

Blackhawks and Human Rights:
The Impact and Consequences of Short-term
Incentives in Militarizing “Plan Colombia”

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Abstract

This paper asks: why do United States policymakers continue to support the militarization of the international drug war despite criticism from human rights advocates and a failure to meet its stated goals?" Drawing on the related theories of the "military-industrial complex" and congressional iron triangles, I tested the impact of the defense industry on legislative decisions concerning the militarization of Plan Colombia, a \$1.3 billion aid package focused on eradication, interdiction, and enforcement to combat Colombia's drug trade. Through a multivariate logit model, I found a positive, statistically significant relationship between defense industry campaign contributions and pro-defense voting patterns in the United States' House of Representatives. I further argue that these short-term incentives have taken precedence over Plan Colombia's stated goals and trump reports of human rights abuses perpetrated by paramilitaries in collusion with U.S.-backed Colombian security forces.

Despite the Obama administration's relatively progressive attitude toward issues surrounding drug use,¹ over half of the United States' annual drug control budget continues to be allocated for domestic and international supply reduction strategies that emphasize interdiction, eradication, and law enforcement rather than demand reduction programs that prioritize treatment and prevention (ONDCP 2013). On the international stage, this strategy often takes the form of large military and police aid packages. Although a great deal of ink has been spilled discussing the efficacy of this strategy (Mares 2006, Thoumi 2012, Mercille 2011), the motivations behind it are less clear. In light of increasing reports and condemnations of human rights abuses resulting from militarized drug enforcement programs, this question has become that much more poignant. Indeed, this presents a paradox: Why do United States policymakers continue to support the militarization² of the international drug war despite criticism from human rights advocates and a failure to meet its stated goals?

I argue that the geopolitical and economic incentives behind the United States' militarization of international counternarcotics strategy take precedence over the narrative of the "war on drugs." If the United States has ignored or offered ineffective responses to concerns over human rights abuses and the failure to reduce the drug supply, then surely there is another motivation for continuing these programs. I draw on the related theories of congressional iron triangles and the "military-industrial complex," and test my assertion by running a multivariate logit model to illustrate the relationship between the defense industry and congressional roll-call votes regarding military aid-

¹ President Obama has publicly called for the reframing of drug addiction as a public health issue rather than a criminal issue ("A Drug Policy" Whitehouse.gov)

² I borrow Adam Isacson's definition of militarization as "the overinvolvement of armed forces in aspects of governance other than external defense" (2005, 17)

specific amendments to Plan Colombia (H.R. 3908, 106th Congress, 2nd Session), a \$1.3 billion aid package focused on eradication, interdiction, and enforcement to combat Colombia's drug trade. I found a statistically significant relationship between House voting behavior and defense industry campaign contributions, indicating the presence of a mutually beneficial relationship between defense industries and Congress members. I argue this is a motivating factor in the militarization of Plan Colombia, and United States' international drug policy more generally.

Section one provides an historical background leading up to the implementation of Plan Colombia. In the following section, I present new empirical findings supporting a symbiotic relationship between Congress and the defense industry, leading to what I call a "militarized-drug complex." Finally, in section three, I review the negative consequences of the militarized counternarcotics strategy in Plan Colombia, including systemic human rights abuses against the Colombian people perpetrated by paramilitaries in collusion with U.S.-funded Colombian security forces.

The Origins of U.S.-Colombia Military Aid

Since the start of the Cold War, and faced with the burgeoning threat of communism, the United States began to take a hard, militarized stance against states with growing leftist opposition forces. As Latin American countries experimented with import-substitution industrialization, agrarian reform, and nationalized industries, the

United States established a military presence in countries under “communist terrorism”³—most notably Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Cuba (Stokes 2005).

This period marked the beginning of the United States’ pursuit of two goals important to its interests in Latin America: the overthrow of the communist government in Cuba and to quash revolutionary movements throughout the western hemisphere (Villar and Cottle 2011). The strategic alliance between Colombia and the United States was cemented after the United States failed to overthrow Cuba during the early 1960s⁴ resulting in Colombia’s elevated status as the United States’ ultimate democratic ally in the Western hemisphere (Randall 1992). As U.S. aid began to flow to Colombia to fight its growing insurgency, private investment increased, industry swelled, and wealthy landowners filled government seats (Villar and Cottle 2011). Not surprisingly, those in power accepted United States military and economic aid with open arms.

In the eyes of U.S. policymakers, Latin America as a whole was deemed a threat to U.S. interests rather than a region of cooperation (Isacson 2005). This led to the lopsided use of military means over development funds to address these issues of internal conflict and cleavages between U.S. and Latin American geopolitical interests. Most of this aid was requested by U.S. Southern Command (Southcom), the organ responsible for overseeing military operations in the region (Isacson 2005). As the Cold War began to wind down, so, too, did Southcom’s capacity to garner Department of Defense funding. Facing the possibility of a diminished budget, the threat of an illicit drug trade became a

³ As quoted by Secretary of State John Dulles in reference to Guatemala’s political landscape (Stokes 2005).

⁴ There were at least five instances of CIA-backed attempted coups in Cuba between 1961-1963. (*Time Magazine*)

natural pretense for filling the vacuum left by the Cold War.⁵ Southcom's former commander-in-chief, Maxwell Thurman, has been widely quoted as characterizing the drug war as "the only war we've got" in 1989 (Isacson 2005). This was at precisely the point that the Cold War was reaching its end and the international drug war was beginning.

The perceived threat of the narcotics trade was compounded by the Reagan administration's resurrection of Nixon's "war on drugs" and the crack epidemic that ravaged American cities during the 1980s. The link between the illicit narcotics trade, already labeled as a national security concern, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the same groups the Cold War funds were allocated to fight, made Southcom's requests for military budgets that much more attractive to policymakers. These factors culminated in the 1989 Andean Initiative, a 5-year multibillion dollar counternarcotics package aimed at "front load[ing] military and police aid" in the Andean coca-producing region (Isacson 2005, 23). Russell Crandall cites this as another example of how U.S. policy toward Latin America shifted from communism to drugs because Central American countries, once the major recipients of military aid, were becoming more peaceful and democratized (2001).⁶ Southcom, in consultation with the aid-receiving countries' military and defense leaders (Isacson 2005), was able to fill the budget shortfalls left by the end of the Cold War.

⁵ Although the United States was sending counternarcotics aid prior to the end of the Cold War, it was not until 1991 that it became overwhelmingly militarized.

⁶ With the Andean Initiative, the Andes became the number one recipient of military aid in the Western Hemisphere.

The Birth of Plan Colombia

The Andean Initiative quickly proved ineffective, likely due to the “balloon effect” of the cocaine trade moving to less hostile regions. With this faltering strategy, the United States’ policy turned away from its original approach of eradication and interdiction, instead focusing on taking down the cartels through collaboration with the Colombian National Police (CNP). In fact, for a brief period during President Clinton’s first term, military aid to the region declined slightly (Crandall 2001). However, following the 1993 death of Pablo Escobar and the scapegoated presidency of Ernesto Samper (1994-1998),⁷ Congress renewed its interest in militarizing Colombia’s drug war. Between 1996 and 2001, military aid to Colombia increased from 550 million dollars to over 1 billion (Villar and Cottle 2011), a fifteen-fold jump.

The majority of this increase can be attributed to President Clinton’s Plan Colombia – originally a \$1.3 billion⁸ aid package that looked eerily similar to the Andean Initiative. A 2001 Congressional Research Services (CRS) report cites that \$31 million was allocated as assistance to people displaced due to the program.⁹ The remainder was to be marked for five specific purposes: 1) narcotics interdiction, 2) improving the eradication capacity of the CNP, 3) economic development, 4) state-building and boosting Colombia’s institutional capacity, and 5) miscellaneous economic and peace-building efforts (CRS 2001). However, figure 1 shows the overwhelmingly militarized

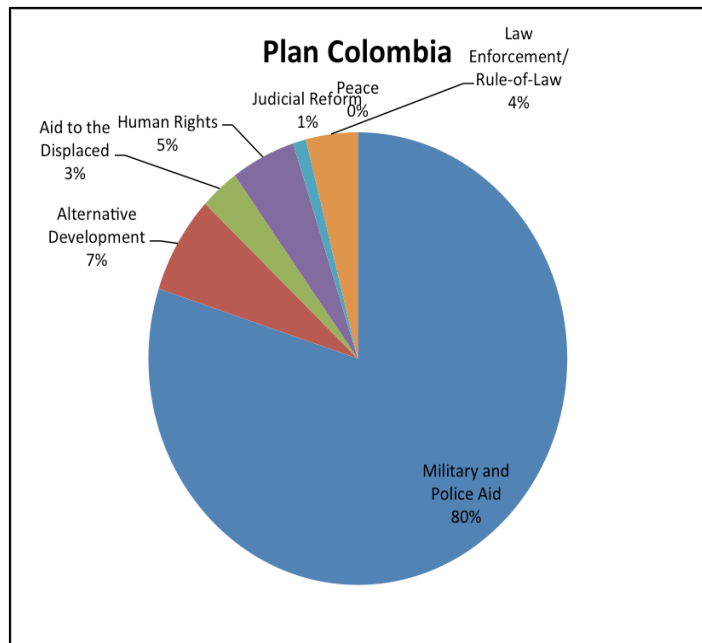
⁷ Samper was accused of accepting campaign funds from the Cali cartel and labeled an enemy of the drug war by the United States (Crandall 2001).

⁸ Congress tacked on additional counternarcotics funds, increasing the aid in Clinton’s original proposal (Crandall 2001).

⁹ For the “push into Southern Colombia,” the main part of the aid package.

dispersal of funds. Furthermore, military funds were freed up with greater vigor and speed than alternative development and institution-building funds.¹⁰

Figure 1



Data source: ciponline.org

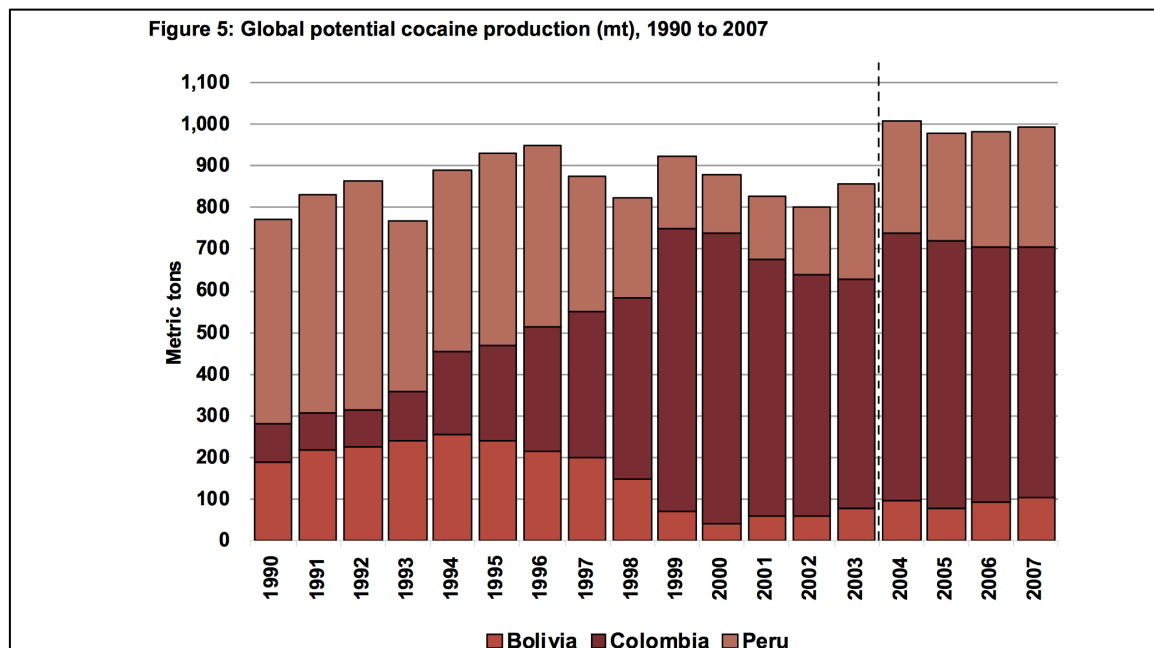
However, Plan Colombia was not without its critics in and outside of Washington. Several amendments were introduced in both the House and Senate calling for a reduction in military aid based on the historical inefficacy of such programs and concern over human rights abuses. None of them passed. Despite criticisms and concerns that it would not work (and possibly cause greater harm), the rhetoric of drugs as a national security threat prevailed and Colombia's position as the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid (after Israel and Egypt) was cemented until the Iraq War in 2003.

The fears of Plan Colombia's critics have been fully realized. Nearly fifteen years after its initial passage, military aid to Colombia's drug war, now expanded through the Andean Regional Initiative, has failed to produce appreciable results. Although reports by

¹⁰ At the times of Isacson's writing, AD funds had yet to be released.

the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime show that coca *cultivation* has decreased, a 2009 UNODC report shows that cocaine *production* has remained relatively stable since the 1990s (see figure 2). This report argues that improvements in technology have increased coca leaf yields, offsetting any declines in cultivation (generally measured in hectares, not yields). The stated goal of Plan Colombia was a 50-percent reduction in cocaine production over its 6-year implementation, a goal that it clearly failed to meet. This, in conjunction with a wealth of reports documenting human rights abuses perpetrated by Colombian paramilitaries in collusion with the U.S.-funded Colombian National Police (CNP) and the Colombian Army (Colar), begs the question: Why is Congress continuing to appropriate military funds to Colombia's failed drug war?

Figure 2



Source: UNODC 2009

Motivations for Militarization

I argue, in line with Crandall, that U.S. involvement in Colombia's counternarcotics effort is informed by "intermestic" priorities, or a combined relationship between domestic and international concerns. Unlike Crandall, however, I do not argue that these priorities are largely due to bureaucratic agency competition (although that is surely a factor). Rather, I argue that these priorities are also a result of short-term domestic incentives that outweigh the costs and contentious politics endemic to the militarized counternarcotics effort. Plan Colombia was originally conceived of as a joint effort between Presidents Pastrana and Clinton. Pastrana's 1998 version contained no military or police aid; it focused almost exclusively on economic development (Ramírez Lemus, Stanton, & Walsh 2005). Once it reached the White House, however, it became "fundamentally altered to reflect U.S. analysis and priorities, and the new U.S.-influenced version would downplay development in favor of military aid. Other countries would show themselves unwilling to support the U.S.-dominated plan." (Ibid, 106) As such, it would be a mistake to analyze the passage of Plan Colombia (and its later iteration as The Andean Regional Initiative) as being borne in a vacuum devoid of economic and political incentives. The military portion of the package was largely in the form of helicopters, weapons, riverine interdiction transportation and equipment, private security contractors, and military training and consultation. The defense industry reaped considerable benefits. Most notably, the final plan included the following helicopters: 33 UH-1Ns, 30 Huey IIs, and 16 UH-60s (Blackhawks), totaling over \$300 million (CRS 2001) to Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation (a division of United Technologies) and Bell Textron. This is in addition to the private military contracts procured by DynCorp, Lockheed-Martin, and

Northrop Grumman (among others). In total, Plan Colombia allocated \$642.3 million in contracts (Neumann, 2006) to be used by Colombia's security forces.¹¹

Not only is militarized counterdrug strategy benefitting the U.S. economy directly through defense and private military contracting, it also allows the U.S. to maintain a diplomatic presence in an economically and politically important region. Although it is impossible to definitively diagnose the causal mechanism behind legislative decision-making, it is possible to empirically examine whether members of Congress with strong ties to defense industries are more likely to support the militarized drug strategy. The following sections investigate whether or not defense industries and private contractors encourage greater political support for Plan Colombia.

Defense Industry Relationship with Congress

One of the most divisive debates in Congress concerned the volume and types of helicopters that would be used under Plan Colombia (Neumann 2006). The fact that so much of this debate surrounded military hardware contracts indicates that contracting and defense benefits matter to legislators. The companies responsible for the Hueys (Bell Helicopter) and Blackhawks (Sikorsky) had as much to gain from this arrangement (e.g., contract dollars, relaxed oversight, tax benefits) as they had to offer legislators (e.g., campaign contributions, local defense employment, revenue). Using the related theories of the "military-industrial complex" and "iron triangles" as a framework, I ran a multivariate logit model demonstrating the relationship between the defense industry and legislative decision-making regarding Plan Colombia.

¹¹ This figure increases to \$952.3 million if including the \$300 million in counterdrug aid appropriated outside of Plan Colombia (Neumann 2006).

Theoretical Background

The “iron triangle” represents a virtually impenetrable alliance consisting of the three primary actors charged with federal spending decisions: “the Federal bureaucracy, the key committees and members of Congress, and the private interest.” (Adams 1982, 24). In the context of national security and defense contracting, this translates to an interdependency predicated on mutual interests between Congress, the Departments of Defense and State, and private companies supplying military goods and services. Adams argues,

The net of defense spreads outwards from the contractor to the labor force and the community. In the absence of alternatives, defense contracting provides careers and jobs for scientists, engineers, technicians and production workers...Defense firms are major employers and sources of revenue in the areas where production facilities are located...Politicians from heavily defense-dependent states all know that there are few real alternatives to the work from defense contracting” (*The Politics of Defense Contracting*, 23)

Because I focus only on the relationship between Congress and the defense industry, I use the “military-industrial complex” and “iron triangle” interchangeably.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower first popularized the term “military-industrial complex” in his 1961 farewell address. With the burgeoning Cold War, and the defense industry boom, he urged, “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the

military-industrial (sic) complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” Eisenhower’s fears were rooted in the calls for increased defense spending coming from Congress members. In other words, he feared that the opportunities for economic growth would encourage excessive defense spending, which could threaten American democracy and mortgage the assets of future generations (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences).

Unfortunately, there have been few quantitative studies testing the existence of the military-industrial complex. The few existing studies proved inconclusive (Cobb 1969, 1973). This is likely due to a difficulty in defining and measuring “defense dependence.” As such, I chose to draw from Becca Thorpe’s 2010 study “The Role of Economic Reliance in Defense Procurement Contracting,” by defining defense dependence as the presence of private defense facilities in economically homogenous areas.

Methodology

Hypothesis: *U.S. House members representing districts with a high dependence on the defense industry were more likely to vote in favor of military aid for Plan Colombia, controlling for other factors likely to influence these decisions.*

Dependent Variables: Because Plan Colombia was tied up in the 2000 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (H.R. 3908), I chose to use two House amendments

aimed at cutting military aid completely (H. Amdt. 624, the Ramstad Amendment)¹² or partially (H. Amdt. 617, the Obey Amendment)¹³ as dependent variables in order to isolate Plan Colombia-specific votes. For both amendments, a “no” vote indicated support for militarization.

Independent Variables:

- 1) *“District Defense Dependence” (an interaction between district defense locations and inversed population density)* - This interaction is an indicator of the economic importance of the defense industry in each congressional district. Districts with lower population densities (i.e., more rural) would theoretically be more economically dependent on the defense industry due to a lack of a variety of industries in a more sparsely populated district.
- 2) *“Defense Contributions” (Aerospace industry campaign contributions to the 106th Congress)* - found on the Center for Responsive Politics website.
Representatives receiving large amounts of campaign contributions from the defense industry are likely to have a mutually beneficial relationship with their donors. Research suggests that campaign donors help subsidize the reelection of their political allies in Congress that support their interests (Hall & Deardorff 2006). Therefore, defense industries are likely to contribute to defense industry-friendly representatives and those representatives tend to vote in favor of defense industry-friendly policy.

¹² The Ramstad Amendment sought to cut the entire package in lieu of U.S.-based demand reduction problems.

¹³ The Obey Amendment proposed cutting \$552 million in military aid.

Controls:

- 1) *Party* – I controlled for each Congress member’s political party (Republican, Democrat, Independent) to rule out the possibility that House member support for the tested votes was due to partisanship.
- 2) *Ideology* – using Poole and Rosenthal’s DW nominate data, I controlled for conservatism and liberalism among the representatives. This was chosen in addition to political party because some members may vote a particular way due to fiscal conservatism (or liberalism) more than party identity. In addition to fiscal conservatism (and a “small government” mentality) there is the possibility that, ideologically, more “conservative” members vote pro-defense in order to distance themselves from being labeled “soft on drugs” (Schack 2011).
- 3) *Unemployment* – Reflects the average unemployment rate for the Congressional district for the respective time periods. This variable was used to control for the possibility that Representatives voted in favor of military aid to bring defense jobs to districts in need of higher employment rates.
- 4) *Defense Industry Presence* – A count variable reflecting the number of top 6 defense industry locations, as well as major industry locations of Bell Helicopter and Sikorsky Aircraft, within a congressional district. Bell Helicopter and Sikorsky were included, despite not being in the “top 6” defense industries, because they received such large contracts from Plan Colombia. This variable was used to control for concentrations of defense industry facilities in each representative’s district.

- 5) *Population Density* – A continuous variable (1000 people per square mile) reflecting urban versus rural congressional districts. This was used to control for homogenous economic conditions that could potentially affect a district's dependence on the defense industry.

Model: To test my hypothesis, I used a multivariate logit model based on the above variables to determine the probability of House members voting in favor of legislation benefitting the defense industry. I present my findings with predicted values in the 10th and 90th percentiles of my “District Defense Dependence” and “Defense Contributions” variables to illustrate the difference between those members with very few ties to the defense industry and those with strong defense-industry incentives.

Limitations: Due to the difficulty in gathering defense facilities data, I have included only the top 6 defense industries as well as the major facilities locations of Bell Textron Helicopter and Sikorsky Aircraft.¹⁴ With more time and resources, it would be beneficial to obtain a more comprehensive list of facility locations from defense industry tax information. Furthermore, this study only takes into account military hardware manufacturers as opposed to private military contractors (PMCs). PMCs were also a major recipient of Plan Colombia funds, and should be included in quantitative analysis in future studies. Therefore, these findings ought to be viewed as preliminary. However, the analysis offers an important initial test.

Results (See Appendix for logit table): Although the models located in the appendix do not show a statistically significant relationship between “defense industry dependence”

¹⁴ Defense facilities data was obtained through each corporation's website. However, the Bell and Sikorsky locations were not adjusted for 1992 congressional districting plans due to time constraints.

and legislators' support for Plan Columbia,¹⁵ there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between defense industry campaign contributions and congressional votes in favor of continued funding for Plan Columbia.¹⁶ While it is virtually impossible to make a causal claim that defense industry campaign contributions *cause* pro-defense votes, it is likely that large campaign contributions are donated to members known to in favor of defense investments. This strategy perpetuates a defense-friendly Congress by providing higher campaign contributions, which help the legislative allies of defense industries win, or keep, congressional seats (Hall & Deardorff 2006).

Figure 3

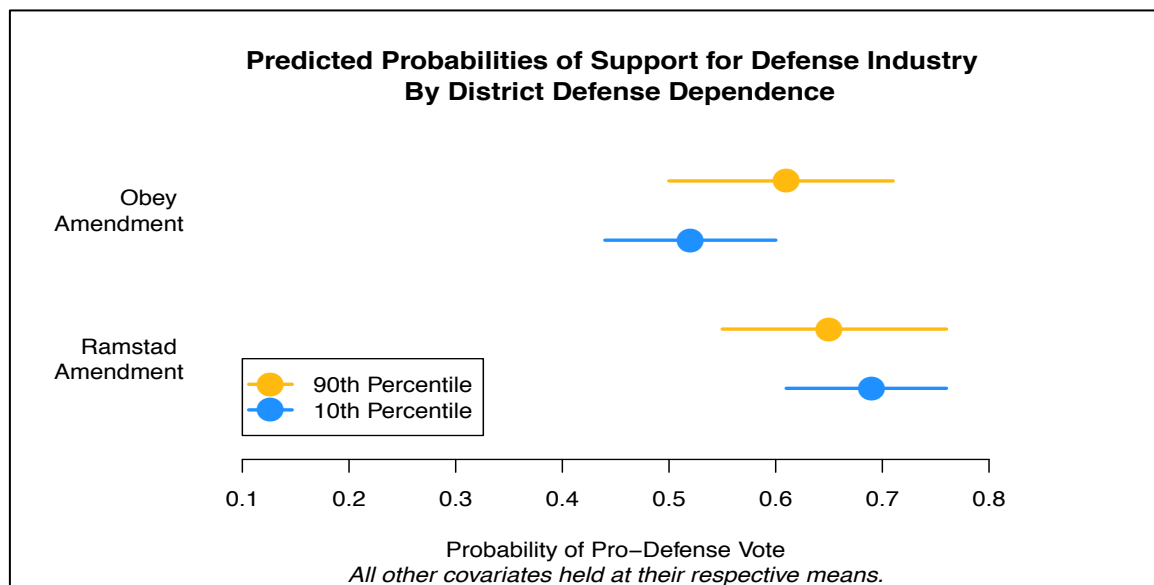


Figure 3 shows the predicted probabilities of pro-defense votes for the Ramstad

¹⁵ I found a nearly statistically significant relationship ($p < .10$) between defense facilities (no interaction) and roll-call votes for the Ramstad amendment. However, this relationship only held in a separate model that included an interaction between defense facilities and unemployment (the interaction itself was not statistically significant). This would require more empirical analysis to interpret a substantive meaning with confidence.

¹⁶ As expected, there is also a positive, statistically significant relationship between ideology and voting behavior for the Obey and Ramstad Amendments (i.e., more conservative members were more likely to support military aid to Plan Columbia).

and Obey Amendments as determined by “District Defense Dependence”. For both amendments, the mean values (and 95% confidence intervals) for the 10th and 90th percentiles overlap, indicating there is no statistical difference between the two.

Interestingly, the predicted values for the Obey Amendment run in the expected direction (i.e., although not statistically significant, the predicted mean value for the 90th percentile is higher than the 10th percentile), but the Ramstad Amendment runs in a direction counter to my hypothesis.

Figure 4

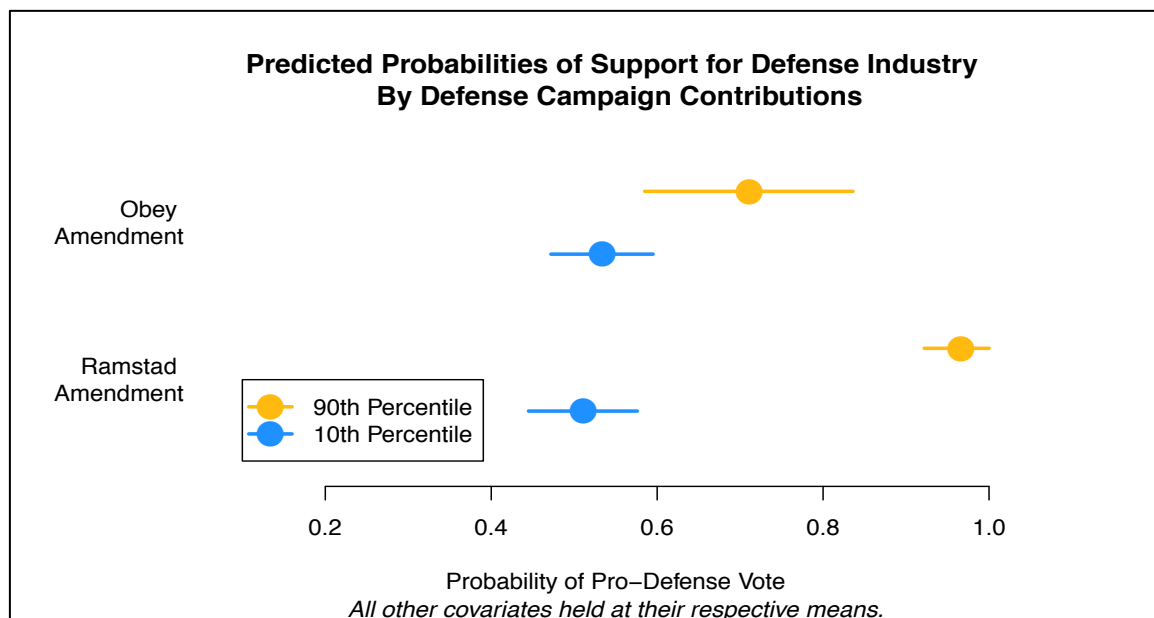


Figure 4 shows the predicted values of pro-defense votes for members receiving defense industry campaign contributions in the 10th and 90th percentiles. Both amendments show a positive, statistically significant relationship between defense contributions and voting behavior. This difference is markedly apparent for Ramstad Amendment votes. Those members receiving contributions in the 10th percentile are just over 55% likely to vote pro-defense, while those in the 90th percentile are approximately 99% likely to do so. This translates to a 44% difference in probability based on defense

industry contributions when controlling for other factors. In contrast, the Obey Amendment is also positive and statistically significant, but with a much smaller magnitude. For the Obey Amendment, members in the 10th percentile are about 56% likely to vote pro-defense, and those at the 90th percentile are approximately 70% likely to vote in favor of continued military funds. The differences between the two amendments, 44% and 14% respectively, is due to the Obey Amendment seeking to cut military aid partially, while the Ramstad Amendment sought to cut military aid *completely*.

When considering the inefficacy of sending military aid for counterdrug programs and the statistically significant relationship between defense contributions and Congressional voting behavior, it is reasonable to speculate that both groups had something to gain from the militarized counter-narcotics effort. I call this mutually beneficial relationship the “militarized-drug complex.”¹⁷ The findings shown above support my theory that the defense industry and key members of Congress form alliances and policy blocs based on “coincident objectives” (Hall & Deardorff 2006) where counterdrug legislation is concerned. Plan Colombia was not only beneficial for defense companies providing military hardware; it also relied heavily on using civilians through private contractors. However, due to the constraints mentioned above, performing a quantitative analysis of these PMCs was not possible. The following is a qualitative analysis of the use of private military contractors in international counterdrug efforts.

¹⁷ As opposed to the “military-industrial complex” which argues that the defense industry has become so large, and the economy so dependent on its existence, that it runs the risk of influencing foreign policy in general.

Private Contracting in Colombia

In addition to the millions of dollars the defense industry has received in contracts for military hardware, Private Military Companies (PMCs) have also received a large portion of the Plan Colombia aid. PMCs have garnered contracts for civilians to act as spray plane and helicopter pilots, mechanics, logistical support, intelligence gathers, and more (Isacson 2005). DynCorp, a security firm based in Reston, Virginia has received the largest amount of contracts in Colombia – in 1998 DynCorp won a \$600 million 5-year contract to provide pilot training and helicopter maintenance throughout the Andean countries (Stanger and Williams 2006). In FY2002 alone, over \$150 million in contracts were allocated to PMCs (Youngers & Rosin 2005).¹⁸

The increasing use of private contractors in the war on drugs¹⁹ can be attributed to several factors. First, the lack of public oversight and accountability allows the U.S. government plausible deniability and fewer political consequences. Second, in conjunction with providing loose oversight and reduced accountability, the use of private contractors allows the CIA, DEA, and other agencies the ability to maintain secrecy. Todd Schack cites a 2001 quote from Taylor Martin: “this is how the CIA has always handled this stuff – give it to contractors who are away from Freedom of Information requests, auditors, inspector generals,” says Wayne Madsen of the Electronic Privacy Information Center. “They don’t have to come under any kind of microscope.” (2011,

¹⁸ I use the 2003 State Dept. information, documented in Youngers & Rosin, due to difficulty in finding reliable aggregated data for PMC contracts through the entire Plan Colombia period.

¹⁹ Isacson goes so far as to argue the drug war pioneered the approach of privatized warfare.

150). Third, it is a widely held belief that outsourcing military operations to private companies is more cost-effective than sending U.S. troops.²⁰

Finally, and most importantly, using private civilian contractors in conflict-ridden areas is safer than sending American troops (Isacson 2005). Essentially, using private contractors is more politically palatable than using official military personnel because the American public is more likely to support military aid being sent to fight a war without clear boundaries if their sons and daughters are not in the line of duty. Anne Patterson, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, stated in 2002: “Sooner or later, official Americans will be killed in Colombia carrying out their duties; when that happens it will be big news.” (Ibid, 43) It never happened precisely *because* private contractors were being sent in place of “official Americans”. However, between 1998 and 2003, eleven civilians died in private contracting missions, with nary a peep in the American media (Ibid).²¹

The secrecy and lack of oversight inherent to the private corporation status of PMCs makes tracing their activities extremely difficult. This is coupled with the fact that the State Department is not required to discuss PMC contracts under the guise of “commercial propriety” or inform Congress of contracts below a \$50 million threshold (Stanger and Williams 2006). Furthermore, PMCs are often comprised of several small subsidiaries making it difficult to understand how their lobbying is conducted. Simply put, we know very little about PMC operations in Colombia. What we do know is that they are receiving nearly half of the military appropriations for Plan Colombia.

²⁰ Evidence has yet to show that this is true beyond theoretical claim (Stanger and Williams 2006).

²¹ This is another important aspect to the militarized drug war, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Considering only 13% of the funds²² actually went to the Colombian government, this is an important piece, however opaque, of the puzzle. The use of PMCs in conjunction with the relationship between military hardware companies and Congress contributes to the perpetuation of a defense-minded perspective in Washington that has had a significant impact on the way the United States pursues its international counterdrug objectives.

The Consequences of the “Militarized-Drug Complex”

My empirical findings show a positive, statistically significant relationship between defense contributions and legislative support for Plan Colombia. Although my findings are preliminary and are subject to methodological limitations, one thing is clear: the short-term US political goals achieved through the militarization of U.S. counterdrug strategy in Colombia also impose enormous costs. These consequences have largely come in the form of human rights abuses at the hand of paramilitaries in collusion with U.S.-backed security forces and disproportionately felt by the Colombian population.

Much of the rhetoric about Colombia and the violence surrounding its issues with drugs trafficking is attributed to the Leftist guerrilla groups the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). However, in an investigation into the “parapolitics” scandals linking Colombian politicians and cocaine trafficking, the International Criminal Court (ICC) found that approximately eighty percent of the extrajudicial killings²³ have been at the hand of right-wing paramilitary groups that are known to have ties to Colombian authorities (Vieira 2008 and Holmes,

²² The rest stayed within U.S. borders (Villar and Cottle 2011).

²³ Vieira states 12% of these murders can be attributed to guerrilla insurgents, and the rest to security forces.

Piñeres & Curtin 2006). Despite a formal demobilization process that took place between 2003 and 2006, the paramilitaries continue to exist, albeit in different incarnations, and continue to act with near impunity (HRW 2010),

According to *Human Rights Watch* (2001), Colombians often refer to these paramilitaries as the “Sixth Division” of the Colombian Army (COLAR). COLAR, officially comprised of five divisions, has such strong ties to the right-wing paramilitary groups, that everyday Colombians view them as an extension of the official armed forces (HRW 2001). The relationship between counternarcotics battalions, COLAR, and the paramilitaries is indeed a highly complex one, and presents many limitations to fully understanding the implications of this relationship. While a significant portion of U.S. intelligence agency documents regarding paramilitary-military links remains classified, the National Security Archive at George Washington University has compiled an extensive collection of declassified cables providing evidence of this collusive relationship and the U.S. knowledge of the paramilitary-military situation dating back to the 1980s. Using a small portion of these documents, I begin this section by focusing on the takeover of Mapipirán and massacre of Miraflores in 1997 to show that even though the United States knew of the paramilitary-military relationship *before* Plan Colombia, the short-term incentives realized by militarizing Colombia’s counterdrug effort outweighed the human rights violations that followed. Following this section, I document a few of the many abuses committed by the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), a coalition of paramilitary forces, during Plan Colombia.

Miraflores and Mapiripán

Although the State Department technically “decertified” Colombia in 1996 and 1997 due to the Cali-campaign contribution scandal of President Samper’s administration, a considerable amount of military funding continued through the International Narcotics Control program (National Security Archive, War in Colombia: Volume III). During this period, in 1997, the leader of an AUC subgroup “Llanos Orientales,” Clodomiro Agami, admitted to facilitating the July 1997 takeover of Mapiripán and October 1997 massacre at Miraflores. These events, according to a December 1997 declassified cable to the State Department, occurred with “army foreknowledge and facilitation...and had facilitated the operation [in Miraflores] from ‘beginning to end’.” (Doc No. C17832675, 6)

On July 12, one hundred and twenty paramilitary members flew into Mapiripán’s military-controlled airport. From there they murdered at least 26 residents, according to a witness account (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* January 9, 1998). After taking control of Mapiripán, the paramilitary group moved on to the nearby Miraflores, where they massacred at least 12 more individuals over a three-day period, displacing hundreds more (National Security Archive “Lifting the Veil on Colombia’s ‘Emerald Czar’”). The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article quotes a letter from Miraflores residents stating, “the police, army, and navy did not make an appearance” through the paramilitary takeover. The State Department cable quotes “Clodomiro” as feeling impervious to arrest: “The Army was so infiltrated by paramilitaries that he and his colleagues felt no concern about ever being arrested; he claimed they were always warned in advance of any possibility of capture.” (Doc No. C17832675, 6)

While the documents and journalistic accounts clearly state the CNP was not involved in these events, the military was, without a doubt, in direct collusion with “Clodomiro” and his fighters. Although it is difficult to ascertain whether or not U.S.-funded COLAR brigades were aiding the paramilitary in the events at Mapipirán and Miraflores, we do know that the United States was aware of this relationship and continued to send military aid under Plan Colombia anyway. Furthermore, this paramilitary-military nexus continued throughout Plan Colombia despite a formal demobilization process. Not only was the United States aware of the problem, the short-term domestic incentives behind Plan Colombia trumped concerns over human rights.

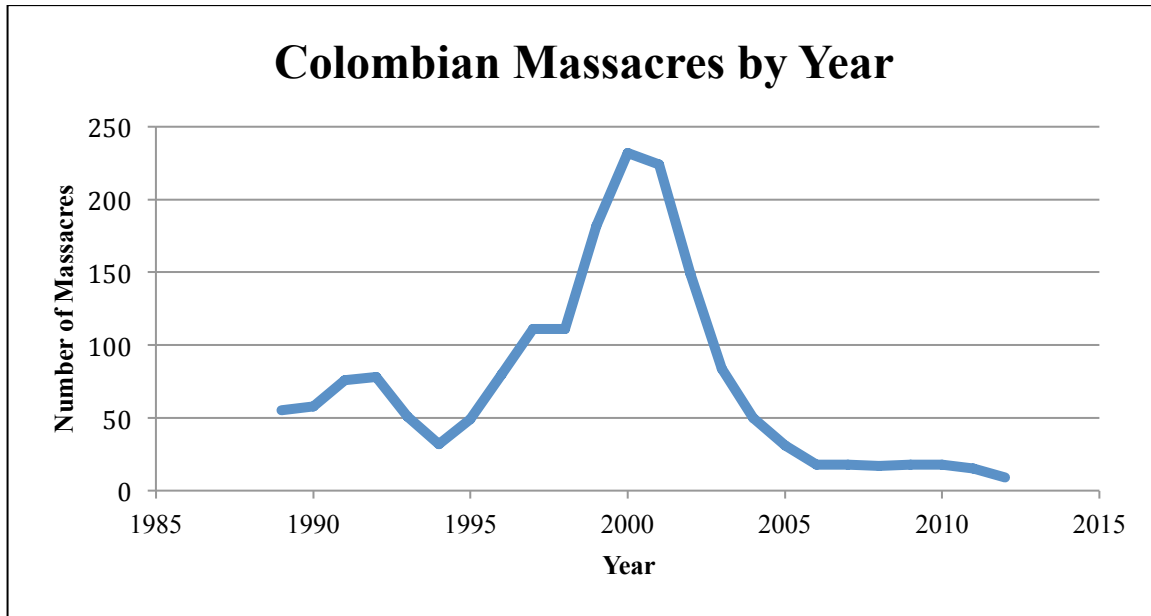
Paramilitary-Military Ties during Plan Colombia

Despite provisions added to legislation providing foreign military aid²⁴ and documentation of human rights abuses at the hand of COLAR and its affiliated paramilitaries, President Clinton signed a waiver lifting human rights contingencies to Plan Colombia on August 22, 2000 citing a national security concerns (HRW 2001). In doing so, military aid to COLAR flowed freely despite State Department investigations into military units allegedly responsible for human rights abuses (Ibid 2001, National Security Archive 2002). According to *Rutas del Conflicto*, a project of InSight Crime, violence against civilians drastically increased in 2000 (see figure 5). Indeed, both sides of the civil war perpetrated violence against civilians. However, as figure 6 shows, Colombian massacres have been disproportionately committed by right-wing paramilitary

²⁴ Congress passed the Leahy Law in 1997 as a human rights contingency to foreign military aid, as well as five additional human rights provisions to Plan Colombia (CRS 2001), but their loose wording and poor implementation may have acted as a legitimating force in aiding Colombia’s military and police.

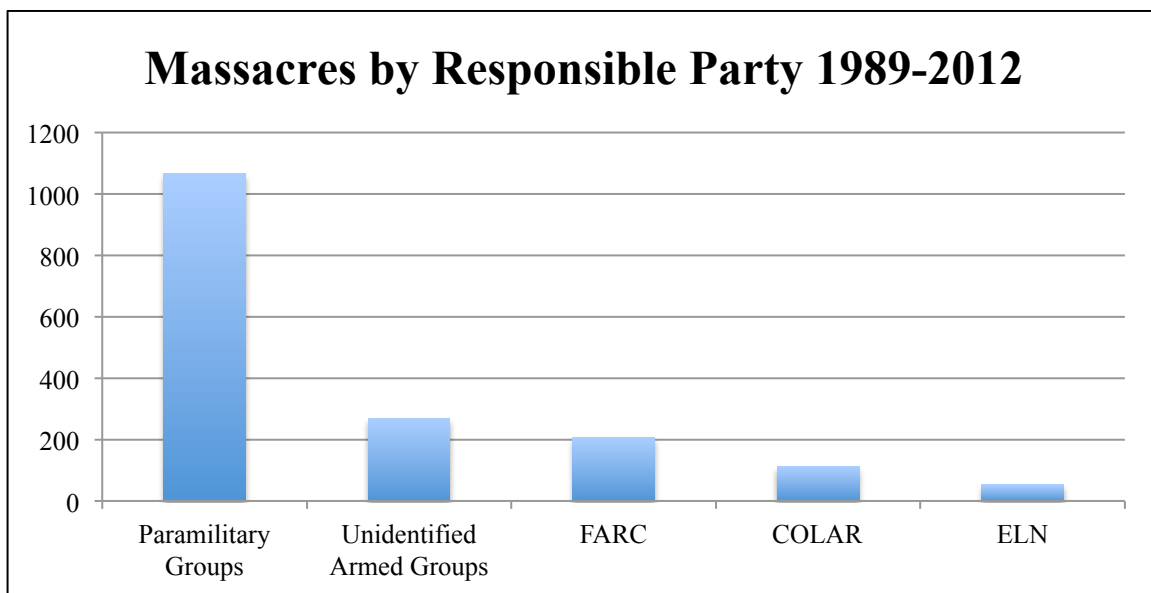
forces, followed by unidentified armed groups, the FARC, COLAR, and the ELN. In fact, by 2009, over 200,000 people had registered as victims of paramilitary violence (HRW 2010).

Figure 5



Data source: "Rutas del Conflicto" InSight Crime

Figure 6



Data source: "Rutas del Conflicto" InSight Crime

Both the left and right non-state forces grew out of the period of La Violencia, a political struggle between the Liberal and Conservative parties that took place from the end of the 1940s to the 1960s, but the right-wing paramilitary forces began to grow in strength during the 1980s (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos 2013). In 1997, several small paramilitary groups consolidated themselves into the AUC (Rutas del Conflicto). As evidenced by the case of Miraflores and Mapipirán, the AUC was actively violating human rights before Plan Colombia, but a huge spike in these abuses occurred between 2000 and 2001, precisely when Plan Colombia was being implemented. Indeed, measures were being taken by the State Department and Colombia's Attorney General's office to investigate military units suspected of paramilitary ties, but the outcomes of these investigations rarely developed into criminal charges (HRW 2001).

The following case study will document the “push into Southern Colombia,” the main target of Plan Colombia, and the paramilitary violence associated with it. The evidence suggests that the actions taken by state actors to prevent paramilitary-military violence have not been effective.

The “Push into Southern Colombia” and AUC Violence

The “push into Southern Colombia” was the “centerpiece” of U.S. counterdrug strategy under Plan Colombia (CRS 2001). Southern Colombia, essentially devoid of state presence, was experiencing an increase in coca cultivation in the Putumayo department. Rather than focus on state-building, Plan Colombia appropriated \$416.9 million of the \$516.7 million²⁵ of the assistance to Colombia's military (Ibid 2001,

²⁵ This does not include aid to the Colombian National Police.

Isacson & Poe 2009). The main recipient of these funds was the 24th Brigade of the Colombian Army, which was cleared for U.S. military assistance under the Leahy Provision (HRW 2001).

According to interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch in 2001, the 24th Brigade, and some CNP officers, maintained close ties to the AUC from 1999 until the end of 2000, resulting in “extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, and death threats.” Human Rights Watch found that the AUC initially declared it would send forces to Putumayo in January of 1998. A year later, in 1999, the AUC killed 26 people and “disappeared” 14 more in the village of Le Tigre. This would be their largest massacre to date. Over the next year, the AUC would come to control more and more of Putumayo, all while acting with direct complicity on behalf of the Colombian military.

Germán Martínez told Human Rights watch that between 1999 and 2001 he heard reports of dozens of forced disappearances, murders, and threats on civilian from the paramilitaries. He apparently discussed his concerns with army and police officers, but was met with a refusal to investigate his claims. Martínez told an interviewer:

...I informed him [Colonel Gabriel Díaz, commander of the 24th Brigade] as the personero [municipal official charged with accepting civilian complaints] that [paramilitaries] acted with full liberty within the town of Puerto Asís and that they were located...close to the Twenty-Fifth Battalion and the headquarters of the [Twenty-Fourth] Brigade. This information made it to the paramilitaries, who threatened me for what I had said during the Security Council meeting...I was later threatened by [Colombian National Police] Major Carlos Kenedy Veloza Lancheros...he

was telling me at the end, “We’ll see who explodes first, you or me”
(2001, 19)

This is just one example of the several accounts provided by Human Rights Watch regarding the virtually impenetrable link between the military and the AUC in Putumayo. In the same report, they conducted similar interviews with residents of the Valle, Cauca²⁶, and Middle Magdalena departments, among others – all with direct ties to U.S. funded army brigades. Although the Colombian government attempted to take measures to combat this collusive relationship, they proved ineffective.²⁷ The following section addresses the failed AUC demobilization process.

The Failed Demobilization Process

In 2003, the Colombian government, under the presidency of Álvaro Uribe, attempted to decrease civilian violence by paramilitary forces through a formal demobilization process. Although more than 30,000 AUC members officially disarmed, this gave way to smaller “successor” groups that continue to instill fear of violence among Colombian civilians (HRW 2010). The demobilization effort was implemented through a series of measures intending to reintegrate former paramilitary members back into civilian life. The demobilization consisted of disarming ceremonies where AUC members turned over their weapons, made pledges to “abandon their groups and cease

²⁶ One Cauca resident states, “When guerrillas attack, the Army responded in less than two hours...But despite killings every three of four days, there was never a response by the army against the paramilitaries. I can’t think of a single clash between them.” (2001, 43)

²⁷ For example, HRW reports that under President Pastrana, military discharges due to human rights abuses were common, but the discharges never led to criminal investigations. In turn, discharged military members ended up joining the AUC, strengthening the paramilitary forces (2001).

criminal activity.” (Ibid) Of those who participated in the official demobilization ceremonies, the vast majority were pardoned for their crimes, never to be subject to criminal investigation. As such, it is entirely plausible that many of these “demobilized” AUC members returned to their activities in the groups that formed from the demobilization process.

The process was further complicated by the government’s haphazard investigation into the paramilitary’s criminal networks. As HRW suggests, “the government should have focused on the sources of their power: their drug trafficking routes and criminal activity, their assets, their financial backers, and their support networks in the political system and military.” (2010, 34) HRW does point out, however, that there was a Constitutional Ruling in 2006 requiring paramilitary members facing criminal charges to “give full and truthful confessions” in order to reduce their sentences under the Justice and Peace Law. This had some positive effect in paramilitary accountability, but only those who had criminal records or legitimate fear of being caught had incentive to proceed with the Justice and Peace process – “the overwhelming majority simply sought pardons under Law 782” (2010, 35). By not comprehensively investigating the totality of the paramilitary networks, or offering better incentive to do so, it is hardly surprising that splintered groups persist after the formal process of disarmament.

The demobilization process indeed changed the way paramilitary groups operated. Following the dismantling of the AUC, most of the smaller paramilitaries acted independently from one another. However, many links between the AUC and the successor groups are apparent. HRW states that “most [successor groups] are led by former mid-level commanders of the AUC who either never demobilized or simply

continued their operations after supposedly demobilizing.” (2010, 11) Further, the drug trafficking and criminal networks persist.²⁸ Finally, the fact that the displacement of persons and violence due to paramilitary activity has persisted despite the demobilization process is cause for concern, and evidence that the process has failed to meet its goals.

Conclusion

My preliminary empirical findings point to a need for further investigation into the defense industry benefits behind militarized drug policy as well as other economic incentives behind the militarization of Colombia, especially regional trade incentives and the oil industry. It is my contention that these incentives are a driving factor behind U.S. policy in Latin America, and contribute to an interventionist mentality and post-Cold War ideology premised on protecting United States economic interests. In addition to my quantitative findings, my qualitative study further supports my assertion in two ways: 1) the United States has disproportionately focused on the FARC and ELN over clear paramilitary involvement in the drug trade and human rights abuses and 2) the United States has offered ineffective responses over concerns of these abuses in lieu of continuing aid.

The case of U.S. military involvement in Colombia’s counterdrug strategy presents many paradoxes, and this paper acts to explain only a small piece of the puzzle: Why do United States policymakers continue to support the militarization of the international drug war despite criticism from human rights advocates and a failure to

²⁸ Because it is out of the purview of my analysis, I have chosen not to address the narcotics trafficking activities of the AUC. However, AUC members themselves have admitted they receive anywhere from 40-50% of their income from the drug trade (HRW 2001).

meet its stated goals? Surely there are several factors at stake ranging from bureaucratic competition (Crandall 2001), moral panic and the need for politicians to expel notions of being “soft on drugs” (Schack 2011), “breaches in the policy cycle”(Neumann 2006), to a continued ideology oriented toward Cold War politics (Stokes 2005). The analysis I presented here contributes to this discussion another factor: a mutually beneficial relationship between the defense industry and United States policymakers has provided short-term benefits that take precedence over the “war on drugs.” Further, these short-term benefits have had egregious consequences for populations without a say in the matter. Colombian civilians cannot vote out of office the U.S. policymakers that insist on militarizing their security forces despite human rights violations and internal displacement. Nor do Colombians have the ability to change their own state’s subordinate status (Crandall 2001). This is not to mention the fact that this militarized drug strategy has not made appreciable strides in its stated goals, yet continues with equal vigor. Even if Plan Colombia had met its goal to reduce narcotics trafficking by half in a 6-year span, would the costs attributed to its implementation be worth it? While my empirical findings underscore the importance of domestic defense interests in perpetuating a militarized drug war, understanding additional motivations behind the United States’ militarized drug policy is crucial. As our legislators review this approach in the future, it should be imperative to recognize the short-term benefits acquired at a great cost to the Colombian people.

Appendix

	Ramstad	Obey
<u>Variable</u>		
Defense Facilities+Pop. Density (Inverse)	0.000000591 (0.00)	-0.00000315 (0.00)
Campaign Contributions	0.0504** (0.01)	0.0118* (0.01)
Unemploy-ment	0.117 (0.10)	0.219* (0.10)
Defense Facilities	-0.0176 (0.04)	0.0197 (0.04)
Pop. Density (Inverse)	-0.00000136 (0.00)	0.0000101 (0.00)
Ideology	0.596* (0.25)	1.708** (0.27)
Party	-0.000522 (0.00)	0.0000890 (0.00)
_cons	-0.395 (0.41)	-0.823* (0.41)
<i>N</i>	420	425

Standard errors in parentheses
 + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

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