



*Schlesinger Working Group  
on Strategic Surprises*

# Colombia at the Crossroads

SCHLESINGER WORKING GROUP REPORT, SPRING 2000

Prepared by Aleksandar D. Jovic

The Institute for the Study of Diplomacy of Georgetown University launched the Schlesinger Working Group in 1999. This project is based on a multi-year Working Group initiative with a mandate to review and assess a range of possible scenarios that contain significant potential for strategic surprise and for unanticipated outcomes. The Schlesinger Working Group relies on a permanent “core membership” of generalists from the policy-making and research communities and academia, who are joined by some half dozen respected authorities recruited for the regional or functional topic under consideration. The meetings are chaired by Schlesinger Professor of Strategic Studies Dr. Chester Crocker and ISD Director Professor Casimir Yost.

In the Colombia project, ISD expresses particular thanks to Michael Brown, Myles Frechette, Randy Pherson, Brent Scowcroft, Michael Shifter and Viron P. Vaky, whose opening remarks set the stage for the discussion that followed.

Aleksandar D. Jovic is the Program Officer at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. He holds a Masters degree in International Relations from SAIS—Johns Hopkins University.

## OVERVIEW

The Institute for the Study of Diplomacy hosted the spring session of the Schlesinger Working Group on the topic of strategic surprise in Colombia. After a presentation on four potential scenarios that may face Colombia (see next page), Schlesinger Working Group core members and Colombia specialists examined the key factors driving events in this conflict-scarred country, as well as possible outcomes for current political initiatives. Among other issues, the participants touched on the range and dynamics of the present conflict, its effects on Colombian institutions, the country’s neighbors, as well as on the role of powerful outside players, primarily the United States. Upon defining these key factors, participants identified a broad outline for future policy towards Colombia, which would safeguard key U.S. interests, defined as an end to the conflict, political and economic stability in the region, and the suppression of the drug trade. The following report is based on the informal and general findings of the group and is therefore not a consensus document.

## SUMMARY

The Group discussions — over 7 hours of meetings in April and May, 2000 — covered many aspects of the Colombian drama. The central themes that emerge flowed from these judgements:

- The Group identified no clear path to stability/recovery in Colombia. Rather, the most likely immediate prognosis is for continued fragmentation of national authority.
- The U.S. Administration’s \$1.6 billion aid plan, while politically and symbolically necessary, is unlikely to contribute to a prompt reversal of Colombia’s deterioration. A rejection of that package could, however, accelerate that deterioration.
- Colombia’s problems are contributing to instability in the broader Andean region and this

negative spillover of the Colombian crisis is likely to intensify.

- The Pastrana administration’s peace initiatives, while popular and commanding media and diplomatic interest, have not yet developed the traction necessary to shape events on the ground.

- The bottom line, therefore, is that the United States has a significant interest in pursuing a long term effort in Colombia, which emphasizes peace making and restoration of government capacity and authority.

## THE SCENARIOS

A number of participants felt that one of the scenarios, “Imperfect Peace” (a gradual political integration of the rebels along with economic growth and a stabilization of the security situation) was too optimistic and assumed a quality and capacity of leadership not present in Colombia. While “Descent into Order,” a situation where continued instability led to a Fujimori-style government, had some adherents, others argued that Colombia was too fragmented a country to produce a centralizing authoritarian leadership, as happened in Peru. The two remaining scenarios, “Fragmentation,” which foresees the steady dismemberment of Colombia into government-controlled cities, and rural pockets of control for the leftist insurgents and the paramilitaries, and “Pockets of Civility,” which envisions the strengthening of local civil society, had a number of supporters. It was argued that Colombia’s decentralized, perhaps even neo-feudal, system of local fiefdoms affiliated with armed security units was most conducive to a continued slow erosion of central power. In this event, local rulers could be either benign organizations or self-serving groups. In general, the participants agreed that the four scenarios covered the main possible futures for Colombia.

# Colombia: Alternative Futures

The following list of drivers and scenarios was developed at a conference sponsored by the National Intelligence Council that was held in May 1999, at the Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C. The conference gathered some 50 Colombia watchers including academics, members of the business community, and representatives of various non-profit organizations and the US Government to generate several alternative futures for Colombia, using a multiple scenario methodology.

ISD is indebted to Randy Pherson, former National Intelligence Officer for Latin America for presenting his piece *Colombia: Alternative Futures*, and for leading the discussion on the scenarios. He is currently the Director of the International Studies and Analysis Division at Evidence Based Research, Inc.

The evolution of events in Colombia over the next ten to fifteen years will most likely be determined by the following seven “drivers” or key forces for change:

- Government Capacity/Quality of Leadership
- The Insurgency — Its Nature, Unity, and Goals
- The Economy
- The Paramilitaries — Their Capabilities and Goals
- The Engagement of Civil Society/Extent of National Will to Resolve the Conflict
- The Impact of the Drug Trade
- The Extent of Foreign Engagement

By varying the impact of these drivers, four distinct scenarios can be developed that describe a broad range of alternative futures for Colombia.

***Imperfect Peace.*** This is the most optimistic scenario, as the peace process takes hold between the Government and FARC insurgents, and later (separately) with the ELN insurgents, while the paramilitaries gradually diminish in numbers and influence. The peace is imperfect because FARC remains in nominal control of parts of the southeast, and paramilitary and insurgent splinter groups continue to operate as bandits in some areas. The drug trade is reduced but active. The economy returns to its historic growth rates, and the government’s prudent fiscal policies spur more foreign investment and the repatriation of flight capital. Government capacity is enhanced by external aid and investment flows, and the political system moves on a stable, reformist path.

***Descent into Order.*** A decade of economic deterioration, a series of failed peace initiatives, growing crime and disorder, and guerrilla success in establishing an urban foothold spark growing popular frustration. Capital flight becomes more pronounced and many of the business elite depart. Neither of the two political parties appears capable of turning the tide, and in a 2010 election a new coalition of rural elite, urban middle class, and the military combine forces to elect a non-traditional politician on a law and order platform. The new president uses the military and police to drive the guerrillas out of the cities

at the cost of increased human rights abuses. The paramilitaries are co-opted and order is gradually restored to most populated areas. Such strong-arm tactics reverse the tide of elite migration and slowly reinvigorate the economy. Meanwhile, Colombia’s drug situation remains unabated and U.S. influence ebbs.

***Pockets of Civility.*** Colombia experiences cycles of relative peace and war without undergoing fundamental reform or restructuring. The weaknesses and strengths of all the key players offset each other, leaving no party with a decisive advantage. Central government authority is further weakened, leading to the emergence of “pockets” of effective local governance in a national landscape marked by rising crime, insurgent violence, and unchecked paramilitary forces. The government engages some guerrilla groups in social and political change while driving others to banditry. Unremarkable economic performance exacerbates the government’s ability to buttress the military and extend key social services to many parts of the country. Over time, government authority is increasingly ceded to civil society. Less civil groups in society also prosper including drug lords, paramilitaries, and criminal groups. The state’s continued relevance comes to depend on its ability to work effectively with an emerging panoply of civic society actors.

***Fragmentation.*** By 2015 the government has staged a strategic retreat to the major cities—the only areas it is still capable of defending. A peace agreement without disarmament is concluded with the FARC, but both the government and the insurgents fail to commit the resources necessary to implement it. The insurgents take advantage of the peace talks to rearm. The insurgency expands to urban areas but does not threaten Bogota. The paramilitaries grow in strength. Continuing instability undermines economic performance. By 2015 the military is exhausted, the FARC is in firm control of much of the south, the paramilitaries are conducting a successful dirty war against the ELN in the north, and the drug traffickers exert nominal control over many rural areas. Colombia’s neighbors are alarmed by the growing lawlessness and fortify their borders. ■

### SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

A comprehensive examination of the Colombian case, with an emphasis on potential strategic surprises and unanticipated outcomes, requires a solid understanding of Colombia's political and economic background. The potential for a radical shift is often brought about by a change in circumstances, however subtle. It is clear that neither the current violence, nor the country's tendencies toward decentralization, are new phenomena. Experts were quick to point out that the fighting has been continuous, with ebbs and flows during the last five decades. The left-leaning rebels have been present for nearly three decades (and were offshoots of an even older group, as one participant explained). The peace process itself has been a part of Colombian political parlance since the early eighties.

#### *Political and Economic Changes in Colombia.*

However, several factors or "drivers" have actually experienced important change. First, a number of participants emphasized the strong economic downturn that has plagued Colombia in recent years. The once steady 3 to 4% annual GDP growth has recently been negative. This is joined by a worrisome elite exodus, which strikes at the heart of entrepreneurship, tax revenue, and civil society institutions. The recent surge in oil prices is not expected to fully ameliorate the situation. Second, the explosion of drug production and trade, sparked by an increase in U.S.-led demand, and the successful anti-narcotics campaigns in neighboring countries (which shifted the trade to Colombia), have vastly increased the power and influence of the narcotics industry. These cash inflows have benefitted the FARC, the larger left-wing insurgent group (who have, as a result, been marked the "bad guys" by the U.S.), and the paramilitaries from the right.

In response to the present spiral of violence, a grassroots civic movement called *No Mas* (No More) has taken to the streets in force, calling for an immediate end to the violence. Alongside these popular sentiments, the peace process is presently bolstered by strong support from the business community. Finally, one speaker noted that the climate of indiscriminate danger has now touched the elite. This sparked a discussion on the topic of public order, with participants noting that indiscriminate violence could lead to a collapse of personal security and the rule of law and an end to central institutions, leaving citizens to rely on local, informal, or self-styled security institutions.

### THE PROTAGONISTS

As in any discussion on conflict, much of the first meeting focused on the antagonists, their goals and capabilities. In order to craft a successful strategy for dealing with Colombia's problems, participants first examined the internal weaknesses of the Colombian state, and further defined the variety of challenges that both official Bogota and Colombian society face. Participants emphasized the complex nature of the current playing field, but noted a number of factors that could foster a strategic shift in events in Colombia. Perhaps what was most evident, to a number of the participants, was the concerted government push for peace, led by an effort to reach out to the FARC guerilla group. Others, however, noted that this effort had not resulted in any substantive change in the rebel group's policies. Another note of caution concerned the new Pastrana administration, which was welcomed with much fanfare in Colombia and abroad. Speakers noted that the President is a clever, albeit instinctive politician, with little strategic vision (the fact that the hastily announced referendum to "end corruption" may have also weakened Pastrana's reform agenda in the Colombian Congress bears witness to this), and that he is pressed by the looming end of his term. However, the present administration could also be attempting to reach a partial agreement, leaving further work for after the 2002 elections. Even Colombia's political system seems in crisis, with the traditional parties unable to adapt to the turmoil the country finds itself in.

*The Rebels.* The demands of the insurgents broadly revolve around issues of social welfare, economic development, agrarian and judiciary reform, and reorganization of the security forces. However, the conflict in Colombia also has a pronounced territorial component, with the guerillas vying for control over local budgets and administration and the exploitation of natural resources. Participants spent considerable time analyzing the strategy of the uncompromising and increasingly out-of-touch leftist insurgency, the FARC, since its stance could bode ill for the current peace process. However, not everyone was equally dismissive of the guerillas. Some emphasized efforts by the FARC's leadership to reach out to the West, and the recent government-sponsored FARC tour of Europe, as well as to the probability that the FARC leadership, many of whom are now elderly, may be willing to compromise in exchange for tangible results. Participants also brought up the issue of recent government concession to the ELN, the smaller

The explosion of drug production and trade, sparked by an increase in U.S.-led demand, and the successful anti-narcotics campaigns in neighboring countries (which shifted the trade to Colombia), have vastly increased the power and influence of the narcotics industry.

Since late April, the ELN has been able to operate with relative freedom within a zone free of government troops in the north, a smaller version of the FARC's power base in the south.

Cuban-inspired left-wing rebel group, which operates in the north of the country. Since late April, the ELN has been able to operate with relative freedom within a zone free of government troops in the north, a smaller version of the FARC's power base in the south.

There was also some debate over popular opinion on the left-wing insurgency, with some arguing that its influence has suffered, while others noted that this home-grown rebellion remains an important political, as well as military, factor in Colombia. In any event, participants noted that the left wing rebellion could survive even a complete collapse of their substantial drug-trade related revenue. Furthermore, one participant even warned that "backwardness" might not hamper the FARC, and that one strategic surprise (with visions of the Taliban in Afghanistan) was an outright victory of the rebel group, an outcome not considered plausible in any of the four presented scenarios.

*The Paramilitaries.* Another factor that participants highlighted was the recent upsurge of paramilitary activity. Recent efforts to centralize these disparate, local groups could radically change the outlook for Colombia. Their growing strength is also both the cause and result of growing tensions. On one hand, paramilitary presence in many rural areas has resulted in killings and insecurity. However, their very existence is proof that Colombia's security forces are not able to provide a modicum of safety in many of the country's rural areas. In addition, the paramilitaries are often accused of acting in concert with the security forces, particularly the army. This fact is often cited as a reason for withholding U.S. assistance. But at the same time, the best way to break these links is by professionalizing the armed forces through U.S. assistance programs. One participant ventured that the paramilitaries are gaining adherents in the populace, as a second best option, in view of government passivity or weakness. Still, it seemed to many that if this was true, it was a sign of general desperation with the security situation. With these factors in mind, an increasing amount of thought is being given to the potential future role of the paramilitaries in the peace process.

*The Criminals.* Finally, much talk centered on the drug trade. Yet, this activity was viewed more as a social and economic phenomenon, internationally induced, rather than as a political force in its own right. In addition, widespread criminal activity must not be simply pigeonholed into the drug

trade, since it would weaken the necessary response. Colombia is becoming a haven for a variety of illegal activities. These illegal activities will not be stopped by army anti-narcotics battalions, and are poised to have a further serious effect on the criminalization of the Colombian economy.

Although participants remained skeptical about the possibility of an overall take-over of the state by criminal enterprises, it was underlined that these groups do possess some of the attributes of state power, at least in the sense that they need not be concerned with legal constraints that criminals in other states face. At the same time, it is true that the powerful individual cartels, such as the ones in Cali and Medellin, were recently destroyed in an all-out conflict with the Colombian military. Unfortunately, smaller and more flexible organizations grew in their wake. These enterprises have subsequently proven more resilient and difficult to defeat, thanks both to the fact that they present a smaller target for law enforcement, and to their sheer number. However, the narco-mafia's most powerful ally is the left-wing insurgency, most prominently the FARC, which controls many of the drug producing areas in Colombia. It is this blend of criminalization and civil war that has posed such a daunting problem to the Colombian government and the international community, and has paralyzed U.S. policy-making. Other criminal activities such as counterfeiting and intellectual property rights piracy, particularly of software and compact discs, as well as other forms of commercial criminality are likely to spread in Colombia as well.

It has become apparent, several participants underlined, that simple interdiction and suppression of the drug trade, a major component of the US-supported Colombian government strategy toward illegal narcotics is not enough. The problems of poverty, bad governance, and unemployment must be addressed as well. The efforts of the Colombian government, and particularly foreign aid, must be aimed at the development of alternative crops, increased political participation and land redistribution, which would to some extent also address some of the concerns of the left-wing insurgency.

#### THE OUTSIDERS

All the participants seemed to share the opinion that the crucial outside player in the Colombian context was the United States. The Europeans have also become involved in the search for peace, as has the United Nations, which has established a special field office for the peace process in Colom-

Participants highlighted the influence of Colombia's neighbors, particularly in respect to the anti-insurgency campaign, and potential cross-border conflict, but also the migration and refugee issues that they generate.

bia. Alongside these actors, participants highlighted the influence of Colombia's neighbors, particularly in respect to the anti-insurgency campaign, and potential cross-border conflict, but also the migration and refugee issues that they generate. While it was noted that border fortification was an option for some of Colombia's neighbors (Venezuela is said to have concentrated a third of its military along the border), Brazil's remote border could not be defended in the same fashion. To the north, Panama, lacking a strong military, and its strategic canal could be endangered by guerilla forays from within Colombia.

Participants unanimously noted that the drug trade, and therefore a large segment of revenue for both the FARC and many of the paramilitaries, was a demand-related phenomena, almost totally generated by the United States. And it is precisely the United States that must deal with or decrease this demand if the tap of narcotics funds is to be turned off. In accordance with the Working Group's focus on the broader conflict and the peace process, there was little discussion on traditional and current tactics of dealing with the drug trade, such as crop dusting and counter narcotics field operations.

A more discussed aspect of U.S.-Colombian relations was proposed U.S. aid, which is part of a larger Colombian-proposed package encompassed under the Pastrana administration's *Plan Colombia*. There was debate about the likely impact of this aid package, which underscored different views of the strength and efficiency of Colombia's embattled armed forces and police, as well as what the true goal of the aid package was: to achieve a military balance or an outright government victory. However, there seemed to be broad agreement that the aid package would affect present conditions and that any delay or serious watering-down of the U.S. aid package could do irreparable damage to the Pastrana Administration and the current peace process. The U.S. Administration must make a convincing case that aid should be used to restore civil society and public order and therefore influence the peace process, not just the drug trade, since Colombia's problems stem from a multi-sided civil conflict, not the production of illegal narcotics. In general, most participants supported the aid package, yet noted that its size, as well as the amount of liquid funds it involves, were greatly exaggerated among the Colombian populace. It was also noted that aid is not a strategy in itself; it is a tool serving overall policy that could and should be supplemented by a number of other elements.

*The Colombia's Neighbors and Regional Security.* Participants explained that Colombia's predicament is in some respects a result of recent successes of its neighbors. Their forceful eradication of narcotics production (along with the defeat of local insurgencies, most notably Peru's Shining Path guerillas) moved much of the illegal drug production to the jungles of Colombia. Indeed, these countries appear to be in competition for limited U.S. funds. Ironically, Ecuador and Peru's impressive victories may carry with them unanticipated side effects. They, along with Colombia's neighbors to the west and north, Venezuela and Panama, now face increasing instability generated by Colombia, such as refugee flows, guerilla cross-border incursions, and slowing of regional economic development. This, several participants noted, is also a result of a fragmented and haphazard approach to the war on the supply of illegal narcotics, sponsored by the U.S.

Colombia's geo-political importance was duly noted by several participants, graphically explained by the statement that Colombia is not Haiti, and therefore cannot be contained or simply ignored and allowed to slowly dissolve into chaos. Further instability in Colombia threatens not only the physical security of its neighbors, but also deals a disheartening blow to the concept of democracy in the Andes at a crucial moment. Economic and political instability in Ecuador, electoral turmoil in Peru, and recent political convulsions in Venezuela can only be further intensified by a collapse of the Colombian state. If events deteriorate further, Colombia could become, as one participant stated, a "South American Congo," a fragmented state exporting conflict to a destabilized region. Participants concluded by voicing their concern that the successful employment of violence, by the narco-traffickers, paramilitaries and guerillas, could set an unfortunate precedent for the whole region.

*Washington.* Participants noted that recent Congressional decisions may make or break U.S. aid for Colombia. The U.S. contribution for the Pastrana Administration's comprehensive *Plan Colombia* now appears to be on the verge of being overwhelmed by debate that unexpectedly interrupted what many thought would be a strong bipartisan action supporting the ever-popular war against illegal drugs. Yet, as proof that individual cases cannot be examined through a narrow prism, the fortunes of U.S. aid to Colombia have been hampered by a wide variety of domestic political considerations, coupled with the lack of a coherent

The failure to present events in Colombia as directly impacting the United States could endanger its commitment to stability in the country and the wider region. Yet, aid for Colombia seems wedded to the “drug war,” neglecting the overarching regional security aspect for fear of outright Congressional rejection.

U.S. strategy towards the drug trade, human rights and security concerns in Colombia.

Ironically, the expected bipartisan support turned into a concerted bipartisan effort to slow or condition U.S. aid to Colombia. The aid package, the only tangible leverage the U.S. holds, must now be examined alongside the open-ended U.S. commitment to peacekeeping in Kosovo, and strong reservations by some in Congress and the NGO community about the efficacy and behavior of the Colombian armed forces, and their informal ties with the right-wing paramilitaries. Several participants noted that the growing confrontation between the Clinton White House and Republican Congressional leaders is also hampering prompt decision-making. Indeed, even the urgency of aid for Colombia has come into question, with some in Congress feeling that such a large step should be left to a new Administration. It seemed evident to most participants that these delays could not only erode the amount of money earmarked for Colombia, but could so change its shape and character that its efficacy and impact on events on the ground in Colombia could be badly damaged.

It needs to be noted that the confusion this issue has generated is also a product of shifting perceptions of national security and U.S. priorities. The failure to present events in Colombia as directly impacting the United States could endanger its commitment to stability in the country and the wider region. Yet, aid for Colombia seems wedded to the “drug war,” neglecting the overarching regional security aspect for fear of outright Congressional rejection. Participants also noted the apparent lack of consultation between the Clinton and Pastrana administrations, with the former warning of a potential collapse of democratic governance in Colombia, and the latter firmly proclaiming the strong credentials of Colombia’s democratic institutions during a recent visit to Washington. Perhaps these statements partially reflect an uncertainty among officials on how to present the aid package to Congress and the U.S. public — as throwing a life jacket to a deeply shaken neighbor and ally, or a wise investment in strengthening antinarcotics enforcement. Skeptics also question the sustainability of aid to Colombia, criticism which is strengthened by Administration declarations that the aid is a one time deal.

Indecision in Washington is furthered by the legacy of Vietnam, and the fear of some that further U.S. involvement (now at the official level of counter-narcotics training) could lead to an open-ended “slippery slope” engagement, sea-

soned with memories of jungle warfare and American casualties. In addition, recent U.S. military engagement in purely civilian humanitarian work (construction of infrastructure in a small village) caused a considerable backlash among the Colombian public.

Still, it needs to be noted that the Colombian state is still viable, and that the United States need not engage in nation-building, but “state-strengthening,” an endeavor both Washington and the wider international community have had more success in. And after all, much progress has been made in putting Colombia on the radar, and therefore making it a first tier concern for the policy community in the U.S. In addition, participants reminded, the United States has had some success in the region, most notably in El Salvador, where they were able to support a regionally-sponsored negotiated end to the civil war. Yet, both the Administration and Congress seem hesitant to even entertain the possibility that the true problem Colombia faces is one of insurgency, a problem that cannot be effectively dealt with through a costly but limited anti-narcotics campaign. Participants hit home the notion that this grave misconception could ultimately doom U.S. strategy for Colombia, hampering the country’s efforts to regain stability and endanger U.S. interests in the region.

#### INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS

With these issues in mind, participants suggested the formation of a “Friends of Colombia” circle of concerned countries, perhaps with UN support, which could guide and advise the current protagonists in Colombia, in an effort to reintroduce stability to the region. European moves to become more involved, as well as the upcoming South American Summit, to be hosted by Brazil, were also noted as positive steps. Several participants further discussed the attitudes of Colombians and other South Americans toward U.S. policies, and concluded that the prevailing opinion was one of ambivalence. Paradoxically, citizens of this region fear both potential U.S. action and inaction. Other suggestions included the need, first and foremost, for cooperation between the concerned outside actors (both from the region and beyond). In addition, the Colombians themselves need to improve military and police cooperation with their neighbors, in order to assure that border policing is effective and does not just send insurgents and drug traffickers scurrying across another frontier.

**INSTITUTE FOR THE  
STUDY OF DIPLOMACY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Max M. Kampelman  
(CHAIRMAN)

L. Thomas Hiltz  
Peter F. Krogh  
(VICE CHAIRMEN)

Thomas Boyatt  
Chester Crocker  
Joseph B. Gildenhorn  
Brandon Grove, Jr.  
Lee Hamilton  
Brian C. Henderson  
Arthur H. House  
M. Farooq Kathwari  
Tommy Koh  
Samuel W. Lewis  
Jack F. Matlock, Jr.  
Donald F. McHenry  
David C. Miller, Jr.  
David D. Newsom  
Phyllis E. Oakley  
William E. Odom  
Mark Palmer  
Rinaldo Petrignani  
Janmarie Prutting  
Leonard Raish  
Rozanne Ridgway  
Cokie Roberts  
Tara Sonenshine  
Peter D. Sutherland  
Robert H. Trice  
Frank Wisner  
Milton A. Wolf

**THE BOTTOM LINE:  
RESCUING THE PEACE PROCESS**

In closing, the discussion pointed to a number of factors that could induce unanticipated outcomes. First and foremost, participants noted that the window for peace was open at present, but probably not for long. Time would play a key role in future events, whether to pressure the Pastrana government and the insurgents, or as a factor in the steady fragmentation of central state authority. However, events in Colombia will not necessarily unfold in a linear fashion, and reversals or long periods of standstill should be expected. The rising levels of violence coupled with attacks on the elite, and the general breakdown of public order, are also potential causes of a strategic surprise. The ambiguous and difficult to anticipate behavior of the Pastrana administration, the isolated guerilla movements and the disunited paramilitaries also play a role. Other crucial factors include the drug trade, influenced by the volatile U.S. drug market, Colombia's oil dependent economy, as well as the actions of the country's neighbors. As a result of this complex web of components, Colombia finds itself at a crossroads, rife with unanticipated outcomes.

Colombia itself will need to embark on a systematic course of reforms, ranging from establishing better governance, rural empowerment, and alternative development to the professionalization of its armed forces, participants concluded. The country desperately needs a sustainable peace settlement, which will address the legitimate concerns of the rebels, but end the violence and lawlessness, put a stop to the criminalization of Colombian society and redress economic problems. The insurgents must be brought to the table, even if this means intensifying the conflict in the short term, especially in view of the FARC's increasingly arrogant and abusive attitude, which may have been fueled by

government concessions. The Colombian government needs to deal with the rebels from a position of strength and test the ELN and FARC's true intentions towards their socio-economic agenda through the peace talks, while retaining the option of increasing military pressure if the guerillas fail to deliver. The drug trade, for its part, must also be dealt with as a demand-related economic phenomena, whose roots lie in the voracious appetite of the U.S. narcotics market and poverty in rural Colombia. The paramilitaries must be reigned in or coopted into the legal security forces. While some of the reasons for their existence can be understood, or even justified, their tactics cannot be tolerated. The only way to end the violence is to truly professionalize the armed forces, whose lackluster performance has fueled skeptics in Colombia and abroad, most notably in the U.S. However, blocking aid or distancing the security forces due to undeniable human rights violations only avoids the problem, it does not solve it.

The United States must begin to act like a superpower, acknowledging the fact that the turmoil in Colombia is a result of a long and complex armed struggle between insurgents and the government — and is therefore a question of regional and hemispheric security, and not a chapter in the “war against drugs.” Therefore, participants underlined that U.S. aid needs to be forthcoming, not only to the security forces, but also to the government, civil society and the economy as a whole. U.S. policy on human rights, drugs, and security must be transformed into a coherent and sustainable strategy towards Colombia and the wider region. To achieve the goal of helping Colombia pick the right path, as it stands at the crossroads, the United States will have to harness not only its drug-fighting abilities, but its diplomatic and conflict resolution skills, and intelligence and military potentials. ■

**ISD MISSION AND PROGRAM**

The Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (ISD), founded in 1978, is part of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service and is the School's primary window on the world of the foreign affairs practitioner.

ISD studies the practitioner's craft: how diplomats and other foreign affairs professionals succeed and the lessons to be learned from their successes and failures. Institute programs focus particular attention on the foreign policy process: how decisions are made and implemented. ISD conducts its

programs through a small staff and resident and nonresident associates. Associates, who include U.S. and foreign government officials and other foreign affairs practitioners, are detailed to or affiliated with the Institute for a year or more.

The Institute's immediate constituency is Georgetown students. ISD staff and associates teach courses, organize lectures and discussions, mentor students, and participate on university committees. ISD's larger constituency is the broader academic and policy community. The Institute reaches this group through its conferences, working groups, publications, and research activities.