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ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Szrogh Bence

Anglisztika alapszak

Angol szakirány

2017

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ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Amerikai-kolumbiai kapcsolatok és a drogellenes háború

US-Colombian Relations and the War on Drugs

Témavezető:

Dr. Szabó Éva Eszter

egyetemi adjunktus

Készítette:

Szrogh Bence

anglisztika alapszak

angol szakirány

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Introduction

During the Cold War, the United States regularly assisted countries which were deemed strategically important for the fight against Communism, often through military aid. When the Cold War ended, it was a major Latin American country, Colombia, that became "the third largest recipient of US military aid in the world, and the largest by far in Latin America" (Stokes ii). This thesis aims at presenting the main motives behind this amount of support by exploring the history of US-Colombian relations, mostly focusing on the second half of the 20th century.

Since the mid-1960s, the US has intervened in Colombia multiple times, using different excuses and numerous methods. This era, also known as the Colombian conflict, can be divided into three periods from a US perspective: The War on Communism (1964-1991), the War on Cocaine or Drugs (1991-present), and the War on Terror (2001-present). This thesis examines how the main US ideologies of these periods were used to justify the involvement of the US in Colombian internal affairs. It is based on the analysis of Stokes, who insists that the US is not battling Communism, neither drug trafficking nor terrorism in Colombia; Washington merely needed justifications for supplying the Colombian military, who in turn waged a war both on the progressive sections of Colombian society and the insurgents of the country, protecting economic and strategic interests of the US (2). The paper also adopts Boville's idea, that the War on Cocaine "translates into a battle for hemispheric control" as it permitted the US to achieve authority and leadership in the Andean region (143). These two books, along with several others this thesis uses as references, provide an understanding of US diplomacy with and covert operations in Colombia, forming the backbone of the thesis.

As the title suggests, the thesis will focus on the War on Drugs, but for a total understanding, its precedents and consequences must be introduced, too, as they are connected in numerous ways, which will be presented in their respective parts. First, the beginnings of US-Colombian relations will be discussed, concentrating on the interactions of the two nations

from the establishment of Colombia as an independent nation until the height of the Cold War. Then, in the second chapter, the US' transition from the War on Communism to the War on Drugs will be thoroughly investigated, introducing the expansion of the cocaine market and concepts such as narco-terrorist and narco-guerrilla, both of which were main pillars of the internationalization of the War on Drugs. The significant roles of some major actors in this war, such as the Medellín Cartel and the FARC-EP, will also be examined. Finally, the thesis will consider the changes that occurred in the US-Colombian relations, namely the decertification of Colombia by the US, and the details of 'Plan Colombia', both before and after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The thesis will conclude with the description of the Colombian peace process, which will bring the issue to the present.

I. The Beginnings of US Influence in Colombia

From the Monroe Doctrine to the Beginning of the Cold War

In the early 19th century, most Latin American colonies gained their independence and were established as separate nations. Therefore, it can hardly be seen as a coincidence that the Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed in 1823, in the midst of the fires of the Latin American wars of independence, stating the moral opposition of the US to European colonialism in the Americas (Monroe). This was a significant first step in the US-Latin American relations, and ever since then, it has been the goal of the United States to expand its own authority in Latin America in an undisturbed way. Belén Boville states that in the 19th century, the US regarded the Western Hemisphere as "the pillar of US foreign policy" and Washington wished that "all the Americas should be natural allies of the US" (97). Boville also highlights that, in accordance with the Monroe Doctrine, the US aimed at preventing instability in Central America and the Caribbean Basin, which could have been the cause of renewed European intervention (98).

Colombia, named Gran Colombia at the time, also encountered the influence of the United States, not long after it gained its independence. Even though the US mostly maintained a good-neighbour policy with Colombia in the early 20th century, there was one major incident that hindered the US-Colombian relationship: The Panama-Colombia separation. Despite the fact that Gran Colombia disintegrated into Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia in 1831, Panama did not secede from Colombia until 1903. This separation was highly encouraged by the US, in order to gain a friendly, independent Panamanian government that would assist the US-led construction of the Panama Canal (Major 41). The tension that was caused by this action was only relieved by the coming of World War II, when Colombia and the United States, the two leading democracies of the Western Hemisphere, allied to defend the Americas, promoting "hemispheric solidarity, inter-American military readiness and regional stability" (Coleman xiii).

Not long after World War II, a civil war between the Colombian Liberal Party and the Colombian Conservative Party tore Colombia apart. This conflict is known as *La Violencia*, which lasted from 1948 to 1958. Besides the fact that this civil war claimed as many as 300,000 lives (Stokes 4) and that it severely damaged the southern parts of Colombia, it also strengthened the Colombian Communist Party, or as it is known by its Spanish abbreviation, the PCC. According to Wickham-Crowley, some safe havens called 'peasant republics' were established, which were protected from the violence but were also "rural islands of Communist Party influence in a sea of Liberals and Conservatives" (qtd. in Brittain 5). La Violencia ended with the creation of the National Front in 1958, but the small, independent republics remained. The US, in the midst of the Cold War, was not particularly satisfied with the presence of these Communist settlements; in fact, the United States and Colombia agreed on 'Plan Lazo', an arrangement to break the growth of these self-defence groups (Brittain 12). It was within the bounds of Plan Lazo that the Marquetalia Republic, one of the Communist settlements, was

attacked and defeated by the Colombian Army in 1964. This was a major operation for US/Colombian forces, as the expenses of the operation would amount to $3 billion today (Brittain 12), and 16,000 Colombian troops were involved, all of them US-supplied (Stokes 73). Plan Lazo was the first time when the United States had assisted the Colombian military on Colombian soil, but, as it will be made evident, not the last.

The War on Communism

To wholly comprehend the relationship of the United States and Colombia in the 1990s, one must consider the changes that occurred after World War II. During the Cold War, Colombia assisted the US in dealing with Communism on a global level: It was the "only Latin American country willing and able to fight" in the Korean War (Coleman xvii), and the US welcomed Colombia's assistance to international security at the time of the 1956 Suez Crisis (Coleman 144). However, the most significant struggles occurred inside the Latin American country's borders, with the assistance of the United States in several cases. In this part, one of Colombia's largest guerrilla movements, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (to which the paper will later refer by its Spanish abbreviation, FARC-EP) will be in focus, as it will be an important participant in the War on Drugs, too.

The aftermath of Plan Lazo, more specifically, Operation Marquetalia, also needs to be addressed. It was not a true success, as the guerrilla groups were still regarded as threats to US interests in Colombia, since the regions ruled by them were likely to become centres of resistance to the government. Consequently, Colombia continued and embraced the counter-insurgency (CI) strategies of Plan Lazo, which were devised by a US Special Survey Team headed by Special Warfare Center Commander General William P. Yarborough. According to Stokes, under Plan Lazo, paramilitary forces were used for the first time in Colombia to gain intelligence for CI actions; the whole network was educated and equipped by the US. Operation

Marquetalia was also a failure, because one of its survivors was Manuel Marulanda (see Fig. 1), "an orthodox communist and member of the PCC" (Brittain 14), who acted as the founder and main leader of the 'bloc of the South' in 1964, which became FARC-EP in 1966, also led by Marulanda. Operation Marquetalia, thus, basically led to the birth of FARC-EP. Besides the fact that Marulanda, one of the US' primary targets, remained alive, a large part of the rural populace started to assist the guerrillas. Stokes argues that the FARC-EP was attractive to the Colombian rural population because it had "deep roots among the peasant colonizers" and it also "provided basic social services in the absence of the Colombian state" (73). He also claims that because the guerrilla organizations in Colombia remained intact and became more organized with time, while at the same time being closely connected to worker and peasant communities and deteriorating Colombia's political system, the US continued its counter-insurgency aid for a sustained conflict against insurgencies and for the handling of civil unrest. The US had sent $160 million in military aid to Colombia by 1967, and its CI support continued during the Cold War. The Colombian state only began to distance itself from Plan Lazo in the early 1980s (Brittain 13-14; Stokes 72-74). From the amount of this aid, it is evident that the US attempted to contain Communism in Colombia at all costs. This can be explained with Washington's fears that, according to the domino theory, if one South American country became a Communist state, others would follow suit.

As poverty in Colombia was continuously increasing, the guerrilla movements remained popular. Besides the FARC-EP, the National Liberation Army (ELN, in 1964), and the 19th of April Movement (M-19, in 1970) also appeared on the stage. To stop the situation from getting any more disastrous, President Betancur started negotiating peace in 1982. Amnesty was promised, a ceasefire was agreed on in 1984, and the government was eager to reform the "traditionally bipartisan political system" (Stokes 75). However, the US still maintained its support of the Colombian military and paramilitaries—whose origins will be detailed later—,

and these organizations did not cease their campaigns against the guerrillas, with “266 murders carried out in 1982, 433 in 1983 and 310 in 1984” (Stokes 75). Also, an earlier US army manual titled ‘Stability Operations’ was translated into Spanish, and it formed a significant material to train Colombian CI officers. The US wanted to eradicate Communists from Colombia, not invite them into politics. Not only did the American government ignore human rights abuses carried out by the Colombian military, but it also continued CI training, instructing 4,844 personnel from the military between 1984 and 1990. The US also sent $50 million in weapons to Colombian forces in 1984 alone, which was the year when the ceasefire was officially signed. Stokes argues that within the CI strategies of the US, “communist insurgency was defined so broadly as to encompass practically any form of dissent” and this “served to legitimate widespread repression while protecting and preserving social orders deemed favourable to US interests” (78)—therefore it is clear that the instrument the US used in its CI warfare was in fact extensive state terrorism, which was validated with the principle of Cold War anti-Communism (Stokes 63-78).

US intervention, however, did not stop with the end of the Cold War: The justification merely changed from anti-Communism to anti-narcotics, which will be described in the next chapter. Having discussed the establishment and the early history of the FARC-EP, it is time to link this guerrilla movement to the world of narcotics.

It was during the ceasefire between 1984 and 1987 that the FARC-EP expanded into the richer areas of Colombia, dividing the country into seven blocs, each consisting of 4-5 fronts in minor blocs and 15-20 in the more sizeable ones (see Fig. 2). Around the same time, the guerrillas started to build connections with narcotics manufacturers, whose operations were conducted in areas that the guerrillas have newly expanded into. José Olarte, mayor of Calamor, argues that “until 1981 the insurgents in that area forbade the cultivation of coca and marijuana, which they considered counter-revolutionary” (qtd. in Rabasa and Chalk 26), but when coca

cultivation became a prevailing economic activity in Colombia, the FARC-EP started to support and promote the cultivation of the coca crop. Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk highlight another reason behind this action: Drug traffickers were cooperating with right-wing paramilitaries, and the FARC-EP did not wish to lose its social base, the agricultural migrants who worked on the coca plantations, to its political enemies, so the guerrillas rather assisted them in their activities (Rabasa and Chalk 25-27). This episode of Colombian history marks the beginning of the process through which the Communist guerrillas became narco-guerrillas in the eyes of the United States, which led to the internationalization of the issue; this will be discussed in detail later.

II. The War on Cocaine

A Short History of Cocaine in the US and in Colombia

This part will introduce how the American cocaine market came to existence, how cocaine production became one of Colombia's most lucrative economic activities, and what reactions it invoked in the United States. These are all necessary factors to understand why the US chose to fight drug cartels, narco-terrorists and narco-guerrillas in Colombia.

The use of the coca leaf did not begin in the 20th century. In fact, humans have experienced with the coca plant, grown in the South American continent, for more than 5,000 years, even before the empire of the Incas was established. At that time, the coca leaf was chewed during religious ceremonies and was used to reduce fatigue while working; this habit was maintained, and some Spanish conquistadors noticed that chewing the leaves "increased the endurance of the Indians" (Allen 8). However, the coca leaf was not widely imported to Europe back in the 16th century, as the leaves would deteriorate during shipping. The first breakthrough occurred in 1859, when a German chemist named Albert Niemann managed to separate the chief alkaloid of coca and called it cocaine, but it was in the 1880s that Sigmund

Freud popularized cocaine by praising it for treating impotence, depression and weariness. Cocaine became a “wonder drug”, and although its addictive features were soon discovered, the drug remained highly prominent (Allen 7-9).

Cocaine became extremely popular in North America after 1886, when John Styth Pemberton developed Coca-Cola, a syrup that originally consisted of coca and caffeine. Allen states that according to estimates, “Americans consumed as much cocaine in 1906 as they did in 1976, with only half the population” (10). The US government did not welcome this extensive use of cocaine and in 1906, afraid of an increase in crime levels and alarmed by the effects of addiction, cocaine was eliminated from medicines and drinks; in 1914, the use and distribution of cocaine were completely banned; and in 1922, importing cocaine became illegal (Allen 10).

Afterwards, cocaine use in the US declined until the 1960s, only to become a token of prestige in the 1970s, when it was adopted by famous musicians, public figures and the media. The only thing that was missing for cocaine to be extremely popular again was an extended supply, and the Andean countries of Peru, Bolivia and Colombia were there to provide it. At first, the main cocaine exporter to the US was Bolivia, where cocaine hydrochloride was refined from Peruvian coca leaves. However, as Colombian drug traffickers had been successfully smuggling marijuana into the US for years, and because cocaine is significantly easier to transport than the aforementioned drug, Colombian cartels managed to seize the first place from Bolivian traffickers, and Medellín became the capital of cocaine, so much so that by the early 1980s, cocaine replaced coffee as the most important foreign exchange earner in Colombia. The domestic cultivation of coca plants in Colombia also grew steadily, with the number of participant farmers growing from 25,000 to 300,000 by the late 1990s (Karch 163-166; Allen 10; De Grazia 13; Felbab-Brown 72).

Understandably, the US government was not delighted at the news of the re-emergence of cocaine, aided by Latin American traffickers. Of course, cocaine was not the only problem. The use of LSD, marijuana and heroin grew significantly in the 1960s and the 1970s. Something had to be done. Washington's answer was to declare a War on Drugs, which occurred in 1971, when US President Richard Nixon stated that "America's public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse" (Nixon). Although the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was established in 1973, and both the Ford and Carter administrations continued the War on Drugs after Nixon, a 1984 President's Commission on Crime concluded that "the nation's drug problem at the end of the 1970s was as great, if not greater, than the problem in 1970" (qtd. in Chepesiuk 32). It was only via President Ronald Reagan's neo-conservative program, with numerous anti-drug propaganda campaigns, that an actual crusade against drugs started to take shape.

Still, according to Boville, even during Reagan's first term as President of the US, the war on drugs was but "one more open front of the Cold War, and as such, it was subordinate to it" (122). Even though the US Army was allowed to engage in the battle against drugs after the US Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act of 1982, it could not effectively do so until the USSR weakened and collapsed at the end of the 1980s. The fight against cocaine only became prominent when the concept of narco-terrorism—at the time synonymous with narco-guerrilla—was embraced, linking international Communism to drug trafficking and thus creating a hazard that "sounded very real to US society" (Boville 127). Also, once the Soviet Empire disappeared, the Star Wars Program was aborted—therefore, the Pentagon required a new excuse to receive continued funding for the weapons industry and surveillance. The US Army was completely incorporated into the War on Drugs when the National Defense Authorization Act of 1989 was passed—the Department of Defense became entitled to "direct detection tasks and monitor air and sea trafficking of illegal drugs into the US" (Boville 132),

and the DEA and the CIA also cooperated willingly (Boville 122-133). However, the crusade on drugs still needed a final push to become international and form the main part of US-Colombian relations in the last decade of the 20th century. The organization that provoked this was no other than the Medellín Cartel.

The Medellín Cartel: From Drug-trafficking to Narco-terrorism

Despite the efforts of the US government, by the late 1980s hundreds of tons of cocaine were smuggled into the US every year, 90 percent of which originated from Colombia (Allen 11; Felbab-Brown 69). The main party responsible for this great influx of cocaine was *el Cartel de Medellín*. Next, the paper will explore how the Medellín Cartel rose to dominance in Colombia, and more importantly, how the drug traffickers became narco-terrorists and therefore enemies of both the Colombian state and of the US government.

The Medellín Cartel was established in the mid-1970s by the three Ochoa Vásquez brothers, Jorge Luis, Juan Davíd and Fabio, as well as José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, Carlos Lehder and, of course, Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria (see Fig. 3.). Since in the 1970s and the early 1980s the Medellín Cartel was allied to the other major Colombian cartel of that era, the Cali Cartel, led by the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers, Gilberto and Miguel, their empire expanded rapidly. In the middle of the 1970s, the Medellín Cartel sold 40 kilograms of cocaine a week; by the end of the decade, several hundred kilograms a week; and by the early 1980s, the cartel started to measure its weekly sales in tons. To achieve this success, Escobar, the head of the Medellín Cartel, employed harsh and brutal methods. As Karch writes, his "way of keeping subordinates and his associates under control was known as '*plata o plomo*' (silver or lead): you took his money or you died" (166). The traffickers built sizeable processing laboratories, smuggled the cocaine abroad, established distribution systems in the US, and perfected money-laundering methods; they had economists, financial experts and lawyers in their pockets; and

despite the brutality the narco-traffickers showed to their enemies, they managed to gain popular support in Colombia (Karch 164-166; Felbab-Brown 72).

In the 1980s, a severe economic crisis hit Colombia, but with the help of the drug money, the Medellín Cartel reduced unemployment and supported social projects. Also, with the slogan *Medellín sin Tugurios*, which is Spanish for 'Medellín without Slums', Escobar built 450 to 500 houses in a district that became known as Barrio Pablo Escobar; later, he donated great amounts for public education and school transportation as well (Felbab-Brown 73). As Felbab-Brown writes, "Escobar made sure that his services to the community were well-advertised" (74). Of course, it is not a neglectable fact that in 1988, Medellín was the number one city in the world in terms of murder rates, with a "homicide committed every three hours" (Felbab-Brown 74).

Escobar also had political ambitions. In 1982, he ran for the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia on the Colombian Liberal Party's ticket, and he was elected for the Antioquia seat as alternate representative. Escobar's advances, however, were not welcomed by Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, who, after trying to halt the political ambitions of the drug kingpin, was assassinated on Escobar's orders in 1984—he received 'plomo' instead of 'plata'. According to Boville, this murder led to the UN's Quito Declaration (on the Control of Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse), which labelled drug trafficking as a crime against humanity. As it will be presented later, this was one of the first steps on the road to the internationalization of the War on Drugs (Felbab-Brown 74; Boville 136).

Bonilla was not the only member of the Colombian political elite trying to curtail the political power of the cartels. Throughout the 1980s, this fight between politicians and cartels was manifested in the highly controversial policy of extraditing narco-traffickers to the US, towards which the government's attitude changed often: The first treaty was signed in 1979, deactivated between 1982 and 1984, then activated again, only to be declared unconstitutional

by the Supreme Court of Justice of Colombia in early 1987, then reinstated in the same year. As the cartels had no local influence in the US, any person who was extradited and tried in the US would receive a lengthy prison sentence; therefore, the response of the Medellín Cartel was to establish the group *Los Extraditables*, which started to wage war against the Colombian government, blackmailing and murdering judges, journalists and politicians who embraced extradition, crippling the judicial system as a result. This method, which the Medellín Cartel used in the war, became known as narco-terrorism, separate from narco-guerrilla. However, for such a full-scale war, the cartel needed manpower, and this was achieved by recruiting mercenaries, thereby also aiding the development of paramilitary groups significantly (Felbab-Brown 75; Tate 49).

One of the paramilitary groups that the Medellín Cartel not only helped, but de facto founded, was the *Muerte a Sequestradores* or MAS, established in 1981. MAS was the result of the collaboration of cartels and the Colombian Army, which became a "training school for a nationwide counterterrorist network" and "a criminal extension of the army" (Scott 77), an organization that was used to violate the ceasefire agreed by President Betancur and the FARC-EP. Cartels needed protection from the guerrillas, whose main income came from extortion and kidnappings of the rural elite—hence the name MAS, which is Spanish for 'Death to Kidnappers'—, and the paramilitaries served this purpose excellently. The United States was involved in the development of paramilitaries, too: According to Scott, over seven hundred FARC-EP members were murdered in the 1980s, and as the Reagan administration opposed President Betancur's peace plans, the US did not exert any pressure on the Colombian Army to put an end to these killings (Scott 77-78; Tate 70).

Seeing the Medellín Cartel's connection to the anti-Communist MAS, it appears to be contradictory that Escobar and his associates would make an alliance with leftist guerrillas. However, the US government, in particular Vice President George H. W. Bush, claimed that

there was a drug connection behind the Colombian Palace of Justice siege, which was committed by M-19 guerrillas in November 1985. Although it is true that on the day the siege began, the supreme court of Colombia was ruling on the extradition of several drug traffickers to the US, and incriminating materials on the traffickers were burnt, M-19 denied any association to the Medellín Cartel. In fact, Scott claims that it was not the guerrillas, but the Colombian Army's counterattack that destroyed these files and also killed several justices, who were held captive by the guerrillas (Scott 87-88; Felbab-Brown 91). Nevertheless, this "unlikely alliance" (Scott 87) was used to legitimize National Security Decision Directive 221 in April 1986, which, according to Scott, defined narco-trafficking as a "national security matter, allowing for the use of U.S. troops in Colombia in alliance with the CIA" (88).

The controversy regarding the alliance of traffickers and guerrillas was manifested in other forms as well. As mentioned earlier, from the early 1980s, the FARC-EP entered the coca trade. The insurgents began to act as mediators between peasant farmers and narco-traffickers, guaranteeing decent prices for the farmers. In its reports, the CIA affirmed that this act of the guerrillas caused disputes between them and the traffickers, and that their relationship could be "characterized by both cooperation and friction" (qtd. in Stokes 86). A report from the DEA in 1994 uses almost the same wording to describe the trafficker-guerrilla relations: they were "characterized by both cooperation and conflict" (qtd. in Stokes 87). Another noteworthy fact is that, according to the report, the "DEA believes that the insurgents never will be major players in Colombia's drug trade" (qtd. in Stokes 87). Still, the guerrillas' alleged connection to cocaine production and to narco-traffickers fit the purposes of Washington perfectly. This way, they managed to categorize the War on Drugs and the fight against Communist insurgents as parts of the same low intensity war—and so the justification for US military aid and presence in Colombia became consolidated (Stokes 86-87; Boville 151).

The US in Colombia: The Vienna Convention and the Andean Initiative

As we have seen, by the end of the 1980s, the US was slowly but steadily turning the War on Drugs into an international, global issue. The Medellín Cartel's violent acts further accelerated this motion. In addition to carrying out the actions discussed in the previous section, Escobar's associates also murdered five presidential candidates, among them Luis Carlos Galán, a supporter of extradition. During the same year, in 1989, a bomb was detonated at the headquarters of the Administrative Department of Security in Bogotá, murdering 100 people. Another bomb killed 119 people, when it was exploded aboard an Avianca flight between Bogotá and Cali. Bowden claims that Escobar hoped to kill another presidential candidate, César Gaviria Trujillo with this bomb, but he was not on the plane. Furthermore, two American citizens were among the dead, which infuriated the Bush Administration (Felbab-Brown 75; Bowden 81).

After all these acts of narco-terrorism, it was not difficult at all for the US to argue that drug traffickers indeed posed a threat to national security in their respective countries. But even in 1988, a year before these bombings, the UN's Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances was approved in Vienna. Boville calls this the "Cocaine Convention" (136), and she describes it as an addition to US policy. Even though the Convention states that its goal is the "protection of the health and well-being of humanity" (Boville 136), it was actually more concerned with suppressing international drug trafficking and supply than it was with prevention and personal consumption. This fitted the purposes of the US perfectly as Washington's policy was anti-supply, eliminating the problem at its roots. The drugs issue was considered an external problem, "an invasion by outside forces, and thus a motive for defense" (Boville 138). US President George H. W. Bush himself insisted that the "cheapest way to eradicate narcotics is to destroy them at their source" (qtd. in Stokes 84), and

that to achieve this, the US would "make available the appropriate resources of America's armed forces' for the new war on drugs" (qtd. in Bowden 85).

The Vienna Convention also assigned the most able state the task of completing the Convention's objectives. Therefore, with the increase of violence committed through narco-terrorism, it should come as no surprise that Colombia, among other Latin American nations, sought US aid to defend its judiciary sector, for example. Through this framework, economic as well as military aid was provided (Boville 137-141). In exchange, according to the 1991 "Strategy on the formulation of policies on Latin America", the US aimed at "reinforcing the political commitment of producing and transit nations to strengthen their laws, judicial institutions and programs, to try and punish and, where possible, apply the law of extradition to narco-traffickers and money-launderers" (qtd. in Boville 141).

The internationalization of the War on Drugs was further accelerated when the 1990s was proclaimed the UN Decade against Drug Abuse. The UN's World Plan of Action from 1990 assisted the goals of the US once again: It focused on supply rather than demand, claimed that producing and consuming countries have a "shared responsibility" (Boville 142) in fighting drugs, and promoted police collaboration, the bolstering of judicial sectors and sending resources to production zones. Prevention and education programs were also supported, and when the issue became treated in a scientific manner, the War on Drugs gained further validity (Boville 141-142).

A truly effective military and economic approach to the Cocaine War was achieved with the Andean Strategy, or Initiative. This plan of action was agreed upon in Cartagena in 1990 by the presidents of Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and the US, and as its main result, US-Latin American relations became dominated and shaped by Washington. Colombia agreed to open her economy to US capital in exchange for receiving 100 military advisors and $65 million in military aid to combat narco-traffickers. The military and economic approach of the US focused on three areas:

"prohibition, eradication or crop substitution, and alternative development" (Boville 148). As narco-trafficking was a very adaptable and well-disguised activity, Washington chose to move the War on Drugs to the producing zones. This kind of warfare, however, required specialized units. It was two divisions of the US Department of Defense that had the leading role in the war: The Southern Command and the Special Operations and Low Intensity War Command, both headquartered in Florida. These bodies used numerous strategies "based on low intensity warfare, intelligence, the development of covert operations and spy systems with double agents and instigating agents . . . and through an agile system of communications" (Boville 149). The DEA and the CIA also participated in said covert operations, partly by employing the advanced technology of the Aerial Recognizance Program and the Radar Network for the Caribbean Basin (Boville 148-150; Stokes 85).

At this point, US-Panamanian relations must be mentioned, as they were closely connected to the involvement of Washington in Colombia. Although it is true that the US is economically interested in Colombia itself, Stokes highlights that the strategic importance of the country lies in "its proximity to the crucial sea lane of the Panama Canal" (68). As early as 1960, the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, Colonel Edward Lansdale, argued that the Colombian Army's CI operations should be assisted by the US to "correct the situation of political insurrection" in Colombia, a "place so vital to our own national security" due to its closeness to "the [Panama] Canal Zone" (qtd. in Stokes 129). During the last decades of the Cold War, Panama has become an essential transit and money-laundering country for narco-traffickers, and the FARC-EP also established bases in the southernmost region of the country, "which has effectively become an extension of the Colombian northwestern theater of operations" (Rabasa 85). At the same time, the US was working on establishing Panama as an international financial centre, with the growing presence of the CIA and the Southern Command as well. General Manuel Noriega, one of the major CIA-collaborators in Panama from 1959

until the 1980s, and military dictator of the country from 1983 to 1989, had a huge role in this. However, as Boville writes, when he was suspected of cooperating with the Communist dictatorships of Cuba and Nicaragua, it was convenient for Washington to accuse Noriega of participating in laundering the money of the Medellín and Cali cartels, and to use this as a pretext for the US invasion of Panama in 1989. Through this operation, the US gained control of the vital Panama Canal, which was only returned to Panama in 2000 (Boville 86-87). Despite the intervention of the US, Panama remained "a paradise for narco-launderers and narco-traffickers" (qtd. in Boville 87). However, the importance of the canal did not decrease. In 2000, General Peter Pace, former commander of the Southern Command, claimed that the FARC-EP must be eradicated for a maintained access of the US to the Panama Canal, as it is "a strategic choke point . . . that, if closed, would have a serious impact on world trade" (qtd. in Stokes 129). The program designed to achieve the downfall of the FARC-EP and to gain stability in Panama's Southern neighbour was Plan Colombia.

The Death of Pablo Escobar and its Consequences

Meanwhile in Colombia, both the guerrillas and the cartels managed to increase their power by the late 1980s. As Boville writes, the burden of the War on Drugs led to an economic crisis in Colombia, and the part of the population that was affected by this became a reliable support of the guerrillas. On the other hand, the narco-traffickers took control of 40 percent of Colombia's territory, partly by seizing the land of those small farmers who helped the guerrillas. This led to a severe conflict between the two parties, in which the cartels were keen on utilizing paramilitary groups. These right-wing militias were protected by both the Colombian Army and the State, as the government's peace negotiations with the guerrillas, initiated during President Betancur's term, were not fostered by President Virgilio Barco, Betancur's successor. Still, one could not say that Barco's administration sided with the cartels, either: Between August 1989

and December 1990, more than twenty narco-traffickers were extradited to the United States, and the government seized $125 million "in drug-related assets" (Felbab-Brown 75). However, President César Gaviria rejected extradition to the US, complicating the War on Drugs. Also, in 1991, he arranged a deal with the Medellín Cartel, through which most of the organizations' traffickers turned themselves in, in exchange for light sentences. Even Escobar surrendered, on terms of being assigned to a uniquely designed prison situated near Medellín, called *La Catedral* (see Fig. 4). He remained there for more than a year, continuing to lead his organization from the inside. Eventually, he escaped and was killed in 1993 in Medellín, by a group of elite Colombian soldiers, the Search Bloc, who were supported by the CIA, DEA, FBI and the National Security Agency. Recent evidence suggests that the Search Bloc was also aided by a paramilitary group called 'The People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar' or *Los Pepes*. Felbab-Brown and Stokes both highlight the fact that Los Pepes was connected to the Cali Cartel, who were the second largest Colombian cocaine cartel after the Medellín Cartel, and by this time also the rival of Escobar's association (Boville 153-154, 160; Felbab-Brown 75-76; Stokes 104). Stokes further claims that "[t]he CIA has refused to disclose any information in relation to alleged collaboration between US operatives and Los Pepes" (104). Tate even suggests that Los Pepes was secretly providing information to the DEA regarding its rivals (49).

Therefore, it is evident that the US was very much invested in the destruction of Escobar's drug empire. However, Washington did not manage to stop the influx of cocaine at all—the result merely was that one cartel was replaced by another. As Karch writes, Escobar's "death mattered very little" (166), as the *Cartel de Cali* was quick to become the new leading narco-trafficker organization of Colombia. The Cali Cartel worked much more efficiently and elegantly, in accord with the government, so much so that in 1994, tapes and an intercepted phone call were released, "suggesting strongly that the Cali cartel had put $3.5 million into the electoral campaign of the eventual winner, Ernesto Samper" (Scott 88). Several other authors

also support this claim (Stokes 88; Felbab-Brown 76; Boville 161). What followed is known as the decertification of Colombia by the US.

The US could not openly support a Colombian president whose connection to drug cartels was proven. However, this only meant that Samper's government was de-legitimized in the eyes of the US government. The US military aid sent to Colombia was, in fact, boosted compared to earlier years, the only condition being that the aid had to be used solely for counter-narcotics purposes. With this help, most Cali Cartel members were successfully captured and incarcerated by 1996 (Karch 166; Stokes 91; Boville 161-162).

However, narco-trafficking did not end with the elimination of the Cali Cartel either; the leaders of the earlier-mentioned Los Pepes had a significant role in this. The organization was funded by the Cali Cartel, but it had among its main leaders the Castaño brothers Fidel and Carlos, who were formerly Escobar's paramilitary allies. According to Brittain, Fidel felt that Escobar's former anti-Communist ideology had weakened, and Carlos witnessed as the drug kingpin revoked his considerable support to MAS; consequently, they decided to turn against Escobar (Brittain 137). After the collapse of the Medellín and Cali cartels, Fidel and Carlos founded the United Self-Defenders of Colombia (AUC). This was not only a right-wing paramilitary group, but it also filled the void left by the cartels and "became one of the primary organizations involved in the Colombian narcotic industry" (Brittain 138), along with smaller, more camouflaged and less-structured, so-called "boutique cartels", such as the Norte del Valle Cartel (Felbab-Brown 76-77; Rabasa and Chalk 14). Both organizations were active through the first decade the 21st century. Therefore, the drugs issue did in fact become more complicated and more difficult to solve.

III. The War on Terror

Plan Colombia Before and After 9/11

During the years of decertification, the left-wing rebels of Colombia became considerably more confident. By the end of the 1990s, Colombia lost control of around 50 percent of its national territory to insurgents—the strength of the guerrillas, most importantly the FARC-EP, was constantly growing. Therefore, in 1997, the military aid provided by the US was restored to support CI activities along with counter-narcotic measures. When Andrés Pastrana was elected President of Colombia in 1998, he pledged to decrease the amount of social turmoil in the country. Washington was aware that Colombia's instability was connected to that of the whole Andean region as well, and consequently to US interests too. Therefore, the US was eager to assist Colombia once again, in the form of an aid program. This program was called Plan Colombia, and it was developed during US President Clinton's second term, in 1998 and 1999, originally amounting to $1.3 billion (Stokes 91-92; Scott 73; Karch 167).

Initially, Plan Colombia was designed to support the Colombian military in its fight against revolutionary insurgents such as the FARC-EP, with 90 percent of the funds assigned to the Army. It is noteworthy that even though the problem of drugs in Colombia was not solved, the American press stopped referring to Colombia as a 'narco-democracy'. Instead, it identified the FARC-EP as the main enemy in Colombia, just as it had done in the 1970s. However, members of the FARC-EP were no longer simply referred to as mere 'guerrillas'—they were now called 'narco-guerrillas', something much more dangerous to society. Therefore, in its initial form, Plan Colombia's focus was strengthening the military, and the plan was criticized for this. Still, Plan Colombia remained a major pillar of US foreign policy in the early 21st century, so much so that although it was conceived by a Democrat administration, it was furthered during the presidency of the Republican George W. Bush. The Bush administration expanded Plan Colombia in early 2001 so that it would support the economic growth and the

"democratic institution building" in Colombia (Scott 73). According to Scott, the effects of this extension were merely cosmetic, but as Colombia's economy experienced recession in these years, the Colombian government gladly accepted the US government's support, even if it meant the growing presence of US transnational corporations (Scott 73, 122; Stokes 92). All in all, as Boville highlights, "US military aid to the Colombian army and its own war against the narco-guerrilla" was not putting an end to, but in fact "intensifying the Colombian civil war" (162).

As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, the DEA stated that leftist insurgents, such as the FARC-EP, were not major participants in narco-trafficking. Interestingly, the Castaño-led AUC, who had a dominant role in drug trafficking and committed most of the human rights abuses in Colombia, and whose predecessor, Los Pepes, arguably cooperated with the DEA, was not targeted through Plan Colombia (Stokes 105). The FARC-EP came even more to the centre of attention after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, following which its members were not only considered narco-guerrillas but also linked to international terrorism (Stokes 106). US Attorney General John Ashcroft, for example, described the FARC-EP as the "most dangerous international terrorist group based in the Western Hemisphere" (qtd. in Stokes 106). However, Brittain claims that in fact it was the paramilitaries, sponsored by the US and Colombian governments, who made peace negotiations with the FARC-EP impossible, forcing it to continue its armed opposition (xiii). Another notable piece of data is that in 2001, the FARC-EP was named responsible for only 2.5 percent of coca production in Colombia, while the AUC was considered accountable for 40 percent, as well as 26 percent of the country's heroin production (Scott 72, Felbab-Brown 95). Nevertheless, through the War on Terror, the US managed to find a 'renewed' adversary in the form of the FARC-EP, who were now considered terrorists, drug traffickers and leftist insurgents as well, which justified the further involvement of Washington in Colombia.

Fortunately, however, in September 2001, the AUC was also placed on the list of foreign terrorist organizations by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, bringing the fight to the paramilitaries as well (Scott 72). By 2004, both Fidel and Carlos Castaño were dead, and President Uribe of Colombia negotiated a demobilization deal with the AUC in 2005. His pact was mainly successful because he threatened to extradite the paras to the US on charges of drug trafficking, had they not accepted the agreement. By December 2007, around 31,000 paramilitary troops were demobilized, improving security both in urban areas and the countryside. By 2008, the Colombian government was in control of 90 percent of the country. Still, like in the case of the cartels, the cooperation of the US and Colombia did not manage to eradicate the paramilitaries. New groups have emerged and continue to gain profits from the drug trade, among other illegal activities (Felbab-Brown 107-109).

The Colombian Peace Process

As it was mentioned above, after the War on Terror was introduced, the FARC-EP became the primary target of the US in Colombia again. Rand Beers, Assistant Secretary of State, claimed that it "is believed that FARC terrorists have received training in Al Qaeda terrorist camps in Afghanistan", although this statement was later invalidated (qtd. in Stokes 106). President Álvaro Uribe stated in March 2004 that "if Colombia [did] not have drugs, it would not have terrorists" (qtd. in Felbab-Brown 69). Although this thesis demonstrated earlier that the FARC-EP was not a main actor in narco-trafficking, after 9/11, the DEA started to produce reports that would negate the evidence supporting this fact (Brittain 260). President Pastrana was aware, however, that the FARC-EP was not participating in drug trafficking, and he began peace talks with the organization: A demilitarized zone was created and hundreds of prisoners were exchanged; however, the US pressured his administration to end all negotiations with the FARC-EP (Brittain 218, 277).

The next President of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe, was not so forgiving with the FARC-EP. After being elected in 2002, he developed a plan to eradicate the guerrillas. Through this 'Plan Patriota' the Colombian Army dispatched 18,000 troops, assisted by US-supplied helicopters, to assault guerrilla fortresses in the jungles of Southern Colombia. By 2006, the Colombian government's spending on defence was increased to $6.9 billion. The United States also supported the program by granting $4.9 billion to the police and the military of Colombia, along with US technical and signal intelligence. Throughout these years, coca production was also being eradicated intensively, reducing the FARC-EP's income: Just between 1999 and 2003, coca cultivation was reduced by 30 percent (Karch 167). By 2008, some of the most significant leaders of the guerrillas, such as Manuel Marulanda, had died. Although the strength of the FARC-EP had been considerably undermined, both sides were exhausted by the conflict. Occasional peace talks occurred, but as the Colombian government assumed that it could prevail without strategic negotiations, it was not willing to grant the FARC-EP's wishes. By this time, 46 percent of the rural population was in poverty, and although the FARC-EP was weakening and the economy in general was getting more developed, Colombia did not cease to be a highly unbalanced society (Felbab-Brown 104-105, 110-111).

It was only during the presidency of Juan Manual Santos, who was inaugurated in 2010, that an actual peace process could begin. The negotiations were started in November 2012 in Havana, Cuba, but there was some opposition from the beginning from former President Álvaro Uribe, who believed that the insurgents were "getting away with murder", as according to the peace talks, although the rebels would be disarmed and reintegrated into society, they would not be severely penalized for their war crimes (qtd. in "What is at stake"). After a referendum rejected a peace deal in October 2016, a revised agreement was submitted to the Congress of Colombia for ratification instead of another popular vote; both houses approved the accord on November 29-30, 2016, finally putting an end to the Colombian government's armed conflict

(Partlow and Miroff). The last rebels arrived in demobilisation zones or transition areas in February 2017, where they will remain until 31 May to be registered and "prepared to reintegrate into civilian life" (see Fig. 5; "Colombia's Farc rebels").

For the last decade, US involvement has been decreasing in Colombia. In 2008, it was the ninth largest recipient of US military aid, but in 2012, it was not among the top ten (see Fig. 6). Still, although the armed conflict seems to be over, there are both guerrilla (such as the ELN) and new drug-trafficking paramilitary organizations in Colombia that are intact these days. This thesis has illustrated that such groups can indeed serve as targets of the US; only time will tell whether it will occur again or not.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered US-Colombian relations from the first days of the Republic of Colombia in the early 19th century until the disarmament of the FARC-EP in 2017. It reviewed early interactions between the two states, such as the Panama-Colombia separation, as well as their cooperation during World War II and the Cold War. From this period, the paper pointed out how Washington fought Communism inside the borders of Colombia, with Plan Lazo and Operation Marquetalia as major examples, and explained how the FARC-EP was established and how it became affiliated with the term 'narco-guerrilla'.

The focus of the thesis, however, was the War on Drugs. The study discussed how cocaine became increasingly prominent in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, and what the reactions of the consecutive governments were. It examined how the War on Drugs was internationalized and used as the legitimization of Washington's involvement in fighting narco-trafficking in Colombia, while protecting US interests. The most important one of these interests was maintaining an undisturbed access of the US to the Panama Canal, and as a result, Washington wished to maintain stability in the region, free of narco-guerrillas and narco-

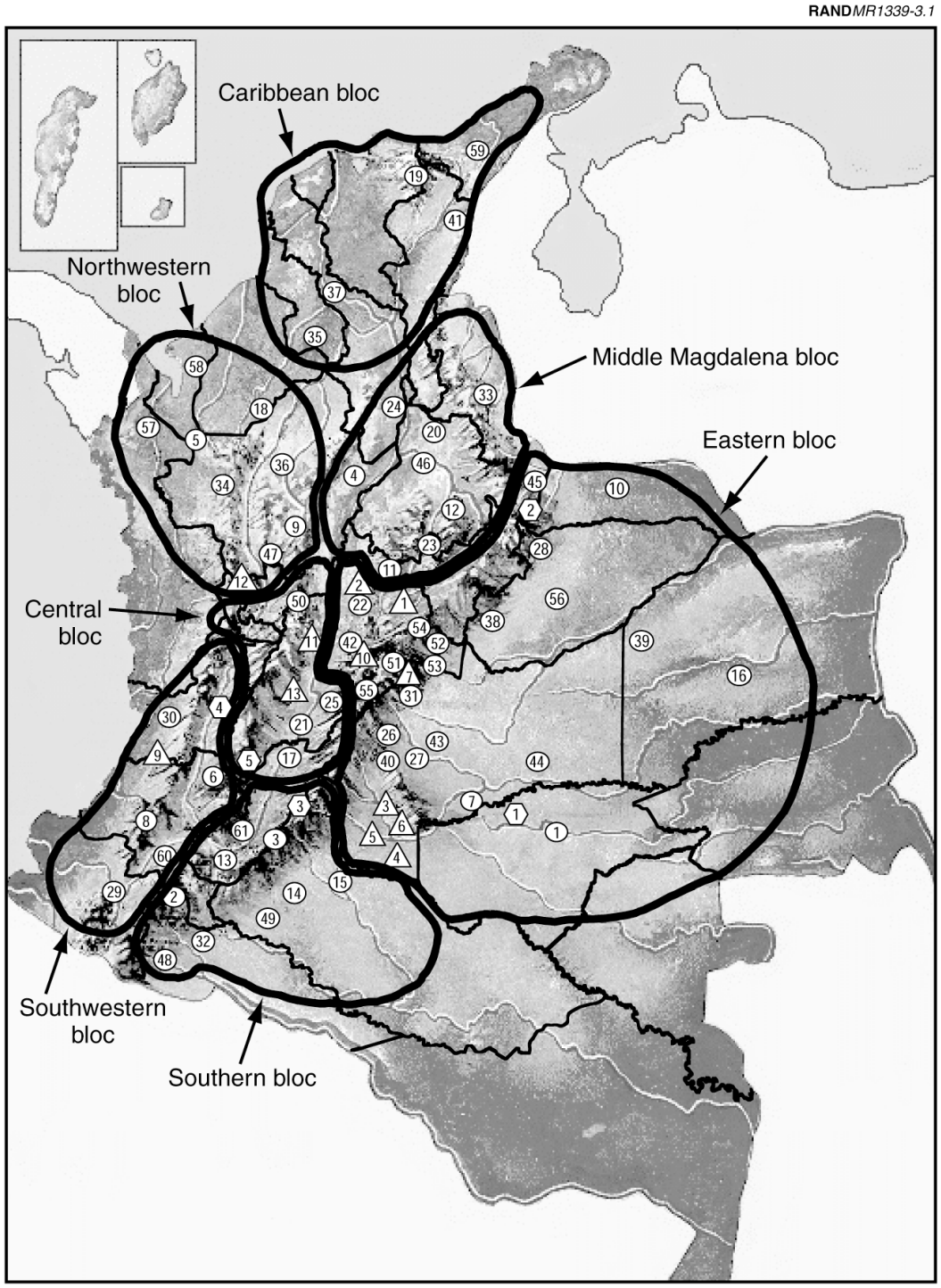
traffickers. Major participants of the latter activity, the Colombian drug cartels, were also introduced, as well as the violent acts that caused them to be known as narco-terrorists. The thesis highlighted how the collapse of the Medellín Cartel did not mean the cessation of cocaine production at all, and it showed how smaller, 'boutique' cartels and right-wing paramilitaries emerged following the collapse of Escobar's association.

Finally, the paper explored how the US-Colombian relations were altered during the decertification period, with the initiation of Plan Colombia and in the light of the September 11 attacks. It discussed how the guerrillas and paramilitaries became associated as terrorists after 2001, and it finished by describing the long road that has led to the Colombian peace process.

Appendix

Fig. 1. Manuel Marulanda.

Source: “Las FARC quieren”



SOURCE: Colombian Army.

Fig. 2. Location of FARC-EP blocs and fronts.

Source: Rabasa and Chalk 28.

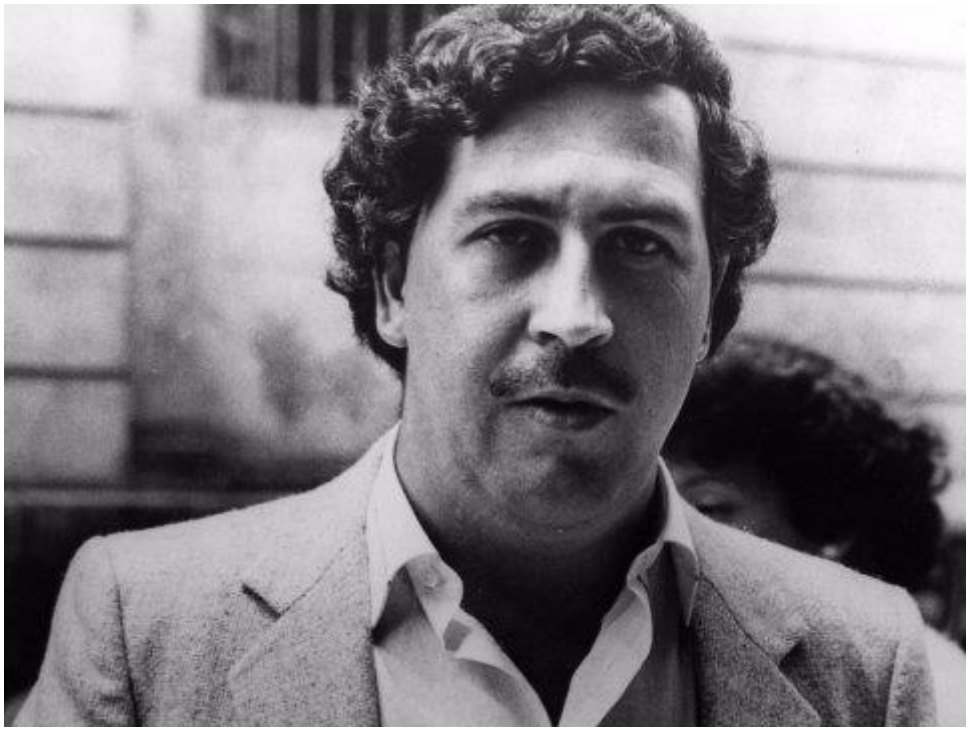


Fig. 3. Pablo Escobar.

Source: Woody.

Fig. 4. La Catedral.

Source: Griggs.

Fig. 5. Farc guerrillas arriving in transition zones.

Source: “Colombia’s Farc rebels"

Fig. 6.: US Foreign Aid.

Source: “Top 10 US Foreign Aid Recipients.”

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