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# **Colombia: Prospects for the New Government**

**National Intelligence Estimate**

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*NIE 88-86  
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**THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.**

**THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.**

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:*

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the intelligence organization of the Department of State, and the Treasury.

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The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

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**NIE 88-86**

**COLOMBIA: PROSPECTS FOR THE  
NEW GOVERNMENT**

Information available as of 25 September 1986 was used in the preparation of this Estimate, which was approved by the National Foreign Intelligence Board on 25 September 1986.

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### SCOPE NOTE

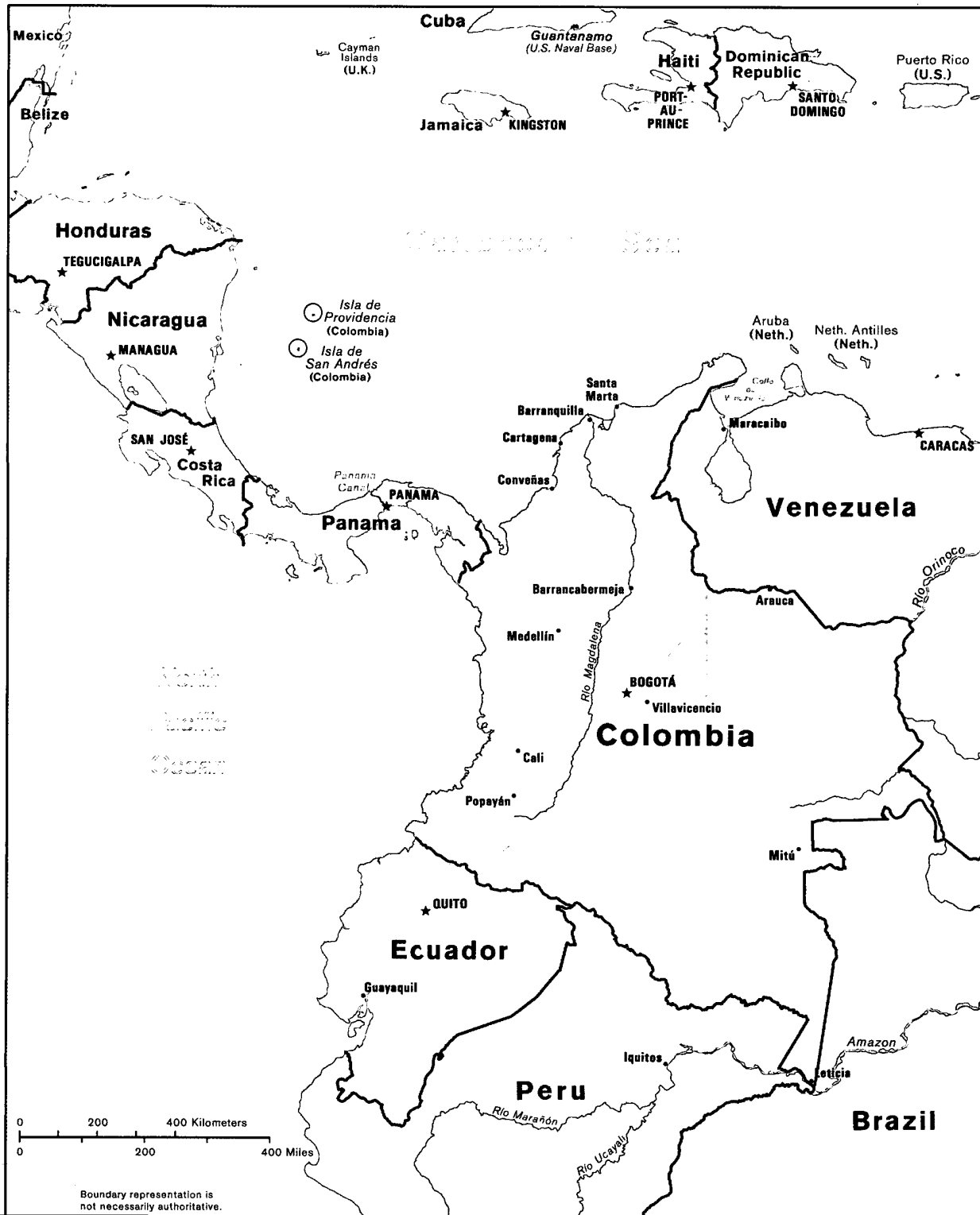
Colombia, which has the third-largest population in South America and the fourth-largest economy, has suffered heavily in recent years from a persistent insurgency and a growing narcotics industry. This Estimate examines the prospects for the new Colombian Government of President Virgilio Barco over the next four years. It focuses on the problems posed by increased drug trafficking and continued insurgency and their impact on Colombia's economy and political stability. It also addresses Colombia's likely foreign policies, particularly toward Nicaragua and Cuba, as well as their implications for the United States.

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Figure 1



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## KEY JUDGMENTS

Colombia's newly elected government of President Virgilio Barco has been given a strong mandate by the voters and has a solid majority in Congress. We believe Barco intends to follow generally moderate domestic and foreign policies over his four-year term, but he is likely to be strongly tested by a *growing insurgency* and a *thriving illegal narcotics industry*:

- The insurgency has grown steadily over the past several years despite former President Betancur's efforts to arrange a peaceful settlement as a model for Central America.
- Thus, Barco's primary domestic concern will be the 6,500- to 10,000-man insurgency, which, if not contained, may eventually threaten political stability.

The *next year will be crucial for the continuance of the government's nominal truce* with Colombia's largest insurgent group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), as well as Bogota's efforts to draw other groups into peace talks:

- The government has used the truce to try to weaken the insurgency by bringing moderate insurgents into the political process and concentrating resources against guerrilla hardliners.
- The FARC has participated in elections under a Communist-backed alliance, the Patriotic Union, but has exploited the truce by refusing to give up its arms and continuing to grow in strength. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union probably continues to provide some political direction and limited financial support to the FARC through the Moscow-line Communist Party of Colombia.
- Colombia's other major insurgent groups remain outside the peace process and have formed a loose alliance to better coordinate their efforts. Led by the 19th of April Movement (M-19), they have received significant assistance from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Libya, including arms, training, and financial support; and have formed a multinational guerrilla unit, the America Battalion. Such aid is likely to continue over the next several years as these countries seek to influence Barco's domestic and foreign policies.



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Barco intends to take a harder line against the insurgents and will attempt to improve the counterinsurgency capabilities of the military and security forces, with US assistance. He also has announced a plan that would eventually require the FARC to disarm and accept verification of compliance with the truce.

Barco would like to strengthen the truce and make it more effective. He will want to keep the FARC in the peace process—even if he cannot ensure compliance—to buy time to contend with other guerrilla groups while gradually improving the military's counterinsurgency and counterterrorist capabilities.

On balance, we believe that the insurgency will remain a major threat to Barco, and he will make little progress in defeating the guerrillas over the next few years. Nevertheless, the situation will not deteriorate rapidly unless there is a complete breakdown in the truce:

- Should the truce break down completely—especially if the FARC becomes dissatisfied with its political gains or believes Barco is pushing too hard on compliance efforts—fighting between the government and the insurgents will escalate sharply.
- Nevertheless, a more serious conflict probably would not threaten Barco's tenure in office, particularly if he is able to get sufficient US aid to bolster his military and security forces.

Barco also intends to pursue an aggressive drug control program, relying on continued US assistance in an attempt to reduce Colombia's role as the major drug center in South America:

- Barco is especially concerned about the link between the insurgents and drug traffickers. The drug trade offers the insurgents access to large amounts of money to buy arms and to finance other operations. This is best documented in the case of the FARC but has been demonstrated with all major guerrilla groups.
- Government efforts to suppress drug trafficking have led to clashes with insurgents and have forced the lightly armed National Police, responsible for drug enforcement, to call for assistance from the military, which is tasked with the counterinsurgency effort. The government, moreover, has had little success in bringing major drug traffickers to justice, despite tougher laws, and the drug overlords have responded with stepped-up attacks on police and judicial officials.

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We believe that further gains against marijuana production are likely, but that Barco will be unable to significantly reduce the flow of cocaine to the United States, even if he should upgrade police and military capabilities:

- The vast financial resources available to the traffickers will enable them to undermine enforcement efforts through bribes and intimidation.
- Furthermore, Barco is likely to be reluctant to endanger the truce with FARC by authorizing aggressive military drug enforcement efforts in regions controlled by the guerrillas.

High unemployment and persistent social inequities have fostered discontent and provided fertile ground for guerrilla recruitment efforts. Barco has inherited an economy strengthened by two years of successful stabilization efforts and increased revenues from coffee, petroleum, and coal exports. His greatest fiscal challenges will be to reduce unemployment, limit inflation, and prevent mismanagement of the recent coffee bonanza while—at the same time—sustaining growth, accelerating development, and attracting new foreign investment:

- Barco's economic program includes job creation and a variety of social programs. A major focus will be on agrarian reform and efforts to improve agricultural production in rural areas, designed to reduce support for the insurgency.
- Bogota has been able to service its \$12 billion foreign debt without rescheduling, and coffee earnings and capital repatriation have pushed up reserves to \$2.5 billion. We believe Barco will continue sound economic policies but will seek larger loans and more favorable terms from international lenders.
- Despite the prospect of continued economic growth through 1990, the government is likely to have problems in distributing the benefits to the lower classes and appreciably raising the standard of living.

On foreign policy matters, we anticipate that Barco will be a reliable US ally, particularly against the Sandinista government. Colombia has played a major role in the Contadora peace process for Central America, but Barco appears less dedicated to the effort than was President Betancur:

- Barco favors Cuba's eventual readmission to the Organization of American States (OAS). Although he would prefer to maintain his distance from Castro, he may come under pressure to

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reestablish diplomatic relations. Cuba, for its part, would like to restore relations and gain more direct access to Colombia's new leftist political alliance.

- Barco is upset with Nicaragua's continued claim to the San Andres and Providencia Archipelago in the Caribbean, and relations with the Sandinistas are likely to remain cool. If the Contadora process achieves no results, his government may recommend referral of the Central American peace talks to the OAS.
- The new government's relations with other regional governments will probably be cordial, and Barco is likely to encourage bilateral drug control and counterinsurgency efforts with neighboring countries.

Barco will probably be more positively inclined toward Washington than his predecessor—he attended universities here and is married to a former US citizen. Nonetheless, as a forthright nationalist, he is sensitive to issues concerning Colombia's sovereignty and will not hesitate to assert independent views:

- He reportedly sees good relations with the United States as the cornerstone of Colombia's political and economic well-being. Colombia is the third-largest US export market in Latin America.
- Barco will look to Washington for financial aid for his social programs, and for trade concessions and intercession with international lenders.
- He also will want increased US support for his counterinsurgency, counterterrorist, and antinarcotics programs, but is unlikely to favor in-country training by US military advisers.
- Failure to obtain adequate US security assistance would hinder Barco's efforts to ensure guerrilla compliance with the truce. It would also weaken the government's antinarcotics and counterterrorist programs.

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## DISCUSSION

1. Colombia, with its large population, important agriculture and mineral wealth, and strategic location in the western Caribbean, has traditionally been an influential member of Latin American regional councils. The country has long been troubled, however, by persistent poverty and social inequities that have fueled Latin America's most prolonged insurgency. The previous President, Belisario Betancur, tried a new strategy to end the conflict. Rather than rely on military force, he attempted to negotiate a truce with the insurgent groups to bring them gradually into the political process. Meanwhile, Betancur also took a leading role as a regional peacemaker by helping to initiate the Contadora negotiations for Central America. Both efforts failed, however; the insurgency continues to grow and the Contadora talks have yet to achieve a regional peace agreement. [redacted]

2. Cuba, in an attempt to improve relations with the Betancur government, became more circumspect in providing support to the insurgents. Havana has continued, however, to urge the various insurgent groups to form an alliance and still provides clandestine support to the guerrillas. While the largest insurgent group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), has entered the peace process, the remaining groups, led by the 19th of April Movement (M-19), have broken away from the peace process and continue to advocate armed struggle. These groups still receive outside support, primarily from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Libya. The Soviets, for their part, have concentrated on political support for the FARC, which is the armed wing of the Moscow-line Colombian Communist Party. [redacted]

### The 1986 Election: The Political Scene

3. On 25 May 1986, Virgilio Barco Vargas—a pro-US moderate—was elected President of Colombia for a four-year term, beginning 7 August 1986. The 64-year-old Liberal Party candidate received 59 percent of the popular vote, winning an unprecedented 1.6-million-vote margin over Conservative Party candidate Alvaro Gomez Hurtado. Communist candidate Jaime Pardo Leal, of the guerrilla-backed Patriotic Union (UP), won only 4 percent of the vote. With

support in all regions and within all classes, Barco has a strong political base to implement his programs—the Liberal Party previously won a solid majority in the congressional elections in March 1986. [redacted]

4. Barco's hand is further strengthened by an all-Liberal Cabinet, forming an administration that breaks a 28-year pattern of power sharing with the opposition. Under the mandate of Constitutional Article 120, each of the major parties has been guaranteed representation in the executive branch, and decades of high-level deals have stifled debate between the ideologically similar Liberal and Conservative Parties and restricted the ability of the opposition to challenge the government. In a departure from this policy, Barco has shaped a predominantly one-party administration to implement his reforms, with Liberals occupying governorships, which are appointive, and top administrative positions. The opposition Conservative Party refused several national and local posts in the new government, a decision that reflects widespread bipartisan agreement on the need for constitutional change as well as anger at Barco's offer of only token representation. [redacted]

5. The elitism of the Colombian political system remains an issue of concern. The continued concentration of power in the political elite has made it difficult for new parties and personalities to emerge. The elite has begun to demonstrate increased flexibility in recent years, but the system still responds slowly to the needs of most Colombians. Although the traditional parties will probably survive for the foreseeable future, they will have to develop a broader commitment to social change—without returning to the reflexive obstructionism that has long characterized Colombian politics—or open the way for a serious challenge from emerging opposition groups across the political spectrum. [redacted]

6. The participation of the Patriotic Union in the election adds a new element to Colombia's traditional political system. The injection of a few guerrilla leaders into mainstream politics has won a measure of legitimacy for the insurgents and has begun to allow a political outlet for leftist groups outside the moderate political mainstream. If Barco cannot deliver the social

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and economic reforms he has promised, the UP and other opponents may become more effective critics of his administration.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the UP is likely to continue its efforts to cultivate grassroots political support through social programs aimed at rural farmers and townspeople. [redacted]

### Prospects for Narcotics Control

7. Rising domestic drug abuse, increasingly frequent clashes with narcotics traffickers, and continued attacks by traffickers on judicial officials are likely to raise the priority of drug control for the new government. President Barco views the narcotics trade as a major problem, and he has expressed particular concern over the insurgent-trafficker link—with its potential to augment the strength of the major groups—and is willing to involve the military in counternarcotics operations. Barco has been receptive to continued close cooperation with US-backed antinarcotics efforts, although he probably will not favor in-country training of police and military personnel by US military advisers. He will continue current eradication, interdiction, and extradition efforts, and he is likely to follow Betancur's lead in encouraging bilateral cooperation and enforcement efforts throughout the region.

8. Colombians continue to dominate South America's illegal marijuana and cocaine trade in terms of both volume and control, despite improved drug control efforts by Bogota since traffickers assassinated Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in April 1984. That event prompted former President Betancur to declare a state of siege, authorize greater military involvement in drug enforcement and prosecution, begin eradication of marijuana, and implement Bogota's 1982 extradition treaty with Washington. The government's two-year war on narcotics has had mixed success. Aerial eradication and crop seizures have reduced marijuana production by as much as 85 percent in the major growing areas near the Guajira Peninsula (Peninsula de la Guajira) but have probably encouraged expanded cultivation in other areas. [redacted]

9. Coca cultivation is limited, and most of the cocaine produced in Colombia comes from imported coca products. Most Colombian cocaine is refined in laboratories in the sparsely populated southeastern jungle from coca paste and base shipped from Bolivia

<sup>1</sup> The UP, which is the FARC's political front, was formed in 1985 under the provisions of Betancur's 1984 peace accords; FARC extended its truce with the government in March 1986. [redacted]

### Narcotics Traffickers and Extradition

Following the murder of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla by drug traffickers in April 1984, Bogota instituted a far-reaching crackdown on narcotics traffickers. President Betancur, reversing his earlier stance, agreed to implement Colombia's bilateral extradition treaty with Washington, which took effect in 1982. Betancur signed the first extradition orders in late 1984 to approve the remand of five traffickers to the United States. Since then, Colombia's powerful drug traffickers have made repeated attempts to overturn the treaty and circumvent the extradition of individual traffickers. In mid-1984—during the chaotic period following Lara's death—a group of major traffickers met in Panama with former President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen and Attorney General Carlos Jimenez Gomez. At that meeting, the drug dealers offered to inject \$3 billion a year into Colombia's economy—then suffering the impact of a rapid erosion of foreign reserves and faced with a foreign debt of about \$11 billion—in exchange for amnesty, according to [redacted] press reporting. News of the offer provoked a public outcry, and the traffickers' proposal was rejected. [redacted]

and Peru. The government has focused its cocaine control efforts on laboratory destruction and control of processing chemicals. Major seizures of cocaine and chemicals since 1984, combined with stepped-up laboratory raids, airstrip denial, and controls on air and ground transport, have prompted some traffickers to move their refining operations outside Colombia. This has not substantially damaged major trafficking organizations or reduced the amount of cocaine entering the United States from Colombia, estimated [redacted] at 50 metric tons in 1985, about three-quarters of the total entering the United States. [redacted]


10. The government has prosecuted few major traffickers, despite increased efforts to apprehend them. A comprehensive antinarcotics law passed in January 1986—still untested in court—stiffens penalties, but constitutional challenges to the law are likely, and traffickers continue to exploit legal and judicial loopholes. Extradition to the United States could become a more effective tool against drug traffickers if Barco and the new Justice Minister can prevent attempts to circumvent it. Intimidation by traffickers seriously threatens the Colombian judicial system, inhibiting arrests and slowing prosecution efforts at all levels.

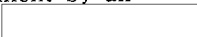
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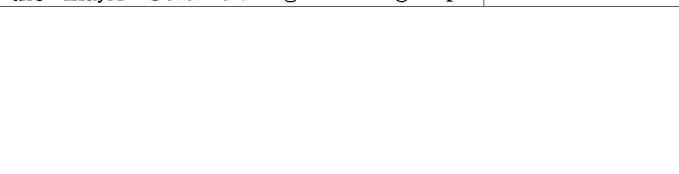
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Judicial officials face continuing threats from drug traffickers, and Barco has expressed concern about the effects of corruption and intimidation on the judicial system. He has pledged to protect Supreme Court judges, and will probably seek US assistance to upgrade security. 

with antinarcotics police. Narcotics involvement by other insurgents is less well demonstrated, although continuing reports indicate some involvement by all the major Colombian guerrilla groups. 

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11. Because of their vast financial resources, Colombian traffickers have the means to thwart well-conceived efforts to disrupt their operations. Although public concern over domestic drug abuse has risen, traffickers will try to undermine public support for government extradition and eradication efforts by exploiting nationalist and environmental concerns. They will also continue to subvert antinarcotics programs through bribery of law enforcement, judicial, and local governmental authorities. Corruption occurs at all levels of the law enforcement hierarchy. Some military commanders in drug-producing areas are heavily involved in narcotics-related activities. Traffickers can be expected to intensify their efforts to buy protection as the government implements planned drug control programs.<sup>2</sup> 



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14. The involvement of FARC in the narcotics trade will complicate enforcement efforts for the new government. Narcotics control is primarily the responsibility of the National Police, whose antinarcotics force carried out limited US-backed eradication and interdiction operations during Betancur's administration. The police, however, carry only light arms, and the US-funded police helicopter unit is neither armed nor armored for defense against guerrillas protecting airstrips and narcotics laboratories. Consequently, in areas where insurgent presence is likely, the police rely primarily on military protection from hostile fire.

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12. We do not know the extent of the insurgents' involvement with narcotics, but their colocation with narcotics traffickers encourages frequent cooperation. The drug trade offers insurgents access to sizable amounts of money to obtain arms and equipment and finance political and social welfare programs; well-armed insurgents offer traffickers effective protection from law enforcement officials. Even where there is no evidence of systematic drug involvement, Colombian insurgent groups obtain arms through smuggling channels established and used by drug traffickers.



13. FARC's involvement with narcotics has been well documented. Its political front, the Patriotic Union, demonstrated impressive local electoral strength in major coca-growing and cocaine production areas—narcotics proceeds probably fund UP activities. Some FARC units regularly tax and provide protection to drug cultivators and processors in large areas of rural southeastern Colombia. They obtain arms through drug traffickers, and some members occasionally cultivate coca. Government drug raids have confirmed at least one instance of cocaine processing operations at a FARC camp, and recent interdiction efforts have resulted in a series of skirmishes

15. The military services have been hard hit by lack of funds and training, and military personnel and helicopter gunships—whose primary mission is counterinsurgency—are not always available to support police antinarcotics operations. Moreover, although Barco may want to rescind restrictions imposed by Betancur on military operations in FARC-controlled areas, he will still have to balance drug enforcement actions against truce considerations. Unless drug traffickers and the insurgents associated with them escalate their attacks on drug enforcement officials—and unless the security forces can considerably upgrade their capabilities for operations against insurgent-backed traffickers—it is unlikely that Barco will risk endangering the truce with FARC solely to achieve bilateral narcotics control objectives. 

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### Rising Insurgency Concerns

16. Colombia's political system has long survived chronic violence by several major insurgent groups, maintaining its stability because disaffected antidemocratic elements constitute a relatively small proportion of the total population. From the mid-1950s to the early 1980s, the security forces were able to contain but not eliminate guerrilla activity, keeping the total number of insurgents at a fairly constant level. This balance began to change when Betancur negotiated a

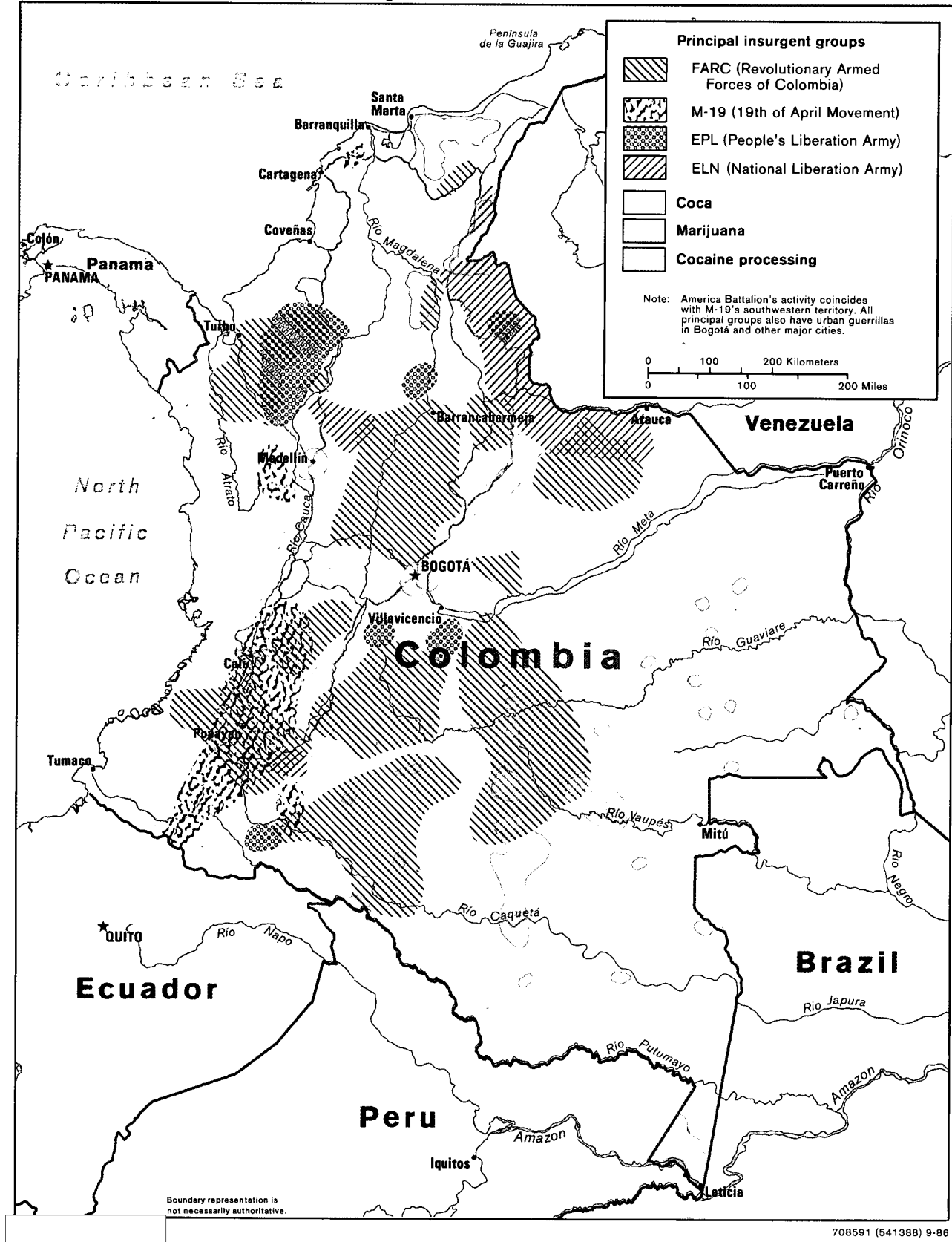
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Figure 2  
Rural Fronts of Principal Insurgent Groups and Narcotics Production



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cease-fire with the major groups in 1984 and imposed constraints on military counterinsurgency actions. Since then, the guerrillas have exploited the truce to rest, regroup, rearm, and recruit, marking the beginning of a slow but steady rise in the overall level of insurgent threat to the government.<sup>9</sup>

17. The combined armed strength of the major insurgent groups is probably some 6,500 to 10,000, reflecting a steady increase over the past several years.

more guerrillas are active, and the level of violence is higher, than at any time since the 1950s. The security forces have been hard pressed to contain the insurgents arrayed against them, and, although the insurgents do not threaten the central government in most urban areas, their influence is growing there as well as in rural areas, where they have traditionally held sway. The challenge for Barco will be to reverse this expansion and regain the initiative.

18. With 32 military fronts nationwide, FARC poses the most formidable long-term threat to government stability. It is the only group that still maintains an official truce with Bogota. It has used the ambiguities of the two-year-old peace process to increase its strength, consolidating its control over large areas of rural Colombia and gaining a measure of political respectability through its legal affiliate, the Patriotic Union. FARC continues to fund its operations through kidnaping, extortion, robbery, and narcotics-related activities. Its strength is conservatively estimated at 4,000 well-armed combatants, but some fronts could quadruple their forces by using lightly armed auxiliaries. believe FARC guerrillas have arms as good as or better than the Army's. FARC guerrillas will probably prolong their truce with the government as long as it is advantageous, while insurgent leaders publicly deny responsibility for continued low-level hostilities. The group has urged other guerrillas to mask antigovernment activities with nominal adherence to truce agreements.

19. From Bogota's perspective, the truce with FARC buys time and enables the government to contend with the other major guerrilla groups—especially M-19, the group most influenced by Cuba, Nicaragua, and Libya, and the most active in forming alliances with other insurgent groups in Colombia and



The Terrorist Threat

Colombia has been considered a high-threat area for US personnel since 1984, when threats from narcotics traffickers prompted the evacuation of all US dependents. US personnel and facilities in Colombia are potential targets of three distinct kinds of violence: a high level of common crime, attacks on law enforcement officials and antinarcotics agents by drug traffickers, and operations by the country's major insurgent groups. Travel restrictions limit the movement of US personnel outside major cities, US consulates in Cali and Medellin have been closed, and the no-dependents policy still applies to all US personnel stationed in Colombia. With the level of insurgent violence rising and the state of siege—or a similar provision—likely to remain in effect, threats to US citizens and personnel in Colombia could escalate during the new administration.

Terrorist attacks on US businesses in Latin America have increased substantially since 1980. Colombia ranked first in Latin America in recorded incidents targeting US investors, with 13 attacks on US businesses in 1985—reflecting an increase in international terrorist incidents of 60 percent over 1984. This trend will probably continue throughout Barco's term, especially if rural insurgent groups conduct higher profile urban attacks in response to military pressure.

The threat to US interests will probably grow as Washington increases its financial and logistic assistance to Bogota's antinarcotics and counterinsurgency efforts. Drug enforcement officials will remain prime targets for narcotics traffickers. Enhanced security for official US installations, however, has provoked a shift in insurgent tactics, focusing most guerrilla attacks—often low-level harassment bombings—on softer targets such as US-related businesses, schools, and binational centers. This trend will probably continue during the new administration. President Barco's ability to enforce the truce with FARC will be an important factor in combating terrorist attacks; the security forces are probably not capable of protecting foreign interests from a large-scale guerrilla offensive. Moreover, although FARC is primarily a rural insurgent force, it possesses a potentially formidable urban terrorist capability which, if activated, would pose a grave threat to US personnel and facilities in Bogota.

throughout Latin America. Despite losses of top leaders and consequent internal power struggles, M-19 has improved its rural combat capabilities over the past two years, and the government continues to view the group as a significant threat. The government has inflicted blows on M-19's urban forces, particularly

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during the Palace of Justice incident, but the group still poses a terrorist threat to US personnel and facilities in Bogota. It staged a series of anti-US bombings there in May 1986, and has since threatened attacks on US Embassy personnel. M-19's total strength is estimated at 850 to 1,100 hardcore combatants, but these fighters often combine forces with other guerrilla groups. [REDACTED]

20. A significant development since late 1985 is M-19's formation of a national guerrilla coalition, which includes elements of all major insurgent groups outside the peace process. This coalition, the National Guerrilla Coordinating Committee (CNG), has served as a rallying point for insurgent propaganda and political plans, and has probably facilitated larger and more coordinated attacks than were previously possible. The CNG has also succeeded in forming a multinational rural guerrilla force, the so-called America Battalion. It probably numbers 400 to 600 insurgents and is known to contain Colombian coalition members and foreign guerrillas—most notably from the Ecuadorean Alvaro Vive, ¡Carajo! (AVC) and the Peruvian Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). [REDACTED]

21. Colombia's oldest insurgent group, the Cuban-linked National Liberation Army (ELN), has become increasingly active during the past two years, staging antielection bombings, attacking military outposts on the Venezuelan border, and striking at Colombian and foreign developers in the major oil-producing region in northeastern Colombia. The ELN is an elitist anti-US and anti-imperialist group whose leaders—including several radical ex-clergy activists—have so far refused to negotiate with the government. Some dissident ELN members have joined FARC in the current truce, and the group apparently has temporary working agreements with FARC in the major oil region. It also has officially joined the CNG to combat government forces in southwestern Colombia. Estimates of ELN's strength vary widely, from 650 to more than 1,500. The group has apparently expanded considerably with the aid of extortion payments and ransoms collected from Colombian, US, and West German oil companies. [REDACTED]

22. The smallest of the major insurgent groups is the People's Liberation Army (EPL), a Maoist group responsible for the kidnaping of two American citizens last December. Like FARC and ELN, the EPL—which signed a truce agreement in 1984 but subsequently rejected it—has made extortion demands on

several investors in the major oil-producing region. The EPL has joined M-19's coalition and fights with the CNG in rural southwestern Colombia; the group is also active in Bogota, devoting about half of its estimated 450 to 600 guerrillas to urban operations. [REDACTED]

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group is likely to remain a secondary but active player in M-19's antigovernment offensive. [REDACTED]

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#### Foreign Aid to the Insurgents

23. Although the major insurgent groups are largely self-sufficient—funding their operations through kidnaping, extortion, bank robberies, and, especially in the case of FARC, narcotics—most have accepted some form of aid from foreign sponsors. We do not know the full extent of this support. FARC probably receives political direction and may have obtained limited funds and training from the Soviet Union, either directly or through the Moscow-line Colombian Communist Party. The Patriotic Union, apparently to compete with government development efforts, reportedly plans to seek Soviet funds for an agricultural project in the central mountain valley. FARC has benefited from Cuban training, as have most other Colombian insurgents. [REDACTED]

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24. Havana—the principal source of aid for revolutionaries throughout South America—is the most important foreign sponsor of Colombian insurgents. Fidel Castro helped establish the ELN, and still has close ties to that group. Havana has also provided extensive funding, arms, and training to M-19. Castro, fearing diplomatic repercussions, reportedly threatened to cut off aid after the group's widely condemned attack on the Palace of Justice, but he has apparently not done so. Another sponsor for Colombian insurgents is Nicaragua, which has trained FARC, M-19, and ELN guerrillas and provided arms and supplies to M-19. The EPL received arms shipments from Nicaragua in 1985, although its cadre trained in China and North Korea. [REDACTED]

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25. Colombian insurgents have received funds, arms, and training from Libya, but will probably not change their tactics significantly at Muammar Qadhafi's behest. Although other groups may receive support indirectly through the CNG, M-19 has been the primary—and perhaps only—recipient of Libyan aid to date. We do not know the current extent of Libyan aid to M-19. [REDACTED]

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intelligence assets, the HTRF is a rapid-response force based in Bogota. Barco will probably continue to work closely with US advisers to remedy shortcomings in crisis management, hostage negotiation, and joint task force command. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] FARC has probably also been in contact with Qadhafi, but there is no evidence that it has received Libyan support. Qadhafi's support to Colombian insurgents appeared to be put on hold following the US airstrikes in April 1986, but he is likely to resume attempts to expand his influence in the region when the opportunity arises. [Redacted]

**Government Capabilities**

26. Although Barco wants to take a hard line against the insurgency, the security forces' counterinsurgency and antinarcotics capabilities continue to be hampered by personnel shortages, poor intelligence, and aging and inadequate equipment. After slashing the military budget during his first three years in office, President Betancur last year began to improve the government's capabilities. Barco will continue to strengthen counterinsurgency capabilities in an effort to increase his potential leverage against FARC and cope with the expected rise in attacks by other guerrilla groups. Nevertheless, the geographic spread of the insurgent forces, the inhospitable and often mountainous terrain, and the need to defend many critical economic and political targets will strain the military's resources. [Redacted]

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27. A more extensive counterinsurgency effort would necessitate an expansion of the armed forces. The Army reportedly plans to ask for 15,000 more troops—the minimum it estimates it will need if the FARC breaks its truce with the government. The armed forces need more helicopters to improve tactical mobility, better and secure communications equipment, and improved tactical intelligence collection, coordination, and dissemination. More extensive training in pursuit-and-engagement counterinsurgency techniques could also improve the military's performance against rural guerrilla forces. [Redacted]

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28. The government's newly formed counterterrorist unit, the Hostage and Terrorist Reaction Force (HTRF), will probably play an increasingly important role, particularly if the insurgents—testing their power against the government—escalate attacks against political and economic targets. Developed and trained with US assistance and composed of military, police, and

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**Prospects for the Truce**

29. The FARC will probably continue its efforts to persuade other insurgents to sign a truce with the government, using the successful exploitation of its own truce as a persuasive argument. Moreover, FARC appears to be using the truce issue as a means to pursue its traditional ambition of achieving primacy among Colombia's guerrilla factions. The FARC may be considering a formal alliance with the CNG—an unprecedented show of solidarity that would strengthen the insurgents' political hand and allow FARC to press the ideological aims of its Communist Party sponsors. Having long observed de facto territorial agreements with other guerrilla groups, the FARC has also begun efforts to coordinate its operations with ELN and EPL in the major oil-producing region. FARC leaders privately argue that, once inside the peace process, groups could continue military operations but deny responsibility for them, thereby gaining a measure of protection from government enforcement actions, as FARC itself has done for the past two years. [Redacted]

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30. Ongoing talks between the FARC and the CNG may lead to a nominal alliance. In the past, such efforts have foundered because of leadership disputes and differences over tactics. These will again probably preclude formation of an effective operational alliance between the FARC and the CNG. However, the insurgents may be willing to form a loose coalition to coordinate individual actions and facilitate intelligence sharing. Any cooperation will pose a greater challenge to the security forces. Even limited coordination efforts will be well received in Havana, since they conform with longstanding Cuban objectives of fostering national and regional insurgent unification. Continued progress along these lines could prompt additional Cuban assistance to Colombian guerrillas, even at the expense of damaging prospects for improved relations with Bogota. [Redacted]

31. President Barco will need to strike a delicate balance as he tries to reduce guerrilla manipulation of the peace process, even if other guerrilla groups do not join the truce. He will attempt to focus promised social and economic reforms in rural areas where insurgent

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groups are strong, but guerrillas dominating such areas will not readily relinquish control to government authorities. He has also announced a six-point peace plan that will require the guerrillas to disarm and will establish verification measures to ensure compliance—strictures Betancur's peace accords never imposed. The FARC's top leader responded to the peace plan by declaring that the group will not accept ultimatums from the government, and Barco is likely to modify his requirements to postpone a confrontation with FARC. Moreover, the insurgents' policy of plausible denial—coupled with their formidable military strength—will complicate the President's efforts to enforce the truce without risking a return to open war with FARC.



32. On balance, Barco will probably make little progress in defeating the insurgency over the next few years, but the situation is not likely to deteriorate rapidly unless there is a complete breakdown in the truce. Barco will try to keep the FARC in the peace process while curbing its antigovernment activities throughout the country. Mutual testing of strength between the military and the insurgents and gradually increasing clashes are likely. Continued attacks on government officials by drug traffickers and guerrillas outside the peace process will heighten security concerns and could trigger increased violence and a stronger government response to insurgent activities, as M-19's Palace of Justice assault did in 1985.

33. Although violations of the truce by both sides are likely to become increasingly frequent over the next few years, a nominal truce may remain in effect indefinitely, as long as both the government and the insurgents perceive it to be advantageous. The formal end of the truce could be hastened if the Patriotic Union becomes dissatisfied with its political gains, the guerrillas openly defy Barco's truce requirements, or drug enforcement efforts spark a larger conflict. Should the truce break down completely, fighting between the government and the insurgents will escalate sharply, but Barco will probably try to forestall a nationwide conflict by limiting military actions to one area at a time. Even a serious conflict would probably not threaten Barco's tenure in office, especially if he is able to bolster his military and security forces.

34. The new government will continue to seek US assistance to improve its antinarcotics, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism capabilities. US aid and training have enabled Bogota to carry out effective drug eradication operations, target cocaine labora-

tories, and enhance military capabilities, and have recently been instrumental in developing a paramilitary counterterrorist force. US funding and training of the National Police air fleet have created a modern and well-maintained transport helicopter fleet for drug interdiction but have caused friction with the Air Force, which has been hard hit by lack of funds and cannot sustain support for antinarcotics operations. Improved antinarcotics performance will be contingent on more comprehensive integration of police and military assets.



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### Economic Outlook

35. High unemployment and persistent social inequities have long fostered discontent among the poor, providing fertile ground for guerrilla recruitment. President Barco's campaign focused largely on economic concerns, and his agenda for the next four years includes a variety of measures designed to accelerate social and economic reforms while undermining guerrilla strength (see inset). Barco begins his term with the benefit of an improving economy, and he has indicated he will take full advantage of gains achieved by Betancur to deliver promised reforms, especially in rural areas where support for insurgent groups is greatest. His strongest economic assets are increased coffee revenues—an estimated \$3 billion in 1986, resulting from high world prices after a poor Brazilian crop last year—and a gradual momentum toward recovery from the economic stagnation that greeted Betancur four years ago. Following low growth rates of 3.2 percent in 1984 and only 2.5 percent in 1985, real gross domestic product (GDP) growth is forecast at 4 to 6 percent for 1986, and may average 4 percent through 1990 (see charts).

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36. The new government's greatest economic challenges are to reduce unemployment, limit inflation, and prevent mismanagement of the coffee bonanza, and—at the same time—to sustain growth, accelerate development, and attract new foreign investment. Bogota has been able to service its \$12 billion foreign debt without rescheduling, mainly through draw-downs of reserves. Lower government spending and increased tax revenues cut the government deficit almost in half in 1985, from 5 percent to 2.7 percent of GDP. Barco inherits a financial system less constrained by lack of liquidity and domestic corruption, with interest rates now determined by free market forces. External accounts have improved substantially during the past year, and leading Colombian firms have

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### Economic Impacts of Insurgency and Drug Trafficking

Insurgent activity imposes direct costs on the economy in terms of capital damage, production losses, and rising protection expenses. The energy sector has been particularly hard hit. Several insurgent groups—especially the ELN—make frequent extortion demands on Colombian and foreign oil developers in northeastern Colombia, and the high ransoms paid by multinational corporations are likely to stimulate more kidnaping of US and other foreign employees in that area. Insurgent attacks have dealt substantial blows to oil developers: a May 1985 strike at an Occidental Petroleum drilling site inflicted damage estimated at \$2 million; dynamite attacks on the new Caño Limon pipeline in July and August 1986 stopped the oil flow for several days. The security forces will probably be unable to prevent further attacks on petroleum and mining facilities, and developers will continue to bear the brunt of protection costs. The financial impact of guerrilla activity—added to high development costs and low average well flows—may become a deterrent to investors already affected by low world oil prices. New foreign investment in 1985 totaled \$86 million—half the amount approved by the government in 1984 and the lowest figure since 1978.

Other sectors have also felt the impact of guerrilla attacks. Electrical pylons and transmission substations are frequent targets, and power facilities will probably become more vulnerable as insurgents strike at the country's economic infrastructure. Similarly, losses in commercial activity are likely to grow as guerrillas increase their operating revenues by employing robbery, kidnaping, and extortion against local banks and businesses. Agriculture has been seriously affected by the insurgency. Rural crime and guerrilla attacks on cattle ranchers have contributed to a significant drop in beef exports from 1981 to 1985. Guerrilla disruption of ranching and farming activity is probably partly responsible for the high level of annual food import bills, averaging \$400 million since the early 1980s.

The drug trade has a profound influence on the Colombian economy, manifest in the far-reaching power of major trafficking organizations. Illegal earnings from drugs probably represent at least 4 percent of GDP. Drug earnings are Colombia's second-most-important source of income after coffee—equivalent to about 20 percent of legal exports in 1985, up from 12 percent in 1983. Less than 5 percent of these revenues return to Colombia—the rest stays in the hands of intermediaries abroad, especially in the United States—but the drug proceeds that are repatriated support a wide variety of legitimate businesses, including legal and economic consulting firms, currency exchanges, and thousands of retail front businesses. The major drug money channels are smuggled US currency or Colombian pesos, smuggled goods and gold, and fraudulent invoicing of imports and exports. Illicit imports—mostly smuggled consumer goods—financed by drug money probably add \$400-500 million a year to the economy's already large informal sector, which employs more than 100,000 workers in contraband markets in 30 cities.

If the economy performs as well as expected during the new administration, drug traffickers will probably take advantage of higher domestic interest rates to return an increasing amount of cash to Colombia. Tight foreign exchange controls in Peru and implementation of banking reforms in Panama may also encourage repatriation of drug earnings. Rising drug money inflows will probably act as economic incentives to encourage more traffickers to enter the lucrative drug production and distribution market. Even if Barco pursues banking reforms initiated by Betancur to reduce the influence of drug money on Colombian society, the government is unlikely to inflict serious financial blows on major traffickers unless concerted regional and international efforts are made to monitor and curb drug money flows. [redacted]

refinanced their foreign debt, halting the erosion of foreign exchange reserves—due to high world interest rates and low coffee prices—that occurred after Betancur took office in 1982. By early July 1986, coffee earnings and capital repatriation had pushed foreign reserves up 57 percent, to about \$2.5 billion, since the end of last year. [redacted]

37. Coffee will continue to play an important role during the new administration, both as a primary income earner and as a challenge to fiscal management. Early this year Bogota reached an agreement with the National Coffee Federation on distribution of windfall profits, a step designed to ensure that sizable export receipts would improve public finances as well as increase the income of coffee producers. As compet-

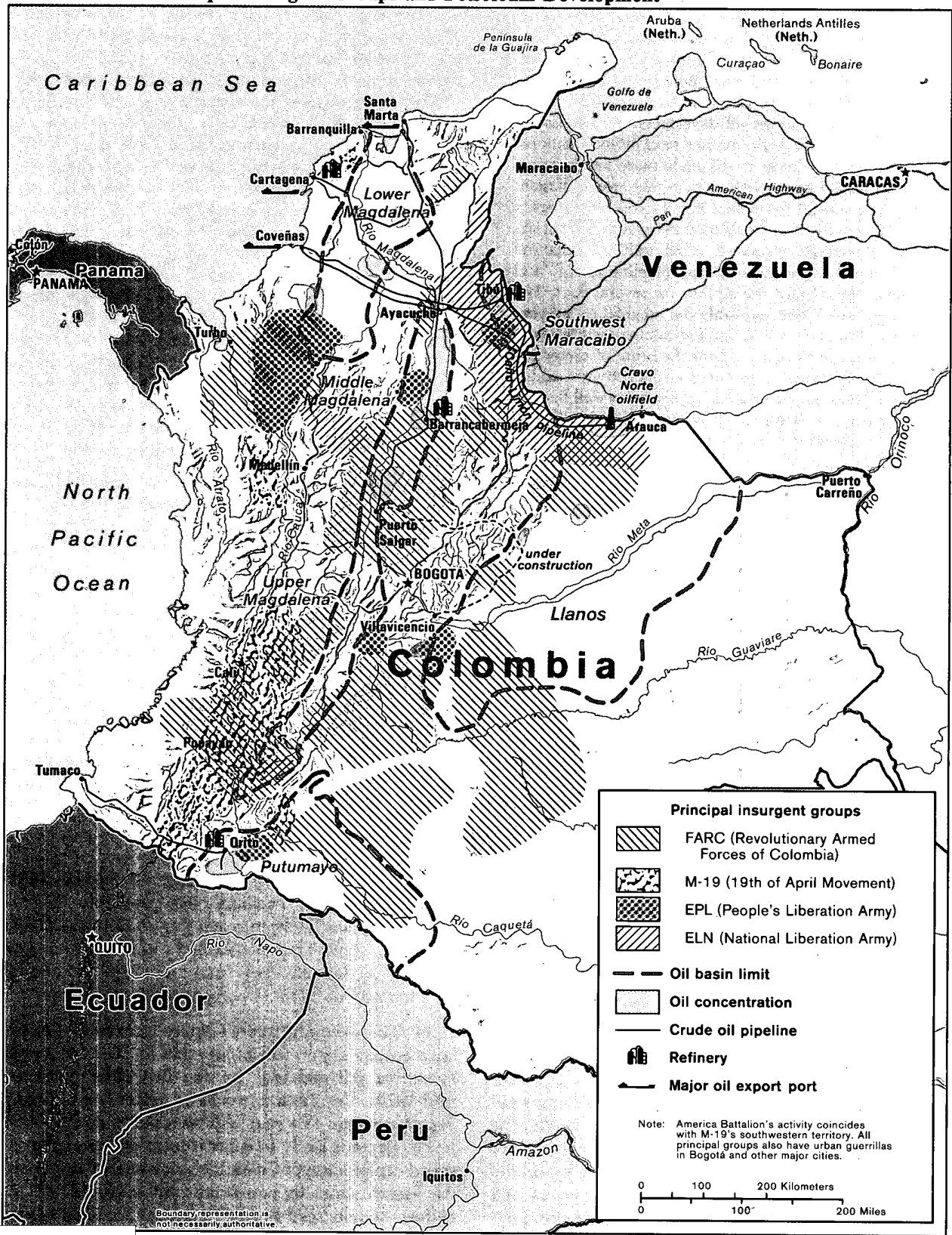
ing exports from Brazil gradually rise in late 1987, Colombia's coffee earnings will probably decline slightly and are likely to reach the usual level of \$1.5 billion by 1988. The government's success in limiting inflation so far this year may result in an annual inflation rate of 20 to 25 percent for 1986. [redacted]

38. The new government hopes to expand Colombia's energy sector. Oil production in 1986 has made Colombia self-sufficient for the first time since the mid-1970s. Despite low world oil prices, oil and coal export earnings this year will be roughly double 1985 levels. Barco is likely to court foreign oil companies to speed exploitation of Colombia's rich energy resources. An export surge in petroleum and coal—as well as coffee—should keep Bogota's external accounts among

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Figure 3  
Rural Fronts of Principal Insurgent Groups and Petroleum Development



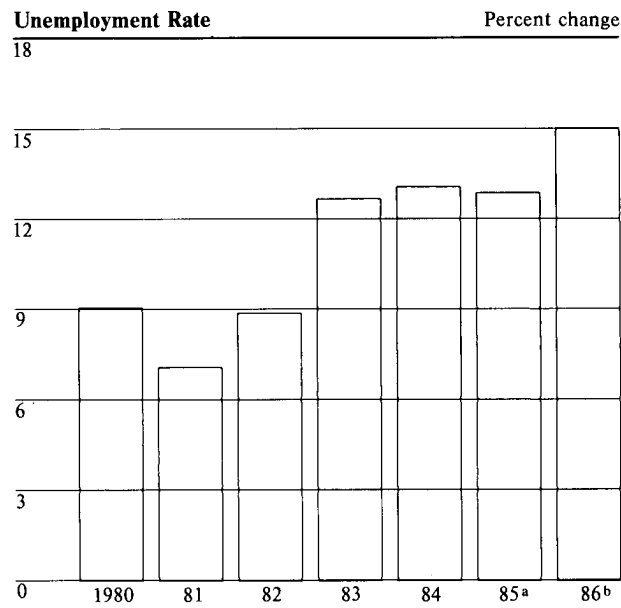
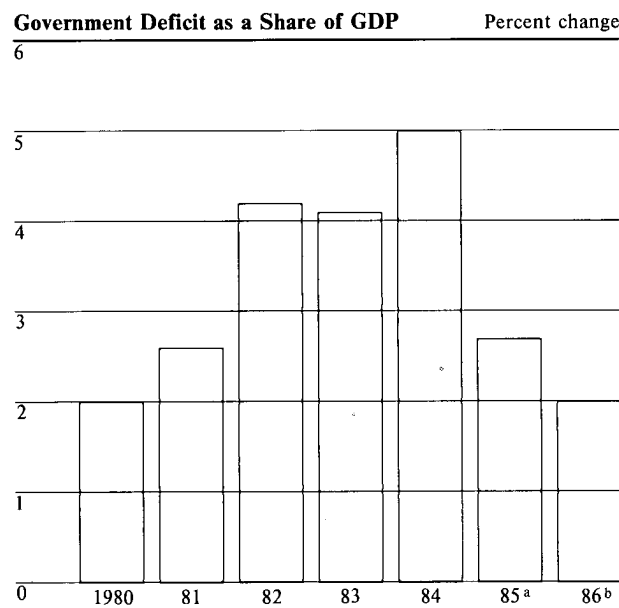
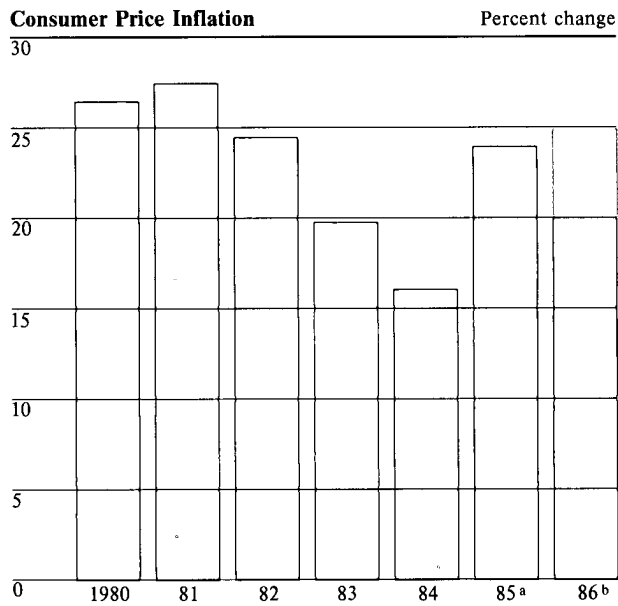
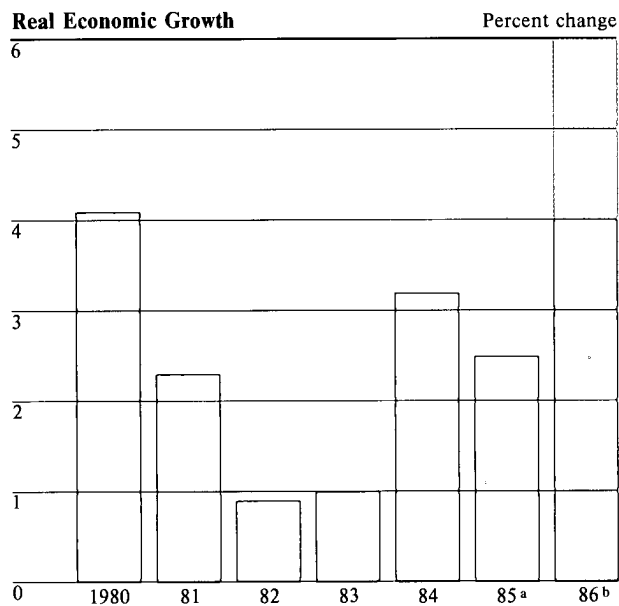
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**Colombia: Selected Economic Indicators, 1980-86**



<sup>a</sup> Estimated.

<sup>b</sup> Projected (assumes Bogota maintains its stabilization program).

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**Table 1**  
**Colombia: Balance of Payments**

Million US \$  
(except where noted)

	1982	1983	1984	1985 <sup>a</sup>	1986 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Current account balance</b>	-2,885	-2,826	-1,994	-1,305	-320
Trade balance	-2,076	-1,317	-312	9	1,365
Exports (f.o.b.)	3,282	3,147	3,668	4,036	5,630
Coffee	1,577	1,536	1,799	1,575	2,735
Oil	279	378	445	300	600
Coal				104	240
Imports (f.o.b.)	5,358	4,464	3,980	4,027	4,265
Net services and transfers	809	-1,509	-1,682	-1,314	-1,685
Interest on debt	649	-739	-1,086	-1,112	-1,120
Debt amortization	429	636	700	767	950
<b>Financial gap</b>	<b>3,314</b>	<b>3,462</b>	<b>2,694</b>	<b>2,072</b>	<b>1,270</b>
Direct investment	337	514	411	729	450
New medium- and long-term capital inflows (net)	1,322	983	1,278	1,173	1,870
Short-term capital and errors and omissions (net)	314	-449	-848	73	1,105
<b>Other financial items</b>					
External debt (end of year)	10,287	11,035	11,035	11,966	13,000
Short-term debt	3,109	2,872	2,230	1,966	2,000
Debt service ratio (percent) <sup>c</sup>	32	29	33	34	43
Foreign exchange reserves (end of year) <sup>d</sup>	3,861	1,901	1,364	1,595	2,500

<sup>a</sup> Estimate.

<sup>b</sup> Projected on assumption Bogota maintains stabilization program.

<sup>c</sup> As a share of exports of goods and services.

<sup>d</sup> Excludes gold.

the healthiest in Latin America, although the government's decision in January 1986 to assume control of all oil pipelines will cause developers to look askance at Colombian oilfields even if, as seems almost certain, Barco does not enforce it. Sustained low world oil prices would not alone have a decisively adverse impact on Colombia's economy, but in combination with additional setbacks, such as a sudden drop in world coal prices or massive capital flight, could force increased drawdowns of foreign exchange reserves and strain Bogota's ability to service its debt. [ ]

39. Betancur's two-year economic stabilization program has paved the way for sustained growth, but it has also exacted a significant social toll. Real wages continued to fall in 1985 as inflation outstripped salary increases, and government wages lagged inflation by 14 points before organized labor won matching increases. The mining and construction industries re-

vived in early 1986, but agriculture and commercial activity remain depressed. Unemployment stands at a record 15 percent, feeding popular discontent and encouraging movement to the informal sector, including sales of both smuggled consumer goods and narcotics. Leftist influence on organized labor—primarily a political irritant to date—has increased, and may cause problems for foreign investors if democratic labor leaders continue to lose ground to Communist labor activists. [ ]

40. Job creation—Barco's top-priority campaign promise—will be a major challenge. Barco sees expansion of agricultural production as a means to offer employment opportunities to landless peasants, who have long been natural recruits for the guerrillas. He has pledged to accelerate agrarian reforms and improve provision of basic services, and emphasizes the need for agricultural and industrial development. Also, the government is likely to increase spending in

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health, education, and communications, and will continue to expand construction of low-cost housing developments in both urban and rural areas. Barco's integrated rural development program—aimed at increasing food production, providing basic services, and alleviating unemployment—could substantially improve living conditions for poor Colombians.

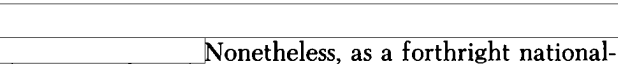
achieves no results, he is likely to recommend that the negotiations be referred to the Organization of American States (OAS), which he regards as the proper forum for settling regional problems.

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**Foreign Policy**

41. Barco will probably be more positively inclined toward Washington than his predecessor—he attended universities here and is married to a former US citizen.



Nonetheless, as a forthright nationalist, he will remain particularly sensitive to issues concerning Colombia's sovereignty and will not hesitate to assert independent views.

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42. Barco's statements of foreign policy objectives largely reflect traditional Colombian concerns. High on his foreign policy agenda is settlement of Colombia's longstanding dispute with Nicaragua over sovereignty of the San Andres and Providencia Archipelago off Nicaragua's Caribbean coast (see map, page 2). Barco has expressed anger at Managua's renewed claim to the islands, and may request a ruling from the International Court of Justice to reaffirm Colombian ownership on the basis of its long occupation and administration. Barco shares heightened military concern over a potential threat to San Andres and Providencia, and he will probably strengthen the islands' military defenses. The installation of a US-built radar system on San Andres Island (Isla de San Andres), which has long been delayed, would improve Colombia's early warning capability as well as assist narcotics surveillance and interdiction efforts.

44. Barco is likely to be cool toward Havana, although he favors Cuba's eventual readmission to the OAS. Cultural exchanges with Cuba increased during Betancur's administration, and Havana will probably continue attempts to reestablish diplomatic relations with Bogota. Barco, under pressure from leftists within his own party, may accept such overtures, particularly if he can exact assurances from Castro that Cuban aid to Colombian insurgents will cease. Barco will probably reject Cuban attempts to expand the current low level of trade with Colombia because Havana can offer few attractive commodities.

45. Colombian relations with the Soviet Union are unlikely to improve dramatically. Direct Soviet influence is limited, with no military contact and a low level of trade, and Colombian leaders are disturbed about the potential for increased penetration by Moscow. the total number of Colombians studying in the USSR may approach 2,500—second only to Cuba in total Latin American student presence there. Few Communist-trained Colombians hold prominent positions, but the Patriotic Union's congressional gains—as well as FARC's efforts to extend its influence through grassroots political and economic programs—clearly have broadened the avenues of access for the Soviets.

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46. Barco's relations with governments in the region are likely to be cordial, although he will probably be less outgoing and more domestically focused than his predecessor. He favors an international approach to drug control, and is likely to encourage bilateral intelligence sharing and enforcement efforts initiated by Betancur throughout Latin America. The new government will probably increase bilateral efforts to combat insurgent movements across the Venezuelan, Brazilian, and Ecuadorean borders. Barco views Venezuela as Colombia's natural ally, and wants to settle the two countries' maritime boundary dispute—dating from colonial times—over the mineral-rich Gulf of Venezuela (Golfo de Venezuela), the major Venezuelan oil export route. Previous proposals were blocked by the Venezuelan military, but improved bilateral military relations—fostered by increased joint counterinsurgent and drug control efforts along the oil pipeline on Colombia's northeast border—may smooth the way for a long-delayed settlement.

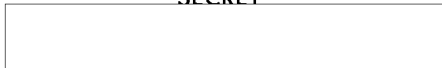
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**Implications for the United States**

47. For both ideological and economic reasons, the new administration will probably remain closely aligned with the United States. President Barco reportedly sees relations with the United States as the cornerstone of Colombia's political and economic well-being, and is expected to act accordingly. He will look to the United States for the financial support he sees as crucial to eliminate poverty and undercut support for Communist insurgents, and [redacted] assistance from Washington is essential to revitalize the economy, provide for future growth, and promote the long-term stability of the Colombian democratic system. [redacted]

48. Barco's concern about the growing power of the narcotics trade, and especially about evidence of insurgent involvement, will redound to Washington's advantage. Barco will be particularly dependent on US aid to improve the security forces' counterinsurgency capabilities, curtail narcotics production, and provide protection from terrorist attacks targeting US citizens and investors. Increased US military and antinarcotics assistance to Bogota could bolster Colombia's democratic role in the region and promote regional initiatives against drug traffickers, insurgents, and terrorists. Conversely, US failure to provide adequate security assistance would hinder Barco's efforts to improve

insurgent truce compliance and government antinarcotics performance. [redacted]

49. US commercial interests would benefit from a sustained economic recovery in Colombia—it is the third-largest US export market in Latin America. Because Bogota wants to diversify exports, the new government is likely to criticize US countervailing duty actions on Colombian goods, including coal, textiles, and cut flowers. However, increased opportunities for US sales are likely as a result of the government's 1985 import liberalization and improved foreign exchange situation. On the regional debt front, Bogota has had a good macroeconomic management record and has adopted IMF-monitored policies. Barco will probably ask for additional loans from international financial organizations and seek easier IMF compliance targets. [redacted]

50. For his part, Barco can be expected to support Washington on a range of major foreign policy issues, especially in Latin America. He shares Washington's pessimism over prospects for a Contadora treaty, although he is reluctant to abandon the forum for domestic political reasons. The new government is likely to be supportive of US policy initiatives in other international arenas. In particular, Barco will be a reliable ally for Washington against the Communist government in Managua, and responsive to US concerns in the Caribbean Basin and throughout Latin America. [redacted]

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## ANNEX A

### THE COLOMBIAN SECURITY FORCES

Colombia's Armed Forces are composed of the military services—Army, Navy, and Air Force, which are charged with national defense and counterinsurgency—and the National Police, responsible for narcotics control. Their total strength is 136,000, of which almost half belongs to the National Police. The Army, Navy, and Air Force are separate services under a single Commander of the Armed Forces, who is subordinate to the Minister of Defense. The Minister of Defense, who also controls the National Police, is traditionally the highest ranking general in the Army, the largest and most prestigious of the three services. With Colombia facing little serious external threat, domestic guerrilla groups and illegal narcotics activity will pose the greatest challenges to internal security and to the defense forces over the next several years.

#### The National Police

The National Police is a volunteer force, with a personnel strength of about 60,000, that has the primary responsibility for narcotics control. The service is headquartered in Bogota, with subsidiary headquarters in each of the country's 23 departments.

Two elements of the National Police play an important role in the government's counterinsurgency and antidrug efforts. [redacted] the 6,000-man Intelligence Division, which may respond directly to the President, is the most capable component of the security forces, with a high level of motivation and efficiency; it is also active as a training unit. The other key element is the 1,500-man narcotics enforcement unit, a very professional force established in 1980—when the National Police was designated the primary drug enforcement agency—as the Special Anti-Narcotics Unit (SANU), and since renamed the National Command for Narcotics Control (CONAN). Headquartered in Bogota, with a countrywide operations and control system, CONAN has carried out limited drug eradication and interdiction operations since its creation, and is the principal recipient of US antinarcotics assistance. In areas controlled by the insurgents, CONAN's drug interdiction is usually conducted jointly with the military.

The National Police has its own air wing, including 21 helicopters and 14 fixed-wing aircraft, for drug

interdiction and eradication. Unlike the Air Force, the police air wing has not felt the effects of insufficient government budgets; most of its funding, training, and maintenance has come from US sources. The National Police [redacted] now has a more modern and better maintained helicopter fleet—the key to CONAN's active drug enforcement campaign—than the Colombian Air Force. US advisers have stressed to Colombia's new National Police director the need to develop Colombia's own aerial reconnaissance program to improve eradication and interdiction efforts.

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#### Administrative Department of Security

The third major element of the Colombian security forces is Bogota's civilian security service, the Administrative Department of Security (DAS), an investigative intelligence-gathering and enforcement agency with a personnel strength of about 3,500. The semiautonomous DAS—responsible directly to the President—is functionally comparable to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation. DAS is charged with safeguarding the internal and external security of the state; it shares with the Armed Forces the responsibility for domestic intelligence collection. It also investigates kidnaping, criminal, and human rights cases, monitors foreign residents, and controls aliens. Like the National Police intelligence organ, it has its own judicial police group. DAS coordinates its activities at Cabinet level with other government agencies.

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DAS is organized into three major divisions tasked with intelligence collection and analysis, administration, and regional operations. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe it to be less professional than either the military or the police. Nonetheless, its influence is apparently extensive.

#### The Military

Despite handicaps, such as high personnel turnovers, shortages of officers and equipment, poorly educated and illiterate conscripts, and inadequate logistic systems—all eroding the capability to sustain effective

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counterinsurgency operations—the Colombian military remains among the most professional in Latin America. As an institution, the Colombian military is nonpolitical; active-duty Armed Forces personnel do not have the right to vote.

The 60,000-man Army is charged with national defense, counterinsurgency, and civic action. Through more than three decades of guerrilla violence, its primary task has been counterinsurgency—a concentration that has honed its internal security skills at the cost of conventional capabilities. The Commander of the Army exercises direct command over the major Army units: five divisions consisting of 13 brigades and over 60 battalions, of which about half are infantry. Units involved in counterinsurgency efforts are likely to be increasingly active and challenged as they implement President Barco's policy of meeting the guerrilla threat with strength.

The Colombian Navy, with a total strength of nearly 10,000 (including the Marine Corps and a small Coast Guard), is the smallest and is likely to remain the weakest of the military services. Its forces, mostly scattered around the periphery of the country, are so deteriorated that they cannot be deployed in any high-threat environment—a weakness that has allowed drug traffickers and arms smugglers to operate with relative impunity on the coasts and rivers.

The 6,200-man Colombian Air Force—a key element in Bogota's counterinsurgency and antinarcotics efforts—has been particularly hard hit by lack of funds in recent years. While the Air Force's aging French and US fighters are poorly maintained, a more likely target for initial improvement under Barco will be the helicopter fleet, to enhance mobility and improve response capability. Most new helicopters are likely to be US-made. The acquisition of a US-made AC-47 gunship for police use against insurgent-supported drug traffickers is under discussion with Ministry of Defense officials.

### Weaknesses

Overall, Colombia's defense forces suffer from serious weaknesses, not the least of which are severe budgetary constraints and a shortage of equipment and trained personnel. They will be hard pressed to mount an effective antiguerrilla campaign, at least over the short term. Although President Barco intends to take advantage of Colombia's improving economic conditions to provide increased support for the security forces, a number of deficiencies and other factors

will persist and limit their capabilities over the next year or two:

- **Defense Spending.** Increased defense funding is unlikely to overcome past deficiencies in the short term.
- **Shortage of Equipment and Trained Personnel.** Shortages in troop transport, helicopters, firepower, communications, and other equipment will remain serious. The military will also be slow to overcome a shortage of pilots, maintenance personnel, and combat troops. With conscripts serving only 24 months, most tactical infantry units will attain only a marginally satisfactory standard of proficiency, be stretched thin, and remain short of deployable forces.
- **Weak Leadership.** The lack of a clear counterinsurgency strategy, ineffective field commanders, loss of initiative, and less than vigorous leadership from the top have had a negative impact on military performance, which is likely to continue despite recent changes in the hierarchy, including a new Minister of Defense.
- **Logistic Weaknesses.** All of the services are capable of meeting normal peacetime requirements, but none could support mobilization or even extended field operations by a major segment of their forces, because of a lack of technical skills, poor supply systems, weak planning, and limited maintenance.
- **Intelligence Gaps.** Poor tactical military intelligence has prevented effective counterinsurgency and counterterrorist actions.
- **Limited Joint Command Effectiveness.** Ineffective interservice cooperation will persist, as will problems in coordination and intelligence sharing between the National Police and the Armed Forces. Rivalry over scarce resources is likely to continue.
- **Concern About Corruption.** The military's traditional reluctance to participate in drug enforcement is at least partly because of fear of corruption, and such compromise is also a factor in interservice and military-police relations at the local level. Although the extent of corruption in either wing of the Armed Forces is unknown, reports of corruption at field level and above—especially in major drug trafficking areas—are

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common, generating distrust both within and among the security forces. Narcotics corruption is also a problem in the DAS, and both the DAS and, to a lesser extent, the Army have also been penetrated by insurgents.

The Colombian Armed Forces, which have lost their combat edge, will most likely be unable to defeat the

guerrillas over the next several years. Successful implementation of President Barco's plans for dealing with both the guerrillas and the narcotics traffickers will be requisite on major improvements in the security forces.



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