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## PLAN COLOMBIA

### TOWARDS NEW US STATE BUILDING POLICY

**ABSTRACT** The article discusses the evolution of US policy toward the Colombian crisis. The policy and Plan Colombia are studied in the context of US nation building and state building policy. The article shows whether Plan Colombia referred to previous experiences of US nation or state building policy and how that policy evolved. The case study of Colombia allows for a general reflection on the evolution of US policy after the Cold War.

**Keywords:** Colombia, war on drugs, state building, United States, US foreign policy

## INTRODUCTION

Being one of the most significant Latin American countries, Colombia has always played an important role in US foreign policy towards Latin America. Its role in international relations has been determined by various factors in modern history. The country's geographical position determined its political significance for the United States. The proximity of Caribbean islands and the Panama Canal made Colombian stability one of the priorities of US policy in the region. The Cold War reality significantly influenced not only Colombian politics but also US-Colombian relations. Paradoxically, the country that was considered one of relatively stable and most promising in Latin America in the post-World War II period, became one of the challenges for the United States foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.

Colombia has shared many features of the Spanish heritage with other Latin American nations but has also been unique in many important respects. It stood out in Latin America for its democratic government and developed economy. Economic growth has not been high but stable in post-World War II period. As one of few Latin American nations, Colombia avoided debt crisis in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

Although initially, US policy that aimed to deprive Colombia of Panama (1903) seemed not to be promising for future relations between the two countries, US-Colombian relations remained relatively friendly in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Colombia has remained one of the crucial subjects of US policy on Latin America in the Cold War era. Its geographical position determined geopolitical role in US foreign policy. Economic role of Colombia in US policy has been strongly associated with security issues. A threat that US foreign trade and interests in the Panama Canal might be posed by destabilization in Colombia, has constantly been a source of concern for the United States.

The final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a period of growing involvement of the United States in Colombia in an obvious consequence of the US 'war on drugs' – a counter-narcotics policy continued by the US administrations since the presidency of Richard M. Nixon. The significant growth of US engagement in this country since the 1990s, which included more or less coherent activity not only to fight the drug trade but also to strengthen Colombian state, has not been the first policy directed to strengthen Colombian state. The United States has been involved in Colombia in the 1960s when John F. Kennedy administration adopted an unprecedentedly ambitious plan of reforms: Alliance for Progress. Kennedy policy towards Latin America is an example of 'nation building' policy: comprehensive program of political, social and economic reforms, which his administration undertook also in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.L. Montaña, A.G. Durán, "The Hidden Costs of Peace in Colombia," in A. Solimano (ed.), *Colombia: Essays of Peace, Conflict and Development*, Washington 2000, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> M.E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation Building' in the Kennedy Era*, Chapel Hill 2000.

The very definition of 'nation building' is subject to scholarly debates. There is a significant leeway in interpretation of this term by scholars. It is necessary to emphasize that the term is used here to describe activity of a foreign power (in this case, the United States) to build a modern state institution in a country where its basic roles are not fulfilled. This article does not concern, however, the process of nation building understood as 'birth of nation.' Generally, nation building focused not only on reforming states and building state institutions, but also on specific social engineering. Since the United States aimed to democratize Latin America, a program of this kind required not only specific institutional reforms but also social and often economic reconstruction.<sup>3</sup>

This article discusses the evolution of the US policy towards Colombia in light of US efforts to reconstruct and strengthen a state that is in the US sphere of influence. The research of US nation building (or state building) policy in Latin America proves that ambitious policy of the Cold War era influenced by social sciences (modernization theory) has been replaced by more pragmatic attitude after 1990. The United States current aims are limited and focused on stabilization. The Colombia case also exemplifies the redefinition of US national security agenda, since the threat of revolution in Latin America has been replaced by danger of drug trade and migration that threaten the United States from that region. The United States could not and has not abandon its role in the Western Hemisphere and US involvement in Colombia demonstrates what instruments dominate in US policy. Our assumption is that US nation/state building policy is currently closer to stabilization policy than social engineering as it was in the 1960s. In a study of the evolution of US policy, historical and comparative perspectives seem most appropriate. The policy towards Colombia must be considered in the broader context of US foreign policy in the post-Cold War period.

## THE EVOLUTION OF US NATION BUILDING POLICY IN COLOMBIA

The first phase of 'nation building' policy adopted by US administration took place in the 1960s. US policy towards Colombia was then a part of a broader, ambitious project that John F. Kennedy administration designed particularly for Latin America. Alliance for Progress, which was developed by Kennedy and his advisors, was to be an answer to a specter of revolution that Latin America faced after the victory of July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement in Cuba in 1959. The plan was radical and impaired interests not only of Latin American autocrats but also social elites in the region. Kennedy believed it was necessary. *Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable*, the President stated.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Idem, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present*, Ithaca 2011; T.R. Seitz, *The Evolving Role of Nation-Building in US Foreign Policy*, Manchester 2013; J. Dobbins et al. (eds), *America's Role in Nation-Building from Germany to Iraq*, Santa Monica 2003.

<sup>4</sup> J.F. Kennedy, *Address on the first Anniversary of the Alliance for Progress*, 13 March 1962, The American Presidency Project, at <https://www.presidency.ucs.edu/node/236988>.

Alliance for Progress was a revolutionary project in itself, however, its aim was to contain revolution thanks to political and economic reforms in Latin America. Alliance for Progress was a liberal idea that remained under tremendous influence of modernization theory.<sup>5</sup> Liberal 'action intellectuals,' who played an important role in Kennedy team, believed that a combined economic and political reform of Latin American countries could accelerate a process of accomplishing a stage of modernity. The whole concept was largely based on a conviction that Latin America achieved the level of 'middle-class revolution.' Unfulfilled expectations of Latin American societies entered a new stage when they should be addressed by proper liberal program of development. One of Kennedy advisors on foreign affairs, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., claimed that the US was able to channel the revolutionary potential in Latin America in the right direction. Like others in Kennedy administration, he was well aware that revolutionary tension in Latin America was a consequence of radical inequality, poverty, and violence. Therefore, he welcomed a process that he identified as a growth of middle class; a process that, in his opinion, could lead to democratization of Latin American states and creation (or birth) of civil societies.<sup>6</sup> Such a process, however, required US support, both conceptual and financial. American liberals that joined Kennedy administration or influenced US foreign policy on Latin America in the 1960s. took responsibility for implementing reforms.<sup>7</sup>

Assuming that U.S. administrations pursued policies that aimed to (re)construct Colombian state in two particular periods (1960s and 1990s and later), it is worth to consider the nature of a policy initiated by President Bill Clinton under the banner 'Plan Colombia' and continued by the successive administration. The policy of 'nation building' or 'state building' that has been addressed to Colombia since 2000 represents new, post-Cold War concept of 'state building' policy, developed not only in a different international situation but also reflecting new ideological determinants of US foreign policy. The term 'state building' is used intentionally here instead of 'nation building' since U.S. policy after the Cold War evolved in a direction of different aims. It is not based on a grand social theory and, at least in some aspects, has more limited and pragmatic aims. US policy in the 1990s, devoid of pressure of a specter of revolution, has abandoned attempts to breed another grand strategy for Latin America.<sup>8</sup>

The end of the Cold War meant a radical change of international relations. World politics entered a period called 'unipolar moment.' This term, popularized by Charles

<sup>5</sup> M.E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology...*, pp. 21-68.

<sup>6</sup> Report to the President on Latin American Mission February 12-March 3, 1961, in E.C. Keefer, H.D. Schwar, W.T. Fain (eds), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, vol. 12: *American Republics*, Washington 1996, pp. 11-18.

<sup>7</sup> M.E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology...*; J.F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America*, New York-London 2007.

<sup>8</sup> See: M.T. Berger, "From Nation-Building to State-Building: The Geopolitics of Development, the Nation-State System and the Changing Global Order," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2006), pp. 5-25; A. Oberda-Monkiewicz, *Polityka USA wobec Ameryki Łacińskiej po zimnej wojnie*, Warszawa 2009.

Krauthammer in 1990, described a situation when the United States was the only, unchallenged superpower.<sup>9</sup> Another important feature of world politics after the Cold War was an accelerating democratization process in many regions. Prevalence of liberal democracy seemed to be a dominating tendency in the post-Cold War world. This tendency affected also Latin America, where a process of transformation of nondemocratic regimes into democratic systems had been going on since the end of the 1970s. Paradoxically, the process of democratization that characterized the post-Cold War world entered a stagnation in Latin America after 1992.<sup>10</sup>

In the new situation, the 'unchallenged' American superpower became less preoccupied with possible threats to US national security in Latin America, at least in the early period of the 1990s. The communist threat that dominated US foreign policy towards Latin American countries ceased to exist, however, the US assessment of the political situation in Latin America was not completely optimistic. Democracies of the region were vulnerable, especially in view of weak institutions and deficiencies of political culture. The Soviet Union weakened in the late 1980s and finally imploded, losing ability to operate in Latin America. Nonetheless, the United States faced new challenges for Latin American stability and its own interests in the region and US national security. US policymakers were preoccupied with the growing challenge of drug production and trafficking from Latin America to the United States as well as migration from Latin America.<sup>11</sup> As Gaddis Smith aptly pointed out, *In short, there was no longer even a perception of external threat but the United States had no ground for celebration.*<sup>12</sup>

One of the reasons for concern in Washington was the deteriorating situation in Colombia. The production and export of drugs was a matter of primary concern for U.S. administrations that faced an increasing drug problem at home. Another challenge was the growth of criminal organizations (cartels) that might threaten the foundations of the Colombian state. US policymakers apprehended this danger relatively early.

The state in Colombia has never been a strong institution able to have control over the country's territory. Historically, Latin American states were repressive but usually unable to fulfill typical functions of a state: deliver public services, secure effective legal system and judiciary.<sup>13</sup> What differed Colombia from many Latin American states was that this country had not experienced long-lasting dictatorships or military interventions in its political life. Colombia was a democracy, however, its system did not allow to channel social needs; it was an oligarchic system with two domineering parties. One

<sup>9</sup> C. Krauthammer, "Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 1 (1991), pp. 23-33.

<sup>10</sup> S. Mainwaring, A. Pérez-Niñán, "Latin American Democratization since 1978," in F. Hagopian, S. Mainwaring (eds), *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*, New York 2005, pp. 14-59.

<sup>11</sup> A.F. Lowenthal, *Partners in Conflict: The United States and Latin America in the 1990s*, Baltimore-London 1990, pp. 51-69; L. Schoultz, *In Their Own Best Interest: A History of U.S. Effort to Improve Latin Americans*, Cambridge 2018, pp. 224-225.

<sup>12</sup> G. Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993*, New York 1993, s. 212.

<sup>13</sup> D.M. Brinks, S. Levitsky, M.V. Murillo (eds), *The Politics of Institutional Weakness in Latin America*, Cambridge 2020.

of the causes of the state weakness in Colombia was rooted in the geography of the country. Colombian territory is large (439,736 sq. miles) and divided by the Cordillera, which makes communication between parts of the country difficult. Due to this, the central government was not able to control the whole territory of Colombia effectively when the insurgency movement began to develop.<sup>14</sup>

Geography of the country not only limited the central government role but also contributed to perpetuating political divisions in Colombia. Colombian political life was determined by the division between Conservative and Liberal party. A similar division was also present in Mexico where it had a more radical character. The ideological differences in Colombia were not so fundamental, both Liberals and Conservatives were rather moderate.<sup>15</sup> The differences concerned mainly the pace of the process of decolonization, not its direction. The country has experienced a period of internal political turmoil in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Political radicalism within main political parties played more important role after World War II, when a populist movement appeared (or found its place) in Liberal Party. The assassination of Eliecer Gaitan, a leader of populist wing in Liberal party, started a long period of Colombian *violencia*. Subsequent decades were marked by violence in politics that undermined the weak state and brought Colombia to the brink of a 'fragile state,' if not a failed state.<sup>16</sup> The political rift between Conservatives and Liberals seemed very deep, but their ability to reconcile in the 1950s and later proved that the political elite had never been so divided as society itself<sup>17</sup>.

*La violencia* initiated a development of guerrilla organizations. Over time, military organizations of radical left became a vital threat to the Colombian state. FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) undermined the stability of the country and took control over vast territories. Insurgents were also involved in developing drug trade, which they used for financing the guerrilla. This naturally deepened the crisis of the state that faced growing militant narco-organizations.<sup>18</sup> The military organization of anti-revolutionary, right-wing sector of Colombian society (private armed groups organized eventually as AUC, that is, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) cooperated with the government and army in war

<sup>14</sup> J. Hartlyn, J. Dugas, "Colombia: The Politics of Violence and Democratic Transformation," in L. Diamond et al. (eds), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, Boulder 1999, pp. 249-253, 256-260.

<sup>15</sup> S. Mazucca, *Latecomer State Formation: Political Geography and Capacity Failure in Latin America*, New Haven-London 2021, p. 307 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Whether Colombia can be defined as a fragile state is a matter of debate. Even if one assumes that a long tradition of democratic government and a relatively stable market economy exclude Colombia from the group of fragile states, the inability of the central government to control the whole territory of the country does not allow to recognize Colombia as fitting the definition of a stable state. See: S. Elhawary, "Security for Whom? Stabilization and Civilian Protection in Colombia," *Disasters*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2010), p. 389.

<sup>17</sup> R. Stemplowski (ed.), *Dzieje Ameryki Łacińskiej. Od schyłku epoki kolonialnej do czasów współczesnych*, vol. 3: 1930-1975/1980, Warszawa 1983, p. 218.

<sup>18</sup> J. Hartlyn, J. Dugas, "Colombia: The Politics of Violence..." pp. 276-287.

against the guerilla, however, their very nature and existence eroded the already fragile state. Crimes committed by paramilitaries (AUC) fueled the Colombian internal conflict and further worsened the condition of civil rights and deepened disorder in Colombia.<sup>19</sup>

The United States looked at the Colombian problem of narco-business with growing concern. Colombia experienced a significant growth of drug production controlled by criminal organizations. Cartels of Medellin and Cali were able to remove competing organizations and to take full control over drug production and export operations. In the 1970s, the cartels and the revolutionary movement became so powerful that they threatened the Colombian state. Problems that undermined stability in Colombia began long before the end of the Cold War (*violencia*) or intensified particularly in the 1980s (drugs). Both affected the situation in Colombia in the last decade of the Cold War and later. Due to this, Colombian democracy could not be considered a system that fit the standards of the modern democratic state. It has become a 'besieged democracy' or a democracy 'under assault.'<sup>20</sup>

The threat was correctly diagnosed by President Julio César Turbay (1978-1982), who took steps to contain the process of the decomposition of the state. Turbay could count on the US significant engagement in actions against organized crime and revolutionary organizations. The United States, interested in an effective reduction of drug export from Colombia, was ready to support Colombia. The Reagan administration considered narcotics trafficking in Latin America a danger for democracy. Leaving aside the question whether democratic system was always an ultimate priority in Reagan administration policy on Latin America, such an assumption was not only correct but also proved a good judgement of US policymakers. National Security Decision Directive no 221 of 1986 stated that *Of primary concern are those nations with a flourishing narcotics industry, where the combination of international criminal trafficking organizations, rural insurgents and urban terrorists can undermine the stability of local government.* Although the Directive used general terms, it focused on threats that affected particularly Colombia. It stated that trafficking organizations were able to influence public opinion by controlling media, impeding government cooperation with the United States in counter-narcotics operations. The Directive indicated also that *some insurgent groups finance their activities through taxing drug activities, providing protection to local criminal traffickers, or growing their own drug crops.* The diagnosis of major security problems incited by narcotics in Latin America closely coincided with situation in Colombia. The Directive also indicated desirable US policy towards this problem. Since drug trade threatened US national security by *potentially destabilizing democratic allies*, the United States should contain drug production and export of narcotics through cooperation with the local governments, limiting the ability of

<sup>19</sup> J. Lindsey-Poland, *Plan Colombia: U.S. Ally Atrocities and Community Activism*, Durnham-London 2018, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> A.M. Bejarano, E. Pizarro, "From 'Restricted' to 'Besieged': The Changing Nature of the Limits to Democracy in Colombia," in F. Hagopian, S. Mainwaring (eds), *The Third Wave of Democratization...*, p. 235.

insurgent groups to gain profits from this activity and *strengthen the ability of individual governments to confront and defeat this threat*.<sup>21</sup> Although the suggested US activities concentrated on police and intelligence operations, the Directive clearly indicated that successful fighting drug trade would require an aid for individual governments (states).

The period of Ernesto Samper presidency (1994-1998) proved the growing role of Colombia in US anti-drug policy. Even if it was a time when the US was preoccupied with the Middle East, the problem of drug inflow to the USA also became burning. In the 1990s, a significant change took place in the structure of coca production in Latin America. The Colombian share in the coca production in the Andean region grew from 18% in 1991 to 67% in 1999.<sup>22</sup> This shift certainly influenced US policy towards this country but the situation was complicated by the very person of the Colombian president. Samper assumed the office in the atmosphere of a scandal. He was accused of having ties to the Cali cartel, which reportedly financed his electoral campaign. The United States was concerned (Americans were the first to receive information of the alleged ties) but the Clinton administration took a conciliatory stance. Such an accusation was strong enough to disqualify Samper as a US partner in the 'war on drugs' but Colombia was too important in US anti-drug policy and general policy in the region. The US could implement its anti-drug policy in Colombia because Samper could not ignore Washington's expectations and perhaps surprisingly to many, became a reliable partner of the USA in the policy of suppressing the production of coca and its export to the American market. Samper sought for legitimation in Washington, a privilege that Clinton administration was not inclined to grant him.<sup>23</sup> US-Colombian relations in this period showed ability of the USA to achieve its aims in spite of a bad climate of bilateral relations: Samper's presidency marked the first period of growing involvement of the United States in Colombian politics after the end of the Cold War. It was a consequence of U.S. judgement that the war on drugs could not be limited only to police or military activity. It must go further and include also a policy aimed at strengthening of state institutions.

The position that the United States adopted in the period of Samper presidency was to avoid direct relations with him, but to cooperate with Colombian security agencies. This policy of limiting relations with a head of state was counterproductive in the long term since it undermined Colombian anti-drug policy and the Colombian state.<sup>24</sup> The deteriorating internal situation in this country induced the United States to redefine its Colombian policy. In the last period of Samper presidency, the grave internal conflict escalated to a civil war. The policy adopted by the Colombian governments with

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<sup>21</sup> National Security Decision Directive Number 221: *Narcotics and National Security*, 8 April 1986, at <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-221.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> C.J. Arson, A.B. Tickner, "Colombia and the United States: Strategic Partners or Uncertain Allies," in J.I. Domínguez, R.F. de Castro. *Contemporary U.S.-Latin American Relations: Cooperation or Conflict in the 21st Century?*, New York-London 2010, p. 169.

<sup>23</sup> R. Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia*, Boulder 2002, pp. 103-110.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-133.



US assistance did not brought progress in eliminating drug trafficking. It was estimated that by 2001, 22-33% of heroin consumed in the United States came from Colombia.<sup>25</sup>

Originally, Plan Colombia was a Colombian project initiated by Andres Pastrana administration (1998-2002). The story of its beginnings reflects different views of Colombia and the United States on the crisis in the country. The idea of the new policy was a consequence of previous failures and a growing belief that the deepening crisis of the state requires new concepts and tools. Pastrana presented the new idea at a speech delivered at Hotel Tequendama in Bogota on June 8, 1998. He came up with a concept of a 'Marshall Plan for Colombia,' which was quite symbolic. Famously, the Marshall Plan became a lasting symbol of successful reconstruction of post-war Europe. Apart from prosperity, it also brought security and democracy to Western Europe. The Colombian President considered illicit crop cultivation a social problem that fueled the internal conflict. In his opinion, the situation required an effort of both the Colombian state and the international community. Pastrana saw the USA, the European Union and Latin America as potential partners in the plan of 'reconstruction.' He called this new chapter in Colombian foreign policy a 'Diplomacy for Peace.' This obvious intention to internationalize the Colombian conflict meant that Pastrana came back to an old doctrine of Colombian foreign policy of *respice polum* (*mirar hacia el norte*, that is, look toward the North). According to this doctrine, the United States remained the crucial point of reference for Colombia in international relations.

This doctrine is often criticized for its alleged passivity. Pastrana's turn to the United States was to be balanced by cooperation with Latin American countries and the European Union.<sup>26</sup> Any criticism of Pastrana so called 'neo-*respice polum*' doctrine must take into account the inability of the successive Colombian governments before Pastrana to find a solution to the growing internal conflict. Pastrana presidency began when the Colombian political elite judged that the internal conflict brought the country on the brink of the 'failed state' position. There was an expectation of Colombian society to appease the internal situation.<sup>27</sup> In these circumstances, Pastrana intended to work out and implement a plan of reforms combined with anti-drug policies.

As it appeared, the United States was interested mainly in anti-narcotic policy based on police and military instruments. Bill Clinton intended to deliver assistance to Colombia, but expected the new plan to focus first of all on drug trafficking. He was afraid of a broader American involvement in the Colombian conflict for fear of another war which, like Vietnam, would exploit US assets with a great political cost. After Congressional approval, Clinton signed Plan Colombia on July 13, 2000. Although the Clinton administration declared the will both to fight narcotics production and trade also

<sup>25</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, updated 16 December 2021, at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43813>.

<sup>26</sup> M.F. Gawrycki, *Między autonomią a zależnością. Polityka zagraniczna państw Ameryki Łacińskiej i Karaibów – studium przypadków*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 240, 255-257.

<sup>27</sup> J.C. Pinzón, "Colombia Back from the Brink: From Failed State to Exporter of Security," *PRISM*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2016), p. 3.

also to support democracy in Colombia, 80% of the aid was transferred for military aims. Human rights and democratic promotion only accounted for 20% of it<sup>28</sup>.

One of the most important areas of Plan Colombia was a strengthening of the police and military forces. Washington intended to suppress criminal and insurgent organizations in the first place. Colombia willingly accepted US aid and assistance. The first phase of transformation of the Colombian forces took place in 1999-2006 and included advanced training and a revision of military doctrine and strategies.<sup>29</sup>

One of the crucial elements that determined US foreign policy after 2001 was the security concern. 'The war on terror' proclaimed by President George W. Bush defined the priority of US policy for coming years and, at least initially, received unequivocal bipartisan support in the USA. The security question influenced also US policy towards Latin America. The United States, preoccupied with fighting terrorism, focused mainly on those Latin American countries that posed problems in security perspective. As a result, relations with Colombia became even more important for the United States, whereas, for instance, the position of Argentina dropped on the US agenda. Deteriorating situation in Colombia was considered a threat to US security. Americans were worried of a perspective of Colombia becoming a failed state *on U.S. southern flank, posing a threat to U.S. national and regional interests*. The G.W. Bush administration also assumed that a weak Colombian state could facilitate a growth of terrorist organizations in the region.<sup>30</sup> Such assessment were naturally followed by decisive steps.

The securitization of US foreign policy coincided with taking office by President Alvaro Uribe in Colombia. He came to power under the banner of tough policy on the guerrilla and narco-business. Despite the fact many commentators pointed out that his attitude and views might have been determined by a personal tragedy (his father was murdered by FARC), it might have also been a consequence of rational calculation. Failures of previous talks with FARC and the escalation of violence by the insurgents led to a growth of social support for a firmer policy.<sup>31</sup> Pastrana's policy seemed to fail and encourage the guerrilla to extent their activities. This political climate fostered Uribe's victory. Uribe represented the position of non-negotiating with the guerrilla forces. He claimed that the policy of the previous governments was leading nowhere and the only way of a successful elimination of the guerrilla, narco-business and violence was to build the capacity of the state to wage police-military operations.<sup>32</sup> Strengthening the state was to be an aim of his presidency. Only an efficient state, not peace talks with FARC, could end Colombian crisis. In this, Uribe was close to Pastrana's diagnosis of

<sup>28</sup> J.D. Rosen, *The Losing War: Plan Colombia and Beyond*, Albany 2014, pp. 24-41.

<sup>29</sup> J.C. Pinzón, "Colombia Back from the Brink...", p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> J.D. Rosen, *The Losing War...*, p. 51. Quotation from joint report by the National Defense University and National War College. Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> J.C. Pinzón, "Colombia Back from the Brink...", pp. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> R.D. Ortiz, *The Counterinsurgency Strategy of President Alvaro Uribe*, Real Instituto Elcano, Working Paper, 2003, at <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/work-document/the-counterinsurgency-strategy-of-president-alvaro-uribe-plan-for-victory-or-recipe-for-a-crisis/>.

the sources of the Colombian crisis. However, Uribe rejected Pastrana's idea of peace talks because he claimed that regaining control over the territory was the only way to establish an efficient state and the rule of law. One of the important aspects of Uribe's concept was interdependence between security and democracy ('democratic defense and security policy'). According to this concept, it was weakness of Colombian democratic institutions that, among other factors, led to the expansion of criminal and insurgent organizations.<sup>33</sup> *Security is a democratic value. Nowadays, it is impossible to foster democracy without providing security to the people*, said Uribe while visiting the United States during his second term, confirming a central idea of his policy.<sup>34</sup>

Uribe's concept, which gained undeniable social support in presidential elections (Uribe was elected twice, in 2002 and 2006 by a big margin), was warmly received in Washington. Since 2001, the issue of security became of primary concern for the USA. Uribe took an advantage of the opportunity to cooperate with the administration pre-occupied with a problem of stability and security. G.W. Bush and Uribe represented very similar attitudes towards security issues: both believed in a 'tough' policy. The Bush administration shared Uribe's government concept that somehow equaled the 'war on drugs' and fighting insurgents with the 'war on terror,' the central issue in US security and foreign policy. Three years after Uribe became President, Bush publicly emphasized the effectiveness of Uribe's strategy and the alliance of the two nations in the counter-terrorist policy.<sup>35</sup>

Uribe's was a two-pronged policy: counter-narcotic and counter-terrorist.<sup>36</sup> The Bush administration supported Uribe's stance and understood the frustration of the Colombian military that US military aid was restricted to activities defined as counter-drug, not counter-terrorist operations. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld strongly recommended convincing Congress to show more flexibility. *Uribe's war to defeat terrorism is effective. He needs and merits our support*, Rumsfeld stated in a Memorandum for Bush.<sup>37</sup> He postulated to increase the funding of military operations although, in 2002, Congress allowed to finance anti-guerrilla operations whereas previously US aid was addressed only to counter-narcotic operations. The Bush administration made Colombia one of the priorities of its foreign policy, clearly guided by the national security policy.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> C.J. Arnson, A.B. Tickner, "Colombia and the United States...", p. 173.

<sup>34</sup> "Colombia Remains Staunch US Ally in a War on Terror," VOA News, 29 October 2009, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-a-2004-03-25-1-colombia-67342357/382368.html>.

<sup>35</sup> "President Bush, President Uribe of Colombia Discuss Terrorism and Security," The White House. President George W. Bush, 4 August 2005, at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050804-2.html>; O. Palma, "Colombia: the Changing Meaning of Terrorism in Colombia," in M.J. Boyle (ed.), *Non-Western Responses to Terrorism*, Manchester 2019, pp. 246-270.

<sup>36</sup> C.J. Arnson, A.B. Tickner, "Colombia and the United States...", p. 174.

<sup>37</sup> Secretary of Defense, *Memorandum for President*, 22 August 2003, at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Other/06-F-2073\\_Doc\\_45.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Other/06-F-2073_Doc_45.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> A. Isacson, "Optimism, Pessimism and Terrorism: The United States and Colombia in 2003," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2004), p. 245.

Uribe planned to modernize and expand the armed forces. He declared the state of emergency and established a new 'war tax' which was a wealth tax. This solidarity taxation of the wealthiest Colombians was to contribute to the military effort. Uribe desperately needed financing of the 'anti-terrorist' policy he proclaimed. Colombian economy was in decline, the funding of Plan Colombia from the United States was reduced. Uribe's decision had a state-building potential since in a situation of an internal conflict, the endangered elite sees a strong state as a much needed institution and it is inclined to bear a burden of financing the effort of increasing the state capacity to regain effective control over its territory.

## CONCLUSION

Some say that US policy towards Colombia was determined mainly by one aim: security. Even though the United States supported the civil rights and civilian society, as critics claim, the real criterion of the efficacy of US aid and policy was security. It meant that the US expected Colombia to be able to contain the communist threat in the Cold War era and suppress the guerrilla and narco-business in the post-Cold War time. It was supposed to be a short-sighted policy since no stable state could survive in the long run the negligence of the basics of modern democracy. Such criticism, which corresponds with the position of US liberals of the Cold War era (Alliance for Progress), seems to ignore the fact that the US did not reject the idea of protection of civil rights but focused on building an effective state power first. It is undeniable that prioritization of security had significant consequences and led to a worsening of the civil rights situation in Colombia. However, the history of liberal reforms enforced in some Latin American countries in the 1960s by the Kennedy administration did not prove effectiveness of implementing institutional and political reforms, including civil rights protection and securing stability simultaneously. The causes of the failure had been complex, however the US attitude was influenced by this disappointing record of the nation building policy in the 1960s.

An attempt to assess the US role in the state building policy in Colombia leads us to a conclusion that the United States was involved in this policy more broadly than was initially intended, especially after 2002. As early as the 1980s, Washington realized that halting drug trade and eliminating cartels and insurgent organizations would require an activity to strengthen state institutions. The idea of Plan Colombia that came from a Colombian leader covered not only the 'war on drugs' but also strengthening the state. Pastrana, who took the challenge of redirecting Colombian policy, considered peace with FARC a *conditio sine qua non* of the state consolidation in Colombia. The United States, ready to assist Bogota in anti-narcotic crusade, extended its engagement in Colombia beyond police and military aid and assistance. This happened in accordance with Pastrana's wishes of an internationalization of the Colombian conflict. Hereby, the United States was involved in a state building policy. In Colombia, however, the US engagement was limited, not only compared with the ambitious aims of nation

building in the Alliance for Progress era. The scale of the US involvement in the state (or nation) building policy in Afghanistan and Iraq after 2001 exceeded the Colombian case in terms of aims, however the size of the financial aid proved that Colombia was among top priorities of the United States.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Colombia did not require so fundamental a process of nation building which included social engineering rooted in modernization theory and its implementation in the 1960s. The George W. Bush administration returned to a broadly designed concept of nation building in the Middle East.<sup>39</sup> With an aim of building democratic regimes and modern states, the Bush had to adopt such a plan, rooted in an idealistic, liberal concept of nation building. Colombia required reconstruction that focused on strengthening of state institutions and regaining control over the whole territory of the country by the government. In that sense, US policy in Colombia matched the definition of state-building, which is interpreted more narrowly. However, both terms may be used interchangeably, especially since – as post-Cold War cases of nation or state building US policy prove – the United States never abandoned the ambition to build states that match the Western concept of it.

Interestingly, the Marshall Plan, so often invoked by politicians in Latin America (for instance, after World War II and in the case of the Tequendama speech) who expected the United States to deliver aid to Latin American nations, meant also significant involvement of the US in European politics. Such an involvement is not welcomed in Latin America. In fact, the only indisputable examples of a successful US involvement in nation-building policy are post-World War II West Germany and Japan.<sup>40</sup> The United States occupied both countries and greatly influenced their political systems and socio-economic order after World War II. The US involvement in several Latin American states had an almost equally significant extent as in West Germany and Japan. In the Cold War era, the Dominican Republic was an example of US nation building policy. The United States offered substantial aid to this nation under the auspices of the Alliance for Progress, in order to stabilize the country after the fall of dictatorship. The political aim was the only criterion of the generous U.S. financial aid there. The Johnson administration intervened militarily and occupied the country, but the United States did not achieve its aims. The process of democratization dragged for decades, far beyond the period of the direct US involvement.<sup>41</sup> Modern history of Latin America does not deliver convincing examples of successful nation building policies pursued by Washington. As a consequence, US policy in the time of Plan Colombia was conservative and the aims fairly limited.

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<sup>39</sup> M.E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution...*

<sup>40</sup> South Korea is also indicated as a successful nation building project under the aegis of the USA, however, this example may raise debate because it represents authoritarian modernization. Moreover, the US involvement did not have so direct a character there as in Germany and Japan.

<sup>41</sup> J.F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy...*, pp. 123-147.

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