

@CHAPTER = COLOMBIA

In 1989, political violence in Colombia continued to be the most dramatic in the hemisphere. The figures are almost identical to those of 1988: almost 4,000 Colombians have been killed for political reasons, 75 percent in some 70 massacres involving five or more victims. In the United States, however, this human rights tragedy has been overshadowed by -- and often confused with -- violence by the Medellín cartel of drug traffickers in fighting President Virgilio Barco's efforts to bring them to justice, including by extraditing them to the United States.

The main actors in the political violence are the so-called "paramilitary groups" that operate against left-wing politicians, union leaders, grass-roots organizers and human rights monitors. Although these groups of private gunmen are recruited, financed and trained by the Medellín cartel, they are distinct from the armed thugs that are responsible for the violence committed in the ordinary course of the drug business. As the drug traffickers accumulate vast wealth and increasingly adopt the extreme right-wing views of certain members of the Colombian establishment, they have formed the "paramilitary groups" to conduct an ideologically based "dirty war" against actual and perceived leftist threats to their wealth. The "paramilitary groups" act under the direction of the Medellín cartel, but they also enjoy crucial assistance from well-placed and high-ranking officers in the Colombian army who share the druglords' right-wing ideology or who are willing to be bought off for those ends. These officers provide intelligence and ensure impunity for "paramilitary" actions. The high command of the army may not be deliberately involved in this unholy alliance, but it has repeatedly obstructed judicial and investigative efforts to stop it. For its part, the Barco administration took some brave steps in 1989, first to outlaw the "paramilitary groups," and then to prosecute some of their junior members. But it has yet to conduct aggressive inquiries into the connections between these groups and high-ranking military officers.

In August, the Medellín cartel escalated its war on Colombian society by murdering Senator Luis Carlos Galán, the candidate from the governing Liberal Party and the front-runner for the presidency. In response, President Barco launched a sustained attack on the cartel's vast holdings and, applying state-of-emergency powers, reinstated an extradition treaty with the United States. The Bush administration, for its part, outlined a dramatic plan to back Barco's efforts. President Bush announced the broad contours of the plan in a September 5 address, but the full details were still being worked out at year's end. The plan will eventually include \$2 billion in military aid, crop substitution and economic development for Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. For fiscal year 1990, however, all of the new assistance sought is in the form of military aid, including weapons, training and advice.

In August, President Bush used his authority to "draw down" defense stockpiles and released \$65 million in military aid and equipment to Colombia. This was the largest amount ever drawn from that stockpile, which exists to confront military emergencies. In 1989, Colombia received a total of \$82 million in U.S. military aid, which represents more in one year than all the military aid received by Colombia in the 20 preceding years combined. This aid is designed exclusively to help the Colombian army fight the druglords. For fiscal year 1990, the Bush administration proposes to give Colombia \$86.2 million in military and narcotics-control aid. The figures proposed for Bolivia and Peru are even larger.

The bill now before Congress that would authorize this aid (H.R. 3611, International Narcotics Control Act of 1989) requires as a condition of funds going forward a certification by the State Department that the recipients are

not engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights. The Reagan administration had a history of making such certifications about some of the world's most abusive regimes. We urge the Bush administration to use the certification process in a fair and accurate manner so that the condition on U.S. military assistance might be used as a powerful inducement to respect human rights.

Secretary William Bennett, the administration's "drug czar," has offered assurances that aid will not be given to human rights violators. In October, however, he requested from Congress a special waiver of the prohibition on police aid that is currently in effect for Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, as part of a package of \$125 million in additional military aid. In a compromise, Congress approved the package in November but ordered that only 10 percent of the money spent in each country could go to police forces. In this fashion, restrictions that have been in place since the 1970's, and that effectively prevented the United States from becoming linked to police practices of torture, disappearances and executions, are quickly being swept aside. Latin American police bodies, whether under democratic or dictatorial governments, continue to use torture regularly as a standard interrogation technique. The current drug crisis seems to be the excuse for abandoning a policy that was soundly based in ethical and pragmatic terms.

Most important, the rush to provide military aid to the Colombian army and police ignores the unholy alliance between the Medellín cartel and high-ranking officers. The Bush administration does not seem concerned with this aspect of human rights in Colombia and reacts only to the cartels' attacks on establishment politicians and judges; while the U.S. has rightfully protested the killing of judges and Sen. Galán, it has ignored the killing of leading figures of the leftist *Unión Patriótica*, including presidential candidates and high-ranking officials. The danger in this approach is that indiscriminate military aid will strengthen the hand of, among others, the most anti-democratic elements in the army, and thus could further fuel Colombia's "dirty war." Although the Colombian government deserves help in fighting the drug cartels, military aid can and should be conditioned on an effort to sever the military-cartel alliance that plays such a large part in Colombia's political violence. The infusion of vast amounts of aid could help promote human rights, but only if the Bush administration is willing to use it as leverage to encourage the democratic institutions of Colombia to investigate the "paramilitary groups" thoroughly, to punish those officers who have contributed to recent massacres, and to drive the drug cartels' military allies out of the armed forces. Unfortunately, the Bush administration has yet to show any interest in pursuing these ends.

Finally, we note that the Bush administration has shown no interest in restricting the private export of weapons to Colombia. Paramilitary groups and cartel thugs buy assault rifles and semi-automatic guns of all sorts in the United States, where the gun lobby effectively prevents any meaningful restrictions on their sale. It appears that a large number of the Chinese-made AK-47 assault rifles which were sold by the thousands in the United States have made their way to the cartels. In response to public outcry over the killing of schoolchildren in California, President Bush restricted the sale of imported automatic weapons, but he refuses to institute any controls on semi-automatic weapons and on any weapon manufactured in the United States. Nor are there any plans to control the export of guns. This attitude eases the drug cartels' effort to build effective defenses against Colombian law enforcement and it gives the paramilitary groups the tools to commit political murders. Congressman Charles B. Rangel, Chairman of the House Select Committee on

Narcotics Abuse and Control, has introduced a bill to control the flow of weapons to Colombia. The administration should support this effort.