

**DETOXIFYING COLOMBIA'S DRUG POLICY:  
Colombia's counternarcotics options and  
their impact on peace and state building**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Colombia's counternarcotics policy choices have profound impact on consolidating peace in the wake of the 2016 peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo, FARC) and on the building of an effective state. Strategies of forced or voluntary eradication of coca crops have proven ineffective. As evidence from around the world shows, a long-term comprehensive effort to promote alternative livelihoods for coca growers — integrated into rural development and supported by well-designed interdiction efforts, with eradication delayed until these alternative livelihoods are generating sustainable income — has the best prospects for producing peace and a capable state and for reducing drug production.

To achieve sustainable and robust reduction of illicit crop cultivation, Colombia must thus expand its timeline of drug policy and state-building intervention well beyond 15 years. To achieve any viable transformative effects, it will also have to concentrate resources to selected zones of strategic intervention and gradually connect them and expand them to encompass larger areas in state intervention efforts.

The alternative livelihoods approach requires a concerted effort to build international support, particularly with the United States. It also requires countering the objections of Colombia's political right. Arguments can be framed around the ineffective and counterproductive outcomes of forced eradication, the demonstrated benefits of comprehensive alternatives livelihood combined with well-designed interdiction to reduce the power of criminal groups, and other counternarcotics priorities in the United States.

A zero-coca conceptualization that insists on eradication first and conditions development aid on prior eradication of coca jeopardizes peace-building and state-building. In Colombia and elsewhere in the world, it has consistently failed to produce

a sustainable reduction of coca cultivation. Forced eradication undermines the peace deal with the FARC and the broader legitimacy and presence of the state by jeopardizing the state's ability to establish meaningful presence in areas formerly dominated by nonstate armed groups and radicalizing communities and *cocalero* (coca cultivator) movements. Aerial spraying will only compound these problems; drones will not redress the negative political effects, even if somewhat increasing the precision of spraying.

Voluntary eradication mitigates negative political effects associated with forced eradication. But in its current form, it is not effectively designed. Partly as a result of the zero-coca approach, the policy operates on unrealistic timelines that cannot generate adequate sustainable income for farmers in time and sours them on cooperating with the state.

The most effective policy to sustainably reduce illicit crops would deliver robust assistance before demanding eradication. Learning from the highly successful Thailand model, the necessary development package would include human capital development assistance, economic-resource development, and security and justice dispute resolution mechanisms. Communities would be told that after several years of such development efforts, likely at least five, eradication would eventually be undertaken in phases, gradually reducing illicit crop cultivation.

Special designs and policies must be considered for environmentally sensitive areas. Replacing coca with deforestation and wildlife trafficking would be a failure.

Achieving economic growth that creates jobs throughout Colombia is also fundamental, to give new opportunities to those currently employed in both licit and illicit work in rural areas and to generate adequate resources and political support among lower middle and middle classes for rural development efforts that need to be sustained for years to come.

The more violent conflict in Colombia is reduced, the more effective the country's drug policy can be.

## INTRODUCTION

Counternarcotics policies in Colombia have profound effects on the country's conflict dynamics and its peace- and state-building efforts. Well-designed efforts that bond local populations with the state and facilitate the state's presence in areas where it was previously weak enhance peace. A long-term comprehensive effort to promote alternative livelihoods — integrated into rural development, with eradication delayed until alternative livelihoods are generating income — has the best prospects for producing peace and a capable state and for reducing drug production. Conversely, counternarcotics efforts that undermine bonds between local populations and the Colombian state, such as forced eradication or badly-designed voluntary eradication and crop substitution, jeopardize not only Colombia's historic 2016 peace accords with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo, FARC), but also the expansion of state presence and conflict mitigation.

Devising an effective counternarcotics politics in Colombia is all the more important and challenging given that Colombia's coca cultivation and cocaine production have been at an all-time high for several years: In 2017, between 171,000 and 209,000

hectares (ha)<sup>1</sup> were cultivated with coca, yielding some 1,058 tons of cocaine. In 2018, the level of hectares cultivated with coca declined marginally to between 169,000 and 208,000 ha.<sup>2</sup> Still, because of higher yields, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that cocaine production rose to 1,120 tons in 2018.<sup>3</sup> Criticizing the counternarcotics efforts of the previous Juan Manuel Santos administration (2010-2018) as meek and misguided, the current administration of President Iván Duque has significantly stepped up forced eradication. It is now on track to eradicate 80,000 hectares of coca in 2019, compared to 52,000 ha in 2017, the last full year of the Santos administration.<sup>4</sup> However, as this paper argues, premature eradication is severely counterproductive.

The following analysis discusses in detail the pros and cons of three counternarcotics options in Colombia:

1. **forced eradication**, including the return to aerial spraying and the use of drones;
2. **voluntary eradication** combined with crop substitution;
3. **alternative livelihoods** (a broader and differently-sequenced conceptualization of crop substitution and voluntary eradication).

These three policy options are direct alternatives to each other. A fourth policy option, **interdiction** — arresting drug traffickers, destroying drug labs, and capturing drug flows — is not mutually exclusive with any of the first three policies and can be adopted alone or in combination with another. It will be discussed at the end of the paper.

The assessment of the benefits and downside of each policy is based on the observed results of Colombia's counternarcotics efforts over the past five decades. The cost-benefit analysis also draws on the outcomes of counternarcotics efforts elsewhere in the world — from Mexico to Myanmar and Thailand as well as other parts of Asia.

The paper also includes a section on how to synchronize counternarcotics policy with preservation of Colombia's unique biodiversity. In addition to discussing eradication design in such areas, it reviews the viability and effectiveness of ecotourism and direct financial transfers.

It concludes with a discussion of the international implications of each of Colombia's counternarcotics policy options for generating external support.

Colombia's choice of counternarcotics options has been driven to a large extent by the prevalence of a "zero-coca" framing among Colombia's decisionmakers and influential U.S. policymakers. The zero-coca conceptualization assumes that coca is the primary source of Colombia's instability and violence. It also insists that all coca must be eliminated in a locality before it qualifies for state assistance.<sup>5</sup> Five decades of counternarcotics efforts in Colombia have been based on this approach.

But the evidence from around the world shows the opposite: namely, that conflict in a locality must first end before counternarcotics policy can be effective in sustainably reducing the cultivation of illicit crops.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the evidence shows that demanding eradication of *all* illicit crops first — as a condition for land titles or alternative livelihoods assistance — does not produce good outcomes either in reducing coca crops or enhancing stabilization, human security, and peace building. Moreover, counternarcotics efforts in other countries that delivered human capital development, human security enhancement,

and alternative livelihoods aid first, and for several years before demanding eradication, have produced the most robust, impressive, and sustained success in reducing and eliminating illicit crop cultivation. Yet the zero-coca mentality, and its counterproductive sequencing of state interventions, continues to permeate many aspects of Colombia's state-building strategy and drug policy. Its record is one of failure.<sup>7</sup>

To switch toward the more effective approach, Colombia will need to define the objective of its drug policy efforts to be sustained human security and capital development that bonds rural residents with the state and sustainably, if gradually, reduces the size of illicit crop cultivation.

All four of the indicated policy options require persistent and sufficiently robust state presence in the provision of public goods — including security, socio-economic support, and the delivery of accessible and fair justice and dispute resolution mechanisms. Sporadic and limited state presence makes only two policy options — forced eradication and interdiction — viable. But under such conditions, they will produce suboptimal to ineffective and counterproductive results.

To maximize and sustain the desirable effects of any of its counternarcotics policy options, particularly sustainable alternative livelihoods approaches, Colombia must thus expand its timeline of drug policy and state-building intervention well beyond 15 years.

To achieve any viable transformative effects, it will also have to concentrate resources to selected zones of strategic intervention and gradually connect them and expand them to encompass larger and larger parts of Colombia in state intervention efforts. Otherwise, dissipating policy intervention resources across the entire country from the beginning will undermine the transformative effects of policy intervention, producing disappointment and cynicism. A detailed analysis of how to concentrate resources and of the challenges faced by previous such efforts follows the discussion of alternative livelihoods.

## FORCED ERADICATION

Forced eradication can produce two outcomes that a government can regard as positive. If extensively and repeatedly applied, it can deliver short-term reductions in illicit crop cultivation. Examples of such outcomes include Mexico in the 1970s<sup>8</sup> and Colombia in the 2000s. Such declines in cultivation can also satisfy international donors and actors with influence over the source country (such as the United States in the cases of Colombia or Mexico, or China in the case of Myanmar). Aggressive forced eradication can appeal to Bogotá as a way of appeasing the U.S. government. Although any reductions in coca cultivation are unlikely to be sustainable, Bogotá can report outputs — in terms of hectares eradicated — that Washington wants to hear, even though such a measure says little about the sustainability of coca cultivation suppression. In 2017, the Trump administration threatened to decertify Colombia for not complying with U.S. counternarcotics policy objectives and not eradicating enough of Colombia's expanding drug cultivation. Decertification would trigger sanctions and the withdrawal of most of U.S. assistance, unless a national security exception were issued, and would weaken U.S.-Colombia economic ties. Aggressive forced eradication allows Bogotá to avoid such undesirable developments.

But forced eradication carries many basic negative effects and risks. First of all, unless aggressive and sustained repression is applied against poor producers of illicit crops — most undesirable from the perspective of human rights, political stability, and international reputation — the short-term declines in cultivation will not be sustainable. Such declines have not been durable anywhere, including not previously in Colombia. Unless the state maintains a thick presence — currently, elusive for Colombia — the *cocaleros* (coca cultivators) and drug traffickers will find a way to adapt. They will hide coca fields under legal crops, wash or prune coca crops after chemical treatment, or move cultivation to other areas — most undesirably, into forests and protected areas.

The relocation of cultivation to more remote and environmentally-rich areas will in turn threaten Colombia's biodiversity and increase its carbon footprint — areas in which the ability of government forces to conduct eradication is limited. For multiple reasons, including the effects on efforts to develop meaningful alternative livelihoods development, it is much preferable that coca cultivation stays in accessible areas and does not relocate wholesale to forests and protected areas.

Nor does forced eradication bankrupt or substantially reduce the earnings armed actors gain from the narcotics market in Colombia. The financial holdings of these actors are large enough for them to ride out short-term reductions in income. Moreover, as demonstrated during the height of aerial spraying in the 2000s and manifested in many conflict settings around the world, armed actors, such as dissident FARC groups,<sup>9</sup> the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN),<sup>10</sup> and *bandas criminales* (criminal bands),<sup>11</sup> will have the capacity to switch to other illicit economies.<sup>12</sup> In Colombia's case, those include illegal logging, mining, and poaching and wildlife trafficking, as well as generalized extortion. All these illicit economies pose many severe threats to Colombia's state and society, with consequences sometimes more difficult to reverse or mitigate than in the case of illicit crop cultivation. For example, once plant or wildlife biodiversity is lost through illegal logging or poaching, it often cannot be restored.

Like extensive homicides, generalized extortion fundamentally undermines public safety, eroding the legitimacy of the state (which is unable to prevent it). The high rate of homicides and prevalence of extortion have a much stronger negative impact on support for the government than the prevalence of illicit crop cultivation, tearing the social fabric and hampering economic growth and investment. Inadvertently stimulating a rise in extortion as a result of illicit crop suppression is a most problematic tradeoff.

The most effective strategy to reduce financial inflows to armed actors is to limit the physical territory in which a group can operate. Pushing the armed group out of areas of illicit crop cultivation in one venue, cordoning it off in another area or militarily pinning it down other venues. These approaches were effectively adopted in the 2000s, resulting in the reduction of drug income to particular FARC *frentes* (units). Intense drug interdiction efforts also reduced cocaine flows to the United States.

Furthermore, forced eradication will significantly undermine the peace deal with the FARC and the broader legitimacy and presence of the state. It jeopardizes the ability of the state to establish meaningful presence in areas formerly dominated by nonstate armed groups, as *cocaleros* object to having the state there interfering with their way of life. Even when they cannot prevent the physical establishment of the state presence, they will not trust the state's officials and positively interact with them, thus preventing the state from building up its authority and legitimacy in the countryside.

When faced with forced eradication, Colombia's *cocaleros* will feel once again betrayed by, and alienated from, the state. In turn, such alienation significantly strengthens armed actors in Colombia, providing them with political capital. Local populations whose illicit crops are protected by such actors see the government as an oppressive actor that seeks to starve and impoverish them. Even when they do not actively embrace the nonstate armed actor, they may refuse to collaborate with the government in intelligence provision on the operations of the armed actor whose presence they are pragmatically tolerating.

Such outcomes of forced eradication are already well under way in large parts of Colombia. Forced eradication toward the end of the Santos administration produced protests in Nariño.<sup>13</sup> Their violent repression by the Colombian forces generated widespread international outcry. From Nariño to Cauca, Putumayo, Chocó, Meta, and beyond, forced eradication, greatly intensified during the Duque administration, has alienated *cocaleros* and rural residents from the Colombian state.<sup>14</sup> Such alienation critically undermines the efforts of the Colombian state to extend robust and effective government presence to rural areas, including those previously under FARC control.

Forced eradication also profoundly contradicts the pledges the Colombian government made in the 2016 peace accords with the FARC,<sup>15</sup> and a failure to live up to them creates a new set of problems for the Colombian government. A sense of being betrayed about drug policy that promised to de-emphasize forced eradication and center instead on rural development provides a justification for FARC ex-soldiers to abandon attempts at civilian life and to rejoin the armed fight as defenders of Colombia's rural poor. (Other motivations to return to armed struggle include a lack of legal livelihoods and economic opportunities for FARC ex-combatants, a loss of status and belonging, and a desire for illegal drug profits and power.) Some 3,000 ex-FARC militants, including two important top-level commanders, have returned to fighting and/or called for a new phase of the armed struggle.<sup>16</sup>

Even outside of the military battlefield and rural areas, forced eradication will also enhance the political capital of the FARC groups who have demobilized and entered Colombia's politics. Both in the 2018 presidential elections and in the October 2019 elections for local government offices, the FARC has performed very poorly, with other political parties refusing the former alliances with it and the party struggling to raise money for campaigning. Few urban voters see the FARC offering meaningful socio-economic benefits to them, and many rural and urban voters resent the FARC's brutality, the memories of which are still well alive and not addressed by the ongoing transitional justice process. For decades isolated in Colombia's jungles and out-of-touch with the majority of Colombia's citizens, particularly those of the urban middle class, the FARC does not have capable technocrats to administer the country or a credible vision of the country's socio-economic progress at the national level. But in areas that it controlled for decades, the FARC has been able to build political capital by providing local authority, organizing the provision of limited socio-economic goods on the ground, such as building schools, clinics, and roads, and delivering security from street crime and swift justice.<sup>17</sup> Critically, even when other forms of the FARC's political capital waned around the country, the FARC retained crucial political capital among Colombia's *cocaleros* subjected to forced eradication.

To the extent that Colombia's *cocaleros* again feel betrayed or lose their livelihoods to forced eradication, the FARC will be able to build its future electoral campaigns on its opposition to forced eradication and its condemnation of the government for betraying what it promised in the 2016 accords, once again, presenting itself as the defender of the *cocaleros* and rural poor.<sup>18</sup> Forced eradication can thereby give the FARC a new lease on political life, even if only in areas where forced eradication is undertaken.

Apart from the FARC's ability to extensively exploit forced eradication for political mobilization and electoral purposes, forced eradication is also very likely to radicalize Colombia's *cocalero* movement. Already, Colombia's *cocaleros* have shown far greater organizational skill, mobilization motivation, and independence than had historically been the case. In the short term, a government's insistence on eradication can produce violent encounters between federal police or military forces and the *cocaleros* (such as happened in Nariño), discrediting the Colombian government with donors in Europe and, potentially (if a Democratic administration is elected in 2020), with the United States, and jeopardizing international aid. Violent repression of the *cocaleros* by state forces or *bandas criminales* will undermine the domestic and international legitimacy of Colombia's municipal and provincial elections, and the country's reputation for effective post-conflict stabilization.<sup>19</sup>

More profoundly yet, such violence will further reinforce Colombia's essential historic problem of the rural areas feeling marginalized, abandoned, exploited, and repressed by the state. It will further weaken the country's weak social contract.<sup>20</sup>

The radicalization of the *cocalero* movement as a result of forced eradication can also lead to the *cocaleros* becoming in fact a potent political force, shutting down parts of Colombia, and hampering state access to those areas — as in Bolivia in the 1990s. Although unlike in Bolivia, there is little prospect that they could develop political dominance at the *national* level, they could be elected to power at municipal and even provincial levels.

As decades of evidence from around the world show, for forced eradication to be successful in durably (if not permanently) suppressing the cultivation of illicit crops, three conditions must be met. First, violent conflict must have ended and safety from armed actors and highly violent criminal groups must have been established. Second, the state must have extensive law enforcement apparatus thickly and constantly present in all areas of illicit crop cultivation. Third, the state must be willing to resort to extensive and repeated violent repression.<sup>21</sup> Only three or four countries succeeded in conducting sustainable reduction in illicit crops that way: to some extent China in the 1950s (though much eradication there was, in fact, sequentially negotiated with local populations); Myanmar in the 1990s and early 2000s (though cultivation has since robustly returned);<sup>22</sup> and Vietnam and Laos in the 1980s and 1990s. For human rights and international reputation reasons, Colombia should not wish to join their company.

### ***Aerial spraying and spraying by drone***

Return to aerial spraying (including with drones) promises to maximize access to coca crops and minimize violent injuries to eradication teams. Unlike in the case of manual eradication, even areas with less security can be subjected to such eradication of illicit crops. Aerial spraying would also be welcomed by the Trump administration.<sup>23</sup>

However, such technologies do not eliminate security risks nor overcome all security challenges. Armed actors or *cocaleros* can shoot at spraying planes, either injuring pilots or forcing planes to higher altitudes that compromise the precision of targeting of the herbicide. Such incidents have happened repeatedly over the decades of aerial spraying in Colombia.<sup>24</sup> Various anti-drone technologies already exist, from the highly sophisticated and expensive to very basic, such as shooting down the drones.<sup>25</sup> Many are already available to both *cocaleros* and drug traffickers, and others will spread to them. The first trials revealed a myriad of challenges.<sup>26</sup>

Aerial spraying is also far more ineffective than manual eradication, as *cocaleros* learn to wash off or prune plants after the chemical agents come in contact with the crops. Similar adaptation strategies can be used in response to spraying by drone, even though drones can fly at lower altitudes, closer to the plants and thus discriminate better between licit and illicit crops. Manual eradication, on the other hand, increases the durability of coca crop destruction — where there is replanting, the newer coca bushes will have lesser yields.

The use of chemical agents also poses long-term and multiple threats to Colombia's biodiversity and legal crops. This is particularly so when herbicides, such as glyphosate, or fungicides (rejected for use against illicit crops by the U.S. government in the 1980s after disastrous tests in Florida) wash off into rivers and aquifers and persist in soil. Any destruction of legal crops that farmers also cultivate, however inadvertent a side effect, also undermines the more basic objective of enabling Colombia's *cocaleros* to switch to legal livelihoods. The destruction of their legal crops does *not* deter them from growing illicit crops; it does the opposite: it reinforces their indebtedness, compromises their access to land and microcredit, and forces them to liquidate their productive assets — thus reinforcing their dependence on illicit crop cultivation.<sup>27</sup> And it shatters their willingness to trust the Colombian state, compounding the already enormous trust deficit that hampers the government's operations in the rural areas. The destruction of legal crops and resulting reliance of necessity on illicit crop cultivation also forces the *cocaleros* into dependence on nonstate actors, thus further undermining Colombia's state-building efforts.

Serious questions persist about the effects of glyphosate on human health, particularly its carcinogenic risks.<sup>28</sup> Quite apart from the issue of whether aerial spraying by planes or drones is consistent with the rulings of Colombia's courts that halted the use of glyphosate,<sup>29</sup> new major legal challenges have arisen in the United States. In several precedent-setting cases, U.S. plaintiffs won major awards against the producer of glyphosate for the chemical having caused their cancers.<sup>30</sup> Colombia's *cocaleros* can use these precedents to challenge Colombia's use of aerial spraying in U.S. courts and internationally, potentially resulting in significant financial damages and reputation costs for the government of Colombia.

In short, aerial spraying and drone use increase access to coca fields in the context of insecurity. But they do not resolve the political problems of forced eradication. They generate their own security problems and come with significant legal complications. They are also likely to jeopardize support for Colombia from international environmentally-focused donors, especially European countries. Significantly, few other countries have approved aerial spraying in the last two decades. No spraying has taken place in Afghanistan, the world's leading drug producer. In Myanmar, last extensive aerial spraying took place in the 1980s. The U.S. opioid epidemic and the resulting surge in

Mexico's poppy cultivation and production of heroin destined for the United States, put the Mexican government under U.S. pressure to restart aerial spraying, though not on the same level as at the peak in the 1970s. Only low thousands of hectares have been sprayed in Mexico over the past decade.<sup>31</sup>

Smart forced eradication could be used as a preventative measure in new areas where coca emerges. For many reasons, it is advantageous to limit the spread of cultivation to new localities. At particularly high risk are protected and forested areas, which *cocaleros* have sought out as new areas of coca cultivation to escape eradication in more accessible settings. Creating security buffers there and prioritizing eradication in such environmentally-sensitive areas to minimize further environmental damage makes good sense. But to protect biodiversity and enhance Colombia's international reputation as a country leading in environmental protection in Latin America, only manual eradication, and not chemical spraying, should be used in such areas. Although they may be geographically large, they are still smaller than the total size of areas where manual eradication had previously been deployed, making manual eradication not just desirable, but also feasible. Moreover, deterring illicit crop spread to environmentally important zones will only be highly effective if coca eradication in already established areas of coca cultivation, agricultural lands, or environmentally-degraded areas is deprioritized, lessened, and postponed until the alternative livelihood approach has yielded sustainable results.

## VOLUNTARY ERADICATION

The critical and fundamental advantage of voluntary eradication is that it mitigates the myriad of negative political effects associated with forced eradication. Voluntary eradication enhances the legitimacy, and thus sustainability, of efforts to reduce illicit crop cultivation. Voluntary eradication does not generate the same political capital for the FARC and armed actors that forced eradication does. Nor does it radicalize the *cocaleros*. And it does not undermine state-building and stabilization efforts in Colombia.

Voluntary eradication is also fully consistent with chapter four of the 2016 FARC peace accords, on illicit drugs. Moreover, if voluntary eradication were redesigned, it could also produce a significant and sustainable reduction of illicit crops cultivated in Colombia while strengthening the state's bonds with the rural population.

In contrast to forced eradication, a disadvantage of voluntary eradication, as with comprehensive alternative livelihoods efforts, is that it is a slow process, with extensive coca cultivation persisting in Colombia in the short term.

Unfortunately, the current structure of counternarcotics efforts in Colombia, including the design of the voluntary eradication efforts, is highly problematic. The "voluntary" eradication component centers on the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Crops Used for Illicit Purposes (Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos, PNIS), in which some 130,000 *cocalero* families enrolled during the Santos administration. In exchange for eradicating their coca crops, they were promised \$12,000 over two years and technical assistance with switching to legal production.<sup>32</sup>

A central flaw of its design is the zero-coca mentality. Long pervasive among the Colombian government and political elite and for decades promoted by the United States, though abandoned during the Obama administration, the zero-coca approach

insists that all coca in an area be eradicated first before a community can qualify for any state assistance. This approach fatally reverses effective sequencing of alternative livelihoods efforts and eradication. This design also makes the very name and concept *voluntary* eradication hollow, since to qualify for any state assistance a community must first destroy all of its coca fields. And if the community fails to do so, the state will destroy the coca fields forcefully without providing development assistance. In such a conceptualization, the only element that is in fact “voluntary” is that the farmers, rather than the state, are the agents of destroying their own crops. No doubt, and importantly, this mitigates violence — but not the alienation of the community from the state.

Yet the zero-coca model has been repeatedly adopted in Colombia since the 1980s. Both in the case of national level policies and in provincial-level experimentation, the sequencing of eradicating all coca first and only then delivering alternative livelihoods assistance has generated the same set of problems. In both cases, this sequencing has also failed to produce sustainable coca crop reductions.<sup>33</sup>

The most basic of the problems has been that by eradicating all of their coca crops first, the family and community loses or foregoes all of their income at once. Payments offered by the government in compensation have in each case proven to be too small and short term — usually no more than two years and often less — and have not redressed the losses of income. Mostly, the compensation has temporarily provided families and communities with only food-subsistence levels of support.

These well and long-known problems, many times manifested in Colombia's counternarcotics efforts, have only been compounded by the suspension and delay of the promised payments in the first year of the Duque administration.<sup>34</sup> Since taking office, the Duque administration has been deeply skeptical of the PNIS effort, considering it profoundly ill-conceived by the Santos administration, soft on drugs, and counterproductive.<sup>35</sup> Along with many other aspects of the FARC peace deal, particularly those pertaining to transitional justice,<sup>36</sup> the administration has sought to reverse and revise the voluntary eradication and compensation component of counternarcotics efforts. Although the Santos administration made the PNIS program available to 130,000 *cocalero* families, the Duque administration unilaterally announced that only 99,000 *cocalero* families could benefit from this assistance, cutting off almost a quarter from eligibility. Even the 130,000 number still left many *cocalero* families without assistance, and the Santos administration left office without signing PNIS framework agreements with *cocaleros* in several key coca-producing areas.

The Duque administration has significantly increased forced eradication. Under a new counternarcotics strategy called Ruta Futuro (Path of the Future),<sup>37</sup> it has sought to toughen up Colombia's drug policy across all of its dimensions, including re-penalizing personal use of drugs and reducing personal possession limits that escape penalization.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, the period of compensation payments has been set too short and unrealistic to generate sustainable legal production. Accomplishing the latter requires building roads and processing factories, developing value-added chains, and establishing legal land titles and access to legal microcredit for farmers so they are not dependent on cocaine traffickers for access to the credit necessary for economic survival on a year-to-year basis. Legal crops, such as cacao and coffee, also often take many more years to generate productivity competitive within Colombia and internationally.

The consequent repeated failures of voluntary eradication in Colombia have in turn significantly undermined the willingness of the rural population to trust the state and buy into new, nearly identical versions of such programs. The fact that the *cocaleros* were willing in the 2016 peace accord to place their faith in a program with essentially the same flawed design was remarkable, but it was also ephemeral. Already, that trust has been lost as many *cocalero* communities have not received the promised compensatory payments over the past year or have only received them after significant lapses.

The longer such gaps, the more *cocalero* families must liquidate their productive assets, and the greater their dependence on illicit crop cultivation and illicit actors grows. They thus become trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of indebtedness and lack of productive assets, out of which the only escape is again illicit crop cultivation and reliance on armed nonstate actors or drug traffickers.

Furthermore, each time promised voluntary eradication efforts go wrong, the formation of a social contract is prevented and local populations are more than ever alienated from the state. Squandering the unique post-2016 opportunity of *cocalero* trust being (miraculously) placed in the Colombian government will have profound long-term destabilizing effects in the country.

Once again, as in the case of forced eradication, such resentment and new alienation from the Colombian state are already well under way among *cocalero* families who had been promised payments and alternative livelihoods under the framework agreements they signed, but who did not receive the payments and/or did not see alternative livelihoods materialize. In only very few, if any, areas of Colombia, did the promised alternative livelihoods materialize in the unrealistically-short two-year framework of payments. Rather, in large parts of the country, the payments, if they started at all, are coming to an end without even the robust *beginnings* of an alternative livelihood effort in place. Not surprisingly, across Colombia, disappointed *cocalero* families are reporting severe sense of betrayal and new alienation from the Colombian state.<sup>39</sup> Some local Colombian government officials tasked with persuading *cocaleros* to sign up onto the PNIS program also feel deep disappointment with the execution of the national policy and a shameful personal complicity as the government promised *cocaleros* benefits that never materialized, impoverishing them further in the process.<sup>40</sup> Only robust changes to the existing problematic policy, as outlined in the next section, can still reverse these troubling trends.

No doubt, voluntary eradication as currently conceptualized in Colombia requires a large amount of funding that must be sustained for many years. Still, the 15-year timeline assumed by the voluntary crop eradication efforts is unrealistically optimistic. For example, in Thailand (the country that has had the most successful poppy eradication in the world), where alternative livelihoods efforts were combined *eventually, but not to start with*, voluntary negotiated eradication, it took 30 years to eliminate the country's poppy cultivation.<sup>41</sup> It should be noted, however, that even at its peak, in the 1960s and 1970s, Thailand's cultivation was no more than 20,000 hectares, i.e., one tenth of Colombia's coca cultivation. Thus, both the Colombian government and the international community must acknowledge that significantly reducing coca cultivation in Colombia in a sustained way will take decades of well-designed efforts, not a mere 15 years. Funding must be continued well beyond that overly optimistic timeline.

Thailand provides a critical case for learning about how to best design voluntary eradication and alternative livelihoods efforts. At core, a viable design would reverse the sequence of eradication and bringing in development packages and would reject the zero-coca mentality. Instead, like in Thailand, a community would receive comprehensive development assistance *before* any eradication would be required. The necessary development package would include: 1) human capital development assistance, including access to improved schooling, health, and electricity services, and 2) economic-resource development, including access to titles, microcredit, infrastructure, development of processing facilities, value-added chains, and markets. Neither access to microcredit or titles would be predicated on the eradication of coca plots by the recipient family. The community would be told that after several years of such development efforts, likely at least five, eradication would eventually be undertaken in phases, gradually reducing illicit crop cultivation.

In the short term, that would mean that there would not be much reduction in coca cultivation in Colombia. But there would be far more effective peace-building efforts and law enforcement actions against nonstate actors. And in the long term, coca reduction in Colombia would be sustainable.

Alternatively, Colombia could also learn from the Bolivia model, and require that only a *portion* of a family's coca cultivation would need to be eradicated at first before legal development took off.<sup>42</sup> For example, the government of Colombia could announce that while the ultimate objective in any given area is zero coca eventually, a small area of a family's land cultivated with coca, such as a third or half an acre, will be eradicated only in the last phase of a multi-year effort. By enabling families to maintain sufficient economic income during the difficult and unproductive years of switching to alternative livelihoods and preventing their severe impoverishment during that phase, the program would strengthen the *cocaleros'* willingness and resolve to continue participating in the effort for as long as necessary to build adequate-income generating legal livelihoods. Such an approach would be similar to Bolivia's concept of *uno cato*, under which families are allowed to cultivate 1,600 square meters of their land with coca. Other variants of such an approach could require that only a portion of existing coca plots, such as 20%, be eradicated at first as a commitment measure.

The added advantage of both of the Thailand and Bolivia models is that they would reduce the level of funding required to support monthly payments after families are asked to eradicate all of their coca. That would allow for a larger number of families to receive benefits for a longer period of time.

## ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Ultimately, moving from limited payments and concepts such as crop substitution and eradication *toward comprehensive rural development* into which legal alternative livelihoods efforts are integrated will be critical for a successful counternarcotics policy in Colombia. Such a reconceptualization would certainly be consistent with the first chapter of the FARC peace accords, entitled "Comprehensive Rural Reform."<sup>43</sup> Operationalized as the Territorially Focused Development Plans (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial, PDET), this chapter is nonetheless being implemented very slowly, and drug policy — particularly eradication, but also PNIS — is mostly not well integrated well into rural reform efforts. Still, the Colombian government and the FARC have formally committed themselves to this vision.

Indeed, the term “crop substitution” was abandoned by the international counternarcotics community in the late 1980s as global recognition grew that merely chasing a replacement crop spells disaster for effectiveness of illicit crop reduction. Instead, all structural drivers of illicit crop cultivation must be addressed for counternarcotics efforts, including alternative livelihoods, to be effective. The issues include: access to land, requiring stable titles; access to microcredit; the multifaceted development of human capital; the development of productive assets; infrastructure; processing capacities, value-added chains, and markets; and technical assistance to farmers growing and processing new crops.<sup>44</sup>

Developing value-added chains and markets requires close work with private businesses. However, that does not mean that the state can merely relegate the task of rural development to them. Oftentimes in Colombia, industries (such as African oil palm cultivation<sup>45</sup>) have taken off in a non-labor-intensive way, without generating jobs for *cocaleros* or others and without enhancing human capital development. Worse yet, they have produced new forcible displacement and land theft. The state must be thickly present and diligently regulate private businesses as well as consistently engage with *cocaleros* and the poor communities.

Such efforts take many years. And they require, in addition to commitments by Colombia’s national government, the development of *local* state capacity and fostering local government inclusiveness and equity. Both municipal level capacity and the equity of governance at the local level remain critical deficiencies in Colombia.

Critically, a structural driver that will inevitably need to be significantly improved is security. In the context of insecurity, armed conflict or criminal violence, legal crops never thrive. Premature eradication *increases* insecurity and violence. Providing security means establishing permanent police and military presence to prevent and control intimidation, killings, and extortion by armed actors. Under ideal circumstances, such actors would not be able to operate in areas of ongoing rural development and would be cordoned off from those development zones. To get a start on this process, Colombia must manage to bring down the high level of killings of social leaders that has exploded since 2016. But the lack of adequate security should not be an excuse for failing to implement rural development. Instead, as detailed below, improving security as a necessary precondition and enhancing the chances that rural development will take place requires concentrating resources in a strategic way.

A crucial element in improving security is the expansion of access to justice and dispute resolution services, such as through the establishment of permanent or mobile court houses (like Colombia’s own *casas de justicia* that were at one point rolled out on a limited scale) and community dispute resolution structures. In Colombia, such dispute resolution mechanisms are frequently lacking, particularly in areas vacated by the FARC. In many areas the FARC had previously controlled, the group suppressed local criminality and was the sole provider of justice and dispute resolution mechanisms, however, imperfect. After the peace deal, many of those areas suffered a significant reduction in dispute resolution and justice mechanisms and a rise of street criminality as well as organized crime. Even in more permissive environments in Colombia, access to justice and formal legal processes is limited. A nationally representative household survey in 2018 revealed that resolving legal problems took on average a lengthy 14.7 months, with 40% of the surveyed experiencing some hardship as a result of their legal problem.<sup>46</sup> In rural areas distant from municipal and provincial capitals, the difficulties

in accessing justice and dispute resolution mechanisms are even greater. The lack of access to formal credible justice processes which are neither corrupt nor lengthy, and the absence of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, mean that rural populations will not be able to effectively launch legal rural development. They may be even forced to avail themselves of the dispute resolution systems provided by violent nonstate actors. Such dependence on violent actors of course undermines state-building.

There are other important elements of an effective rural development approach that facilitates the reduction of illicit crop cultivation. First, many parts of Colombia are simply too remote to make legal crops viable. As elsewhere in the world, alternative livelihood efforts must thus focus *beyond* the farm, and enhance off-farm income and job generation.<sup>47</sup> This in turn requires that Colombia adopt a taxation system that minimizes fallow land speculation and capital-intensive economic growth and maximizes job creation and labor-intensive growth.<sup>48</sup> Many *cocaleros* may not be able to move to cities and take advantage of off-farm income. But current farmers of legal crops, such as those closer to cities and roads, may be able to move to urban centers, thus vacating space in the legal agriculture zones for current *cocaleros*. Again, Thailand's experience is instructive. There the job-generating labor-intensive growth in the 1980s and 1990s not only made Thailand one of the East Asian "tigers" (i.e., countries of high economic growth and extensive poverty reduction), but also critically enabled the reduction of illicit crop cultivation. That growth allowed many rural Thai to move to cities and work in factories, vacating opportunities in legal agriculture for poppy farmers transitioning to licit crops.<sup>49</sup>

A focus on job creation in Colombia furthermore needs to prioritize the creation of jobs for ex-FARC members. In the absence of legal employment opportunities, many will be forced back to armed conflict or criminality. A 2017 survey of demobilizing FARC fighters found that at least 60 percent of them wanted to become farmers.<sup>50</sup> Allocating land to them is essential for generating legal livelihoods in the agricultural sectors. But for political legitimacy and sustainability reasons, job support for ex-FARC must be carefully balanced and matched with job and economic support for surrounding communities, a key principle of effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-fighters.<sup>51</sup>

In Thailand, both elements were essential: a well-designed and sequenced comprehensive rural development effort centering on human-capital and economic-resource development and overall significant economic growth in the country that generate vast job creation. And, wisely and critically, eradication in Thailand was delayed for years (usually between five and 10), until legal productive economic activity took root. But even then, eradication was only rolled out in phases, and poppy-cultivating families did not have all of their crops destroyed at once. Instead, eradication was negotiated between the state and the farmers and portions of a family's poppy fields were eradicated each year.

## A SPECIAL CHALLENGE FOR COUNTERNARCOTICS EFFORTS IN COLOMBIA: PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY

All counternarcotics efforts and methods in Colombia must recognize the special challenge of protecting Colombia's extraordinary and unique biodiversity and preserving its enormous natural heritage. Neither coca cultivation nor counternarcotics efforts and legal development should jeopardize these assets.

Harmonizing counternarcotics efforts and economic development with biodiversity preservation requires far more than avoiding aerial spraying in national parks and other protected areas. Colombia needs to avoid the Myanmar outcome, where significant poppy cultivation suppression in the 1990s and early 2000s resulted in massive illegal logging, deforestation, poaching, and wildlife trafficking and massive environmental damage. Poppy farmers without ability to cultivate illicit crops and lacking legal livelihoods were forced to switch *en masse* to these illicit economies, with the connivance of Chinese business and Myanmar's junta.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, Colombia is on the cusp of a major wave of poaching and wildlife trafficking already emergent there and hitting other parts of Latin America, such as Peru and Brazil.<sup>53</sup> With the increasing presence of Chinese and East Asian companies, new poaching and establishment of trafficking networks inevitably follow, as seen elsewhere in Asia and Africa. Already, poaching of jaguars, reptiles and amphibians, and birds is reaching levels previously unseen in Latin America as a result of increasing Asian demand for Latin American wildlife and the establishment of new illegal supply chains.<sup>54</sup> *Cocaleros* who had seen their crops forcibly destroyed or who were angry that promised legal livelihoods did not materialize could easily be recruited as cogs in international wildlife trafficking.

Boosting ecotourism for the affected areas is useful, but only if the ecotourism is designed in ways that provide substantial income and jobs to poor local communities, instead of transferring 90% of profits to large national and international ecotourism lodges and companies (the predominant situation around the world).<sup>55</sup> Multifaceted and sustained assistance will need to be provided to communities to encourage the locals to become the owners of lodges and businesses themselves as well as to be knowledgeable naturalists and guides. Based on lessons from southern Africa, national and international ecotourism businesses must also be required to return a substantial portion of income to local communities.

In Colombia, the problem of adequate income and job generation through ecotourism will be compounded if eradication in some areas pushes new waves of internally displaced into protected and environmentally-sensitive areas.<sup>56</sup> Fostering local handicraft production is equally limited in how much income for a family and how many jobs it can generate, almost never being a viable legal alternative livelihood sufficient to discourage illegal logging, encroachment, poaching, and illicit crop cultivation. It cannot be counted on to generate substantial income for a family, let alone a community, even in the most renowned areas with highest tourist flows, such as Tayrona National Park or Caño Cristales.

Hiring *cocaleros* and other local residents as park guards and guides, as previously attempted under the *Guardabosque* (park ranger) program, makes good sense. But inevitably, the number of jobs will be much smaller than the number of *cocaleros* and impoverished residents in those areas.

Like all legal livelihood efforts, ecotourism development efforts must also critically focus on the development of a stable supply of tourists, including foreign tourists. Besides international advertising efforts, this requires robust and sustained engagement with large ecotourism companies. Colombia's biodiversity makes it uniquely competitive in the development of birdwatching ecotourism, a globally burgeoning and profitable venture.<sup>57</sup> Although Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and Brazil are equally rich in avian fauna, they have long been global birdwatching destinations. Colombia has a big advantage in the novelty it can offer. Promoting birdwatching ecotourism has the further benefit of bringing tourists to areas of Colombia that would otherwise not receive tourists.

It is equally important to recognize, however, that parts of Colombia will not be able to develop viable, sustained, and steady ecotourism in some important biodiversity areas. To discourage local communities from participating in illicit economies, the government of Colombia should consider direct conditional financial transfers for not poaching and logging in these situations.<sup>58</sup> Generating sustained support from international donors for such financial transfers would increase their effectiveness.

## **KEY FOR SUCCESS: CONCENTRATION OF RESOURCES AND GRADUAL EXPANSION OF ZONES OF STATE INTERVENTION**

Concentrating resources in areas selected for government intervention is critical for success of all the outlined policy options, and particularly for voluntary eradication and alternative livelihoods / rural development. To some extent, successive Colombian governments have attempted to concentrate resources, though often proved unable to effectively carry out the policy efforts. In order to concentrate resources, the Santos and Duque administrations chose to focus the PDETs on 170 out of Colombia's 1,100 municipalities. Recently, the Duque administration also selected some 9% of Colombia's territory — areas of intense conflict, drugs, and illegal economies — for a new state intervention program known as Zonas Futuro (Zones of the Future).

But concentrating resources is also difficult politically. Particularly in electoral democracies, policymakers often feel compelled to deliver at least some, however limited, state security and economic assistance to most electoral units to maximize votes, instead of concentrating resources.<sup>59</sup> Equity and inclusiveness — historically fundamentally lacking in Colombia — also encourage spreading resources, despite negative implications for policy effectiveness.

Yet spreading scarce security and political resources across wide areas means that transformative effects will be hard to achieve anywhere. Previous iterations of Colombia's state-building and efforts at expanding state presence thus collapsed into unsatisfactory limited handouts.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately that has also been the fate of efforts to concentrate resources, such as the Consolidation Plan during the Uribe administration. Various iterations of the Consolidation Plan specified a limited set of strategic zones, but Colombian policymakers struggled to settle how many strategic zones there should be and where they should be located. With various communities and stakeholders seeking to get their area of interest included and those whose areas were not selected resentful, the number kept oscillating, from 12 to nine to 17. Although relatively large in geographic scope, those selected areas were still small in comparison with the areas of the country affected by insecurity and illegality but left without state intervention. Even so, the resource demands of the selected strategic areas were so large that the Colombian state struggled to maintain the political will for their robust development as other communities and stakeholders clamored for resources. Colombia's line ministries also often proved obstacles to the Consolidation Plan, rather than effective and committed implementors of the state-building effort. Not just lacking in capacity, they were often captured by vested interests. Within three years or so, even the Uribe administration that had launched the Plan lost the wherewithal to resource it properly and continue expending political capital to maintain its selectivity and focus. Instead of battling line ministries and to placate other areas and stakeholders demanding resources,

implementing officials distributed isolated and limited handouts and the initiative ran out of steam. In virtually none of the selected strategic zones were transformative outcomes achieved. Bringing in one or two police officers per municipality does not amount to an effective security apparatus; nor does putting a bridge or one electric generator into a village constitute adequate transformative rural development.<sup>61</sup> With the Santos administration prioritizing negotiating with the FARC, the momentum was completely lost and implementation withered — the promised resources did not materialize even in flagship areas such as Macarena.<sup>62</sup>

Given the immense size and scope of both the drug cultivation challenge in Colombia and areas of insecurity and underdevelopment, Colombia's policy interventions will only become more effective if resources are indeed concentrated in selected zones, well-resourced, and sustained for many years, across administrations. Such strategic zones can — and should — be geared to become models of how development will eventually be brought to other parts of Colombia. Resurrecting strong policy efforts in Macarena, the prime exemplar of the Consolidation Plan, and one where many conditions are indeed auspicious, would be a good starting point.

Indeed, a serious and *sustained* commitment by successive governments in Colombia to gradually expand and connect the zones of intervention to encompass all of Colombia is critical for obtaining legitimacy and sustainability of programs to concentrate resources. That means that Colombia would need to find the strategic wherewithal to overcome the legacy of successive Colombian governments launching programs without seeing them through and subsequent governments defunding and discontinuing them without a robust evaluation of policy mistakes and effectiveness. Beyond the Consolidation Plan, that has been the unfortunate fate of other top government priority state-building efforts, such as the National Rehabilitation Plan (Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación) of the 1980s and 1990s and Plan Victoria, which the Santos administration launched in 2017.

It makes good sense to prioritize areas with auspicious conditions, such as those relatively close to established commercial markets where infrastructure can be extended relatively easily and those where security is good or relatively rapidly achievable through further deployments, rather than areas of greatest insecurity or most intense coca cultivation. Yet the latter approach is currently envisioned under the Duque administration's Zonas Futuro program. These areas will be the most difficult to reform. Any positive demonstration effects will be long delayed and vast amount of resources will be needed for limited progress, depriving other areas of state focus and intervention.

Selecting easy areas first, such as those close to roads and cities, allows for far more rapid demonstration effects and their gradual expansion. Selecting the intervention zones to maximize connections and gradual connectivity among them will also enhance the capacity to more swiftly generate large areas of effective and accountable state presence. Connectivity amplifies positive outcomes.

The selection of initial areas of intervention also needs to be based on how readily the zones can be linked to each other. Countrywide transformation is elusive and progress in each zone limited if selected zones of intervention remain isolated islands. Such a configuration also means that insecurity can constantly leak into the strategic zones from nearby non-intervention corridors and sectors. However, when the zones become connected, a large contiguous area of progress is created. Only the boundaries of each

of the contiguous zones would then require enhanced state presence while progress in the core becomes self-sustainable. That liberates many law enforcement and civilian officials and other resources to be deployed to new strategic zones.

Inevitably, given that Colombia is twice the size of France and the size of underdeveloped areas of marginalization, violence, and illegality very extensive, expanding the areas of intervention and progress will take time. Illicit crops and other illegality will persist outside of the strategic zones of state intervention for years to come. However, there is no escaping from this problem under other policy designs either. Forced eradication will not produce sustainable reduction in drug production and other illegal economies: they will continue popping up in the areas subjected to forced eradication and be displaced elsewhere, while violence, conflict, resentment, and alienation of local populations intensify.

Unfortunately, the current designs of PNIS and PDETs create very high and unrealistic expectations about the speed and scope of rural development and state-building delivery. The Colombian state is unlikely to meet successfully either effort successfully without adopting sequential concentration of resources. Already, disappointment and frustration are rising.<sup>63</sup> Communities across the country are demanding and expect state intervention, but the scarcity of resources for most PNIS and PDETs will affect many facets of state intervention — from the inadequate thickness of law enforcement presence and paucity of legal dispute resolution mechanisms to the lack of financial resources. This is a prescription for continual souring by local communities on the state.

Realistically, it will not be feasible to develop substantial portions of Colombia for a long time. Basic equity and political sustainability demand that such areas should experience only very *limited* forced eradication. Unless global drug markets become radically altered, such as by the vast majority of global users developing a taste for synthetic drugs instead of cocaine,<sup>64</sup> coca will thrive in these peripheral areas of Colombia for decades to come.

The Duque government has recognized the need to concentrate resources — at least, to some extent, with Zonas Future targeted in five selected zones. However, these zones — Macarena in the department of Meta; the Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander; a part of Nariño; a part of Antioquia; and a region that spans part of the departments of Caquetá and Guaviare — intentionally include some very difficult areas. The overarching selection criterion is a combination of high insecurity and poverty and intense illicit economies, so these are by definition very hard cases. A third criterion is environmental significance — i.e., the national parks of Macarena, Catatumbo Barí, Sanquianga, Nudo de Paramillo, and Chiribiquete. The selected zones are far from each other, spanning the far reaches of Colombia, preventing the possibility of achieving connectivity and synergistic effects. Furthermore, it is not yet clear what the specific design for implementation of the program will look like, how it will be made congruent or different from the PDET program or the Consolidation Plan, and how well or poorly resourced with law enforcement, finances, and technical civilian assistance it will be.

## CREATION OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AND RE-EMPHASIS ON INTERDICTION

Building international support for an effective and sustainable counternarcotics policy congruent with peace and state-building in Colombia — namely, alternative livelihood efforts integrated into rural development — will require a robust determined effort, particularly involving the United States. It is equally necessary to address the objections of Colombia's political right, such as factions led by former President Álvaro Uribe, that praise forced eradication and disparage the 2016 peace accords.

Building such political support can be framed around exposing the ineffectiveness of forced eradication and its counterproductive outcome of critically undermining state-building. The historical record shows that the presence of an effective state that enjoys authority and the cessation of violent conflict are necessary prerequisites for effective counternarcotics policies.

Persuading the United States to correct its misguided insistence on forced eradication in Colombia may not be easy. But breaking with the ineffective approach is essential in order for Colombia to achieve sustainable reduction in drug crop cultivation. The Trump administration has placed Colombia under significant pressure to intensify eradication. Similar pressure for eradication had also started building up already in the later years of the Obama administration. However, despite President Trump's 2017 threat to decertify Colombia for not complying with U.S. counternarcotics objectives, many in the U.S. government, including officials of the U.S. Department of State, do not support such a measure, and Washington has not resorted to such a drastic step through 2019. Colombia enjoys significant bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress, and neither party wants to see Colombia decertified. Thus, even in the face of the Trump administration's stance, Colombia has leeway and opportunities in terms of drug policy. Though Colombia has committed itself under U.S. pressure to reducing coca cultivation by 50% by 2023, Bogotá can be frank that such objectives are not realistic and can emphasize that only comprehensive rural development will in fact sustainably accomplish that goal, even if at a slower pace.

Colombia can also point out that the United States wisely learned in Afghanistan how counterproductive forced eradication is for counterinsurgency and state-building efforts: The Obama administration defunded forced eradication there and did not insist on it, and the Trump administration has maintained that policy.<sup>65</sup> Instead, both administrations have wisely prioritized targeted interdiction.

A counternarcotics strategy focused on long-term comprehensive alternative livelihoods development and suspension of eradication, particularly forced eradication, will enjoy broad support among European countries. Western European countries have not conditioned their support on the equivalent of zero-coca policies and do not fund eradication. In their international counternarcotics policies, regarding Southeast Asia as well as Latin America, countries such as Germany have emphasized the Thailand model.<sup>66</sup> International bodies such as the International Narcotics Control Board or the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have not countered such sequencing. In fact, at various times, such as in Myanmar, UNODC has warned of the risks and lack of sustainability of extensive forced eradication without alternative livelihoods already in place.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, forced eradication and its resultant undermining of state- and peace-building efforts in Colombia will weaken Europe's commitment to the country.

To build support in the United States for policies of voluntary eradication, deemphasized forced eradication, and long-term alternative livelihoods development in Colombia, advocates can highlight that the recent rise of overdose and death related to cocaine use in the United States is underpinned by the increasing mixing of the synthetic opioid fentanyl into cocaine.<sup>68</sup> Fentanyl is increasingly laced into cocaine in the same way that it is laced into heroin and even methamphetamines. The solution to halting these overdoses thus lies not in significant coca destruction in Colombia but in reducing the flow of fentanyl to the United States. Most of the fentanyl destined for the United States originates in China, and none of it originates in Colombia. Given the severity of the current U.S. drug epidemic, the United States must prioritize addressing fentanyl.

To further reduce external pressure for counterproductive eradication, Colombia can re-emphasize and prioritize the role of interdiction in reducing the flow of cocaine to the United States and other countries, a policy that was effective in the 2000s.<sup>69</sup> Well-designed interdiction enhances stabilization policies in Colombia in several ways: it significantly reduces the destabilizing effects of forced eradication, and in targeting drug trafficking groups, it targets actors who kill civil society leaders and increase insecurity. Overall, interdiction should be conducted so as to reduce the power of criminal groups to perpetrate homicides, to coerce and intimidate citizens and subfederal-level government officials, and to corrupt central government officials.

Colombia needs also to focus on preventing Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) from intensifying their war in Colombia. The war between the two cartels has spread from Mexico to Central America and Colombia as the two cartels battle over cocaine supply and the allegiance of local Colombian traffickers and criminal gangs.<sup>70</sup> The war had led to Colombian criminal groups switching allegiances between the two Mexican cartels. Colombian criminal groups in turn fight among each other to determine who will control smuggling corridors and production territory, and where and whether they will be aligned with Sinaloa or the CJNG.<sup>71</sup> The war among the two Mexican cartels has also resulted in factionalization and infighting among Colombian trafficking groups, further compounding instability in Colombia's rural and urban spaces.

A well-designed interdiction strategy that seeks to dismantle Sinaloa and CJNG operations and networks in Colombia can calm the situation down, reduce homicides, and deliver important benefits from collaboration with the United States. A less violent and chaotic criminal market in Colombia could help the Colombian government focus on the threat from the ELN. However, in order to achieve those results, the government of Colombia will need to assess in advance how a move against either the Sinaloa Cartel or the CJNG will affect local infighting in each locale and how to preposition law enforcement and military forces to deter infighting among Colombian criminal groups and *bandas criminales*. This requires improving both tactical and strategic intelligence.

To further assist with peace building, the government of Colombia can request that the United States removes the FARC political party from its Foreign Terrorist Organization list. Such a removal would allow the United States to provide direct assistance to demobilized FARC ex-combatants, assisting in their reintegration into Colombian society and preventing their return to the military battlefield or criminality.<sup>72</sup>

The more violent conflict in Colombia is reduced, the more effective the country's drug policy can be.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** is a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution. She is an expert on international and internal conflicts as well as nontraditional security threats, including insurgency, terrorism, organized crime, urban violence, and illicit economies. Her fieldwork and research have covered, among others, Afghanistan, South Asia, Burma, Indonesia, the Andean region, Mexico, Morocco, Somalia, and East and West Africa. Felbab-Brown is the author of five books: *Narco Noir: Mexico's Cartels, Cops, and Corruption* (Brookings, forthcoming in 2020); *The Extinction Market: Wildlife Trafficking and How to Counter It* (Hurst-Oxford, 2017); *Militants, Criminals, and Warlords: The Challenge of Local Governance in an Age of Disorder* (Brookings, 2017; co-authored with Shadi Hamid and Harold Trinkunas); *Aspiration and Ambivalence: Strategies and Realities of Counterinsurgency and State-Building in Afghanistan* (Brookings, 2013); and *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Brookings, 2010) as well as numerous academic and policy articles, reports, op-eds, and blogs. A frequent commentator in U.S. and international media, Felbab-Brown regularly provides U.S. congressional testimony on these issues. She has also been the recipient of numerous awards in recognition of her scholarly and policy contributions. Felbab-Brown received her Ph.D. in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and her B.A. in government from Harvard University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Colombia for its support for preparation of this policy paper. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their most helpful suggestions. Many thanks go also to Bradley Porter and Miriam Frost for their research assistance. Ted Reinert edited this paper, and Rachel Slattery performed layout.

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