

played an important role, as it allowed Colombia to funnel money into the country and receive wider support, especially by the United States.

In order to do so, however, Colombia had to gain credibility and restore its status at an international level. To achieve these two results, the country struggled towards a more balanced budget, reducing public debt and cutting public expenditure.

As debt had to be reduced, Colombia also decided to restructure its economy, in fact, under the Presidency of Pastrana, between 1998 and 2002, a series of neo-liberal policies were adopted.

First, a restructuration of the social security system, including pension funds, was enacted. Second, a vast maneuver of privatization was launched, taking banks, electric companies and extraction enterprises from the control of the state and giving them to private companies with the hope of improving their efficiency.

Third, the Colombian government tried its best to lure foreign investment in the form of multinational companies and corporations willing to invest and relocate manufacturing plants in Colombia, thus boosting its GDP and creating new sources of employment.

Oil and Natural Resources

Colombia is a country rich in natural resources. While its main source of wealth is represented by the 2 billion barrels (320,000,000 m³) of high-quality oil in the Cusiana and Cupiagua fields⁶¹, the country also has an important mining industry, with significant reserves of nickel, gold, silver, platinum, and emeralds. However, resources can be a blessing as much as they can be a curse and their successful exploitation requires money, knowledge and proper planning.

Colombia has the ambitious aim of being one of the main supplier of oil in the Caribbean area and extend a natural gas pipeline system that to most of its major population centers, thus making natural gas available to millions of Colombian households by the middle of the next decade. However, the pipeline running from Arauca to the Caribbean sea is often menaced and disrupted by the guerrillas, with bombs and attacks, causing significant reduction in the Colombian exportation of oil. In addition to this, while Colombia has plenty of oil, it fails to meet ever growing internal demand due to its insufficient refining capabilities. In fact, one of the aims of President Pastrana was the creation of additional refineries to address the issue, an objective only partly achieved.

Further, in order to meet its expanding demand and the necessities of the countries Colombia trade with, continual exploration in search of oil is needed. While the northernmost parts of Colombia appear to be rich in oil, they are relatively hard to explore, due to the insecurity of the area and

⁶¹Inclbp, June 2015, South American Countries Mineral Industry Handbook Volume 1 Strategic Information and Regulations, Forgotten Books, p. 31

possible attacks by the ELN.

Once again, achieving security seems to be fundamental in the creation of a long term economic development project.

To solve this problem, the United States contributed to the training of troops and the improvement of the pipeline infrastructure by allocating funds and specific personnel to train Colombian units. These upgrades included: better roads, communication, surveillance and military outposts with the aim of securing the pipeline, boosting Colombian economy and creating employment. Further, by reducing violence and uncertainty gravitating around Colombian oil resources, the government hoped to increase the willingness of investors to get involved in this very promising sector of the Colombian economy.

Agriculture

Agriculture is surely an important part of the Colombian economy; however, profit coming from illicit crops also constitutes a relatively large share of the GDP.

While an accurate assessment is almost impossible, we can affirm that roughly 30% of Colombian GDP is represented by the cultivation and production of coca. It is rather easy to understand why Colombians did not see coca as a problem, but rather as a precious resource and source of empowerment. Even further, as we have seen in the first chapters, coca is indeed part of the Colombian identity and culture, thus making its eradication difficult if not impossible.

Further, the cultivation of illicit crops is often the only viable alternative for people living in isolated areas of Colombia, where the lack of employment possibilities and infrastructures make coca the only possible choice.

Unfortunately, neither Plan Colombia nor earlier counter narcotics efforts considered the difficulties involved in taking away such a lucrative source of income from the rural population and above all they did not provide sufficient possibilities for alternative development.

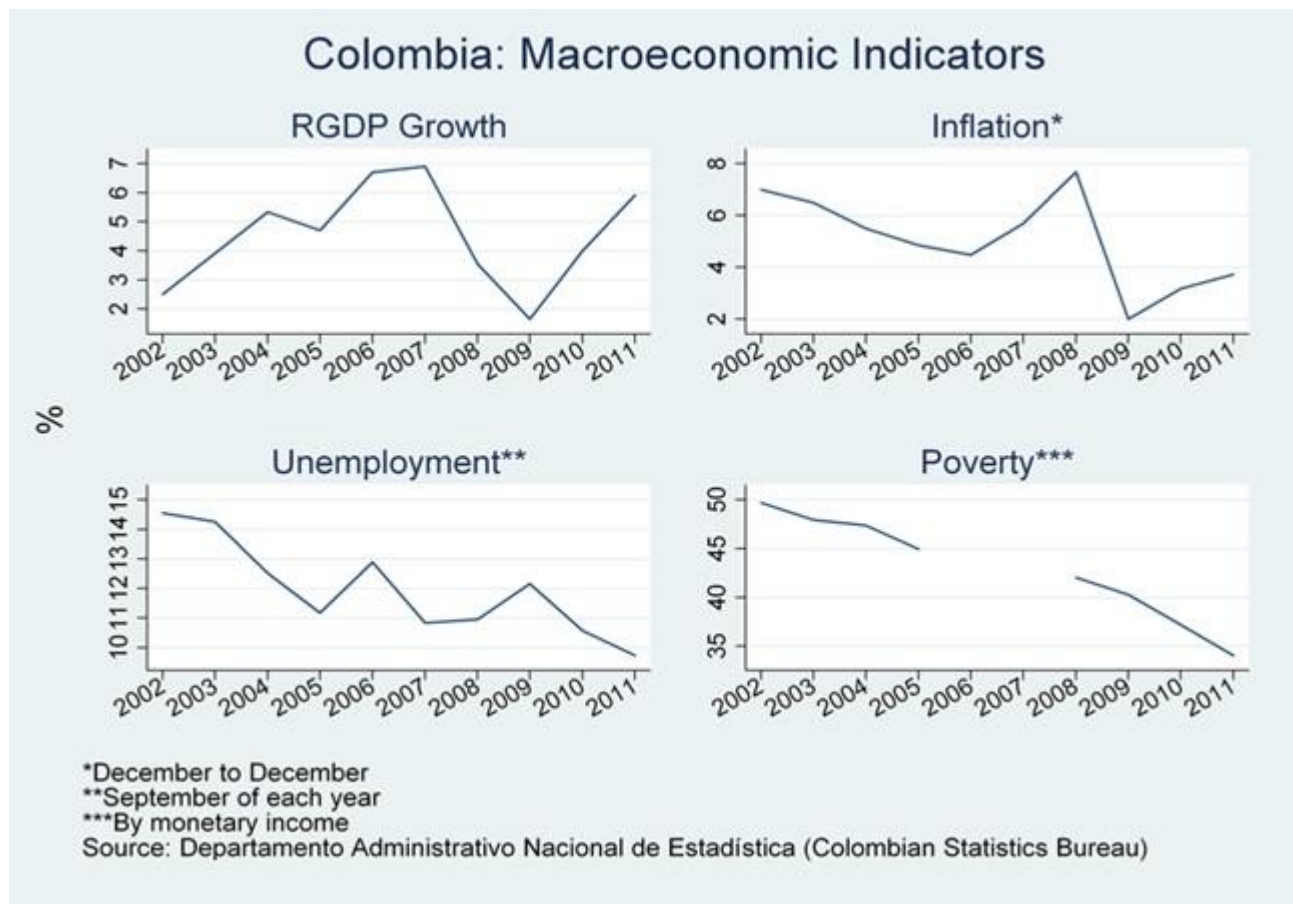
The world market for agricultural programs is today a very competitive one. Multinationals such as Monsanto with their technologically advanced techniques and large yield can flood the market with low cost, highly productive yield. As a consequence, farmers living in rural areas of underdeveloped countries struggle to be competitive and sell their goods, thus failing to make a living with honest means.

Plan Colombia failed to consider these aspects and too little has so far been done for alternative development. As part of the plan alternative cultivations such as yucca, tobacco or potatoes were proposed, however, as mentioned before Colombian campesinos fail to be competitive and out of frustration often switch back to the more lucrative cultivation of coca.

Evaluation of Goal 3

While making a complex and exhaustive evaluation of Colombia economy in the post Plan Colombia period would be a rather difficult if not impossible task, we can make a rough assessment of the situation following the implementation of Goal 3.

The Colombian Statistics Bureau is particularly useful as it offers us some macroeconomic indicators. We can take a look at the chart and consider how RGDP, Inflation, Unemployment and Poverty changed over time.



RGDP Growth

Colombian RGDP appears to have grown steadily from 2002 to 2011, with a momentary plunge due to the world crisis. Its peak was in 2007 when annual grow reached an all-time high of 7%. If compared to other economies in the world, Colombia has been doing rather good.

Inflation

Unlike other Latin American countries such as neighboring Venezuela, Colombia never experienced enormous problems due to inflation. Even in the last decade, as we can see, inflation was kept under

control reaching an all times low at 2% in 2009.

Unemployment

Unemployment at the time of Plan Colombia was one of the most worrisome issue of the Colombian agenda. In fact, with a staggering 20% it threatened to jeopardize the economic development of the whole country, while at the same time rendering counternarcotic efforts useless. Following the implementation of Plan Colombia, however, unemployment kept decreasing steadily reaching 9.4% in 2014.⁶²

Poverty

Astounding results were obtained under the profile of poverty reduction. From a rather worrisome 50% registered in 2002, poverty went down to less than 24% in 2015.⁶³ Reducing poverty is key in the counternarcotic efforts of Colombia and the United States. As a consequence we can say that, under this point of view, Goal 3 was a huge success.

The overall economic situation surely improved due to the reforms of Plan Colombia and both Pastrana and Uribe struggled with a difficult situation, yet managing to implement several policies that allowed Colombia to improve and diversify its economy.

An ever growing RGDP entices us of successful macroeconomic policies that led to a healthy economy; in fact despite the slowdowns linked to world crises the Colombian economy seems to be a booming one, with high levels of growth and an interesting environment for foreign investment. Inflation represents the economic nightmare of many Latin American nations, however, Colombia never truly had relevant problems linked to it. In the years following the implementation of the plan, inflation remained low and even decreased, which suggests cautious and sensible economic planning. Keeping inflation low or at least at acceptable levels (ideally at around 2%) is in fact key for a country aiming at long term economic development, and we can deduce from the graph above that Colombian policy makers succeeded, at least partially, in this ambitious aim. While Colombia presented a dire situation in terms of unemployment, with a staggeringly high 20% at the time when Plan Colombia was launched, through the careful economic planning mentioned before, it was able to work on the improvement and diversification of its economy, stimulating growth and creating new jobs. As a consequence, unemployment kept decreasing between 2000 and 2015, reaching an all-time low of 9.4% in 2014. Such an economic and social improvement did

⁶²Cia World Factbook 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>, accessed 1 December 2015

⁶³World Bank, Colombia Data <http://data.worldbank.org/country/colombia>, accessed 1 December 2015

not only create a better environment for Colombians, offering them possibilities of bettering their socio-economic situation, it also gave the Colombian government a relevant advantage in the struggle against cocaine trafficking. In fact, more employment (and less poverty) also means less people resorting to illicit means of survival, such as the cultivation of coca and the trafficking of cocaine. Poverty also went down from a 50% registered in 2002 to less than 24% in 2015, thus granting a huge boost to the struggle against cocaine. However, poverty and underdevelopment remain high in rural areas, exactly where coca crops are cultivated and cocaine is then produced.

In fact, if some improvements were made in terms of economic and social development, eradication efforts were not followed by properly funded alternative development solutions. As a consequence, the cultivation of illicit crops, just as poverty and underdevelopment, although reduced, remains part of Colombia's economy and rural life.

4.6 - Implementation and Evaluation of Goal 4: to advance the peace process

The advancement of the peace progress is by far one of the most important objectives of Plan Colombia. The security and stability of Colombia are problems whose effects are felt well outside the Bolivarian country. More instability and more violence mean less economic development. Less economic development mean more illegality, more support for the guerrillas and more cultivation and trafficking of cocaine. In fact, the so called narco-terrorist nexus forces both Colombia and the United States to keep a vigilant eye on the Colombian situation and struggle to keep it under control.

The FARC Peace Process

President Pastrana's take on the peace process with the guerrillas was indeed a singular one. Rather than launching an offensive on the FARC and the ELN, Pastrana favored a softer approach. In 1999 he opted for the creation of the so called "*zona de despeje*" a 16.000 square miles demilitarized zone, where the Colombian government virtually ceased to exist, giving in to the authority of the FARC.

While the concession allowed Pastrana to momentarily defuse the growing tension, it also allowed the FARC to reinforce themselves and continue in their operations, thus leading to "fight and talk" negotiation that saw government and rebels at the table of discussions while violence ran wild. Further, similar concessions were made in 2001, when Pastrana ceded parts of northern Colombia to the control of the ELN. Harsh criticism came from Washington and Colombian population itself and even further, civil strife intensified as the AUC took up arms against these sanctuaries of the

guerrillas.

Negotiations under Pastrana failed to make any progress and the last two years of his presidency were so affected by criticism for his soft approach that hard line Alvaro Uribe was elected in his stead.

President Uribe decided instead to launch a zero tolerance campaign against the guerrillas, refusing to make any concession until they had agreed to stop with violence and attacks. However, at the same time, he was also able to get the guerrillas and the AUC at the negotiating table.

Further, Uribe proceeded to the reinforcement of police and army alike and increased the efforts of the Colombian forces against the guerrillas. His ultimate aim was to reach the negotiation table from a position of strength, thus forcing the FARC to give in to the demands of the Colombian government.

However, such an aggressive approach failed to yield the expected results. During Uribe's presidency, the peace progress did not achieve significant objectives and the negotiations dragged well into Santos mandate.

President Santos, at the time of his election (7th August 2010), inherited the difficult situation of the negotiation with the FARC and decided for a serious commitment in taking the conflict to an end, while at the same time waging war on them on Colombian soil.

While between 2010 and 2013 peace talks continued in Cuba and Norway, without meaningful results, the situation in the country improved, with an increased sense of security and increased efforts by the government that led to a curbing down of violence.

Finally, on 27th May 2013, the dialogue made some progress in addressing one of the thorniest issues. Land reform and compensation issues were dealt with in order to allow people who lost their land to receive just reparation.⁶⁴ However, several other problems remain.

While both the FARC and the government agreed that their next aim would be addressing the drug trafficking problem,⁶⁵ the parts are far from reaching a solution.

Evaluation of Goal 4

Goal 4 was far from being a success, and yet the future might not be so dark. Some advancements were made, and peace talks are still ongoing between the various parts.

President Pastrana, by giving in to the demand of the guerrillas, allowed them to reinforce

⁶⁴ Al Jazeera, Deal Reached on Land Reform in Colombia 27 May 2013,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/05/2013526182915832728.html>, accessed 10 December 2015

⁶⁵ Colombian government, rebels move closer to peace deal, Reuters. reuters.com, accessed 28 November 2015

themselves and thrive in the sanctuaries he conceded them on Colombian soil. As a consequence, Uribe inherited a difficult situation where reinvigorated guerrillas refused to cooperate or lay down arms. Only through a campaign of violent offensives, Uribe was able to regain the terrain the precedent administration had lost and force the insurgent forces to negotiate. Santos finally brought the guerrillas to the negotiation table, and the peace process, however long and full of setbacks is going forward. Land reform and compensation is one of the problems that have so far been solved, but several other remain and Colombia cannot yet claim to have achieved peace. While the FARC on 8th July 2015 called a unilateral ceasefire, that began on 20 July 2015⁶⁶ they have yet to lay down arms and violence might escalate again.

Quoting the words of the ex M-19 member Anthony Navarro Wolff:

*“If the government wants a serious peace plan they will have to take control of the coca leaf plantations that are currently owned by the FARC because if not another criminal group will take over it.”*⁶⁷

However, convincing the FARC to give up the control and taxation of coca plantation is not a likely option. As most of their income is obtained through the taxation of illicit crops, taking coca away would mean taking FARC’s weapons away, something that the guerrillas are not ready to accept. The Colombian government should enjoy the temporary “peace” and work even harder than before to implement measures towards the achievement of a long lasting peace. Even further, similar commitment shall be devoted to the peace talks that for the first time see a quartet of nations, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile and Vatican-backed Norway, brokering a solution.

4.7 - Implementation and Evaluation of Goal 5: to advance democratization and social development

While social and cultural aspects are part of Plan Colombia, it is well known that they received relatively little funding and attention if compared to the military ones. Insufficient funding, coupled with an overemphasized military effort by the Colombian government (especially during Uribe and Pastrana mandates), increased discontent among the population and alienated the state at the eyes of Colombians.

As a consequence, even when the Colombian forces are able to gain control of areas previously occupied by the FARC, they struggle to maintain their presence there and keep the area safe. Further, the Colombian government is not the only actor operating in the areas of social and human rights in Colombia. Several NGOs and associations work towards the improvement of Colombia, aiding the population and carrying out project for sustainable development and empowerment of

⁶⁶Colombia Farc rebels call unilateral ceasefire BBC.com. 8 July 2015, accessed 22 November 2015

⁶⁷Stage set for Colombia's peace process, 3 September 2012, blogs.aljazeera.com, accessed 14 December 2015

Colombians living in rural areas. Humanitarian organizations, however, often find themselves (and their workers) entangled in a difficult milieu where governmental forces, militias and insurgents clash and strive to achieve their objectives.

Human Rights

It is possible to affirm that the initiatives for human rights under Plan Colombia went in two different directions. On one hand the training and the professionalization of Colombian police and armed forces allowed them to operate within the boundaries of legality and improved their behavior during raids, operations and routine controls.

In fact, the military has provided mandatory training in human rights to its uniformed personnel and opened 117 human rights offices run by professionals

On the other hand several NGOs and human right associations express harsh critics at the Colombian situation and voice their doubts relatively to the outcome of Plan Colombia in this area. During the civil strife that characterized Plan Colombia, both the FARC and the paramilitaries have engaged in activities including atrocities and human rights violations.

The FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN) continue to commit serious abuses against civilians, including killings, threats, forced displacement, and recruiting and using child soldiers. In September 2013, the government's human rights Ombudsman's Office expressed alarm over the forced recruitment of children from indigenous Paeces communities in Cauca department, allegedly by the FARC.⁶⁸

Further, not being subjected in any way to the Ottawa Convention on landmines, the guerrillas continue using antipersonnel landmines, which often hit Colombian forces and peasants alike. The Colombian Government reported that landmines and unexploded munitions killed 13 civilians and injured 107 between January and August 2013.⁶⁹

Similarly, the paramilitaries (such as the AUC) have been found guilty with several violations of human rights, however, as part of the peace process they could enjoy a demobilization that allowed them to rejoin newly formed groups and go unpunished for most of their crimes. Implementation of the Justice and Peace Law, which offered dramatically reduced sentences to demobilized paramilitaries who confess their atrocities, was way too slow. As of July 2013, eight years after the law was approved, special Justice and Peace unit prosecutors had obtained convictions against only 18 individuals. In 2013, the unit adopted a new investigative method that

⁶⁸ Human rights watch, World report 2014 Colombia <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/colombia>, accessed 14 December 2015

⁶⁹ Ibid.

has accelerated its progress bringing charges against paramilitaries.⁷⁰

Governmental forces, not unlike guerrillas and paramilitaries were often found guilty with abuses on the population. The so called “false positives” representing one of the most worrisome issues. Colombian armed forces and police often killed civilians, and then reported them as combatants killed in action. However, the incidence of these crimes seems to have reduced in the last few years.

Evaluation of Goal 5

In order to make an evaluation of the success achieved by Goal 5, we need to distinguish between what happened during the decade of Plan Colombia and what happened “after” Plan Colombia.

In fact, during the decade following the launch of the plan, Colombian life was characterized by increased civil strife. Uribe’s Presidency was a particularly rough period, as it saw governmental forces launching a strong offensive on the guerrillas to regain previously lost territory. As a consequence, during those years, the number of violations increased. Torture, murders, kidnappings and every other kind of violation took place on a daily basis. However, as time passed, violence and human rights violations started following downward trend. While it is not easy to assess it with precision, we can identify two reasons behind this improvement in the situation civil strife that Colombia was facing at the time.

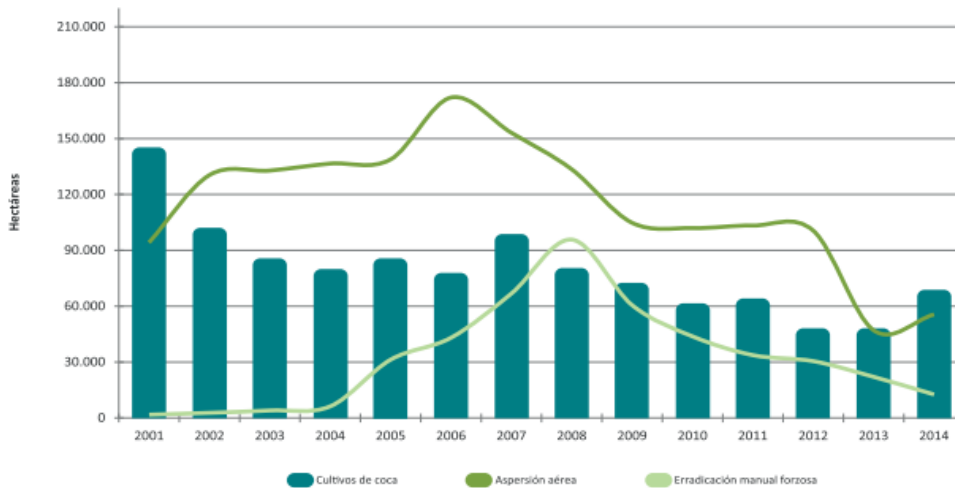
First, the Colombian civil conflict slowly came to an halt and the guerrillas finally agreed call a cease fire and take part to the Peace Talks. Second, the training and education received by the Colombian forces, including the army and the police, might have led to improved work ethics, reliability and professionalization, thus making violations and crimes on their part less frequent. Finally, Plan Colombia itself might have actually be behind all of these improvements. While cocaine trafficking per se was not stopped, years of eradication and fumigation might have reduced the willingness of traffickers and cultivators to remain and fight the government, in order to protect their business. Rather, as explained in the next chapters, violence and illicit activities might have just moved to neighboring countries.

4.8 - Evaluation of Plan Colombia's success

Plan Colombia has yielded several different results, yet the decisive outcome cannot be considered a complete success. Violence and crime seem to have subdued and the peace talks are surely going in an encouraging direction. The FARC and the ELN, called off the use of violence and attacks, at least for now, and the Colombian government is enjoying a moment of respite.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

However, Plan Colombia did not have a significant impact on cocaine trafficking. If we compare the amount of cocaine produced and trafficked before and after its implementation we can notice a sharp drop in the first years after the launch of the program. However, in the last two years (2014 and 2015), the trend seems to have changed, with cocaine production in Colombia once again on the rise.



Gráfica 27. Comparación del cultivo de coca y las áreas asperjadas y erradicadas manualmente acumuladas, 2001-2014

Source: UNODC 2014

As we can see from the 2014 UNODC chart, Colombia reached an all-time low in cocaine production in 2012, only to face a surge in 2014. Even further, the brief yet intense efforts of Plan Colombia forced traffickers to move their operations to neighboring Peru and Bolivia, where governmental opposition was not as strong as in Colombia, thus making spreading the Colombian problem, instead of solving it.

However, since 2011, when Peru was declared world's top cocaine producer by the UNODC⁷¹ its production has been decreasing. At the same time, cocaine cultivation in Colombia steadily increased, until when the country regained the first place, jumping 112,000 coca cultivated hectares in 2014.⁷²

Colombia and Peru seem flip-flop as the world's largest supplier of coca, while world governments play a whack-a-mole game, in which traffickers are free to move across fragile borders and thick jungles, thus nullifying most counternarcotic efforts.

Most of Plan Colombia's focus was centered on curtailing and limiting supply, either by disrupting the activities of traffickers or eradicating crops. However, the operations resulted very expensive

⁷¹ 4 reasons why Peru became world's top cocaine producer, Jeremy McDermott Wednesday, 25 December 2013 , <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/why-peru-top-cocaine-producer>, accessed 15 December 2015

⁷² WhiteHouse.gov, Targeting cocaine at the source, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/targeting-cocaine-at-the-source> accessed 15 December 2015

and ineffective, as the method of aerial eradication not only failed to eliminate illicit crops, but also caused notable collateral damage to the Colombian population and the surrounding environment. Cocaine production on Colombian soil faced a couple of setbacks in 2003 and 2007. The first was after the beginning of Plan Colombia and the most intense efforts and the second was when Colombian forces intensified manual eradication (yet, to soon abandon it due to security reasons). It is reasonable to affirm that while the efforts of both Colombian and American governments were successful in the short run, they failed to achieve long term results.

Cocaine traffickers, as well as coca crops farmers, were able to respond to Plan Colombia with flexibility and renovated vigor. As aerial eradication caused increased losses to the producers, crops became smaller and started being hidden among legal crops. Productivity and efficiency also grew. New and more resistant strains of coca plants were introduced and helped producers to maintain the similar levels of exported cocaine. Even further, as mentioned above, cocaine production might have just moved somewhere else. As most of Plan Colombia focus is on Colombian territory, neighboring Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia might harbor a fair share of illicit crops and be a safe haven for cocaine related criminal activities. Basically, cocaine cultivation and production did not disappear, rather it moved according to what is called “air balloon effect”.

Drawing a conclusion, it is reasonable to affirm that if Plan Colombia helped building a more efficient and effective state in Colombia, it also presented elevated costs and failed to solve the cocaine trafficking problem per se. Volumes of cocaine produced and cultivated in Colombia have followed a downward pattern in the 15 years after the launch of Plan Colombia, but traffickers, just like illicit crops, are still present on Colombian soil.

Colombia is today a relatively stable and peaceful country, where violence and civil strife are not as widespread as they were before Plan Colombia, however, it is not possible to assess whether these results were brought by the American-Colombian initiative alone and if so to what degree.

In the same way, as levels of cocaine production have not changed as of 1998, it is not possible to assess whether Plan Colombia contributed to keeping the flux of cocaine stable instead of giving way to traffickers and allowing them to even increase production.

While some might argue that in this regard Plan Colombia was a total failure, we can reasonably assume that without the concerted efforts of Colombia and the United States, improved the situation of Colombia in terms of human rights, governmental efficiency and economic development.

Unemployment, as well as poverty levels, dropped significantly and the GDP of Colombia has been growing steadily, despite global crunches and crisis. Several sectors of its economy have improved and neo-liberal policies, including privatization, reduction of trade barriers and opening to world trade have been enacted to create a more competitive and healthier economy.

At the same time, thanks to the training and the schooling in terms of behavior, efficiency and human rights provided by the plan, Colombia disposes of a larger, more efficient and more reliable force, including both police and army. However, Plan Colombia was no silver bullet for all the problems that characterized Colombia and in some ways still afflict the country.

Some rural areas of the country remain heavily underdeveloped, and the campesinos living in those areas struggle to make an honest living with the few available means they can use. Often hit by Plan Colombia or its collateral damages and living in conditions of extreme poverty, these people remain a marginalized segment of Colombian society.

Further, several violations of human rights were committed during Plan Colombia and even today Colombia remains a corrupt country, where justice and transparency are rather relative terms.

If the results obtained by Plan Colombia can be considered a “mixed bag” a few important lessons can be learned and hopefully utilized in the future struggle against cocaine.

Cocaine trafficking per se is not the main problem. Cultivation of coca crops and trafficking of cocaine exist because of two main reasons. First, poverty and unemployment, that make the cultivation of coca very attractive, if not the only solution to make a living. Second, the existence of a substantial demand for cocaine around the globe. Further, the cultivation of coca for traditional and social uses (such as mastication) is deeply rooted in the history and culture of the Andean areas, thus making its prohibition very hard to enforce.

As a consequence, the most effective and possibly the most cost efficient solution is not curtailing the supply, but the demand. Such an approach, of course, is relatively difficult to achieve for a country such as the United States that has a long history of interventionism and places great emphasis on the use of force, rather than on policies focused on the welfare of its citizens. However, in order to save money, time and avoid further costly entanglements abroad both the United States and Europe both should focus on this aspect.

By reducing their demand for cocaine and by educating their population on the dangers represented by the drug, these countries will be able to cause their cocaine markets to shrink, thus making them less valuable for traffickers and reducing their net gains. In the same way, rehabilitation and detox structures represent a turning point in the struggle against cocaine and much more than guns and pesticides can help solving the problem. A widely cited Rand Corporation study sponsored by the United States Army and Office of National Drug Control Policy found that funds spent on domestic drug treatment were 23 times as effective as “source country control”, 11 times as effective as interdiction, and 7 times as effective as domestic law enforcement.⁷³

⁷³Dissenting Views of Hon. Nancy Pelosi and Hon. David Obey in House Committee Report 106-521 on H.R. 3908, 14

Further, while forced eradication and the use of military power appear as largely ineffective tools, that fail to obtain long term results, the same cannot be said about operations of state building that focus on civilian and institutional expertise.

Colombia spent fifty years facing violence and internal conflict, only to gain relative stability and prosperity in the last years. It is possible to affirm that some of this progress is at least partly due to the American role in the region. In fact, the training of troops helped achieving a more efficient and reliable army, distancing it from the violent paramilitary groups that terrorized the country and the building of efficient state structures helped achieving a functioning state apparatus. A functioning, efficient and reliable state structure is no doubt important in the struggle against organized crime and more specifically in the struggle against cocaine.

While Plan Colombia did not halt cocaine trafficking nor reduced coca cultivation by much, it surely helped to bring about a functioning and democratic state in Colombia, which in turn, is great long term achievement in the struggle against cocaine trafficking and illegality itself.

A functioning state can employ policies to actively reduce cocaine cultivation and can offer its citizens alternative sources of development, however, too little has been done so far. Now that the Colombian government has achieved an higher degree of efficiency and self-reliance it is about time to implement policies that help its citizens achieve a decent life, allowing them to get away from illegality and criminal activities.

Further, the economic situation of the country is improving steadily (at least in terms of GDP), but some of its sectors are still very inefficient and lacking of infrastructures.

In order to do build long lasting progress in terms of economy and state legitimation, Colombia should keep investing in the weaker sectors of its economy and promote the development of viable economic solutions for its population.

A *conditio sine qua non*, which is too often ignored, is the education and successful scholarization of the population. An easier access to primary and secondary education will allow Colombia to have a well-educated population, who in turn is more likely to stay away from the dangers of drug trafficking and seek employment through legal means. In order to achieve such an ambitious results, Colombia will have to devote more funding to public education and invest in the building of infrastructures to connect the most remote areas of the country.

Special attention shall be devoted to rural areas, such as those of Putumayo and Caqueta, that are located near the border with Peru and experience high levels of poverty, illiteracy and criminality. Hopefully, via the implementation of proper educational policies, people living in these areas will integrate within Colombian society, get away from criminality and abandon the cultivation of illicit

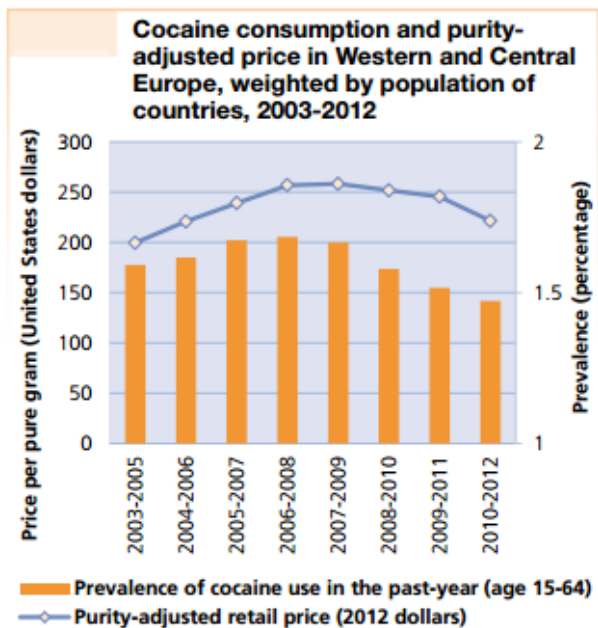
crops. However, in order to allow its citizens to fulfill their needs and emancipate themselves from poverty, the creation of jobs is also key.

It is possible to affirm that Colombia has been achieving great results in this area, as poverty and unemployment both kept decreasing in the last few years, and the country should keep moving in this direction.

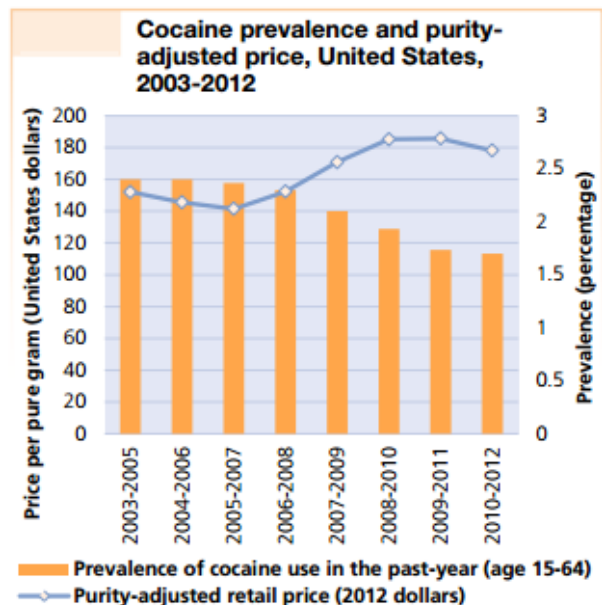
5 - Cocaine today: a matter of consumption and production

Since the implementation of Plan Colombia, the global availability of cocaine seems to have fallen. However, such a fact does not correspond to the end of cocaine trafficking per se, and every country is experiencing a different situation according to its geographic location, economic and social characteristics. If the United States is displaying a downward trend and the relative degree of improvement in its homeland struggle against the drug, totally different is the situation of Europe, where cocaine seems to be once again on the rise. Even further, newly developed countries such as China and Brazil, appear to be now in the aim of traffickers, possibly due to their economic growth and booming markets.

Lastly, even though indicators hint at a downward trend in coca cultivated land (with smaller and fewer crops) it does not necessarily mean a decrease in the amount of cocaine produced and subsequently consumed around the world. Possibly due to the efforts of Latin American governments, above all in Colombia and Peru, traffickers and cultivators have improved their techniques and adopted new, more effective strategies to obtain more productive harvests and more effective delivery of the drug. As a consequence, it is safe to assume that their newly found efficiency result a stabilization of cocaine production levels.



Source: UNODC annual report questionnaire.
 Note: Prevalence figures displayed as moving average.



Source: UNODC annual report questionnaire, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and price data from the System to Retrieve Information from Drug Evidence (STRIDE) database of the United States Drug Enforcement Agency.
 Note: Prevalence figures displayed as moving average

As we can see from the chart, consumption levels in the United States as well in Europe seem to have slightly decreased, but the variation is not so great as to justify or call a victory over cocaine. Cocaine users are still very numerous in both the United States and Europe and people might just be using less cocaine than before. However, cocaine consumption peaked during the crack epidemic in the United States during the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1988, it is estimated that there were 3.6 million cocaine addicts and 6 million casual users in the US, consuming nearly 400 tons of cocaine at a cost of over US\$60 billion.⁷⁴ In contrast, there was very little crack and much less cocaine on the European market.

Today, on the other hand, the trend seems bound to change with the United States losing terrain to the European market, where the cocaine business is flourishing and traffickers have a stable presence.

For all these reasons it is worth to spend some time analyzing and understanding how the cocaine market is structured today and how it has changed in the last few years in terms of demand and supply. Similarly, and partly due to the changes in supply and demand the routes of trafficking also changed, with new paths opening up and old ones shifting or ceasing to exist. Only through meticulous study of the current and past situation of cocaine trafficking, a treacherous and ever changing threat, policy makers will be able to understand what went wrong with past initiatives such as Plan Colombia and hopefully deliver more efficient and cost effective policies.

⁷⁴ US Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1997 What America's Users Spend on Illegal Drugs, 1988-1995. Washington, D.C.: ONDCP

5.1 - Changing Supply: Peru, Bolivia and Colombia

Despite the implementation of Plan Colombia and the decades long crusade waged by the United States against drugs, cocaine trafficking in the Americas has yet to stop. Up in the Andes, coca is still being cultivated, laboratories for the production of cocaine still exist and thousands of people world-wide are regular users, thus fuelling a multi-million dollar business made of money, blood and violence.

American efforts towards Colombia have been particularly intense. Partly because of the good relationship between the two countries and partly because of favorable (pro Washington) governments, that allowed closer cooperation, the United States were able to intervene in the civil strife and drug related problems that characterized Colombia. However, years long programs seem to have achieved mediocre results, especially if we consider the generous funding that was devoted to the cause.

While Colombia, as a cocaine producing country seems to have lost its absolute primacy, other actors have exploited the unfavorable cocaine trafficking environment created in Colombia to increase their production. This is clearly a collateral effect of Plan Colombia, that failed to keep into consideration the extremely porous borders of Colombia and the necessity for a concerted effort of the whole Andean area (at least), in order to avoid a spillover of the problem, due to the so called “air balloon” effect.⁷⁵

Countries such as Peru and Bolivia, that prior to the launch of Plan Colombia produced relatively small quantities of cocaine (if compared to Colombia) are now facing a surge in cultivation and production. Peru in 2011 was ranked first in the world as cocaine producer⁷⁶, and now follows closely Colombia. Bolivia, however a small producer if compared to Colombia and Peru, is facing ever increasing cocaine cultivation and production, and equals to almost half of the cocaine consumed in Brazil.

In the next two chapters we shall analyze how the cocaine market changed in the post Plan Colombia, focusing on the supply and demand, and the appearance of new actors. Peru, Colombia and Bolivia are countries that are historically linked to coca and cocaine trafficking however, we shall consider how cultivation and production changed, thus affecting cocaine supply on a global scale.

On the demand side, we shall focus on Brazil and the North American market (mostly the United States and Canada). The former is a newly industrialized country, with a bulging population and an ever growing demand for drugs. The latter is a well- known player in terms of drugs consumption.

⁷⁵ Council On Hemispheric Affairs, The Balloon Effect, In Effect: Humala, Peru, and the Drug Dilemma (Part 2 of 2) 11 October 2013, <http://www.coha.org/the-balloon-effect-and-displacement-part-2-of-2/> accessed 2 February 2016

⁷⁶ 4 Reasons Why Peru Became World's Top Cocaine Producer, 25 December 2015 Jeremy McDermott, InsightCrime.com, accessed 5 January 2016

Lastly, we shall devote some time to the analysis of the Mexican situation. Mexico might not be an important market for cocaine, however, the country due to its geographical position and the presence of organized crime on a vast scale, covers a role of primary importance in cocaine trafficking world-wide.

The main producers of cocaine today remain the Andean countries of Bolivia, Peru and Colombia with the latter directing most of its cocaine to the North American markets and the other states supplying Latin America, Europe and the rest of the world.

According to US authorities, 90% percent of the cocaine seized by authorities in the United States and analyzed as part of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's Cocaine Signature Program in 2013 was of Colombian origin, consistent with previous years.⁷⁷

No similar profiling program exists in Europe, but seizures indicate a more heterogeneous profile. Between 2008 and 2010, about 25% of the volume of cocaine seized in Europe could be traced back to Colombia, with 6% traceable to Peru and 2% to Bolivia.⁷⁸

Cocaine produced in Colombia is mainly destined for consumption in overseas markets. Cocaine produced in Peru and Bolivia, in contrast, is used more within South America, notably in countries of the Southern Cone such Brazil, Argentina and Chile.

Even though cocaine produced in Peru seems to be playing a growing role in Europe, the criminal groups organizing the trafficking of cocaine from South America to Europe are still primarily Colombian. Unlike in the United States, the Mexican cartels seem to have limited involvement in the European market, choosing to deal mainly with North America, where they have a well-established network of smuggling and distribution.

⁷⁷ US GOV, Country Report : Colombia 2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2015/vol1/238958.htm>, accessed 5 January 2016

⁷⁸ UNODC, The Transatlantic Cocaine Market. April 2011, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Transatlantic_cocaine_market.pdf, accessed 5 January 2016

Colombia

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cultivation (Hectares)	169,800	144,450	113,850	114,100	144,000	157,000	167,000	119,000	116,000	100,000	83,000	78,000	80,500	112,000
Production Potential (Metric Tons)	700	585	445	410	500	510	450	265	260	240	180	165	185	245
Eradication (Air)	84,251	122,695	127,112	131,824	134,474	164,119	148,435	129,876	101,573	97,836	103,302	100,549	47,052	55,555
Eradication (Manual, Hectares)	1,745	2,762	4,220	6,232	37,540	42,110	64,979	95,731	60,954	43,957	34,592	30,486	22,120	11,703

Source: whitehouse.gov

As mentioned before, the problems of Colombia were not entirely solved, however, coca cultivation declined by 53 percent from 2007 until 2012. The initiatives included within Plan Colombia such as eradication, security, state presence, and alternative development allowed to reduce and keep under control the cultivation of coca, but failed to solve the problem per se.

Further, the peace talks between the FARC and the Colombian government seem to be achieving a certain degree of success, thus creating a better environment for the alternative development and an increased governmental presence in rural areas, that would be otherwise controlled by the FARC and most likely cultivated with coca crops.

However, these efforts have become weaker in the last few years, and cocaine cultivation volumes seem to be increasing. From 78.000 hectares in 2011 to 112.000 hectares in 2014.

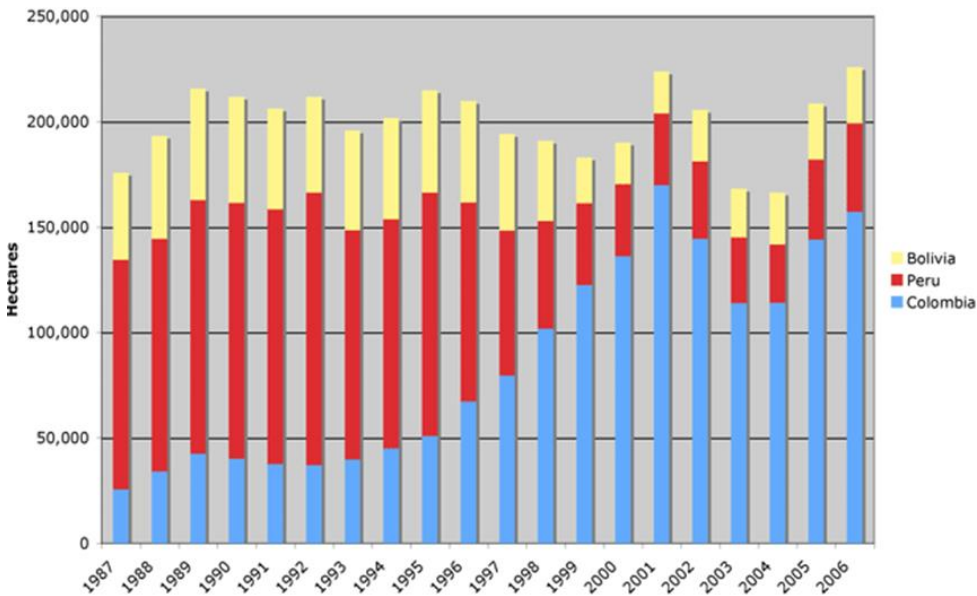
Several reasons can be found behind this very recent trend. First of all, as antinarcotics efforts intensified so did the ones of traffickers. The cultivation of coca crops was made more efficient thanks to interspersed, small crops, often hidden among other plants (guerrilla cultivation), and new, powerful strains like the Tingo Maria from Peru, were introduced to obtain larger harvests.⁷⁹ Further, prices of oil and gold, two very important resources for the Colombian economy, have been hitting all-time lows. As these activities are now not so interesting sources of income, people might have just gone back to the lucrative cultivation of coca.

Eradication has also come to a partial halt. Manual eradication stopped completely, because of the excessive dangers related to it and aerial fumigation continues with lower intensities. Thus, this slowing down of counter-narcotics efforts might have led to a resurgence of coca cultivation in Colombia.

⁷⁹ InsightCrime, Colombia again top cocaine producer <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/colombia-again-world-top-cocaine-producer>, accessed 6 January 2016

Peru

Coca Cultivation in the Andes, 1987-2006



Peru has a long history as cocaine producing country. Back in the 80s and the 90s Peru was maybe the biggest producer of cocaine, with almost 100.000 hectares of coca crops, while Colombia answered for only 19% of world production. However, during the 90s several repressive policies adopted by Fujimori during his presidency allowed the country to fight back the emergency and caused cocaine trafficking to shrink. Torture, assassination, kidnapping and the downing of cocaine loaded airplanes were the highly criticized methods employed in Peru, however, they proved effective in discouraging traffickers from operating in the country. Choosing the path of least resistance, they simply decided to avoid such a stern resistance and move cultivation and production to neighboring countries such as Colombia and Bolivia.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cultivation (Hectares)	32,100	34,700	29,250	27,500	34,000	42,000	36,000	41,000	40,000	53,000	49,500	50,500	59,500	46,500
Production Potential (Metric Tons)	255	280	245	230	260	265	185	185	195	280	260	250	265	285
Eradication (Manual, Hectares)	6,436	7,133	7,022	7,605	8,966	10,136	11,056	10,143	10,025	12,033	10,290	14,171	23,785	31,205

Source: whitehouse.gov

Taking a look at the chart above, cocaine cultivation seems to have increased in 2014 if compared to 2013, however, the trend that can be registered is a downward one, with a constant reduction in cultivation over time in areas where the Government of Peru has launched eradication, interdiction,

and alternative development programs. The government of Peru has many ties with the government of the United States and enjoys its support in the struggle against cocaine.

Bolivia

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cultivation	19,900	21,600	23,200	24,600	21,500	21,500	24,000	26,500	29,000	29,000	25,500	25,000	NA	35,000
Production Potential (Metric Tons)	100	110	100	115	115	115	130	150	150	160	175	145	NA	210
Eradication (Manual, Hectares)	9,435	11,839	10,000	8,437	6,073	5,70	6,269	5,484	6,341	8,200	10,509	>10,000	NA	NA

source: whitehouse.gov

While Bolivia registers relatively small numbers in terms of coca cultivated land, the trend in cocaine cultivated hectares is an upward one, with an increase from 25.000 hectares in 2012 to 35.000 hectares in 2014.

Similarly to what happened in Colombia and Peru, Bolivia underwent a period during which the government (during Banzer Presidency) employed a variety of means and struggled particularly hard in the attempt to eradicate coca crops and limit trafficking. However, as political leaders guiding the country changed so did the situation of cocaine trafficking and the fight against it.

Today, under the guidance of President Morales, a federation deals with coca cultivators, with the objective of limiting and keeping the volumes of coca under control, while allowing them to keep their crops. According to the slight increase in cocaine cultivated land, one might argue that these rather tolerant policies only achieved a partial success. In fact, while most of the cultivators seem to embrace the tolerant approach and gladly copy with a scheme that employs dialogue and voluntary reduction of coca crops, illegal cultivators have not disappeared. Further, according to the US government chart, there was a slight increase in the amount of coca cultivated land from 2012 to 2014, which entices us of how some individuals might still be refusing to cooperate with the Peruvian government and prefer to operate alone, in order to maximize their profits.

While the Bolivian production in terms of cultivated coca crops and produced cocaine is relatively small, we need to underline its growing importance in the shifting demand and supply of cocaine in the world. In fact, despite its mere 30.000 hectares of coca crops, Bolivia is able to supply most of the cocaine consumed in South America with Brazil and Argentine as top consumers.

Bolivia is today a relatively safe country for Latin American standards and does not experience the big scale criminality that plagued the country back in the day. However, small time smugglers and

traffickers are able to keep a very cheap production, producing a kilo of cocaine for a rough price of \$2000⁸⁰ and easily move it into Brazil, through its vast, porous borders, where it is sold for around \$8000, thus allowing traffickers to obtain huge profits and avoid the risks involved in exporting their product outside the Latin American continent.

Due to such an *in fieri* situation, the Bolivian case needs to be monitored and we can affirm that is likely to change and evolve in the next few years with yet unpredictable consequences.

5.2 - Changing Demand

As in every other market, supply and demand represent two fundamental variables according to which the market is shaped. While supply has traditionally been located in the Andean area (Colombia, Bolivia and Peru), demand has been moving and changing significantly over time. The North American market with affluent countries such as the United States and Canada still represents a lucrative one, however, new opportunities seem to be emerging elsewhere. Asian markets, historically dominated by opium or synthetic drugs were not in the aim of cocaine traffickers. Even further, low income and geographical distance made Asia a target of secondary importance. Things however, seem to be changing.

However, globalization, coupled with a sharp improvement of technology, modified these premises. Starting in the 60s, the diffusion of standard containers, supported by cheap flights and Trans-Atlantic travel made the movement of people and goods much easier and much more economically convenient, thus setting new patterns in drugs trafficking.

If mules, backpacks and cars were the preferred means of transport before the advent of these changes, the use of planes and ships became common occurrence, thus virtually removing geographical barriers.

Similarly, cheap transportation allows today's traffickers to easily move their product to Asia, Europe or North America. The Andes might seem far and unreachable, yet cocaine can easily find its way and reach almost every country in the world, no matter how far or culturally different. Asia is no exception. As many Asian countries experience rapid industrialization and solid economic growth, they also have to deal with cocaine outbreaks and an ever increasing demand for drugs. China, for one, according to Brookings Institution, registered an increase in number of addicts from 70,000 in 1990 to more than 1.79 million at the end of 2011, a 16 percent annual growth rate.⁸¹

⁸⁰ InsightCrime, Bolivia: the New Hub for Drug Trafficking in South America, 16 October 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/bolivia-the-new-hub-for-drug-trafficking-in-south-america>, accessed 5 January 2016

⁸¹ The Atlantic, China's Growing Appetite for New Kinds of Luxury Drugs, 4 January 2013,

Similarly, Latin American that managed to industrialize and improved their economic situation are now confronted with the collateral effects of progress. Namely, a growing middle class that boosts the demand for luxury goods, drugs included. Brazil, along with several other countries, is one of the best examples of this phenomenon. While until a few years ago, Brazil represented a corridor country, the country is now a destination point for 18% of world cocaine.⁸²

Europe, on the other hand, is not new to the consumption of cocaine, but until a few years ago its market was a secondary one if compared to North America. However, the trend is clearly changing. If the United States is experiencing a slowdown in the demand for cocaine, the opposite could be said for Europe where cocaine trafficking is an extremely lucrative, and ever expanding business.

Europe

Europe seems to remain one of the most important markets for cocaine trafficking, especially as consumption levels decreased in the United States, thus allowing traffickers to turn their attention to the old continent. With Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom at the top of the chart, Europe accounts for a significant share of the demand for cocaine in the world and its generally high average income, makes it an interesting market for traffickers of every kind of drug, cocaine included.

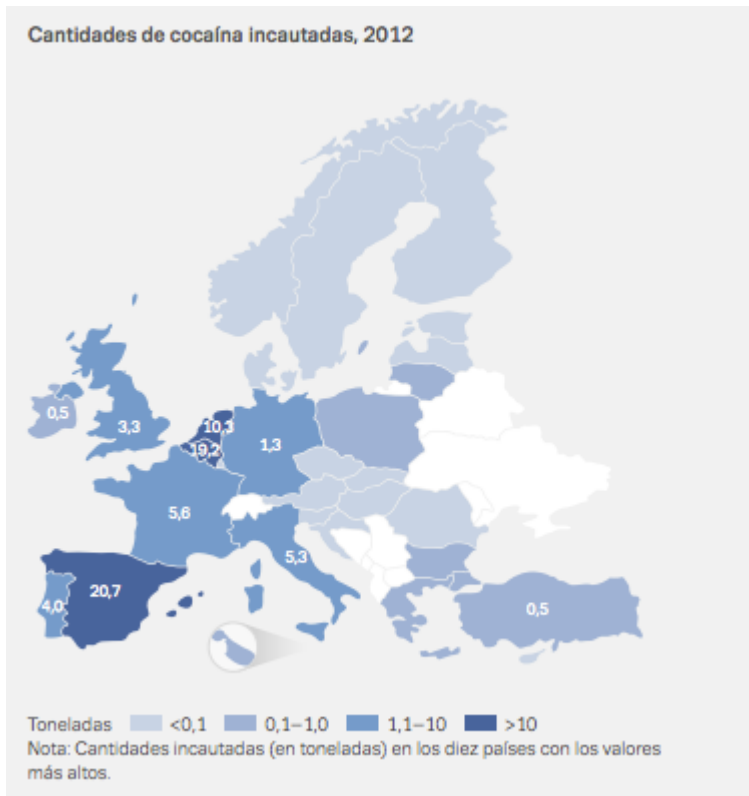
Further, traffickers in Europe have a long history of activity in the area, with the Iberian Peninsula being home to vast communities of Spanish and Portuguese speaking immigrants from Latin America, who enabled creation of a network through which drugs are smuggled and distributed. Central Europe, however, also represents one of the favored points of entrance for cocaine, with the ports and airports of the Benelux as gateways for drugs of any kind.

Europe, with its very well developed infrastructure of ports, airports and railroads, is indeed an interesting environment when it comes to moving drugs within the European Common Market.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/chinas-growing-appetite-for-new-kinds-of-luxury-goods-illegal-drugs/266815/>, accessed 6 January 2016

⁸² Bradley T., Brazil Now Consumes 18% of World Cocaine, Quartz, 23 September 2012,

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/chinas-growing-appetite-for-new-kinds-of-luxury-goods-illegal-drugs/266815/> accessed 7 January 2016



The chart above entices us of where cocaine trafficking entry points are located. With around 20 tons of seized cocaine in 2012, Spain ranks first, followed by Belgium with 19 and the Netherlands with 10. Benelux countries do not share the huge presence of Latin American immigrants, however, they have efficient infrastructures that make them relevant to cocaine trafficking.

An efficient railway system, a network of busy ports such as those of Antwerp and Rotterdam, and well-connected airports such as Amsterdam Schiphol allow traffickers to smuggle cocaine and drugs in general within Europe with relative ease.

Further, another trend can be registered. While in the past years Western Europe represented the only hub for cocaine crossing the Atlantic, Eastern Europe is now receiving more attention from traffickers.

Similarly to what happens to developing countries, as the general population income grows so does the demand for cocaine, thus making the area more interesting for traffickers. Further, Eastern European countries are often fighting crime and corruption with relatively poor means and low standards in terms of law enforcement, thus making these countries even more attractive for traffickers.

South America

The recent economic development of Brazil has come with a series of collateral effects, among which, an ever growing consumption of drugs. As poverty was reduced in the past few years and a new middle class emerged, Brazil went from being a transit country for drugs such as cocaine, to

being the final destination point. Even further, with its huge population and thriving megalopolis Brazil represents today the second largest market for cocaine and its strategic position makes it an objective of prime interest for traffickers. Through its vast, porous borders, cocaine can easily be smuggled from Bolivia, Colombia and Peru into Brazil and then consumed or smuggled to the other side of the Atlantic.

According to a study of the Universidade Federal de São Paulo, during a period of 12 months between March 2011 and March 2012, when people were interviewed, 2.6 million adults and 244 thousand youths had tried cocaine.⁸³

CONSUMO DE COCAÍNA E CRACK NO ÚLTIMO ANO*	
País ou região	Número de pessoas (em milhões)
EUA	4,1
Brasil	2,8
América do Sul (exceto Brasil)	2,4
Ásia	2,3
África Central	2,3
Reino Unido	1,1
Espanha	0,8
Leste Europeu	0,6
Canadá	0,5
Oceania	0,4
Caribe	0,3
África do Sul	0,3
América Central	0,1

* Dados da OMS

The alarming numbers are confirmed by this graphic of the OMS, according to which, Brazil has around 2.8 million cocaine users, however, cocaine is prevalent in the form of crack cocaine. Also called “poor man’s cocaine” crack cocaine comes in a brown, rocky shape. Surely cheaper and possibly deadlier, crack cocaine is a cheap alternative for people who want to do cocaine but cannot afford the more expensive drug.

Brazil is a good example of this trend. Thriving on its masses of poor and destitute people, crack cocaine is meeting great commercial success on the Brazilian market. Further, the reasons at the basis of this cocaine boom and the relative shift from “corridor country” to “destination country” are several.

First, its geographical position. Brazil borders with the main cocaine producing countries, above all

⁸³ Isaude.net, Brazil is the largest consumer market in world crack, pointing UNESFP, 5 September 2012, accessed 10 January 2016

Bolivia, where the “Basuco” paste for the production of crack cocaine is produced. Further, being so close make the transportation of cocaine logistically more efficient for traffickers, who often prefer the proximity and safety of Brazil to Europe and North America.

Second, scarce competition and local cooperation. Unlike Asia, North America and Europe, Brazil experiences a comparatively minor use of injectable opioids such heroine. Thus, crack cocaine is free to penetrate a market with few competitor products and low entry barriers, spreading among the population like a plague and facing little resistance. Further, Brazilian organized criminality appear to receive the “crude cocaine paste” from Andean traffickers, in particular Colombians operating in Bolivia and complete the process of transformation by turning it into crack cocaine.⁸⁴

Crack is the easy-to-produce high best targeted for Brazil’s largely low-income drug users. With a price of about \$2 a hit, compared to \$40 for heroin and even more expensive cocaine, crack cocaine could not but become the drug of choice of the poor. Epidemic of crack cocaine are reality in Brazil and entire neighborhoods have fallen to it, giving birth to the so called “*cracolandias*” run down and abandoned parts of the city where governmental presence is scarce and crime is rife. Brazil is now facing the same pains as Europe and North America, where developed countries have to deal with the backlash of progress, namely, organized crime, hard to administer sprawling megalopolis and drugs insinuating every strata of society.

While Brazil has plenty of experience in terms of fight against organized crime and counter narcotics, the booming market for drugs represent something new and authorities should struggle to employ proper policies to curtail demand and limit this threat.

North America

North America, with a special focus on the United States still represents a very important market for cocaine traffickers, however, the use of cocaine in the United States seems to be diminishing. Based on the data available, the share of the global population that uses cocaine seems to have stabilized, but the global population has grown, resulting in a larger number of consumers. In 2009, between 14 million and 21 million people used cocaine at least once in the previous year.⁸⁵ Numerous indicators show that the cocaine market in the United States experienced a significant drop in cocaine availability, resulting in sustained decreased levels of availability and use.

The reduction in the size of the US cocaine market has had global repercussions. Cocaine use in the

⁸⁴ InsightCrime.org, Bolivia: the New Hub for Drug Trafficking in South America, Jeremy McDermott, 16 October 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/bolivia-the-new-hub-for-drug-trafficking-in-south-america>, accessed 5 January 2016

⁸⁵ UNODC World Drug Report 2011, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2011/WDR2011-ExSum.pdf>, accessed 5 January 2016

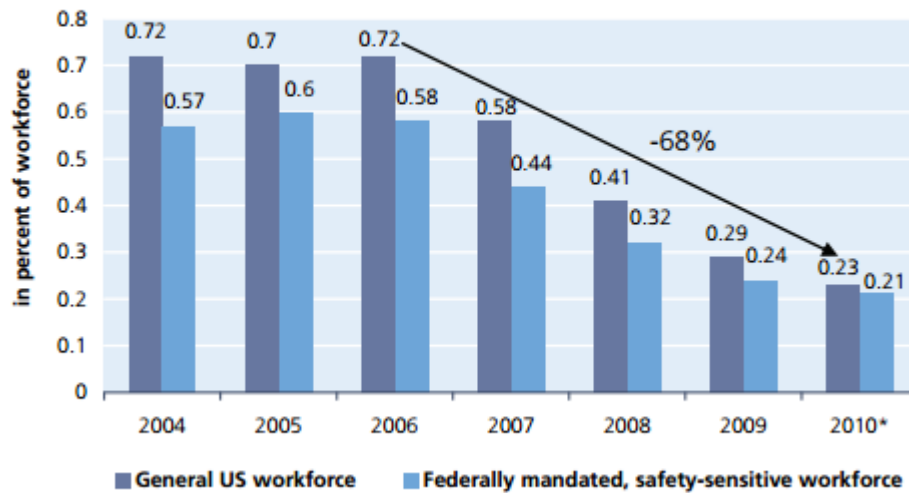
United States has been in long-term decline since the late 1980s, when it reached its peak. Starting in the 90s a downward trend kicked in, initially thanks to the disruption of cartels in Colombia and then Mexico, where the disruption of the smuggling and trafficking network caused interruptions to the flow of cocaine heading to the United States, thus making the drug scarce and more expensive. Further, there are other factors that need to be kept into consideration, while trying to analyze how the North American market for cocaine changed. Law enforcement efforts in Mexico and the transit zones have been particularly intense, with the launch of the Merida Initiative and a more multilateral approach involving the countries of Central America and the Caribbean. As we have seen, most of the American cocaine comes from Colombia, and while Plan Colombia was no silver bullet, it focused most of the United States efforts on Colombia, thus producing a crackdown on the cultivation and production of cocaine and causing their volumes to shrink.

New markets also contributed to a reduction in the amount of cocaine flowing to the United States. Why would traffickers keep struggling against strict controls and law enforcement efforts? In fact, as any other criminal enterprise they enjoy low risk and good business opportunities. So, they simply choose to move their production and business somewhere else.

In order to understand this we can just take a look at what happened with Europe. Initially, the most favored entry points were represented by the Archipelago of Macaronesia, Southern Europe in general and Benelux countries, however, as law enforcement agencies learned about these paths and started to exploit them, traffickers decided to move their basis to the grey areas of Western Africa. Now that the same grey areas have reached a point of excessive instability, even for traffickers, the logistics of cocaine trafficking seem to be once again on the move.

As a consequence of the above mentioned changes, purity-adjusted cocaine prices in the United States rose by more than 80% between 2006 and 2009, making it inaccessible for plenty of people. The impact this had on cocaine use is clear from the national employee drug testing results. Cocaine-positive urine tests (reflecting use in the past few days) showed a decline of 68% between 2006 and the first two quarters of 2010. Similarly, positive hair tests (reflecting cocaine use over the past three months) fell from 5.3% in 2007 to 2.3% over the first two quarters of 2010 (-57%)

Positive urine tests for cocaine use among the US workforce, 2004-2010*



Source: UNODC, Trans-Atlantic Cocaine Market, 2011

As we can see from the graph above, during the period going from 2004 to 2010, the United States experienced a decline in the use of cocaine among the work force, which in turn caused the North American market for cocaine, where the United States is one of the most important countries, to shrink. A reduction in the amount of people consuming cocaine means a reduction in the amount of people buying cocaine and in turn a reduction of the profit this market represents for traffickers.

Asia

Historically, the presence of cocaine in Asia has never been particularly strong or deeply rooted. Unlike other cultures, those of Asia do not present particular links or traditions in relation to the drug and even when coca started being exported in various forms, during 19th century, Asia was almost immune to it and had instead to struggle against opium.

In fact, other drugs met better fortune in Asia, above all, opiates and more recently synthetic drugs. Such a peculiar situation, however, seems to be bound to change. In fact, during the last decades, Asia and in particular China and South East Asian countries (such as Indonesia, Thailand, etc...) underwent a process of rapid industrialization that caused several unexpected changes to its societies.

New generations are today experiencing a boom in wealth and luxury, struggling to keep in touch with the past, and without any doubt, embracing a lifestyle that is close to the western one.

In fact, drugs such as cocaine that until a few years were virtually unknown, are today penetrating Asian markets and societies and creating a particularly thorny problem for the governments of the

South East Asian area, which often are relatively inexperienced and lacking sufficient means to tackle the problem.

*"Police and customs officials in Asia don't often have connections in the Americas and have little knowledge of what may be coming their way," said Jeremy Douglas, regional representative for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. "They don't operate internationally. They're about to have to"*⁸⁶

Even further, it is not only the scarce resistance that makes these markets so interesting, but also the profits. In fact, Asia-Pacific economies offer much higher profit margins than the cartel's traditional markets. In Hong Kong, a kilo of cocaine can sell for up to three times the price it would in the US. In Australia, it can be as much as six times, according to police and experts.⁸⁷

Lastly, future developments in the area hints to increased trade and subsequent drugs trafficking. Well aware of the growing economic importance of Asia, American states have been trying to push for a liberalization of the pacific, in order to turn it into a grand free trade area with little custom barriers and intense exchange of goods and services.

Such a thing would mean improved economic relations between the two sides of the Pacific and at the same time increased volumes of goods crossing the ocean. However, when volumes of traffic are so high, such as in the case of NAFTA and the Mexico-United States border, the enforcement of strict controls becomes almost impossible, thus creating a gateway for traffickers willing to smuggle drugs hidden within regular cargos.

Unlike Europe and America, Asia still displays low levels of integration and cross-border cooperation is often a difficult challenge. Now that the situation of drugs and crime seems to be changing and worsening, an unprecedented need for cooperation is also arising. Quoting Thailand Foreign Affairs Ministry's director general of ASEAN affairs department, Sakkrit Srivali: *"Strengthening skills, capacity and cross-border cooperation among border and port security agencies is therefore essential to counter rapidly evolving transnational crime challenges"*⁸⁸

The cocaine demand of tomorrow

Maybe the biggest and most interesting question for policy makers of today and tomorrow, the direction of cocaine demand makes indeed a thorny and most difficult interrogative.

The "south to north" flow that once characterized cocaine trafficking, seems today an outdated concept. In fact, while cocaine still is in great demand in the so called "global north", several other

⁸⁶ CNBC, Mexican drug cartels eye Asian markets, 24 September 2015, <http://www.cnb.com/2015/09/24/mexican-drug-cartels-eye-asia-as-rising-wealth-spurs-cocaine-demand.html> accessed 10 January 2016

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ JakartaPost, ASEAN members discuss effective border security, 24 August 2015, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/24/asean-members-discuss-effective-border-security.html> accessed 10 January 2016

markets have spawned due to the effects of globalization and the rapid industrialization of some countries (the BRICS, the MIST, etc...).

As we have seen, the “old markets” are still point of interest for traffickers, and represent lucrative business opportunities. Despite all the years of struggle, cocaine demand did not subside enough for policy makers and government to claim a victory over the drug and cocaine users are still very numerous both in the United States and Europe.

As a consequence, their governments should keep cooperating and investing funds aimed at the reduction of demand, which, as we have already seen, is one of the most cost effective ways to deal with the problem.

However, if today presents serious challenges, we need to focus on what is possibly happening tomorrow and plan in advance an effective response. For this reason, while continuing to focus on Europe and the United States is necessary, we shall devote more attention to newly industrialized countries such as China and Brazil that are about to face emergencies in terms of drugs consumption. With several million people and booming economies, these two countries might represent tomorrow’s outlet for a fair share of the cocaine produced in the Andes and as a consequence their situations should be studied, monitored and kept under control.

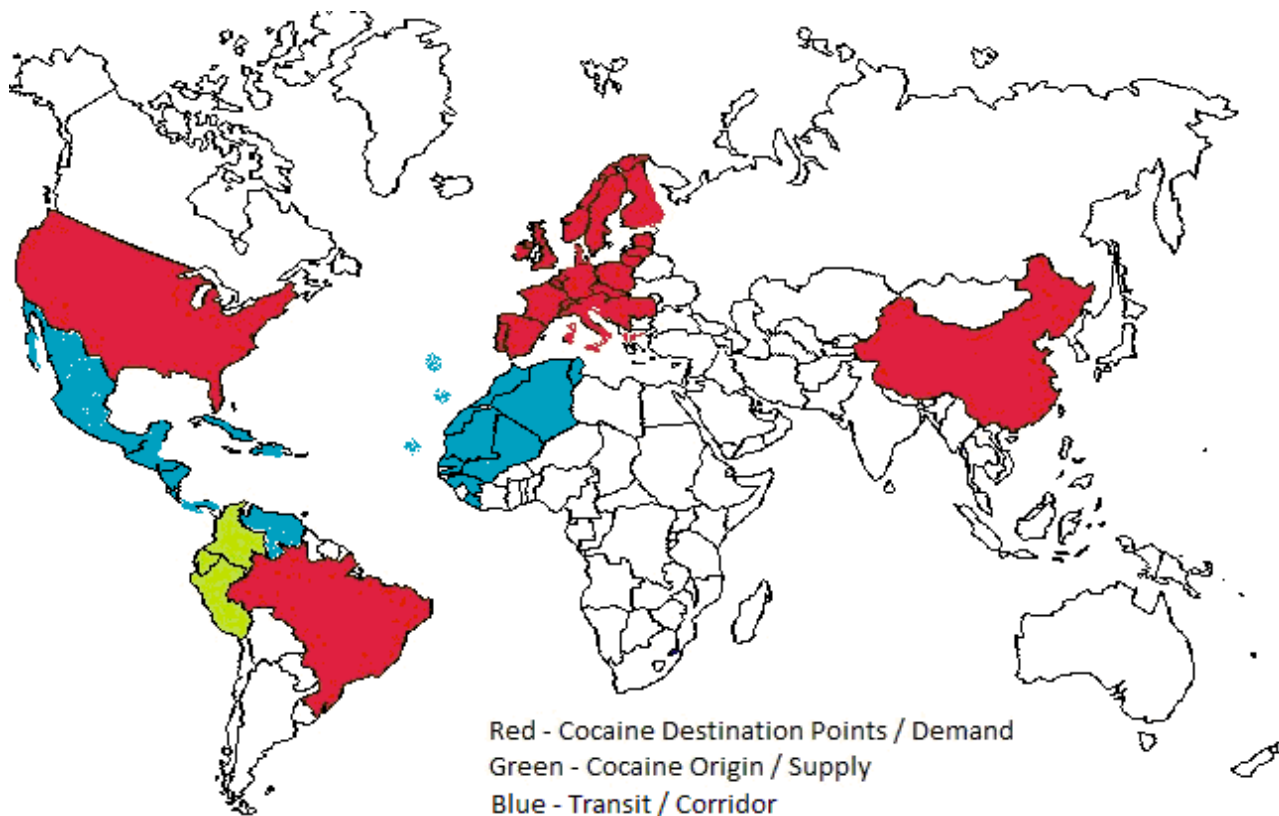
The Brazilian case might be the most urgent one, as the usage of cocaine in the form of crack is already widespread among the population, thus endangering the health and security of Brazilian society, while the Chinese one could be considered still *in fieri*, with a constantly evolving situation and growing numbers in terms of users and consumed cocaine, making it a most worrisome actor in terms of cocaine demand for the future.

In fact, the information I gathered during my analysis of supply and demand allowed me to draw a detailed picture of an ever shifting and changing situation. Supply changed, and so did demand.

Even further, in the last years the problems linked to cocaine came to interest even countries that were virtually untouched by it.

Drawing a conclusion relatively to the present and future of cocaine demand, we might conclude that due to the adaptive nature of the threat, constant vigilance, prevention and study of the phenomenon, especially in most recent scenarios, constitute part of the recipe to address the problem.

6 - Cocaine routes and corridors



Through this chapter, I analyze the changing landscape of cocaine trafficking around the world in the post Plan Colombia scenario, with particular attention to the routes and a paths along which cocaine moves. As we have seen, cocaine trafficking is today a very active and lucrative business, with new markets opening up (mostly in developing or newly industrialized countries) and new routes and patterns of cocaine trafficking being set. During the last decade, the routes and corridors through which cocaine moves changed significantly, partly because of the improved efforts of law enforcement agencies around the world and partly because of the appearance of new opportunities for cocaine trafficking.

In the Americas, the United States protracted efforts and bilateral initiatives involving North, Central and South American countries altered the environment in which traffickers operated. The 80s and the 90s offered them a scenario ripe with opportunities, where the poor means of local Governments collocated traffickers and authorities roughly on the same level in terms of resources logistical capabilities. Trafficking cocaine was a dangerous and risky business, even back then, however, as Governments realized the necessity to stem the flow of cocaine they decided to intensify their efforts, thus making traffickers lives much harder.

Extradition, jailing, and even less orthodox methods such as torture and assassination made their appearance in a battle that against crime that was slowing transitioning into a total war.

Further, the evolution of technology also played a considerable role in the evolution and adaptation of cocaine trafficking routes. In fact, the improvement of information technology and the advent of the internet changed the rules of the game in terms of communication capabilities and surveillance, thus offering revolutionary instruments to both traffickers and law enforcement agencies.

Plan Colombia might be considered the peak in the war against cocaine, and more in general against drugs. However, as we have seen Plan Colombia landed several blows to cocaine trafficking without putting an end to it. Even further, it also prompted several collateral effects that can be witnessed in the ways in which cocaine is moved and smuggled today.

First and foremost, cocaine seems to be departing from multiple points. As we have seen, the American initiative caused a spillover of the problem into neighboring countries and policy makers have to face a much more multifaceted and subtle threat, with several countries being involved.

Further, traffickers answered to the ever increasing efforts of authorities, by improving their methods and techniques, adopting new technologies and exploiting new routes and paths. Basically, the efforts to disrupt the supply of cocaine that peaked with Plan Colombia and under a certain point of view continue today with the Merida Initiative forced traffickers to step up their logistical capabilities and explore uncharted territories.

As a consequence, we can affirm that the trafficking of cocaine is in a status of perpetual evolution and its shifts and changes need to be kept into account when delivering anti-narcotics policies. Stopping and inspecting cocaine loaded planes or ships does not suffice anymore, and even walls such as that built between Mexico and United States hardly represent a real challenge.

The improvements that cocaine trafficking methods underwent in the last decade are indeed game changers, and as supply and demand fluctuated and changed so did the means through which cocaine is smuggled. Even today, new patterns are arising and new routes are being set, thus, rendering an analysis of the routes and trajectories of cocaine much necessary.

Back in the 80s, at the time of the Medellin and Cali Cartels, Colombian traffickers employed different methods and approaches. They did not rely on the help of other organized criminality groups, rather, they would exploit small aircrafts and boats to smuggle the cocaine directly into the United States.

However, flying from the Andes into the United States was not feasible, due to the long distance and the need to refuel the aircrafts, and so, they would often stop in Central America or the Caribbean, where favorable regimes granted them safe haven.

The Central American situation, however, has changed quite a lot over the years, and if the Cali and Medellin cartels do not exist anymore so do drug trafficking friendly regimes and their leaders.

Further, globalization along with technological improvements has united the world, thus making once far away markets more interesting for traffickers, however, greater distances need to be covered in delivering cocaine. A shipment of cocaine departing from Colombia, Peru or Bolivia to cross the Atlantic or maybe reach Asia, would never be transported on the same small, unreliable aircrafts. Second, in order to reduce the risks connected with the smuggling and distribution, cocaine producers often opt to delegate this risky part of the business to other people, who have better connections and infrastructure to deliver the product into another country.

Such, for example, is the case of cocaine going through Mexico and Central America, in order to reach the North American market. When the Colombian cartels, who back in the days were responsible for most of the trafficking, were crushed and disappeared, they left their place to a not so organized, less structured criminality. As a consequence, the people working directly in the cultivation and production of coca, did not have the means and did not want to shoulder the burden of delivering their product abroad. So, they decided to rely on third parties. At around the same time, a new brand of organized criminality, specialized on the transportation and smuggling of drugs, spawned in Mexico, thus allowing cocaine producers in the Andes to rely on powerful partners for smuggling and distribution into North America.

However, the flow of cocaine going from the Andes to Mexico and into the United States is just one of many. Traffickers also rely on the support of the so called “Maras” criminal gangs that operate in Central America. In fact, the “Northern Triangle” represented by Guatemala, Honduras e Nicaragua is also an important transit point to get drugs into North America and Europe.

Further, cocaine is also shipped through the ports of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, that due to the high volumes of departing and incoming ships cannot enforce strict controls, thus permitting containers containing drugs to go undetected.

The points of arrival from where cocaine is then transported and distributed are various. The United States receives most of its cocaine in the southern states (due to obvious geographical reasons), with Florida, New Mexico, California and Texas representing the most frequently used entry points. On the other hand Europe presents a rather peculiar pattern, with the most interesting points of entrance being represented by the Benelux and the Iberian Peninsula.

The Benelux Area is particularly attractive because of its ports and efficient infrastructural system. The Netherlands, with the port of Rotterdam (one of the busiest in the whole world) represents the perfect entry point for cocaine.⁸⁹ Once in the Benelux area, cocaine can easily reach any place in Europe via trains, boats and cars. Apparently, efficient infrastructures can backfire by offering

⁸⁹Dutchnews, Rotterdam at the centre of cocaine trade, say Dutch police, 2 April 2014, http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2014/04/rotterdam_at_centre_of_europea/ accessed 4 February 2016

traffickers a highway for smuggling every kind of drugs into Europe.

The Iberian Peninsula, on the other hand, does not boast a particularly efficient transportation system, but due to the cultural ties with Latin American and its geographical proximity to Northern Africa and Macaronesia⁹⁰, represents one of the most important entry points for cocaine flowing into Europe.

Further, not every flow of cocaine that crosses the Atlantic is directed to Europe. In fact, despite its traditionally scant presence there, cocaine is starting to penetrate Asia⁹¹, where busy and highly efficient sea ports allow the drug to reach billions of potential customers. As we have mentioned, newly industrialized and developing countries are, now more than ever, elements of great interest in the agenda of cocaine traffickers.

6.1 - Caribbean Route: South America, the Caribbean, Portugal, Spain, Netherlands



This first route or “Caribbean Route” is actually a web of different paths, trails and trajectories along which cocaine moves. As we can see from the map, shipments of cocaine depart from Colombia, to be transferred into neighboring Venezuela and then to various islands of the Caribbean

⁹⁰ UNODC, *The Trans-Atlantic Cocaine Market*, p.11, April 2011, Accessed 3 February 2016,

https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Transatlantic_cocaine_market.pdf

⁹¹ CNBC, Harris B., *Mexican drug cartels eye Asian markets*, 24 September 2015, Accessed 3 February 2016

basin.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Lucia, Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago and even more relevant countries such as Haiti, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.

However, several common denominators link these countries together, making them a transit point for cocaine. First, weak governments and limited law enforcement capabilities make these countries ideal for traffickers looking for a temporary safe haven. Second, their proximity to the Andean area allows traffickers to employ several different means of transportation, thus achieving diversification (not unlike a financial portfolio) and reducing risk. Mules, cargos, yatches, go-fast speedboats are only some of the vehicles that are employed to smuggle cocaine in the Caribbean basin.

Further, we should bear in mind that some insular states such as Aruba, Curacao and Martinique are part of European countries (the Netherlands and France, respectively), thus allowing an easier smuggling of cocaine into Europe. From the insular states of the Caribbean, cocaine is then smuggled via airplane or boat to the United States or Europe, where the product meets the final customers. As mentioned before, the preferred entry points for the United States are states in the south, while in the case of Europe cocaine transits through the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and the Benelux.

6.2 - Central Atlantic Route: South America, Macaronesia, Iberian Peninsula

NUMBER OF COCAINE PROCESSING FACILITIES DESTROYED IN COLOMBIA, 1997-2012



Source: UNODC, 2013

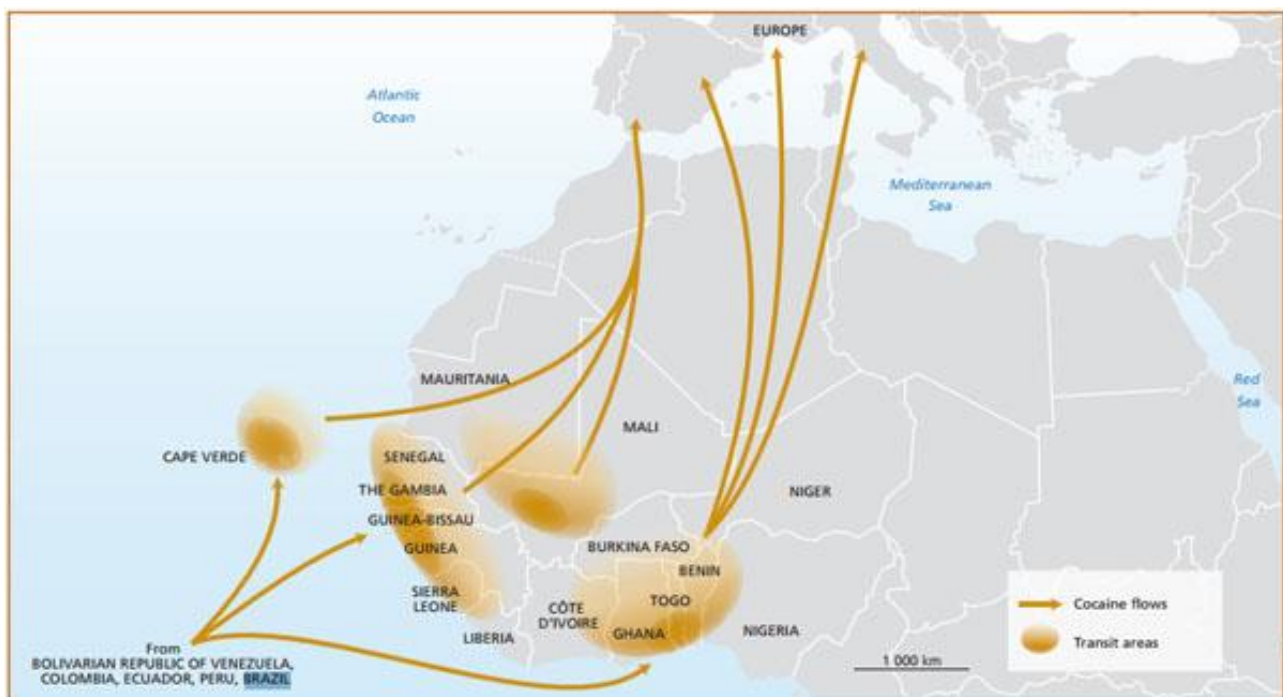
Source: gobiernodecanarias.org

Cocaine leaving Latin America and crossing the Atlantic does not always reach Europe directly. In fact, the so called archipelago of Macaronesia, represents a much used point of transit for drugs entering Europe. The Canary Islands and Cabo Verde, together with Madeira and the Azores cover a

geostrategic role of primary importance. They are all located in the Atlantic Ocean, and they are close to the African coast, yet, they are part of Spain and Portugal respectively, they both host a community of Spanish and Portuguese speaking people, who keep close relations with mainland Europe. In fact, the now irrelevant geographical distance and frequent flights between the islands and Europe, allow easy exchange of people and goods, thus facilitating the work of traffickers who can easily smuggle cocaine and pass undetected among tourists.

Because of these reasons, Macaronesia represents a hub of prime importance for traffickers trying to smuggle drugs into Europe and specifically to the Iberian Peninsula. Drugs enforcement forces are aware of this and controls are enforced with particular attention on ships and planes crossing the Atlantic and stopping there. After all Cabo Verde and the Canarias, not unlike the Azores or Isla Madeira are part of functioning, developed states where the rule of law is still strong and drugs trafficking is fought with determination. As a consequence, this route has become particularly risky and traffickers often prefer to stop and unload their cargoes in neighboring North-West Africa, via what is called the “African Route”

6.3 - West African Route: South America, Western Africa, Southern Europe



Source: UNODC, Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: a Threat Assessment, February 2013 Report

As the North American cocaine market reached a point of saturation in the last few years, possibly due to a shrinking of the demand and increased efforts to control the penetration of the drug into the territory, the cocaine business started reinforcing its links with Europe and shifting its focus on other markets, such as that of Europe. However, as Europe presents little to no ungoverned space

(especially if compared to the American route that goes through Central America), traffickers started exploiting the African territory in order to support their logistics.

Africa does not represent a palatable cocaine market per se. In fact, due to the relatively low income and the scant presence of a cocaine demanding middle class, Africa is not the point of arrival for cocaine. However, the African continent has plenty of “grey areas” that are just perfect for traffickers and smugglers of any kind. In the case of cocaine trafficking, the grey area is located in Western Africa, roughly in a zone that overlaps with parts of Mali, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, and Mauritania. While these countries still have a government, their inefficiency, limited law enforcing capabilities and high levels of corruption make them the ideal candidates to be a trafficking safe haven.

Due to these political, economic and institutional characteristics, these areas are often favored by traffickers in order to set up a network of bases, warehouses and logistical infrastructures, thus allowing them to unload their cargoes coming from Latin America and move cocaine to nearby Europe.

Much of the trafficking involving West Africa used to be carried out by large “mother ships” that unloaded cocaine onto smaller, local vessels off the West African coasts. While this method allowed traffickers to deliver the drug without docking, it would also increase the risk for traffickers of being caught. Slow, heavily loaded ships were easily spotted and the risk of being caught with a large quantitative of cocaine was high.

Today, large maritime shipments have virtually disappeared, suggesting that traffickers have changed their tactics. In fact, similarly to what happens in the Americas, the purchase and utilization of small commercial aircrafts and fast boats is gaining popularity.⁹²

However, starting in 2008, political turmoil and instability resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number and volume of seizures, including both maritime shipments and commercial air couriers. In 2008, only four large (over 100 kg) seizures were made, and in 2009, only one. According to IDEAS, an air courier database, in the second quarter of 2007, 59% of cocaine couriers detected were from West Africa. In the third quarter of 2009, none were. Since then, some increases have again been reported, to 5% in the fourth quarter of 2009 and, on average, 11% in 2010.⁹³

If we consider the last developments in the North African region, it is likely to assume that protracted instability might be creating an environment unsuitable even for traffickers. Terrorism, as well as rebel militias have created a situation of quasi civil war and instability, characteristics that

⁹² UNODC, *The Trans-Atlantic Cocaine Market*, p.12, April 2011, Accessed 3 February 2016, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Transatlantic_cocaine_market.pdf

⁹³ Ibid.

are not exactly favorable to traffickers, who often prefer weak, yet existent governments to a situation of complete chaos and anarchy.

6.4 - North American Route: South America, Caribbean and Central America, Mexico, United States

— Land Route — Sea Route — Air Route ● Air Shipment Drop Zones



Source: Peace Palace Library

The North American market, with special emphasis on the United States, is one of the most important cocaine markets in the world both due to the huge number of users and because of the high income of the population. However, smuggling cocaine into the United States (and subsequently into Canada) is no easy task for traffickers. Despite the NAFTA agreement that facilitates the export and import of goods between Mexico, Canada and the United States, cocaine usually enters Mexico with relative ease (via many of the Central American and Caribbean countries) only to be stopped at the border with the United States.

It is true that due to the high volume of goods crossing the border between Mexico and the United States cocaine smuggling remains possible and takes place on a daily basis, however, efforts to limit the phenomenon have been made. The Merida Initiative in particular allowed a more efficient cooperation between Mexico and the United States, thus making this route less palatable for traffickers and moving the routes of trafficking elsewhere. Similarly to what happened with Plan Colombia, trafficking and smuggling did not stop, rather the initiative worked as an incentive for traffickers to look for easier, less controlled routes, while at the same time operating through the old ones.

Further, traffickers opted to become more efficient and inventive, giving proof of incredible ingenuity and reaching to what could be called a state of the art of drugs trafficking. Catapults, slingshots, submarines and cannons are only some of the tools of the trade that the Mexican Cartels

employ to smuggle drugs, cocaine included, across the border between Mexico and the United States.

Today, we can identify three main arteries for the northward movement of cocaine. They all pass through one of the countries of the so called “Northern Triangle” composed by Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, from where cocaine is smuggled into Mexico and subsequently the United States.

- Pacific fishing boats and other marine craft, including semi-submersibles, particularly destined for Guatemala, supplying cocaine to the Cartel del Pacífico.
- Atlantic go-fasts and other marine craft, including some semi-submersibles, particularly destined for Honduras, to supply both the Cartel del Pacífico and the Zetas.
- Aircraft, departing from the border area of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, particularly destined for Honduras, supplying both the Cartel del Pacífico and the Zetas.⁹⁴

Further, particularly interesting is the use of artisanal crafts, that are built and exploited by traffickers to deliver cocaine. Short distances and relatively favorable weather make the voyage between the coasts of Venezuela and Colombia and Central America relatively easy, thus favoring new possibilities for technological development in the vessels for the transportation of cocaine.

Marine crafts, torpedoes and submersibles were once expensive and unlikely vessels, but are now part of the arsenal of cocaine traffickers and as a consequence they require specific attention.

Marine Crafts

As the first route and second route involve the utilization of marine craft and semi-submersible, particular attention shall be devoted to this topic.

In order to achieve a clear categorization and better analyzed the phenomenon we can distinguish between three categories of marine crafts: semi-submergible, submergible and torpedoes.

Semi-submergible

These vessels first appeared in the 90s. They were rather rudimentary crafts as they could not dive, they were slow and easily detectable, however, this did not stop traffickers from further exploring the use of marine crafts. In 1995, an émigré from the former Soviet Union was arrested in Miami after trying to broker the sale of an old Soviet sub from the Russian mafia to the Colombian cartels. The use of semi-submersible and later submersible continued. The utilization of this kind of crafts in fact, allowed traffickers to smuggle notable amounts of cocaine. In 2000, the Colombian police found Russian documents scattered in a warehouse in a suburb of Bogotá alongside a half-built, 100-foot-long submarine capable of carrying 200 tons of cocaine. Moreover, scuttling was often

⁹⁴ UNODC, Cocaine from South America to the United States, p.32, https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTASouthAmerica/English/TOCTA_CACaribb_cocaine_SAmerica_US.pdf, accessed 10 January 2016

practiced, thus allowing traffickers to destroy any proof of their crime.

Until 2008, in accordance with maritime law, the crew was rescued and, if there was no physical evidence of wrongdoing, released without criminal charges. To address this legal loophole, the United States Drug Trafficking Vessel Interdiction Act was enacted in September 2008, making it a felony for those who knowingly or intentionally operate or embark in a self-propelled semi-submersible that is without nationality and that is or has navigated in international waters, with the intent to evade detection.

Submersibles

Despite the judiciary evolution and the efforts undertaken by both Colombia and the United States under the legal and practical point of view, the evolution of marine crafts continued over the years. It was in 2000 that the first fully submersible craft was found in Colombia. The double-hulled steel vessel could have traveled 3,700 kilometers, dive 100m, and, it was reported, could have carried about 200 tons of cocaine.⁹⁵ This, however, was only the first of many seizures. On 3 July 2010 the Ecuadorian authorities seized a fully functional, completely submersible diesel electric submarine in the jungles bordering Ecuador and Colombia.⁹⁶

If we consider the high costs, the logistical problems and the skilled labor required to build a submarine, we might conclude that these crafts are not very practical and too expensive for the trafficking of cocaine. However, we need to consider two very important factors. First, Newer narco-submarines are fully submersible, designed specifically to be difficult to detected by radar, sonar or infrared systems, which allow them to pass through the patrolling of law enforcement agents. Second, a submarine can carry a street value of up to \$400 million, which makes costs up to \$2 million rather affordable.

Torpedoes

As far as unmanned marine crafts go, cocaine traffickers appear to employ torpedoes. These devices can travel great distances and thanks to a GPS can be then easily retrieved. Another version of torpedo, instead, lacks a real engine and is built in the form of a “container” with buoyant that is towed by a fishing vessel. This second method allows traffickers to release the container in case of an encounter with a patrol ship and recover it later, thanks to the presence of a buoyant (similar to those of tuna fishing nets) and GPS.

All these marine crafts are employed along with aircrafts, go fasts, regular fishing boats and vehicles to transport cocaine from the Andean area, where it is produced, to Mexico and ultimately

⁹⁵ The New York Times, Kushner, David, 23 April, 2009"Drug-Sub Culture"
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/26/magazine/26drugs-t.html?_r=0 , accessed 10 January 2016

⁹⁶ Usatoday, 4 July 2010, "Ecuadoreans, DEA seize drug-smuggling submarine". http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-07-04-narcotics-submarine_N.htm, accessed 10 January 2016

to the United States. Even further, the popularity of these artisanal submarines and devices seem to be declining among traffickers.

The number of seizures of these vessels appears to have peaked between 2007 and 2009, and to have declined since. The United States government notes a reduction of 70% in the estimated use of SPSS between 2009 and 2010.⁹⁷ It may well be that traffickers are returning to more traditional methods of moving their drugs. Go-fast boats, a perennial favorite, seem to be making a comeback along both coasts. The use of aircraft, previously largely reserved for short hops to the Caribbean, has also increased. Light aircraft such as the Cessna Conquest and the Beechcraft Duke seem to be preferred, but larger aircraft have also been detected. They may make several short hops between remote areas in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala. These areas are often not accessible by road, and so rely on small airstrips or jetties for all contact with the outside world. Using both light aircraft and go-fast boats, cocaine can be moved northward in an endless series of combinations, touching down in areas the police rarely visit.

6.5 - Pacific Route: South America, Asia

Due to the recent growth of Asian markets, cocaine traffickers seem to be interested in the lucrative opportunities offered by the Far East. However, unlike North America or Europe, this is not an area where Cartels have an historical presence or a tight network of distribution.

As a consequence, new routes have been set up in the last years, so that cocaine is finally able to reach new customers on the other side of the Pacific. From the Andes, cocaine departs in two directions with the aim of reaching Asia.

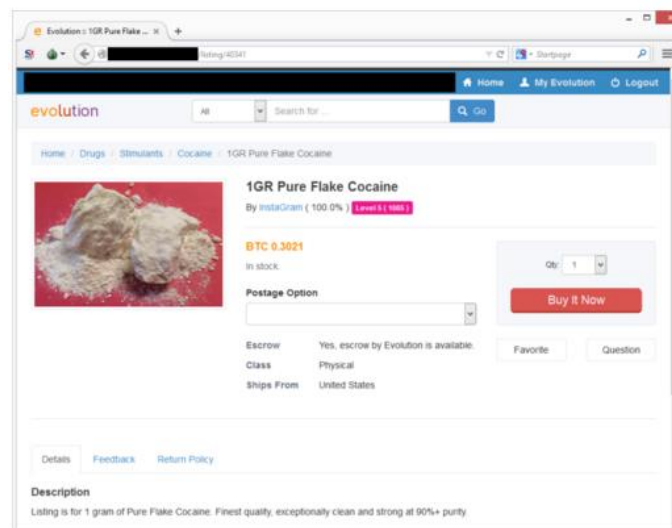
The first route goes straight across the Atlantic, along the coast of South Africa and into the ports of India and South East Asia. However, this does not seem to be a much favored route. Cocaine circumnavigating Africa, seems to be often directed into the Red Sea and across the Suez Canal, reaching Turkey and Southern Europe, with Europe as a final destination.

The other route sees cargo ships loaded with cocaine departing from the countries where the drug is produced: Peru, Colombia and Bolivia, with the exception of Mexico, that despite not being a producer country acts as a corridor and is home to Mexican Cartels, who are today responsible for much of the trafficking. The ships carrying the drug cross the Pacific and reach the ports of Asia, especially those of China, Hong Kong and Singapore, where high tech and efficient infrastructures, coupled with high volumes of goods, allow cocaine to pass undetected and be distributed.

⁹⁷ UNODC, Cocaine from South America to the United States
https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTASouthAmerica/English/TOCTA_CACaribb_cocaine_SAmerica_US.pdf, accessed 11 January 2016

6.6 - Cyber Route: the cyber dimension in cocaine trafficking

An element of counter-narcotics efforts that is often overlooked is cyber-security. Due to the ever increasing use of technology and the far reach of internet, the impact of the cyber world on people's physical security and health is undeniable. Governments seeking to protect their citizens are aware of the potentially harmful role played by medias and social networks, aspects of every-day life that we all know. However, far worse dangers loom in the depths of the Dark Net.



Source: forbes.com

Everything starts with Tor and BitCoin. While the former is a service that allows almost total anonymity on the web, the latter is a recently created currency that allows people to make any kind of purchase without leaving traces. Thanks to these two tools, users can access and browse website such as Agora or Silk Road, with the possibility of acquiring illicit services including drugs, child pornography and weapons.

While we cannot deny that purchase of the above mentioned goods is possible even without technological means, it is safe to affirm that the introduction of online drugs markets changed the reality of drugs consumption and acquisition, both for people and government.

Specifically, we can identify at least three factors that render the online purchase of drugs particularly worrisome: anonymity, safety and practicality.

Anonymity. Acquiring drugs is for many people more than a challenge, either they do not have the right connections or want to avoid any risk related to the sell and trade of drugs. However, thanks to the internet and online markets, people can now acquire drugs in almost total anonymity. Tor allows would be customers to shield and hide their IP address, thus avoiding detection by authorities, and BitCoin grants them the possibility of paying for their purchase without leaving traces.

Since authorities, with the proper amount of effort and attention, can actually trace users behind Tor,

this is only true to a certain degree, however, it still makes online purchasing look an acceptable option for people who are not accustomed to buying drugs.

"There's this feeling of being anonymous behind your screen, it doesn't always feel illegal" said Krister Gaefvert, a police inspector in Sweden, a leading country in the fight against internet drug trafficking.⁹⁸

Safety. Why would anyone wander into an unsafe neighborhood and deal with unsavory characters, when the internet offers you immediate and safe purchase? A wide array of services (in this case drugs) and a quick dispatch, grants online purchasing the upper hand when rivaling with traditional drug dealing.

People acquiring drugs online feel safe and distant from violence and bloodshed often linked to the production of drugs such as cocaine. Another Swedish detective, Cecilia Fant, said that drug trafficking via the web was almost perceived as *"a white-collar crime"*. *"There's no more Pablo Escobar with handcuffs behind his back,"* she said.⁹⁹

Surely, well off tech savvy youngsters purchasing cocaine or any other kind of drug online, are just the last link of a long chain and have no part in the violence related to drugs trafficking or production, however, they still represent part of the demand for drugs, which fuels a multi-million dollar business.

Practicality and efficiency. Similarly to online shops dealing with legal goods (i.e. Amazon), the absence of physical shops allows traffickers to cut the costs of retail sales. Since there are no dealers, no “muscle” to protect the product and no sentinels watching over the place where illegal transactions happen, the costs remain low, thus making the online purchase of drugs very attractive and cheap.

Further, online purchasing has the great advantage of being practical. Drugs are now just a few clicks away, and users can receive them without even leaving their homes.

However, the amount of people accessing online markets such as Silk Road or Agora is still rather limited. As mentioned before, in order to access online markets for drugs some tools (such as BitCoin or Tor) are mandatory, thus making these markets virtually unreachable for non tech savvy users.

Website such as Silk Road 2.0 have proved how the business of online drugs can be lucrative, and represent a totally new and unprecedented way through which drugs can reach the market. However, such a phenomenon is still relatively new and lacks of a wide reach, for these reasons,

⁹⁸ Telegraph, Internet drug trafficking skyrockets experts warn, 11 September 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/2779644/Internet-drug-trafficking-skyrockets-experts-warn.html>, accessed 20 December 2015

⁹⁹ Ibid.

governments, now more than ever, should turn their attention to it and address the problem.

The world is changing and if go-fast boats and drug mules were the backbone of yesterday's cocaine trafficking, new factors are now coming into play. Information and communications technology is key to the understanding and fighting of cocaine trafficking and drugs trafficking in general.

While the disruption of websites allowing online purchase is surely important, there are also other aspects of ICT that need to be kept into consideration.

Smugglers and traffickers, although well aware of the risks involving technology, resort to technology in order to operate and move both money and drugs, thus making electronic surveillance important part of every country's agenda.

Through an efficient network of law enforcement agencies such as Interpol or Europol, in coordination with national police and intelligence agencies, governments should be able to monitor the internet and effectuate routine checks. While this is not a final solution, it is surely a much welcome improvement.

Security is now more than ever related to ICT and information sharing in general and only by stepping up their technological capabilities and coordinating with each other governments will be able to tackle this aspect of the struggle against drugs trafficking and organized criminality.

The Interpol, a leader in contrast to drug trafficking and inter-state initiatives have launched a series of project that allow the sharing of information and the concerted effort of multiple states. Project Drug.net - to tackle the growing area of drug trafficking via the Internet. Having achieved its initial aim of creating a global network of specialists, this Project now concentrates on supporting ongoing operations in the field.

Project White Flow - to boost intelligence exchange on South American-produced cocaine smuggled into Europe via West Africa. Project White flow aims to gather identification material on mid- to upper-level cocaine traffickers linked to Africa and to better disseminate this data among INTERPOL's member countries.

Further, in an operational case from 2010, known as Siska, INTERPOL helped coordinate the investigative activities and flow of information between Belgium, Germany, Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the USA to successfully dismantle an organized crime group trafficking cocaine from South America to Europe via Sierra Leone along the so called "African Route"

Once again, we need to remember that the control and disruption of supply remains a very thorny issue. Governments surely need to step up their cyber-security standards and cooperate with intelligence and security agencies to ensure the welfare of their citizens, however, the complete

control of the web is not possible, nor democratic and several limits within the context of surveillance still exist.

Downing websites and arresting pirates or dealers is a necessary step, but in order to stop the flow of drugs, cocaine included, people need to address the problems of their citizens, providing prevention and education on the danger represented by drugs.

7 - Learning from the past and looking to the future

7.1 - Drawing a conclusion and learning valuable lessons

While making an analysis of the evolution of cocaine trafficking in the immediate period following Plan Colombia, we kept into consideration three elements. First and foremost, we considered the role played by the coca leaf in Andean culture and society. Second, we considered how the external action of the United States in the Andean area, configured through the framework of Plan Colombia altered the situation. And lastly, we considered the current situation with a particular emphasis on the evolution of supply, demand and trafficking routes.

The aim of this thesis is analyzing how cocaine trafficking did not change for the better due to the implementation of Plan Colombia, especially due to the aforementioned cultural and historical reasons and the wrong policy decisions both in Washington and Latin America. Such a proposition is in fact proved in the last chapters, that provide us with an overview on cocaine trafficking. A business that not only survived the efforts of policy makers, but that is also undergoing evolution and change, in order to remain profitable and efficient.

Lesson one: a matter of culture and history

One of the most important factors to consider in dealing with the thorny issue of cocaine trafficking is the history, society and culture of the area where coca is cultivated and turn into cocaine. As we explained in the first chapter, the use and cultivation of coca in the Andean area is very ancient and pre-dates the problem of cocaine by several centuries.

When dealing with the problem of cocaine, most people fail to distinguish between the cultural and historical aspect, linked to the mastication and private, recreational use of coca, and the multibillion dollar business that involves the production and trafficking of cocaine.

Such a perspective, however naïve, is understandable. In fact, the two aspects might be different but they represent different parts of the same problem, due to the very thin line between the cultivation for recreational and cultural reasons and the cultivation for the production and trafficking of cocaine.

In the case of Colombia, and the initiative called Plan Colombia, policy makers failed to

comprehend such a crucial aspect of the problem, which in turn caused poor planning, decision making and several violations of human rights and international law.

Much of the funding of the plan, in fact, was not funneled into alternative development (which could have helped farmers to turn to legal crops), but rather into manual and aerial eradication.

As we have seen, this caused a great disruption and turmoil within rural society of Colombia. Farmers and peasants, who had been cultivating coca for centuries found themselves labeled as criminal and collaborators of traffickers.

Their crops, often their only source of income, were destroyed and violence was perpetrated upon them by armed militias, PMCs, Colombian armed forces and leftist guerrillas alike. Once again, in the struggle against cocaine, those who lost more were not traffickers themselves but the poor campesinos that inhabited Colombia.

In considering how the violent offensive of Plan Colombia did not persuade Colombian farmers to give up the cultivation of coca we need to deduce that the cultural and historical aspects of the plant make it hard, if not impossible to completely eliminate.

Further attempts at tackling the problem in such a hard, violent way are likely to yield similar results: damage to people, environment and governments credibility, while at the same time leaving the problem unsolved.

For these reasons, it is highly advisable to follow the example of Bolivia and President Morales, who by creating a union of cultivators is managing, however with some problems, to keep the cultivation and production of cocaine under control.

While President Morales approach is not perfect, it has been yielding results in the last few years. Bolivia still has an extremely low level of production if compared to Colombia or Peru and thanks to the policies it adopted and human rights have so far been protected by its government. In fact, President Morales decided to renounce America interference by expelling the DEA and prohibiting aerial spraying, which saved local cultivation from the damage of Glyphosate. In short, future policy planning shall keep into consideration society and culture, possibly dealing with the problem of cocaine trafficking by focusing on the reduction of demand and dealing with the supply side in the most respectful possible way, thus protecting human rights and fostering a cooperation that will benefit everyone, from the wealthy citizens who use cocaine to the poor farmers of Colombia.

Lesson two: the futile targeting of cocaine supply

As we already mentioned in the dedicated chapter, the planning and development of Plan Colombia was carried out with a certain naivety, which resulted in a flawed program and poor results.

It is very important to note how the whole initiative was an expensive projection of Washington power abroad, in the attempt to reduce and limit the problem of cocaine trafficking by tackling the supply.

The very idea at the base of Plan Colombia was that by hitting the source, the supply of cocaine would have been reduced and cocaine trafficking would have withered as a consequence. However, such an approach is inherently wrong, as proved by the scarce results of the initiative. First of all, we need to consider how little cost effective Plan Colombia has been. In fact, the very decision to launch an offensive in Colombia channeled American efforts into what could be labeled an economic suicide. While the United States was extremely wary in the use of troops (which in fact, they did not deploy boots on the ground), they still failed to employ their resources in a cost effective manner and protracted their economic commitment for several years, without reaching meaningful results.

As affirmed by Nancy Pelosi and Chomsky, there are several, more cost effective ways to address the issue. Of all the approaches, the most effective and economically efficient is indeed the reduction of the demand through prevention and rehabilitation of addicts and users. Such a solution, however more cost efficient, is not an easy one. In fact, it would entail that every country make an effort to help its own citizens and trust others to do the same. Europe, the United States and Brazil are the countries that account for most of the cocaine users in the world, and they should be the ones to reduce the demand, thus crippling cocaine trafficking without the need of armed interventions. Even further, due to their expertise in the field and vast know-how they are expected to share information and cooperate in devising effective policies with other countries, such as China, that are now facing the same cocaine related problems for the first time.

Lesson three: a constantly evolving problem

A third, very important lesson, to be learned is the evolution and adaptation that cocaine trafficking underwent and is still undergoing. In the dedicated chapter we analyzed how supply, demand and distribution of cocaine keep shifting and evolving, maintaining a high efficiency and allowing it to remain a very lucrative business.

A few decades ago, cocaine moved mostly via planes and Colombians, the very same people that produced it, also took charge of its transportation and trafficking, managing to deliver it on the American market. Today most of the trafficking and smuggling of cocaine seems to have been outsourced to Mexican cartels and the means of production and cultivation have changed quite a lot, in order to beat the efforts of policy makers, evade controls and maintain a good yield. The Cartels arose in Mexico, giving their South American partners a precious occasion to get further deep into

North America, creating a flux of cocaine going through the vast, porous border between Mexico and the United States. Apparently, cocaine trafficking survived every effort to extirpate and reacted in an adaptive and flexible way.

The patterns of traffickers, as we have seen, seem to be keeping track of where the efforts of law enforcement agencies concentrate, in order to avoid them. Even further, traffickers develop alternative solutions and resort to highly innovative and technological means to deliver their product. Go fast boats, planes, ships and even submarines and catapults are the everyday arsenal of cocaine traffickers and smugglers.

However, the means of transportation and smuggling of cocaine are not the only aspects of cocaine trafficking to be constantly shifting and changing.

In fact, cocaine seems to be following a trail of money that is a copycat of the changes in world economy. With the exception of the cheaper crack cocaine, cocaine does not seem to like recession, instability and economic uncertainty of low incomes countries. Rather, cocaine embraces the scenario of booming economies and newly industrialized countries, which are today facing rapid growth (albeit with recent slowdowns such as those of Brazil and China).

As a consequence, if the supply of cocaine remained located in the same area, with Peru, Bolivia and Colombia as champions of production; logistics and demand seem to have moved and are likely to change again in the near future.

While the North American market was the most lucrative until a few years ago, Europe has now assumed a role of primary importance in the agenda of cocaine traffickers, with volumes that can rival with those of United States, Canada and Mexico. Further, Brazil which once was just a “corridor” for cocaine is now a destination point and one of the most lucrative markets in the world accounting to almost 20% of all globally consumed cocaine.

Similarly, China is experiencing a rapidly growing demand for cocaine (and drugs more in general), which could create a worrisome situation in the next few years, as the country has relatively little experience in dealing with the problem.

Given these premises, it is possible to affirm that cocaine trafficking has been unpredictably quick to adapt and evolve in the immediate period following the implementation of Plan Colombia and it is also reasonable to foresee further modifications in the existing pattern of demand, supply and transportation in the near future.

For these reasons, the lesson to be learned here is that cocaine trafficking, however an old phenomenon, does not represent a static and predictable threat, but rather, an ever moving and evolving one. In order to further understand the problem and adopt proper policies and responses, it is highly advisable to keep the situation well monitored, by funding studies and workgroups at a

national and international level. Only with time and proper understanding of this highly complex issue, governments will be able to give answer to the problem and fight the struggle against cocaine with meaning results.

Drawing a conclusion

Despite the efforts and the measures adopted over the years, we can probably affirm that the struggle against cocaine trafficking has just begun. If governments want to eradicate the menace represented by cocaine, both as a security threat and a threat to public health, they will need to undertake a more serious commitment and change the approach they have been keeping so far.

If we consider the proportions and the fallout of cocaine trafficking: violence, damage to public health, social unrest, misdemeanor among the youth, attempts at tackling the issue have been, so far, rather weak; not to mention how cocaine trafficking as associated to gangs controlling the territory via large and sophisticated networks represents a threat to both rule of law and legitimacy of governments.

Even though cocaine trafficking represents a serious threat for almost any government in the world, this is particularly true for governments of Latin America, where legitimacy is often weak and challenged by non-state actors. Governments hardly have the means and the resources to impose themselves over those who try to defy them and fight their presence, namely gangs, traffickers and guerrillas. Such are the cases of Colombia and Mexico, but the situation is bound to change and things could even worsen if Latin American governments do not employ proper policies.

As far as these governments do not meet the necessary requirements to enforce the rule of law, multilateral cooperation and intergovernmental frameworks are necessary, even more so today, when borders are extremely porous and globalization ties everyone together as explained in Chapter 6.

Cooperation, however, is not only advised in the case of weak governments and developing countries. The United States, a country with strong institutional structures and far reaching means, has often found itself cornered during its struggle against drugs and in particular cocaine.

In fact, after the fall of the Soviet Union, all menaces appeared to vane and the United States found itself in a position of almost omnipotence. These assumptions, however, have proved rather naive, especially when dealing with asymmetric warfare and threats projected by non-state actors: terrorism, drugs trafficking, cybercrime...

The United States, however, soon realized the limits of an unilateral approach, In the fields of transnational crime and trafficking, a series of initiatives have been launched over the years, and the United States found several allies in a “war on drugs” it started alone.

Even further, despite the problems and friction originated by the issue of cocaine trafficking, the United States was able to use the cooperation on the matter to overcome friction and cement of its alliances, as the cases of Mexico and Colombia show.

The United States, in fact, displayed particular interest in engaging in cooperation both with its immediate neighbor Mexico and other countries such as those of Latin America (Colombia, Bolivia, Peru...) or even Europe.

A special case of bilateral cooperation was that of Colombia, a country that in the last century has always looked at the United States at its “pole star” and that, when prompted, always provided its American ally with the necessary backup and collaboration.

Evidence of this pro-American inclination in both foreign and domestic policy traces back to the 1950s when the Colombian troops were the sole troops in the whole Latin America to be sent to Korean in support of the United States, and later during 20th century when Colombia agreed to cooperation and backed the United States in its initiatives in the South American continent, above all during the so called Plan Colombia.

Plan Colombia was maybe the most prominent of all the American initiatives. Launched in 1999 under President Clinton, the plan was, however, part of the “War on Drugs” started under President Nixon in 1971 and protracted way past the mandate of both presidents.

Despite the best intentions and the huge support from the American senate and public, this bilateral cooperation initiative failed to achieve the success many were hoping for. The initial objectives were an apparently feasible “*set of alternative development projects which will channel the shared efforts of multilateral organizations and [foreign] governments towards Colombian society*”¹⁰⁰ at least according to American policymakers and Colombian president Pastrana. However, as the initiative developed, objectives started to change and most energies and resources were funneled into military aid, training of troops and disruption of cocaine supply.

Basically, much of the funding that was supposed to support initiatives of economic and social development supported instead the training of Colombian troops, as well as their armament and the eradication of coca crops via different means.

The result was an increased use of military power, instead of civilian and institutional expertise in the struggle against cocaine trafficking; thus achieving relatively little progress.

It is true, on one hand, that the amount of coca crops were reduced and incentives for alternative development introduced, but on the other hand, the results obtained this way proved insufficient, especially for the development of Colombian economy and the benefit of its population.

¹⁰⁰ Pastrana, Andrés; Camilo Gómez , 2005. La Palabra bajo Fuego. Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A. pp. 48–51

In order to understand the failure of the eradication of coca crops, we need to comprehend how the complete elimination of coca leaves is per se extremely difficult and unlikely, if not impossible.

In fact, the cultivation of coca is deeply embedded in Andean history and culture, making it a fundamental element of rural and urban life. Coca leaves are cultivated by peasants in the countryside, then sold and used for chewing, making tea (mate) or other purposes, including medicinal ones. Destroying coca cultures or substituting them is, as of today, unthinkable. Agriculture still represents an important part of Colombian economy and rural life is fundamental part of Colombian identity. As a consequence, the cultivation of coca is not only a matter of crime and illegal activity, but part of a perfectly legal element of life in which coca is cultivated and consumed for its properties.

The complete eradication of coca, if successful, would mean the complete modification of Andean culture. Its identity would be twisted, manipulated and changed forever, if not destroyed.

This is especially true in the case of Plan Colombia, an initiative that meant a relatively swift and decisive action, and not a long, gradual transition. In fact, if the former option means failure, as Plan Colombia showed, the latter offers a glimmer of hope.

The often ignored and undervalued initiative for alternative development, coupled with civilian and institutional expertise, seems to be a viable solution that will allow Andean countries to divert cultivation of coca to legal crops.

An immediate and complete substitution of coca leaves cultivation is, of course, not possible both for cultural and economic reasons; however, via the concerted efforts of all the actors involved (the United States, the Latin American governments, the European Union), progress could be achieved.

What is most important, regarding this aspect, is the continuous and prolonged engagement. Results, due to the nature of the problem itself, cannot be immediate, and governments could be discouraged from engaging in long term, costly projects, when they seem to bring no advantages in the short term.

However, if governments are able to overcome initial diffidence, and engage in multilateral cooperation, the future picture of cocaine trafficking could be less grim than predicted.

The United States, who seems to better master the use of raw power, should continue in their exercise of training and in the material and logistics support of Latin American armies and police forces. In fact, after Plan Colombia the country boasts much more efficient army and police, coupled with stability and decreased levels of violence.

The stability of the Andean region and its government, and the challenge of non-state actors is, as of today, a problem of uttermost relevance. We cannot expect governments to comply with international standards in matters of human rights or engage in international cooperation, when due

to internal problems, they cannot even enforce the rule of law and their legitimacy is questioned on a daily basis.

The struggle against cocaine trafficking must have solid foundations to have at least a chance to end with a victory, and these begin with the solidity of governments and their effective control over their territory.

In fact, the FARC, one of the most prominent guerrilla groups in Latin America that plagued Colombia for decades seem to be willing to cooperate and the Havana Talks are giving good results. However, we need to be wary, as the conflict is far from being over.

American efforts in the military area should be tuned down and adjusted. Human rights have often been violated both by American PMCs operating on the territory and paramilitary groups linked to the Colombian government. As a consequence Colombia lost a great deal of international prestige and the population was further alienated by a government perceived as distant and useless. Where the FARC could offer food, shelter and the possibility of self-improvement, the government answered with the destruction of coca crops, that often represent the only mean of survival of Colombian farmers.

The method with which operations were carried out, not only did not meet a minimum standard of fair use of force and respect of human rights, it even proved largely ineffective and inefficient, costs and results wise.

First, the raids against coca fields, cultivated by “campesinos” failed to halt cocaine trafficking, which was proved by the unchanged prices. As basic economy teaches us, a decrease of supply is supposed to push prices up (as it happened after the destruction of Cali and Medellin cartels), this however, did not happen in the first years after the launch of Plan Colombia.

Prices, in fact, remained the same, hinting at secret stashes of cocaine hidden by traffickers for periods of scarcity, alternative routes of supply or more likely, improved cultivation techniques.

Further, the methods with which eradication of coca crops were carried out raised perplexities.

“Aerial eradication” or “fumigation” in fact implied the use of planes to spray coca crops with a powerful herbicide named Glyphosate, however, as the planes flew over these fields, their large area of effect caused notable collateral damage to nearby plantations. Along with coca crops, yucca, pineapples and several other crops were hit, which resulted in their inevitable destruction and damage to the environment.

Even further, this did not only push the farmers to starvation, but it also affected their health. Apparently, the herbicide sprayed over the plantations, was not Glyphosate, but a much more powerful mixture of chemical agents that affected the health of peasants working in the fields or drinking contaminated water.

Despite all these efforts, Colombian farmers were not deterred to cultivate coca. Such a result can be explained in at least two ways. First, the aforementioned cultural factor, due to which coca is part of everyday life in Andean culture, and that makes its elimination unthinkable. Second, projects of alternative development implying the cultivation of other plants and vegetables are not yet a feasible solution, mostly because of the lack of infrastructures and the scarce competitiveness of Colombian farmers. If governments mean to go down this path, they should indeed increase the efficiency of Colombian agriculture and rural areas, allowing farmers to be more cost efficient and providing them the necessary infrastructures to access markets.

7.2 - Future Action: the United States, European Union and Latin America

The United States

If western governments and in particular the United States want to keep the situation of cocaine trafficking under control or even further limit it, they need to review their role, plans and approach to the problem. American military aid should be provided only when necessary and only if specifically required by local governments. Given this premise, the training of troops and the supply of weaponry do not represent a problem per se, especially when these resources are used to keep the order or prevent further insurgencies, however, due to the less than optimal human rights records of Colombia the situation should be monitored by impartial observers such as those of a UN mission, similarly to what happened in the case of Bosnia and Kosovo.

In the case of Colombia, the doubts interest both Colombia's effective capabilities to impose the rule of law and its legitimacy and the indiscriminate use of force. National sovereignty is of course paramount and it should never be violated, but even if the use of force is monopoly of the state, it has to be administered properly, in the respect of human rights and the good of its population. Such was not the case of Colombia, where the government allowed the interference of the United States in the form of American troops and PMCs, that caused several human rights violations. In fact, PMCs operating in Colombia not only have a terrible records in matters of human rights, they even enjoy a sort of juridical limbo as far as international law goes. Despite the creation, in 1989, of the UN International Convention Regulating the Use of Mercenaries, the PMCs were not encompassed by the treaty, mainly because they claim they are not directly involved in combat actions and thus they cannot be processed or held responsible for their actions, lacking a judicial personality in international law.

Due to all these reasons, as long as PMCs are be present on Colombian territory, the respect of human rights and peace will not be achieved. If long lasting progress is to be achieved, the presence of PMCs is no longer acceptable and only with their leave the basis for functioning Colombian state

will be posed.

The European Union

Despite the preponderance of American presence in the Andean area and in the struggle against cocaine trafficking, other actors should be encouraged to join and increase their contribution to the struggle. Important international actors such as the European Union have so far paid relatively little attention and invested limited resources in the area, however, the problem of cocaine trafficking is today global. Europe is invested by the fallout and the effects of cocaine trafficking as much as the United States and Latin America.

The Atlantic Ocean, once a great divide, is today but a name on a map. Globalization has allowed cheaper, faster and more efficient transports and communication. With the invention of the container the transportation of goods via sea has become way easier than before and even the volume of traded goods has increased conspicuously, so that enforcing strict controls is today extremely difficult if not impossible. As a consequence, the trade of illicit goods such as drugs, and in particular cocaine is now more active and profitable than ever. Thousands of containers and ships pass through the ports of Europe and America, many of them carrying weapons, drugs or even people and governments find themselves fighting an impossible battle to find and stop illicit goods. The events of 9/11 have been fundamental in this sense, as they awakened the interest of many governments for homeland security, but again, it was the United States, and not Europe that took the initiative. With the CSI or Container Security Initiative the United States tried addressing the threat to border security and global trade posed by the potential for terrorist use of a maritime container to deliver a weapon.

If in the 1970s and the 1980s the issue of cocaine trafficking was mostly an American problem, in the last decades, the European market for cocaine has grown significantly, entangling Europe in this long and bloody struggle.

Many factors are accountable for this shift: increased law enforcement efforts in Mexico and the transit zones, decreased cocaine production in Colombia, high levels of cartel violence have contributed to the reduced cocaine availability in the United States.

An opposite trend has been observed in West and Central Europe (EU-25 and EFTA countries) over the last decade. The volumes of cocaine used in Europe have doubled during this period, even though consumption stabilized from 2006 to 2009. Despite the increase in Europe and the decline in North America, overall cocaine use levels in the EU/EFTA region (annual prevalence of 1.2% among the population aged 15-64 in 2009) are still only half as high in the USA (2.4% of the

population aged 15-64 in 2009).¹⁰¹

If we consider these figures, the paradox of the high intensity effort of the United States and the relatively low interest of the European Union appears clearly. Basically, we can observe the typical pattern of the two actors, with the United States willingly employing the use of force and engaging in costly initiatives and the European Union keeping a more cautious, cost efficient approach.

However, the European Union can no longer keep a passive stance and let Washington prevail in the administering of anti-narcotics efforts and policies. Since Latin America is not a peripheral part of the world and “the backyard of the United States” but rather a busy lane where everyone has important interests at stake, Europe needs to step forward even more and accept its role as a top level policy maker in terms of anti-narcotics efforts.

In fact Europeans policy makers appear to have awakened from their slumber to start facing the issue. A series of Trans-Atlantic initiatives such as the AIRCOP have been launched in the past years and cooperation and intelligence sharing between Europe and Latin America is finally developing and achieving meaningful results.

However, the project that most deserves our attention is the so called COPOLAD (Cooperation Program on Drugs Policies).

COPOLAD is a partnership cooperation program between the European Union and Latin America, aiming to improve the coherence, balance and impact of drugs policies, through the exchange of mutual experiences, bi-regional coordination and the promotion of multi-sectorial, comprehensive and coordinated responses¹⁰².

During the 1st EU-CELAC Summit (7th EU-LAC Summit) in Santiago de Chile in January 2013, the leaders adopted a political Declaration and expanded the Action Plan for bi-regional cooperation. Chapter VI of the EU-CELAC Action Plan is dedicated to drugs, the objective being to strengthen bi-regional dialogue and effectiveness of joint efforts to tackle the world drug problem. COPOLAD, launched in 2010, has been financed entirely by the EU, with a total budget of €6.5 million¹⁰³.

The plan in so far appears to be rather successful and it has been renovated for the 2016-2019 period with an European contribution of €10 million.

The COPOLAD program revolves around four main objectives.

First, policy support and consolidation of the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation

¹⁰¹ UNODC, Transatlantic Cocaine Market, April 2011, accessed 10 January 2016

https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Transatlantic_cocaine_market.pdf

¹⁰² https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/latin-america/copolad-cooperation-programme-between-latin-america-and-european-union-drugs_en, COPOLAD, accessed 18/10/2015

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Mechanism on Drugs. Basically, the European Union aims at improving its cooperation with the members of the LAC via the EU-CELAC platform that allows the European Union and members of the LAC to exchange information, expertise and good practices. The European Union can surely be an example in these fields and thanks to its contribution, the members of the LAC can improve their performances while at the same time reducing the burden that the European Union carries in the struggle against drugs.

Second, consolidation of the National Observatories. This objective stresses the importance of creating an integrated system that collects comparable indicators on production, consumption, trafficking, associated crime, and policies, with the final aim of curbing down both supply and demand. Similarly to the first objective, it is quite easy to understand how important the sharing of intelligence is. In fact, it allows various governments to improve the efficiency of their policies and to adopt better measures, in order to achieve a concerted effort.

American presence would be particularly welcome in this field, due to their extensive use of intelligence agencies and their vast experience on the matter, however, the United States is not likely to join such a framework, partly because of its diffidence towards entangling multilateral cooperation and partly because of the possibly overlapping initiatives to which it already takes part with Latin American countries.

Third, capacity-building in the reduction of demand, a very important objective. In fact, as mentioned in chapter 4 the reduction of cocaine demand it is the most effective and cost efficient way to fight drugs. By working on prevention, governments are able to avoid the diffusion of drugs within their societies and stop trafficking dead in its tracks. Treatment, rehabilitation and harm reduction are also fundamental, as they allow to recover precious members of the society and to prevent further diffusion of drugs addiction. Basically, reducing the demand is much more efficient and convenient than trying to reduce or eliminate supply; sadly, the United States, unlike the European Union often failed to understand this very important aspect and in its struggle against cocaine never stressed prevention, treatment and rehabilitation as much as it did with crops eradication and more in general supply reduction.

Fourth, capacity-building in the reduction of supply. To achieve the fourth and last objective, the European Union aims at coordinating areas of law enforcement and alternative development. Similarly to the initial objectives of Plan Colombia as presented by Colombian President Pastrana in 1999, the eradication and reduction of supply (coca crops in the case of cocaine), would be coupled with the so called “alternative development”

The European Union, due to its vast knowledge and valuable expertise, can offer relevant help in this field. One of the reasons why the poorest strata of population in the Andean area resort to the

cultivation, production and trafficking of drugs is the scarce productivity of the land, the lack of proper infrastructures and the inability to compete on the global market, however, both the European Union and the United States can and should provide abundant technical expertise in this field. By offering Colombian, Peruvian or Bolivian peasants the possibility to cultivate lucrative crops, instead of coca leaves, the agricultural sector of Andean countries economies will develop, thus improving living conditions in the countryside and discouraging people from engaging in the cultivation, production and trafficking of cocaine.

Even further, the European Union should mitigate its protectionist measures and allow several exceptions for those countries that are still in need to export their agricultural products on the European market. Such a solution would not prove easy, especially as it would alienate European farmers and damage European agriculture itself, but the sacrifice would probably pay off on the long run, as the finally developed economies and agricultural sectors of the aforementioned countries would be able to sustain themselves and thrive without external help.

What Andean countries need, in order to provide their contribution in the struggle against cocaine trafficking is not necessarily military aid and training, but rather institutional support, agricultural technology and expertise and good policies. The European Union and the United States both should rejoice of this, first, because of the high cost efficiency of these measures and policies, especially if compared to military aid, second, because the European Union could probably be a better contributor in these fields than the United States, thus freeing it from part of its burden. Drawing a conclusion we can probably affirm that the European Union is actively promoting the fight against cocaine trafficking in its own “civilian” fashion and at times, obtaining great results. As the last estimates prove, however, cocaine is still far from disappearing from the markets and the European Union should continue in its prolonged efforts, joining the United States and Latin American countries to achieve better results and durable progress.

Latin America

While the presence and role of external actors have been analyzed, little has been said about the initiatives and the frameworks within which Latin American countries are supposed to operate.

As the Andean area is the most problematic relatively to cocaine trafficking, it is only logic to consider and evaluate the role of the CAN or Comunidad Andina de Naciones in the struggle against cocaine trafficking.

What is most interesting is the degree of integration and power sharing achieved by these countries over the years. If the CAN has a long history (it was founded in 1964) its levels of integration remain far from those of other actors such as the European Union and the framework within which

they cooperate is still a rather loose one.

While the free flow of goods and people, with reduced tariffs and little enforcement of controls take place, little has been done relatively to supranational bodies and power sharing.

While frameworks similar to European ones exist, they have little autonomous power and Latin American countries seem to be rather reluctant to give up sovereignty in order to achieve common objectives. Rather, they appear to prefer multilateral cooperation frameworks with external actors. In fact, such is the case of the Political Dialogue & Cooperation Agreement between the CAN and the European Union. However, if working together with more efficient and experienced actors such as the European Union or the United States can surely bring benefits to the Andean countries and the struggle against cocaine trafficking, it is about time for Latin American governments to stop looking outward and start helping each other in order to secure results.

Latin America is no longer the backward, peripheral area it used to be and should now struggle to be more self-sufficient and independent.

As far as integration and cohesion go, Latin America is still far from European standards, however, in matters such as drugs trafficking we cannot but encourage the setting up of exclusively Latin American frameworks, within which the various governments could cooperate.

In the struggle against cocaine trafficking, we deem fundamental the creation of a common law enforcement agency, similarly to the European Europol. Such agency would improve the cooperation between the relevant authorities of Latin American governments, by allowing intelligence sharing, training and technical co-operation and strategic co-operation aimed at exchanging general trends in organized crime.

However interesting a project like this might look, its achievement remains far. Rivalries, different political ideologies and different interests have often led Latin American governments to different paths. Some remain pro Washington, as they engage in bilateral initiatives with the United States, while others remained on more problematic political positions that do not allow cooperation and strain relationships with their neighbors. Such is the case of Venezuela. The country, that is not directly involved in the cultivation of coca crops, but exploited as a base for smugglers, decided to withdraw from the CAN and expresses no will to cooperate with the United States on most matters. Even further, at a regional level, we must underline how the UNASUR encompassing most South American countries, might be an actor of primary importance and a leader in the struggle against cocaine trafficking. However, the organization has so far accomplished relatively little in the field of anti-narcotics policies, possibly due to its young age and the scarce level of coordination and integration among its members.

In fact, as long as American governments keep a hard line based on ideology and diffidence towards

their neighbors, progress and cooperation will not be achieved.

Joining forces and shaping the future

It is about time for every actor involved in the struggle against cocaine trafficking to embrace pragmatism and do its part; the United States can indeed offer a lot of help due to its decennial experience in the War on Drugs and its vast logistical and operational capabilities. However, the time of heavily militarized responses is hopefully over, and so is that of prohibition and repression, which as we have seen never obtained meaningful results.

Similarly, we wish for a more active European Union in providing civilian expertise and capabilities. Not unlike during missions of post-war reconstruction, European expertise could be handy in supporting Latin American governments and strengthening the process of state building in the areas that need it most. Such is the case of Colombia, that is about to leave behind a long period of protracted civil strife and where governmental presence is still weak in the most remote rural areas.

However, as previously mentioned, the real change is expected to come from Latin American nations, especially those most involved in the phenomenon of cocaine trafficking. Basically, Central American countries, along with Brazil and those of the Andean Area need to activate themselves and take place at the steering wheel in the struggle against cocaine. Far too long these countries have been suffering under the heel of improper policing and the mistakes of Plan Colombia represent an important lesson on how not to tackle the problem we are dealing with. While their capabilities might appear limited, especially if we consider the proportions that cocaine trafficking has reached; these countries have greatly improved their capacity to fight back against drugs trafficking in the last decades. For example, we can consider the case of Colombia, where the army and the police have improved their efficiency and level of professionalism, or Bolivia where more tolerant policies made a compromise with coca cultivators possible.

Hopefully, through a more assertive stance, skillful policing activity and multilateral cooperation Latin America will be able to contribute to the global battle against cocaine trafficking.

Drawing a conclusion, obtaining meaningful results implies the involvement and the cooperation of several countries, each having different skill sets and capabilities.

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