

## *Folly in Colombia?*

“Two Wars or One? Drugs, Guerrillas, and Colombia’s New *Violencia*” by William M. LeoGrande and Kenneth E. Sharpe, in *World Policy Journal* (Fall 2000), World Policy Institute, New School Univ., 66 Fifth Ave., Ninth Floor, New York, N.Y. 10011.

The \$1.3 billion in military and other aid that Washington decided last year to put into the war on drugs in Colombia and the Andean region “marks a major shift in U.S. policy”—one that won’t help the United States and may harm Colombia, contend political scientists LeoGrande and Sharpe, of American University and Swarthmore College, respectively.

In the name of fighting the traffic in illegal drugs, the United States is effectively escalating its involvement in Colombia’s long-running war with Marxist guerrillas, the authors maintain. The escalation was prompted by a dramatic increase in coca production in two southern provinces of Colombia. These are strongholds of the main leftist guerrilla force, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which derives millions of dollars a year from “taxes” on the drug production and trade. But the U.S. “war” on illegal drugs “cannot be won in the Colombian rain forest,” say LeoGrande and Sharpe. “Even if the United States defoliates every acre given over to growing coca, burns every laboratory, and destroys every last gram of Colombian cocaine, it will have won a hollow victory. The drug business will simply move elsewhere, as it always does.” The market is too lucrative to die.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the United States targeted the major drug trafficking organizations in Colombia, which imported most of their coca leaf from Peru and Bolivia. By the mid-1990s, the key leaders of the Medellín and Cali cartels had been

killed or captured, but the flow of drugs continued. Many smaller producers appeared, and some of the business shifted to Mexico (which became the major supplier of cocaine to the western United States). As Colombian coca leaf production expanded (after U.S. efforts succeeded in reducing coca production in Bolivia and Peru), the growers, rather than the traffickers, became the main U.S. enemy in Colombia. For all Washington’s efforts over the last decade, however, the total amount of land planted in coca in the Andean region—almost 500,000 acres—has remained about the same, LeoGrande and Sharpe observe. “Faced with eradication campaigns, peasants simply plant elsewhere.” The new eradication campaign that Washington envisions in southern Colombia will fare no better—and “have no impact whatsoever on the supply of drugs entering the United States.”

But the shift in U.S. policy will have a terrible impact in Colombia, intensifying the violence and making a negotiated settlement between the Marxist guerrillas and the Colombian government more difficult. “Despite fits and starts, the peace process in Colombia is not nearly as moribund as some U.S. officials imply,” the authors believe. But instead of improving the prospects for peace, the United States “is about to put Colombia’s fragile democracy at greater risk by escalating the new *Violencia*. . . . It is the people of Colombia who will pay the price for the inability of the United States to face the fact that its ‘war’ on drugs can only be won at home.”

## *Global Lawfare*

“The Rocky Shoals of International Law” by David B. Rivkin, Jr., and Lee A. Casey, in *The National Interest* (Winter 2000–01), 1112 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; “The New Sovereignists” by Peter J. Spiro, in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov.–Dec. 2000), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child forbids the death penalty for children and sets other standards

for their protection. Only two member nations have refused to ratify the agreement: Somalia . . . and the United States. And that