

TOP TEN REASONS TO OPPOSE US MILITARY AID TO COLOMBIA

In just the last two years the United States government has given almost \$2 billion of mostly military aid to Colombia. This "aid" has inflamed Colombia's 50-year-old civil conflict, contributing to more deaths, more kidnappings, and an increase in human suffering. Now the Bush Administration and hawks in Congress are giving even more military assistance to the Colombian armed forces, and they have repealed Clinton-era rules that prohibited US arms from being used to battle guerrilla groups. These deadly policies must be reversed. US involvement in Colombia is expensive, ineffective, inhumane, and will not lead to peace in the troubled nation.

US Aid Worsens Human Suffering in Colombia

During the last decade alone, Colombia's civil war has taken 40,000 lives and has driven more than 2 million people from their homes. Since the US began sending aircraft and training to Colombia in 2000, politically motivated killings have risen from 14 to 20 per day, and the number of kidnappings and disappearances has doubled. The lives of all Colombians are affected by violence: teachers, labor leaders, community activists, and peace advocates have all been the victims of harassment, disappearance and murder.

US Involvement Makes It Even More Difficult to Achieve Peace

On February 20, 2002, the Colombian conflict took a frightening turn when three-year-old peace talks between the Colombian government and the country's largest rebel group broke down. US military aid makes a terrifying situation even scarier by strengthening the most militaristic factions on all sides. By giving the Colombian military more arms and training, the US emboldens the Colombian armed forces and makes the rebels suspicious of government motives. In this atmosphere peace efforts suffer.

US Aid Hurts Innocent People Most

The impacts of increased fighting fall heaviest on innocent civilians. According to the Bogotá-based Center for Investigation and Popular Education, for every armed actor

killed in combat, six civilians are murdered. Indigenous groups, Afro-Colombians, Peace Communities, women, children, and others find themselves caught in the crossfire. Increased US military aid means that innocent people will keep dying.

This Policy Sends the US into Another Quagmire

Colombia's civil war has been taking lives since before President Lyndon Johnson expanded the US role in Vietnam. The conflict is nightmarishly complicated, with two guerrilla armies battling the government and right-wing paramilitary groups, who have close ties to each other. None of these forces has demonstrated a commitment to peace. US plans for Colombia contain no definition of "victory" and no clear benchmarks for success. What goal must we achieve before we declare success? How many Colombians, and Americans, will we sacrifice to do it? So far none of these questions have answers.

US Aid Supports Terrorism in Colombia

According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists, 75 percent of political killings are committed by right-wing paramilitaries such as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)—a group included on the US State Department's terrorist organizations list, along with both guerrilla groups. In Colombia the line between the US-supported military and paramilitary groups is hazy. Reports

by Human Rights Watch show that one-half of Colombian military battalions have connections to the paramilitaries. The US State Department reports that “members of the security forces sometimes illegally collaborated with paramilitary forces.”

US Military Aid Is More about US Corporate Interests than the Needs of Colombians

This “aid” is a perfect example of how corporations manipulate the government for their own economic advantage. Defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Textron and United Technologies have lobbied hard for increasing military assistance to Colombia, and they have much to gain from the purchase of hundreds of millions of dollars of military equipment. US-based oil corporations will also benefit from heightened US involvement in Colombia and have lobbied accordingly. Private US-based security corporations, unaccountable to the US government, also profit from their involvement in the Colombian conflict.

US Military Aid Is As Much About Oil Addiction as Drug Addiction

The original “Plan Colombia” approved by Congress in 2000 was presented as part of the “war on drugs.” But new aid requests reveal that US involvement in Colombia is quickly changing from a mission intended to end our addiction to drugs to an operation designed to feed our addiction to oil. Colombia is one of the most oil-rich nations in the world, with proven reserves worth \$70 billion. In January 2002, the White House asked Congress for nearly \$100 million to train and equip Colombian troops to guard an oil pipeline operated by Occidental Petroleum. Essentially, US taxpayers are being asked to foot the bill to protect oil industry profits.

US Military Aid Will Not End Drug Abuse

Plan Colombia was based on the notion that the US could reduce drug abuse here by eliminating coca production in Colombia. The strategy has failed. According to the White

House’s own Office of National Drug Control Policy, coca production in Colombia actually increased by almost 25 percent between August 2000, when Plan Colombia went into effect, and December of 2001. Drug experts say the best way to fight drug addiction is with education and treatment here at home. A study by the RAND Corporation found that treatment of cocaine users is 23 times more effective than eradicating coca. Clearly, a better plan to end drug abuse can be developed.

Fumigation of Drug Crops Hurts the Environment and Is Counterproductive

As part of the failed effort to reduce coca production, the Colombian military, with US assistance, has tried to fumigate drug crops through aerial spraying. Various reports reveal that fumigation sprayings have disastrous results, frequently killing legitimate food crops and endangering the health of Colombian communities. In the province of Putumayo chemical run-off empties into the Amazon River basin, causing undocumented ecological damage. Moreover, by destroying subsistence crops the government is undermining its own attempts at substituting drug crops with legitimate food crops.

Colombians Do Not Want This Type of Aid

Although most Colombians do want US aid, many say Colombia doesn’t need military assistance, but instead aid that addresses the root causes of Colombia’s problems—social, political and economic injustice in a country where two-thirds of the population lives in poverty. As Alfonso Velásquez Rico, a spokesperson for Colombia’s United Federation of Workers, has said: “This isn’t ‘aid’ and it won’t help the people of Colombia. This is going to deepen the war in Colombia.” By all accounts it already has.

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