

COLOMBIA: FROM THE BRINK TO SECURITY EXPORTER

INSTITUTIONAL LEAD

PRISM at National Defense University

MODERATOR

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OVERVIEW

Plan Colombia was an initiative of the Colombian President Andres Pastrana, supported by the U.S. government, aimed at providing military and economic aid to Colombia. It aimed to combat Colombia's guerrilla groups and drug cartels. It was conceived in 1999 and was enforced between 2000 and 2015. The objectives of Plan Colombia were related to ending the Colombian civil war and installing an anti-drug strategy to eliminate illicit crops. This session explored how the evolving vision of Plan Colombia helped Colombia step back from the brink of state failure to navigate a path to its current level of stability in an increasingly unstable region. The discussion also explored how the Plan Colombia process might be a useful learning experience in other contexts.

FOCUS

The session aimed to make a close examination of Plan Colombia and the implications it had and continues to have on Colombia and on the US–Colombia relation.

OBJECTIVES

The session had four objectives. First was to determine the role of Plan Colombia in making Colombia a more stable and secure country. Second was to examine the critiques of Plan Colombia. Third was to discuss the relevance it may have for different international circumstances. The fourth objective was to assess the role of Colombia as an 'exporter of security'.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

On determining the role of Plan Colombia in making Colombia more stable and secure, it gave the Colombian military a massive upgrade in their intelligence and air capacity to fight the war against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and provided more security. The aim was not only security, but also peace. No doubt achieving security was important, but it was not enough.

On the successes and failures of Plan Colombia, there are successful elements: the US–Colombian relationship is successful (state to state, military to military). It is key to international relations, and so it is critical that both states continue to cultivate it. Also, conditions in Colombia are significantly better now than before for most Colombians.

Plan Colombia needs to be assessed in comparison with its high financial and human costs and also the lack of sustainability of the work fighting drug trafficking and the lack of adaptation in the closing stages of the conflict.

Colombia can be classified as an exporter of security, with security assistance programs in numerous Latin American and other countries. It does this by emphasizing and focusing on air power, intelligence and, eventually, professionalization and values, and a training approach of the military.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- When thinking about replicating Plan Colombia in other countries, the international and national contexts should be carefully taken into account.
- In assessing the effort oriented towards eliminating illegal crops, it is important to recognize that, regardless of what methods are used (spraying, etc), if people are not provided with alternatives to survive and economic opportunities, such an endeavour will not be successful.

RESOURCE LINKS AND DOCUMENTS

Lindsay-Poland, J., *Plan Colombia: U.S. Ally Atrocities and Community Activism* (Duke University Press: Durham, NC, 2018), <<https://www.dukeupress.edu/plan-colombia>>.

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