COLOMBIA, 1990–2010

Cooperation in the War on Drugs

Abigail Vaughn

The U.S. “War on Drugs” in Colombia demonstrates the benefits of pursuing indirect control rather than direct action. Using a combination of rewards, punishments, and capacity improvements in Colombia, the United States managed to slightly suppress cocaine production and reduce Colombian instability to lower levels than would have been feasible in the absence of a proxy relationship. However, the effort to reduce cocaine production and narcotics trafficking also required significant U.S. investments. Colombia is today the fifth-largest recipient of American military aid, and the United States has delivered tens of billions of dollars to the country over the past two decades.¹ How can a series of tremendously expensive policies that produced few obvious successes nevertheless represent efficient and desirable action on behalf of the United States?

To answer this question, this chapter examines U.S. efforts to reduce cocaine production and establish regional security in Colombia across four Colombian presidencies: those of César Gaviria (1990–94), Ernesto Samper (1994–98), Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002), and Álvaro Uribe (2002–10). I leverage variation in the degree of each president’s interest alignment with the United States to observe how optimal agency contracts change with the agent’s cost of effort.² The results support the predictions of the indirect control model. When the interests of Colombia and the United States were closely aligned, the United States either sought to build Colombian capacity or offered an informal contract of rewards and punishments conditional on the level of observed disturbances. Likewise, when the two states’ interests diverged, the United States sought to further induce Colombian cooperation by using more powerful incentives. Most important, by
adjusting its coercive tools to reflect each Colombian president’s level of interest alignment, the United States was able to better achieve its objectives relative to what it might have accomplished through the alternative strategies of direct control or disengagement.

Background
American interest in the narcotics trade ignited in 1971 when President Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs to address rising rates of heroin use. By the mid-1980s, attention had shifted to a new threat: cocaine. Wrapped in the broader narrative of the culture war, national news media fueled Americans’ interest in the fight against narcotics. Time magazine cover artwork featured martini glasses overflowing with white powder under taglines such as “the bloody business of cocaine wars” and dire warnings about “crack kids.” According to a 1988 poll conducted by CBS News and the New York Times, 48 percent of Americans viewed drugs as the principal foreign policy challenge facing the United States. Sensitive to domestic interest in the issue, politicians were desperate to avoid appearing weak or even flexible on drug policy. The U.S. Congress quickly imposed draconian sentences for drug-related crimes. President Ronald Reagan similarly signaled his commitment to the war on drugs with National Security Directive 221, which labeled drug trafficking a threat to national security and sought to eliminate the supply of cocaine that entered the country.

The war on drugs became increasingly international under President George H. W. Bush. Whereas previous counternarcotics policies focused primarily on interdiction at U.S. ports, as early as his 1988 campaign Bush argued that “the cheapest way to eradicate narcotics is to destroy them at their source.” After assuming office, Bush marshaled resources against the international suppliers of cocaine. In late 1989, the National Defense Authorization Act empowered the Pentagon to engage in counternarcotics operations for the first time. In September of that year, the president also unveiled his “Andean Strategy,” a five-year, $2.1 billion package of military, economic, law-enforcement, and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) assistance directed toward the three largest producers of cocaine: Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Colombia served primarily as a processing and smuggling hub for Peruvian and Bolivian cocaine. However, production in the country soon escalated. Although the United States faced difficulty measuring the precise amount of cocaine that each country produced, government officials were able to estimate the metric tonnage of production using data on hectares of land under cultivation, coca leaf yields, and the coca-leaf-to-cocaine
ABIGAIL VAUGHN

Figure 3.1 shows the potential cocaine production of each Andean country between 1990 and 2010. Potential cocaine production is estimated by multiplying the hectares of coca cultivation with the average kilogram-per-hectare coca leaf yield figure and coca-leaf-to-cocaine transformation ratios. Data from U.S. Department of State, various years; UNODC 2007, 2010, 2013

Three distinct factors precipitated the substantial increase in Colombian coca cultivation during this time period. First, smugglers faced rising transit costs for the importation of coca into Colombia for processing. The U.S. air bridge denial program, a component of Bush’s Andean Strategy, put pressure on aerial smugglers. Unable to bring sufficient Peruvian coca into Colombia for processing, the cartels instead made Putumayo, a state in Colombia’s southern region, the new epicenter of coca cultivation.

Around the same time, several prominent cartel kingpins and officers were captured or killed. The resulting changes in leadership spurred the creation of loosely organized “baby” cartels that splintered from their predecessors. Without the coordination provided by the kingpins and their established relationships with foreign coca suppliers, the new cartels sought to vertically integrate their operations within Colombia, a move that exacerbated demand for domestic coca cultivation. Although the new cartels were less powerful than the organizations they replaced, the fragmentation of existing networks created new challenges for counternarcotics officers, who struggled to acquire targeting information on cartel leaders. Violence also increased as rival groups competed to fill the power vacuum and to obtain larger shares of the narcotics market.
The final change that triggered a rise in Colombian cocaine production in the 1990s was increased collaboration between armed groups and drug traffickers. While multiple insurgent groups emerged following the Colombian civil war in the 1950s, many were quickly eliminated as the national government consolidated power. Two exceptions were the guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarios de Colombia (FARC) and, to a lesser extent, the Ejército de Liberación (ELN), which persisted and expanded their jurisdictions. FARC initially taxed marijuana and cocaine traffickers, but in the 1990s it began to charge coca producers a tax in exchange for protection from government interference. Because most coca cultivation occurred in areas that historically had been FARC strongholds, as coca production expanded so too did FARC’s tax revenue. By the end of the 1990s, FARC resources had grown so much that the group was able to quadruple its forces and gain additional territory for coca production. As a result, by 1997 Colombia had surpassed Bolivia and Peru as the primary supplier of the world’s cocaine.

In addition to the rise in coca cultivation, another major change in Colombia bears mention. Throughout the 1990s, conflict mounted between insurgents and paramilitary groups, and eventually the level of violence threatened to undermine the stability of the Colombian state. Paramilitaries originally emerged in opposition to FARC, the ELN, and violence perpetrated by the Medellín cartel. However, by the mid-1990s, an estimated 70 percent of paramilitary finances were related to the drug trade. The largest and most well-known paramilitary was the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), which by 2002 had established thirty-two blocks across the country. As paramilitaries and insurgent groups grew and competed for power, they wreaked havoc on each other and on the government of Colombia in two ways. First, ongoing violence directly threatened the security of the state. Second, the presence of armed groups protecting coca growers greatly increased the cost to Colombia of suppressing cocaine production.

Finally, while cocaine production remained a concern for the United States, the rise in violence also drew U.S. attention to the threat of instability. Figure 3.2 illustrates how threats to Colombian security, measured by the number of kidnappings, selective killings, and massacres, varied over time. In 1999, following a dramatic rise in Colombian violence over the preceding half decade, the United States placed FARC, the ELN, and the AUC on its list of foreign terrorist organizations. U.S. concern about insurgent groups further increased after 9/11 as policymakers in Washington came to terms with the destabilizing abilities of violent groups. Collectively, the changes in cartel organization, cocaine production, and armed groups resulted in greater U.S. policy attention to both coca cultivation and the security apparatus of Colombia over the time period covered in this chapter.
To achieve its counternarcotics objectives, the United States contracted with the Colombian president to suppress coca-related activity. As the longest-running democracy in South America, Colombia was a natural ally to the United States. The Colombian president was also uniquely situated to eliminate cocaine production: he controlled the police and military and could impose legal reforms that reinforced direct suppression efforts. Finally, Colombia’s intimate knowledge of the terrain and local population made it more efficient for the United States to engage a proxy, rather than attempt to combat the narcotics trade unilaterally.

While the rationale for the United States’ preference for a proxy relationship is clear, why would Colombia participate? As Arlene Tickner argues, “For the Colombian government, the interest was born out of a need to combat an insurgency.” Colombian politicians feared that continued violence from guerrillas and cartels could permanently undermine the state’s legitimacy. Whereas the narcotics trade was initially tolerable—indeed, some Colombian officials actually supported cocaine production on the belief that the associated revenue would strengthen the country’s faltering economy—insurgent violence posed a genuine threat to the government’s survival. As narco-traffickers and insurgents forged new ties and violence levels spiked, the interests of Colombia and the United States rapidly converged.

We can estimate the effectiveness of the U.S.-Colombian proxy relationship based on the extent to which Colombia complied with U.S. demands. Two counternarcotics metrics are particularly important. The first relates to Colombian

![Figure 3.2](http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/informeGeneral/basesDatos.html)

**Figure 3.2.** Threats to Colombian security, 1990–2010. Data from Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, Bases de datos ¡Basta Ya! ¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias De Guerra y Dignidad, http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/informeGeneral/basesDatos.html

The Principal-Proxy Relationship

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attempts to suppress coca cultivation via manual removal and aerial eradication. Figure 3.3 tracks both these measures over time.

The second metric focuses on Colombia’s effort to remove processed cocaine and traffickers from circulation. The United States monitored cocaine seized through interdiction, the number of processing labs destroyed, and the strength of Colombian law enforcement at arresting traffickers, enforcing sentences, and complying with U.S. extradition requests. Figure 3.4 shows the annual metric tons of cocaine that were seized, relative to coca production.\textsuperscript{26}


The United States, in a situation distinct from many of the other case studies in this volume, enjoyed relatively high visibility into Colombian efforts. The DEA and Department of State’s physical presence in Colombia permitted the United States to monitor Colombia’s antidrug efforts with high accuracy. American monitoring capability peaked under Plan Colombia, a large U.S.-led counternarcotics initiative and foreign aid package, when additional U.S. personnel were stationed in Colombia and the United States exerted increased control over counternarcotics operations. Despite this monitoring capability, the case still involved uncertainty for the principal because the United States was unable to observe the cost of effort that each Colombian president faced when pursuing U.S. objectives. Moreover, several Colombian presidents had incentives to exaggerate these costs so that U.S. policymakers would demand less effort than they would if they assumed Colombia could control disturbances with relative ease.

Colombia’s costs of effort took two forms. The first was the direct cost that the government paid to suppress disturbances and fund counternarcotics forces. The second was the political cost that each Colombian administration faced for pursuing policies that conflicted with the desires of its selectorate or that would provoke the ire of the drug cartels, increasing the incidence of violence targeting Colombian citizens. Despite a series of political reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, corruption persisted, and drug cartels were often able to coerce politicians through bribes or violent threats. Citizens also pressured Colombian presidents through traditional political avenues, and would protest against the incumbent government when cartels or armed insurgent groups engaged in civilian-directed violence in response to government policies. Finally, civilians whose livelihood suffered as a result of aerial fumigation also directed protests at Colombian presidents. The extent and type of effort cost that each Colombian president faced played a significant role in determining the degree of counternarcotics policy alignment between the United States and Colombia.

U.S. policymakers relied on a variety of tools to induce Colombian cooperation when they believed interest alignment was low. The United States could reward Colombia by providing economic assistance or diplomatic awards when Colombia demonstrated sufficient effort. Economic aid could also be reallocated in a manner that would benefit Colombian leaders. Economic Support Funds (ESF) were often used for infrastructure and development projects. International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds were similarly used as rewards because they paid for professional military education and training on U.S. weapons systems. Colombian leaders sometimes dispensed resources as patronage by offering their friends and political allies free trips to the United States. Economic aid could also be reallocated in a manner that would benefit Colombian leaders. Economic Support Funds (ESF) were often used for infrastructure and development projects. International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds were similarly used as rewards because they paid for professional military education and training on U.S. weapons systems. Colombian leaders sometimes dispensed resources as patronage by offering their friends and political allies free trips to the United States. Other forms of military aid, however, were primarily designed to build
Colombian capacity, enhance Colombian security, and provide the resources necessary to professionalize the Colombian military. Figure 3.5 shows the proportion of U.S. military and economic assistance given to Colombia each year from 1990 to 2010.

However, most nonmilitary aid to Colombia required annual certification and could be suspended if the United States decided that Colombia was no longer fully cooperative. The certification process provided the United States with a straightforward means of imposing punishment. Threats to suspend aid were also credible given the intense domestic pressure that American presidents faced to crack down on drug-producing countries. If decertification occurred, the United States would impose mandatory sanctions as well as a series of discretionary penalties. Mandatory sanctions included the termination of most forms of foreign assistance and bilateral loans, as well as a U.S. vote against loan requests in multilateral development banks. Discretionary punishments included the loss of trade preference status, the suspension of sugar quotas, tariff penalties, and the curtailment of transportation arrangements. These penalties created further economic hardships for Colombian leaders and, when imposed, delivered a clear signal that the United States sought to impose costs on Colombia’s president. Diplomatic rewards and punishments were essentially costless for the United States to impose, but were highly visible and could engender either international pride or embarrassment.
Theoretical Expectations

This case examines four distinct periods of U.S.-Colombian relations, which coincide with Colombian presidential terms. A key source of variation between periods is the degree of interest alignment between the principal and agent and, thus, the agent’s cost of effort. Applying the model’s logic, at the commencement of each presidential term, the United States estimated Colombia’s interest alignment and then offered Colombia a schedule of incentives and punishments that the United States promised to fulfill, contingent on Colombian effort.\textsuperscript{31} The United States enforced these terms until it either obtained new information about the agent—in which case the United States could alter the terms—or a new Colombian president was elected.

The model makes several predictions that are relevant to this case. First, when the United States—the principal—believes the Colombian agent has closely aligned interests, it should seek to build capacity in order to reduce the agent’s costs of effort. For example, Presidents Pastrana and Uribe both held preferences that were closely aligned with those of the United States; however, both presidents also faced difficulty suppressing disturbances due to very direct high costs of effort. The theory predicts that the United States should attempt to help Colombia build capacity during these periods (H\textsubscript{12}). On the other hand, Presidents Gaviria and Samper held preferences that diverged substantially from those of the United States. The indirect control model predicts that no capacity building should be evident during these terms.

Second, the model predicts that when new Colombian presidents face higher costs of effort than the leaders they replace, the United States must either accept lower effort from the new agent or use higher-powered incentives to extract the same level of effort (H\textsubscript{7}). When the United States uses higher-powered incentives, the Colombian president should be more likely to exert effort to suppress the disturbance (H\textsubscript{6}). While the incentives used may be either punishments or rewards, the incentives must be sufficiently large to motivate the agent. The Colombian costs of effort increased gradually throughout the Gaviria, Samper, Pastrana, and early Uribe administrations, before declining slightly in the latter half of Uribe’s term. The indirect control model therefore makes two empirical predictions: either the United States should accept lower levels of effort from each successive Colombian administration, or, alternatively, the United States should threaten larger punishments and offer more generous rewards to each new Colombian president to achieve the same level of effort as the predecessor.

Third, the coercive mechanism depends on the observed level of disturbance within a period. When the United States observes high disturbances relative to its expectations, it should be more likely to punish the agent, but when the United States observes low disturbances, it should be more likely to reward the agent.
In the context of this chapter, the United States should be more likely to punish when it concludes that Colombia has failed to exert sufficient effort given U.S. expectations. This is especially evident during Samper’s term. Table 3.1 summarizes the expected U.S. incentives for each period given estimated levels of the relevant variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD (AUGUST)</th>
<th>KEY PARAMETER(S)</th>
<th>THEORETICAL EXPECTATION</th>
<th>OBSERVED ACTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990–94</td>
<td>Partial interest alignment; increasing agent’s cost of effort; low level of disturbance.</td>
<td>Principal should use low-level rewards after observing zero or small disturbances (H₂).</td>
<td>Principal used low-level rewards and punishments after observing small disturbances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–98</td>
<td>Diverging interest alignment; increasing agent’s cost of effort; increasing level of disturbance.</td>
<td>Principal should use high-powered incentives to account for diverging interest alignment (H₇). Agent should be more likely to exert effort when high-powered incentives are used (H₆).</td>
<td>Principal used more frequent and larger punishments in response to high levels of disturbance. The agent exerted greater effort to suppress the disturbance in response to the higher-powered incentives used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998–2002</td>
<td>Increasing interest alignment; increasing agent’s cost of effort; increasing level of disturbance.</td>
<td>Principal should punish after observing high levels of disturbance (H₃). Principal should be more likely to engage in direct control and build capacity to reduce agent’s cost of effort (H₁²).</td>
<td>Principal did not engage in direct control or threaten punishments after observing high levels of disturbance because interests were sufficiently aligned. Principal built capacity under Plan Colombia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002–10</td>
<td>High interest alignment; decreasing agent’s cost of effort; decreasing level of disturbance.</td>
<td>Principal should build capacity (H₁²) and reward the agent for decreased levels of disturbance (H₃).</td>
<td>Principal rewarded the agent after observing decreased levels of disturbance and the principal continued to build capacity under Plan Colombia.</td>
</tr>
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(H₂, H₃).
Colombia, 1990–2010

Period 1: President César Gaviria (1990–94)

When César Gaviria assumed office in August of 1990, cartel violence was already rising dramatically. From 1989 to 1990, cartels and insurgent groups planted forty car bombs that left more than five hundred civilians dead. An estimated 350 judicial workers, along with hundreds of other officials, reporters, and even presidential candidates, had been murdered by the Medellín cartel in retaliation for antidrug policies such as the extradition of suspected narcotics smugglers. All told, from 1984 to 1989 approximately thirty-one thousand deaths were attributed to drug traffickers. The violence reached its zenith when the presidential favorite Luis Galán was assassinated by drug cartels for appearing friendly with the United States. Given the circumstances, Gaviria staked his 1989 presidential bid on a promise to reduce cartel violence. He campaigned as a hard-line antidrug candidate and made democratic and judicial reform a high priority for his administration.

Before Gaviria assumed office, President George H. W. Bush initiated the Andean Strategy, which provided aid and identified broad policy objectives for the region. While the plan primarily targeted Peru’s coca production, it also required Colombia to increase military operations, strengthen its laws against drug traffickers, dismantle drug organizations, arrest key narcotics personnel, and minimize corruption. Judicial reform ranked as a particularly important U.S. objective for Colombia. The United States therefore initially interpreted Gaviria’s policy interests as being close to its own, with the notable exception of Gaviria’s opposition to extradition, which he assumed would incite rather than reduce violence. A U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report stated that “Colombia [was] the most dedicated of the Andean countries to reducing the production and shipment of cocaine.”

The United States further assumed that Gaviria’s direct cost of effort was also low. After all, members of the Colombian public were clamoring for a security apparatus that would curb the rising violence. This perception, however, does not paint a full picture. Gaviria faced more moderate costs in two respects. First, cartel violence increased substantially in opposition to U.S. political demands. The losses of life and equipment that Colombian security forces incurred made it more difficult for them to conduct antidrug operations. Second, Gaviria faced political opposition to the United States’ controversial fumigation policy. Locals resented aerial eradication, which damaged farmers’ crops in areas near coca cultivation and destroyed a major source of income for agricultural communities.

Despite the moderate cost of effort that he faced, Gaviria met U.S. demands to reduce the total supply of cocaine. Total Colombian coca cultivation remained
relatively low and even decreased in 1991 and 1992. Cocaine seizures—another noisy signal of production—likewise increased from fifty-three to eighty-six metric tons in the first two years of his term, but decreased thereafter (see figure 3.4). Finally, Gaviria made significant progress in destroying processing laboratories, closing 269 in 1990 and 401 in 1993.

Colombian effort in the realm of judicial reform also matched U.S. expectations. In July of 1991, the Colombian Assembly ratified a new constitution that established an independent judiciary and created the Court of Public Order, which provided additional safeguards to protect judges from cartel violence. From January 1991 to September 1992, the Court of Public Order convicted 70 percent of the eight hundred individuals tried for drug- and terrorism-related crimes, whereas under the previous court system the conviction rate was only 12 percent. Shortly afterward, the United States rewarded Colombia with a six-year, $36 million grant based on the Colombian government’s demonstrated commitment to reform.

Finally, Gaviria achieved significant public success in combating Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel. Although in 1992 Escobar escaped from prison, much to Gaviria’s embarrassment and the consternation of the United States, Gaviria responded by forming the Bloque de Búsqueda, a group tasked with locating Escobar. A March 1993 DEA report suggests that the United States was encouraged by Gaviria’s effort and that the Colombian police had disrupted many of the Medellín cartel’s activities. Finally, in December 1993 the Bloque succeeded in capturing and killing Escobar, providing Gaviria with another visible success.

Despite curbing the reach of cartel money in the judiciary and combating the Medellín cartel, Gaviria’s costs of effort inhibited him from wholly fulfilling U.S. demands in other areas. Bending to Congressional pressure, Gaviria began by reducing drug-related sentences by a third and pledging to prevent the extradition of drug traffickers who turned themselves in and confessed to at least one crime. The extradition pledge was heavily favored by the public, who believed that it would decrease cartel influence while still preserving Colombian sovereignty. Public opinion also motivated Gaviria to cooperate with the Colombian Congress on a constitutional amendment that banned the extradition of Colombian citizens. By 1993, the United States was also increasingly concerned that Gaviria was deliberately treating the Cali cartel with a lighter touch than he had used to suppress the Medellín cartel. One reason for the suspicion was that Gaviria had relied on Cali for information regarding Medellín cartel operations. To allay U.S. concerns, the Colombian police conducted a large operation against the Cali cartel in late 1993 that resulted in the seizure of more than $54 million in bank accounts. As a result, the United States concluded that Colombian effort
was sufficiently high and that the Gaviria administration had demonstrated its commitment to counternarcotics.\textsuperscript{48}

The model outlined in the introduction predicts that if the principal observes small and infrequent disturbances, it should be more likely to reward the agent. During Gaviria’s term, the rate of coca cultivation remained low and the amount of pure cocaine produced varied only slightly. The model predicts that U.S. assistance, particularly economic aid, should therefore have increased as a reward for sufficient effort by Gaviria. Such rewards are directly observable in several instances, such as the $36 million grant that followed Gaviria’s judicial reforms.\textsuperscript{49} The proportion of economic aid also increased during the period, including ESF and IMET funds that Colombian politicians could use to dispense political favors. Most striking, perhaps, was the significant increase in economic assistance in 1993 in the wake of Escobar’s death. Thus, although Gaviria’s moderate level of effort caused him to reject U.S. demands in some areas, his general success in quelling cocaine production, fighting the Medellín cartel, and enacting judicial reform led the United States to offer moderate rewards in hopes of inducing continued effort from his administration.

\textbf{Period 2: President Ernesto Samper (1994–98)}

U.S. policy goals remained consistent when Ernesto Samper assumed the Colombian presidency. As before, the United States maintained that Colombia should strengthen sentencing for drug traffickers, stem the flow of cocaine, and eliminate corruption within the Colombian government. The United States paid particular attention to the last of these issues, with U.S. ambassador Myles Frechette even commenting that “corruption in Colombia is the greatest single impediment to a successful counternarcotics effort.”\textsuperscript{50}

Although U.S. interests remained consistent between the Gaviria and Samper administrations, the same cannot be said for those of the two Colombian presidents. While Samper’s true policy preferences remain ambiguous, it was widely believed—and reported in the U.S. press—that Samper was receiving Cali cartel money.\textsuperscript{51} Samper’s cartel ties compromised his will to effectively combat the drug trade and increased the price he paid for complying with U.S. policies.\textsuperscript{52} In addition, Samper faced steep direct costs of pursuing counternarcotics policies in the form of widespread cartel violence, which increased during his tenure.\textsuperscript{53} Samper therefore needed to balance the threat of possible punishment for failure to achieve U.S. goals with the threat of cartel retaliation if he hewed too closely to U.S. demands.\textsuperscript{54}

As coca growers moved into Colombia from Peru and Bolivia, aerial eradication increasingly became the preferred U.S. counternarcotics strategy. The policy
was massively unpopular with Colombians, who took to the streets to voice their discontent, further increasing Samper’s political cost for compliance. The model predicts that with Samper’s heightened costs of effort, the United States would be forced to use higher-magnitude rewards or punishments to induce sufficient effort. In addition, we should expect to observe punishments when disturbances grow especially large during a given period. The following narrative provides evidence that supports these expectations.

Utilizing the same metrics as described earlier, it appears that on some issues Samper exerted moderate effort. For example, during Samper’s tenure a greater number of cocaine labs were destroyed than under Gaviria. The amount of coca that was eradicated also increased in 1995, dropped slightly in 1996, and then rebounded significantly in 1997 and 1998 (see figure 3.3). On other issues, however, Samper’s performance was mixed: arrests declined during Samper’s term, as did the amount of cocaine seized through interdiction until 1998. The dramatic spikes in coca cultivation and cocaine production are the most worrying signals of Samper’s willingness to exert effort. Closer analysis of the U.S.-Colombian relationship further reveals that what little effort Samper did contribute was motivated primarily by a series of very large punishments and limited rewards.

Because of Samper’s links to the cartels, the United States significantly decreased the amount of assistance it promised to Colombia, from $117.5 million in 1993 to only $34.7 million in 1994. Fearing further reductions, Samper pushed for stricter sentencing laws to assuage U.S. beliefs that he was too soft on drugs. In December 1994, Samper launched Operation Splendor, a controversial fumigation effort in the South. In response to Samper’s compliance with U.S. aerial eradication demands, thousands of farmers who earned their livelihoods from coca production protested in the streets and bombed forty thousand barrels of oil coming from Ecuador.

The United States rewarded Colombia for its effort in 1995 by certifying that Colombia could receive additional counternarcotics assistance. Nevertheless, U.S. officials continued to worry that Samper’s personal ties to the cartels would discourage him from exerting full effort. Consequently, Colombia was only certified with a national interest waiver, and its promised assistance remained around $32 million. Despite the certification, President Bill Clinton stated that Colombia was not cooperating fully in the drug war and that the political will of the Colombian government to act forcefully against the cartels remained a major concern. As a result, the United States offered only small and infrequent rewards, preferring instead to induce effort by threatening punishment.

The Department of State made these threats explicit by demanding that Colombia achieve four objectives by June 1995 in order to avoid decertification the following year. First, the United States ordered Colombia to meet several aerial
eradication targets. In this respect, Colombia exceeded expectations. Second, it required Samper to arrest at least one senior member of the Cali cartel. Once again, Colombia succeeded. Results on the third directive were more mixed. Colombia passed Law 190 in response to U.S. demands for money-laundering legislation. However, the United States viewed the legislation as weak and worried that Colombia would neither implement nor enforce the law. Finally, the United States demanded that Colombia pass tougher sentencing laws for those involved in the narcotics trade. In this respect, Colombia failed entirely. Top Cali cartel leaders received light sentences and several previously captured leaders continued to run their operations from jail. Furthermore, when Samper’s campaign treasurer and defense minister were arrested for accepting bribes from the Cali cartel, he attempted to decriminalize that behavior and halted an investigation into his administration. While the threat of punishment induced some compliance from Samper’s government, the weak money-laundering legislation and the failure to crack down on the cartels indicated that the United States required even larger punishments if it was to induce higher levels of Colombian cooperation.

In March 1996, the U.S. enforced its threat by declining to certify Colombian compliance with antidrug efforts and suspending most U.S. assistance to Colombia. Citing corruption as a primary concern, U.S. congressman Jesse Helms stated that “no government can be completely committed to obliterating the drug cartels, drug corruption, and drug-related violence, nor effective in the achievement of these goals, if its senior officials owe fealty to drug kingpins.” In response to the punishment, Samper proposed and eventually passed an antinarcotics reform package that included stronger asset forfeiture laws. Samper also appeared to exert effort by publicly advocating for a constitutional amendment that would permit extradition, a salient U.S. objective. However, when U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno demanded that Colombia extradite four Cali cartel leaders in June 1996, Samper reneged on his commitments and ignored the request. Scarcely a month later, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee heard testimony that Samper had accepted Cali cartel money as payment for his refusal to extradite. Once again, the United States responded with punishment by revoking Samper’s visa, a move that embarrassed Samper and apparently chastened him into launching Operation Condor, a new series of aerial spraying operations and cocaine seizures. Although Samper once again faced domestic backlash when thirty thousand farmers protested the aerial eradication program, he permitted U.S. instructor pilots to participate in the program beginning in late October.

Due to Samper’s mixed effort in 1996, the United States once again decertified Colombia in 1997. The Department of State justified the decision by explaining that Colombia not only lacked adequate political will but also suffered from
rampant corruption and an underfunded judicial system. The United States specified five goals for Colombia to meet if it was to prevent similar decertification in 1998. First, the Colombian government needed to introduce a new, U.S.-preferred herbicide for aerial eradication. In June of 1997, the Colombian government approved this change. Second, the United States ordered Samper to actually implement the extradition amendment that he had advocated and extradite the four Cali kingpins that the United States had requested the previous year. In November, the Colombian Congress partially complied by passing the constitutional amendment to allow extradition but declining to apply it retroactively, a move that protected the Cali leaders.

The United States’ third request of 1997 was that Samper implement his laws on asset forfeiture, money laundering, and sentencing. Samper was also ordered to accept a U.S. maritime agreement that would improve interdiction of cocaine by increasing the number of ships that counternarcotics agents could inspect. On February 19, the Colombian Congress passed Samper’s antinarcotics reform package, which strengthened penalties for money laundering and moderately increased sentencing. While actual prosecutions remained scarce, Colombian banks strengthened their oversight of unusual deposits. The following day, the Colombian government accepted the maritime agreement as ordered. Procedures that would allow seizure of drug traffickers’ assets, however, remained problematic. In forty cases investigated by the Colombian National Police, only one resulted in a final asset seizure.

Fourth, the United States demanded that Colombia investigate and try corrupt officials. In August, a series of prominent politicians were sentenced for illicit enrichment, including the former president of the Chamber of Representatives, the mayor of Cali, Samper’s campaign manager, his former attorney general, and several members of Congress. Fifth and finally, the United States demanded that Colombia tighten prison security to prevent captured drug traffickers from managing their operations from behind bars. In April, the Colombian National Police assumed control of the maximum-security wings of Colombia’s major prisons. While this was considered an improvement, the United States continued to desire additional action.

As figure 3.6 illustrates, estimated coca cultivation increased substantially over Samper’s term. As per the predictions of the theory, the United States utilized large punishments such as decertification to coerce Samper into exerting additional effort. The evidence from 1996 and 1997 suggests that although Samper was hesitant to cooperate, the credible application of these punishments motivated the Colombian president to comply with U.S. demands. Although estimated coca growth and cocaine production continued to rise, Samper did meet many of the specific goals that the United States required of him. The fact that
Samper exhibited positive effort despite the political costs he faced at home indicates that the incentives at least pushed him in the right direction. Absent the threat of decertification, it is unlikely that Samper would have fulfilled the United States’ requests, particularly given his close links to the cartels and his desire to avoid public wrath. One possible explanation for the continued rise in disturbances is that Colombia lacked the capacity to fully quell cocaine production, but Samper’s interests diverged sufficiently that the United States was unwilling to help him build additional capacity. That concern would change with the arrival of Pastrana.


When Andrés Pastrana assumed the presidency in 1998, coca cultivation had doubled and cocaine production had quintupled since 1994. Colombia had become the world’s largest coca grower, replacing Bolivia and Peru. Internal security had eroded: homicides, massacres, and kidnappings from various armed groups continued unabated. Escalating violence was an alarming sign that the Colombian state was deteriorating. Fearful of the government’s inability to provide security, more than seven hundred thousand Colombians fled the country between 1995 and 2000. By 1998, it was clear that shifts in the nature of the disturbances—namely, the intersection of growing conflict between baby cartels

and the heightened involvement of insurgents in narcotics—had greatly impeded the Colombian president’s ability to suppress narcotics activity.

Resolving guerrilla violence became the central issue of the 1998 Colombian election. Pastrana pledged to initiate peace talks with the rebels, reform the judicial system, and secure a negotiated settlement that could end the conflict.\textsuperscript{81} Pastrana’s interest in stemming corruption and in creating an effective judicial system aligned well with U.S. objectives, which included the implementation of asset-forfeiture and money-laundering laws; extensions that would make extradition retroactive; expanded eradication efforts in the South, particularly Putumayo; crackdowns on corruption; and the recapture of Colombian territory from guerrillas and paramilitary groups. Finally, the United States emphasized expanding aerial eradication methods. Whereas President Samper had been barred from visiting the United States, the newly elected Pastrana was invited for talks due to apparent interest alignment. Moreover, despite rising cocaine production, Colombia was certified in 1998 by a national interest waiver, a move that signaled U.S. willingness to provide assistance if the new administration proved cooperative.\textsuperscript{82}

Relative to previous periods, Pastrana’s direct costs of effort rose significantly, while his political costs remained moderate. Direct suppression costs were driven by four factors. First, Colombia’s resource base contracted, limiting its ability to finance counternarcotics operations. The economy took a sharp downturn, with only 0.5 percent growth in 1998 and a 4 percent contraction in 1999—problems that were magnified by a freeze in international credit markets.\textsuperscript{83} Unemployment likewise ballooned to 18.2 percent in 1999.\textsuperscript{84} Second, the cost of eradication increased as insurgent and paramilitary groups, now involved in narcotics, imposed greater physical costs on government forces. During this time, FARC and ELN forces swelled to more than eighteen thousand fighters who controlled 14 percent of Colombia’s 1,070 municipalities, and were active in two-thirds of the country.\textsuperscript{85} The GAO reported that two-thirds of FARC members and one-third of ELN units financed their activities with the drug trade.\textsuperscript{86} FARC controlled most of the coca-growing territory in Putumayo, and frequently planted land mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in coca fields, making manual eradication all but impossible.\textsuperscript{87} They fired on planes sent to fumigate coca fields, increasing the difficulty of aerial eradication as well. As FARC’s power and control grew, so did the cost of antidrug operations. Pastrana’s costs also rose as baby cartels proliferated and competed for power. Disaggregation from largely hierarchical cartel organizations to more diffuse groups increased the difficulty the government faced in acquiring useful information about high-level cartel officials. Finally, changes in cocaine production also raised new challenges, as stronger strains of coca leaf facilitated an increase in production, the advent of
“black cocaine” impeded detection by drug-sniffing dogs, and coca farmers adapted to eradication efforts by spraying molasses over their plants to protect them from herbicides.

While Pastrana still faced a political backlash related to aerial eradication, these costs were moderated by enhanced public support for ending guerrilla and cartel violence. In October 1999, more than one million Colombians marched in nationwide protests against FARC. Even in Putumayo, the state that benefited the most from coca growth and the presence of FARC, Governor Jorge Devia was elected with the campaign slogan “Putumayo without Coca.”

Shortly after assuming office, Pastrana announced an antidrug strategy called “An Integrated Policy on Drugs for Peace,” fulfilling a U.S. objective that the previous administration had failed to accomplish. The plan included implementation of alternative crop development, increased eradication and interdiction efforts, and legislative and institutional reforms to combat drug-trafficking organizations. Pastrana emphasized alternative development programs such as crop substitution in hopes of attenuating the domestic backlash from increased fumigation. Because the plan paralleled many American policy objectives, the United States authorized $2.6 billion in assistance over a three-year period. However, the U.S. preferred aerial fumigation to crop substitution, and as a result, most of the aid was delivered to the Colombian National Police for eradication operations. The fact that crop substitution was included in the package at all was likely a reward to Pastrana designed to encourage continued effort.

By the end of 1998, Colombia had seized record amounts of cocaine and achieved its best eradication year yet, resulting in full certification for 1999. However, the United States became increasingly concerned that a new demilitarized zone that emerged from Pastrana’s peace talks with FARC and the ELN would negatively affect counternarcotics efforts. After FARC members murdered three U.S. activists who were visiting Colombia to support the Uwa indigenous people, reports from the Department of State identified guerrillas and paramilitaries as the most immediate impediments to U.S. interests. The Department of State eventually encouraged Pastrana to step back from the peace talks, and in June 1999, the United States pressured Colombia to expand eradication into FARC’s southern strongholds.

Pastrana initially worried about the cost of the new eradication efforts, given his government’s resource constraints, FARC’s increased power, and the economic impact on farmers who lacked alternative development options. Nevertheless, in October 1999 the Colombian government announced its desire to enact a $7.5 billion policy known as Plan Colombia, which aimed to attract international funding in order to reduce cultivation, processing, and distribution of narcotics by 50 percent over six years. The plan centered on five key strategies: advancing
peace talks, improving the economy, combating narcotics with eradication in the South, reforming the judicial system, and supporting democratization and social development. The following month, as a signal of Pastrana’s genuine intentions toward eradication, the government extradited a Colombian citizen for the first time in nine years. The United States again rewarded Colombia for good behavior by fully certifying Colombia’s cooperation against drug trafficking. The certification stated that, “Colombian drug efforts . . . demonstrate the true commitment of the Pastrana administration to cooperate fully with the United States in the illegal trafficking of drugs.” Both ESF and IMET aid continued to increase.

By the start of 2000, Colombia produced 75 percent of the world’s cocaine. Its estimated coca cultivation also continued to rise despite increased effort from Pastrana. Nevertheless, the announcement of Plan Colombia convinced U.S. officials that Pastrana’s interests were closely aligned with their own. At the same time, they recognized that Pastrana could not manage the direct costs of suppressing cocaine production. GAO reports from the time period frequently cite Colombia’s lack of capacity as an impediment to achieving eradication objectives. As armed groups joined with cartels, the United States concluded that it would need to help Colombia address these security threats as a first step toward achieving its counternarcotics goals. As a result, in July 2000 the United States agreed to provide $860 million to Colombia for the 2000–2001 fiscal year in addition to the $330 million that was already promised, thereby doubling overall assistance from 1999 levels. The United States directed most of the assistance to training and equipping Colombian military personnel, who were necessary to provide security for the police-directed eradication push in Putumayo. The plan also included antiterrorism assistance to train Colombian units, and increased the number of U.S. personnel on the ground. However, this number was capped to appease U.S. congressional concerns.

Although disturbances under Pastrana increased at a similar rate as under Samper, U.S. responses differed markedly. Because Pastrana’s interests were more closely aligned with those of the United States, American officials began to invest in capacity rather than threaten punishments. The near-perfect convergence between the two actors was reflected in the revised Plan Colombia, which became fully operational in 2001. Both coca cultivation and cocaine production reached their highest levels ever in 2001, but declined once Plan Colombia’s capacity building began to translate into results. Threats to Colombian security followed a similar trend by declining in 2001 after a peak in 2000.

The theory makes two predictions relevant to this period. First, when the agent’s cost of effort increases—as Pastrana’s did relative to the preceding administrations—the principal should be more likely to engage in direct control.
However, in this case the United States realized that the agent’s interests were aligned with its own and that capacity building therefore remained preferable to direct action. While U.S. support for Plan Colombia entailed an increase in U.S. training and personnel on the ground, most assistance was allocated to the Colombian military and police, which remained under Pastrana’s control.

This also explains why the United States declined to punish Colombia despite observing the largest disturbances to date. Coca cultivation and cocaine production rose in all years apart from 2002. It appears, however, that the United States recognized Pastrana as a closely aligned proxy who shared U.S. interests but was unable to suppress disturbances due to a lack of capacity. U.S. assistance to Plan Colombia closely aligns with this prediction: punishments were unnecessary because Pastrana’s motivation was already high. Moreover, the United States preferred to send economic and military assistance to Pastrana rather than either disengage or attempt to eradicate cocaine production directly.

**Period 4: President Álvaro Uribe (2002–10)**

Colombia’s next president, Álvaro Uribe, campaigned as a hard-liner who promised to restore security and stability throughout Colombia. This was not simply bluster—Uribe’s father was murdered by FARC in a botched kidnapping attempt, and as a politician Uribe himself was a consistent and vocal opponent of guerrilla groups. He became the embodiment of burgeoning anticartel sentiment among the Colombian public, and his 2002 election came with a mandate to dismantle insurgent groups and impair cocaine producers. So strongly was Uribe associated with these efforts that on the day he was sworn into office a series of protest bombings killed nineteen people and injured sixty others only blocks away from the inauguration site. Rather than intimidate Uribe, the event merely reaffirmed his desire to demolish FARC.

President George W. Bush considered Uribe a perfect match. Both presidents regarded security threats as a top priority and believed that military action was the most effective means to achieve stability. In the wake of 9/11, the U.S. security establishment was also sensitive to the threat of terrorism and organized violence, and State Department reports from the time period pinpoint the international drug problem as the single largest source of illegal revenue for violent insurgents. While the United States was still concerned with its original counternarcotics goals of drug interdiction and crop eradication, Colombian security threats were now important even independent of their effect on narcotics production. As a result, Uribe enjoyed an ideal confluence of circumstances and interests: he faced low political costs from a Colombian public that had grown weary of violence, and he also benefited from obvious interest alignment with
the United States, which encouraged Washington policymakers to offer assistance. Over time, the capacity improvements Uribe received lowered his direct costs of effort and enabled him to accomplish his goals.

One change that highlighted the shift in U.S. priorities was the relaxation of aid restrictions in Plan Colombia so that assistance could be used to combat insurgents directly. Uribe’s new “Plan Patriota” used U.S. aid to further professionalize the Colombian Army and launch offensives in the demilitarized FARC zone. Uribe also devoted resources to strengthening police presence, and in 2004 he achieved the goal of significantly improving police capabilities in all 1,098 Colombian municipalities. The security investments produced record results. Uribe’s administration averaged 57,247 arrests per year, compared to 13,278 under Pastrana. Likewise, while only 129 labs were destroyed in 2002, this figure increased to 4,869 in 2010. Cocaine seizures, eradication efforts, and extraditions also peaked under the Uribe administration.

Uribe also made significant progress toward dismantling illegally armed groups. In 2003 he negotiated a peace deal with the AUC to demobilize its 20,000 fighters over the next several years. By 2004, more than 4,600 AUC militants had demobilized. In addition, FARC membership dropped by half, from around twenty thousand fighters in 2002 to between eight thousand and ten thousand in 2009. Plan Patriota’s offensives led to the capture of many FARC members and the assassination of several of its leaders, including Raul Reyes, Alfonso Cano, and Mono Jojoy. Finally, Uribe implemented antiterrorism laws that allowed the police greater surveillance powers and facilitated arrests. Colombia’s security and stability improvements enabled the country to attract foreign investment, which helped the Colombian economy grow. This created a positive feedback loop in which Colombia could redirect additional resources toward security. From 2000 to 2009, Uribe tripled his defense budget, which allowed Colombia to assume primary responsibility for restoring the state’s security apparatus.

For most of his presidency, Uribe’s interests were almost perfectly aligned with those of the United States. Two scandals, however, indicate potential divergence. First, in early 2006, the “parapolitics” scandal revealed that top politicians in Uribe’s administration had inappropriate ties to the AUC. The extent to which Uribe was involved remains ambiguous, but he spearheaded the investigation and removed several politicians from power. The second scandal, “False Positives,” occurred in 2008 when Colombian security forces killed civilians and dressed them as guerrilla fighters to inflate casualty rates. Despite the scandals, Uribe enjoyed high favorability ratings throughout his presidency and is considered one of the most popular Colombian presidents. Uribe left office in 2010 with approval ratings above 70 percent. The scandals did not seem to bother the United States, which in January 2009 awarded Uribe its Presidential Medal of Freedom.
Overall, the Uribe period closely reflects two significant predictions of the indirect control model. First, when agents are closely aligned with principals, they can expect to receive assistance in the form of capacity improvements. Thus, when the United States identified Uribe as a closely aligned agent, it offered significant military assistance. Even during Uribe’s second term, aid levels remained high compared to earlier periods. Although Uribe continued to face high direct costs of suppressing disturbances, U.S. support for military professionalization significantly reduced these costs and allowed Colombia to expand the breadth of its operations.

The second prediction relates to the probability of rewards conditional on performance. When disturbances are sufficiently low, principals should be more likely to reward their agents. Coca cultivation and cocaine production decreased during Uribe’s administration from their 2001 levels, and though they rose slightly in 2005, they then continued their descent from 2007 to 2010, never again reaching pre-Urube levels. Likewise, threats to Colombian security showed a marked decline until they leveled off in 2006; they then continued to decline throughout Uribe’s second term. For his efforts, Uribe was rewarded with capacity-building assistance from the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and reprieve when the United States decided not to penalize him for his political scandals. There were no observable punishments during either of Uribe’s terms. The smaller rewards and the lack of any punishments suggest that with a nearly perfectly aligned agent, the United States did not need to utilize many incentives to motivate the agent to expend sufficient effort.

**Alternative Explanations**

Throughout this chapter I argue that the U.S.-Colombian relationship is an example of successful indirect control. Using a combination of punishments, rewards, and capacity building, the United States encouraged Colombia to exert significant effort at managing both domestic instability and the narcotics trade. However, despite the apparent success, the case presents several curiosities that require additional consideration.

First, were U.S. coercion and incentives actually necessary to motivate Colombia, or would the various Colombian presidents have exerted effort even in the absence of U.S. influence? With the exception of Uribe, Colombian presidents faced real and significant domestic backlash against counternarcotics policies. Until the mid-1990s, there was also some civilian support for the drug trade. Many Colombians believed that on balance the cocaine trade helped the economy despite the increase in cartel violence. As a result, in the absence of U.S.
incentives it is unlikely that Colombia’s presidents would have vigorously pursued aerial eradication or other counternarcotics initiatives even if the leaders personally opposed cocaine production.

Another important question is whether the United States should have attempted to build Colombian capacity earlier. After all, capacity building would have lowered the costs that Colombian leaders faced when combating the narcotics trade. However, the fact that several Colombian presidents lacked independent motivation to pursue counternarcotics policies helps to explain the United States’ decision. State Department and DEA reports consistently highlight the ubiquity of corruption as a main impediment to counternarcotics operations. Of particular concern was the Colombian National Police, which was widely thought to have close links to the cartels. As the indirect control model illustrates, the United States was unlikely to expend resources on capacity improvements if it feared that corrupt Colombian officials would divert those funds to alternative ends.

When the United States chose to initiate capacity building, was it motivated by an alignment of interests, or were there other forces in play? For example, some may argue that U.S. domestic preferences shifted in favor of capacity-building strategies and that this prompted the launch of Plan Colombia. There are credible reasons to doubt this alternative explanation. While U.S. policymakers negotiated the details of Plan Colombia, it was abundantly clear that they were under pressure from domestic interests to avoid a deep and lengthy engagement. The United States therefore placed significant constraints on the number of personnel and aircraft that it would provide Colombia, as well as on the uses to which these resources could be applied. If U.S. domestic pressure was a driving force behind capacity building, such limitations would not have occurred. For further evidence that increased interest alignment facilitated capacity building, consider changes in the proportion of U.S. aid in Plan Colombia that was delivered directly to the Colombian president for improvements in the Colombian military or police. Under Gaviria and Samper, military and police aid were relatively limited and closely monitored by the United States. Under Pastrana and Uribe, however, the United States both increased the supply of such funding and also allowed Colombia substantially greater discretion over how the aid should be used.

Another factor that complicates this analysis is whether the provision and withdrawal of assistance to Colombia was attributable to variation in Colombian effort or, alternatively, resulted from coordination failures among U.S. agencies involved in Colombia. It is clear from U.S. government statements regarding the 1996 and 1997 decertifications that assessments of Colombian effort played a significant role in the decision to provide or withdraw aid. While those documents reveal some coordination difficulties at the start of Plan Colombia, these were generally resolved within a year or two following implementation.
appeared to work as expected and were necessary to produce the high levels of effort observed during that period.

Overall, the patterns of historical behavior between the United States and Colombia closely match the theoretical predictions of the indirect control model. Both Gaviria and Uribe appeared to make progress in controlling disturbances and so received substantial rewards for their effort. Samper, on the other hand, held conflicting interests with the United States and faced stiff penalties when he failed to control disturbances. However, the United States still induced effort by Samper, at least partially, through the credible use of high-powered incentives. Finally, when the United States believed Colombian interests were highly aligned with its own, it invested in capacity to reduce Colombia’s future costs of effort, as evidenced by the assistance that it provided Pastrana and Uribe under Plan Colombia.

What insights about the effectiveness of capacity building can be gleaned from this case? Among policymakers, Plan Colombia has been highly praised. In 2016, Secretary of State John Kerry claimed that “it had helped transform a nation on the verge of collapse into a strong institutional democracy with historically low levels of violence.” Other policymakers have advocated applying the strategy elsewhere. Robert Kaplan, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, stated, “Colombia is what Iraq should eventually look like, in our best dreams.” Is Colombia a model for proxy drug wars? The evidence from this chapter suggests two conclusions. First, capacity building should be applied only when the United States identifies a reliable agent whose interests are closely aligned with its own. Second, principals should be aware that their agents may exert significant effort toward particular objectives while largely ignoring others. So principals should prioritize the elements that they most strongly wish to have the proxy state carry out.

The fact that principals often make a series of differing demands for their agents is usefully illustrated by the continued evolution of Plan Colombia. Under President Barack Obama, for example, Plan Colombia was designed for the dual purpose of counterinsurgency and counternarcotics. The United States largely achieved its security aims with limited investment of military force. On November 24, 2016, Colombian president Juan Santos signed a peace deal with FARC, after five decades of fighting. The deal required that FARC fully dissolve, and marked an incredible success for both the Santos administration and Plan Colombia’s objectives. On the counternarcotics front, however, Plan Colombia has been less successful. Although coca cultivation declined during Uribe’s term, it has gradually increased since 2014. According to a recent RAND report, “Strategic cooperation and large amounts of U.S. aid failed to stem the production
of narcotics. Nearly two-thirds of global cocaine continues to be produced in Colombia.

Perhaps rising coca production is simply no longer a salient issue for the United States. After all, over the time period covered by this chapter, U.S. cocaine consumption decreased by 30 percent. However, if the United States is not currently satisfied with Colombian counternarcotics efforts, then U.S. policymakers should clarify the terms they set. Separating counternarcotics and counterinsurgency into two separate policies—as opposed to combining them within a single package—may allow the United States to more directly motivate Colombian effort in each issue area by using a more closely tailored combination of rewards, punishments, and capacity-building initiatives than was applied in the past.

NOTES

2. See the introduction to this volume.
3. An estimated 5.7 million Americans used cocaine in 1985 (U.S. ONDCP 1999).
4. Tate 2015, 35.
6. Ibid.
7. Tate 2015, 36.
12. Because Colombia played a prominent role in narcotics trafficking as well as cultivation, the United States also evaluated the Colombian government’s effort to eliminate cocaine production based on the amount of cocaine the country seized and the incarceration rate of traffickers. Throughout the chapter, I also reference these measures when considering Colombia’s observable level of effort.
14. Tate 2015.
15. Beginning in the 1980s, violence in Colombia was increasingly linked with the narcotics industry. More than thirty-one thousand deaths in Colombia from 1984 to 1989 are attributed to drug trafficking alone. See U.S. GAO 1992.
16. Commonly referred to as La Violencia, the ten-year civil war estimates casualties between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand. See Simons 2004.
17. FARC operated in 175 municipalities in 1985, but by 1995 had expanded to 622 municipalities—almost half of Colombia’s total. FARC had 10,500 fighters with 105 fronts in 1994, up from 7,700 fighters and 80 fronts in 1991 (Steele 2017, 96).
18. FARC charged a per-gram surcharge on coca paste produced by small farmers.
19. Tate 2015.
20. The following year, three-quarters of the world’s cocaine was grown in Colombia (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 1999).
21. Los Pepes, a violent vigilante group opposed to Pablo Escobar, emerged as a counter to the Medellín cartel. Armed self-defense forces were legalized under Gaviria and supported through Samper’s “Convivir” program. However, the groups’ tendency to use
high levels of indiscriminate violence led to the Constitutional Court’s 1997 prohibition on the receipt of weapons. See Tate 2015.

23. Tate 2015.
24. All Colombian presidents in this study had received some of their postsecondary education in the United States, as was typical for the Colombian political elite.
26. Once the armed groups and cartels converged, the United States also evaluated the strength of Colombia’s security apparatus, measured as the extent of police presence and the rate of insurgent demobilization.
27. Elite training in the United States was considered a reward. Officers routinely received trips to Walt Disney World. See Tate 2015.
28. The narcotics certification process was established in 1986 by the Foreign Assistance Act and was replaced by the Foreign Relations Authorization Act (FRAA) in 2002. Similar to certification, the FRAA mandated that the president publish a “Majors list” identifying all major illicit drug-producing and drug-transit countries and determine whether countries have “failed demonstrably” to make substantial efforts to adhere to international counternarcotics agreements. See “‘Majors List’ Presidential Determination,” n.d.
29. Mandatory decertification sanctions applied against Colombia in 1996 and 1997 included restrictions on sales and financing under the Arms Export Control Act, nonfood assistance under Public Law 480, financing by the U.S. Export-Import Bank, and most other foreign assistance. Disaster and humanitarian aid were not subject to restrictions. See U.S. GAO 1998.
30. Ibid.
31. The Colombian president begins his term in August and serves for four years. Until 2005, presidents only served one term. Reelection was forbidden.
33. A Colombian survey showed that at least 25 percent of judges reported that they or their families had been threatened. See U.S. GAO 1992, 1.
34. Stokes 2005.
38. Ibid., 15.
39. The extent to which Colombians blamed Gaviria for increased violence is murky for two reasons. First, Colombia has a long history of violence and Gaviria’s term was not distinct from recent prior periods of violence. Second, Colombia has multiple groups engaging in violence, many for political aims. The public may have been uncertain about which group was directly responsible for the unrest.
42. Ibid, 2.
44. Crandall 2002. Pablo Escobar famously turned himself in along with other top Medellin members, although U.S. intelligence suggests that he was able to operate the cartel from behind bars (U.S. GAO 1993).
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. While total assistance decreased between 1990 and 1991 (see figure 3.5), this was likely reallocation rather than punishment; $100 million in previously committed Andean Strategy funds were redirected to higher-priority foreign policy objectives, one of which may have been the Gulf War (Tate 2015).

50. Quoted in GAO 1995a, 9.


53. See figure 3.2.

54. On November 4, 1996, a van loaded with 360 pounds of explosives was placed in front of an industrial plant owned by a senator who publicly favored a repeal of the extradition ban. The van was widely believed to have been planted by the cartels (Crandall 2002).

55. In November 1994, a mass protest was staged in response to fumigation. The next month another protest paralyzed public life in three municipalities. Antifumigation protests also occurred in 1996 and lasted for more than three months. See Tate 2015.

56. U.S. GAO 1995b, 2. The decrease in economic assistance can be interpreted as consistent with the predictions of the model in two ways. First, the United States was reducing capacity building to an agent whose interests were no longer closely aligned with its own. Second, the United States was punishing Samper for allowing disturbances to occur in the form of corruption within his administration.


60. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 1996.

61. Ibid.

62. A GAO report in August 1995 remarked that the arrest of several senior Cali members was a positive sign but that more effort was desired (U.S. GAO 1995a).


64. Ibid.


67. In December 1996 the Colombian Congress enacted a bill making asset forfeiture retroactive, although this continued to face constitutional challenges.


70. Crandall 2002.

71. Ibid.


74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. See figures 3.4 and 3.6.
79. Tate 2015.
82. Because Pastrana was elected in August of 1998, the United States based its certification decision for the 1998 calendar year on its assumed interest alignment with Pastrana rather than on Samper’s performance (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 1998).
84. Sales 2013, 2.
85. Tate 2015.
88. Black cocaine is cocaine mixed with zinc or other pigments and dyes. The mix absorbs odors and turns the substance black, evading typical detection efforts (U.S. GAO 1999).
89. Mejia 2016.
90. The march was called “No Más” (Shifter 2012).
91. Tate 2015.
93. Ibid. The zone was roughly the size of Switzerland and allowed insurgents to operate with impunity. Nevertheless, the United States was willing to tolerate the plan as long as it did not interfere with coca eradication (Tate 2015; Crandall 2002).
97. The Colombian judicial system was still very weak. Less than 3 percent of all cases, including drug-related cases, were prosecuted (U.S. GAO 1999, 15).
100. Tate 2015.
102. Prevost et al. 2014.
103. See figure 3.2.
104. Uribe even left his own Liberal Party after it supported Pastrana’s 1991 peace talks with FARC (Sales 2013).
106. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 2002. FARC, the ELN, and the AUC had been placed on the Bureau of Counterterrorism’s Foreign Terrorist Organizations list in 1999.
107. Even criticism of aerial eradication diminished over time as the United States shifted toward manual eradication and the country grew more secure.
110. Ibid.
111. Shifter 2012.
112. Steele 2017.
115. When the restriction on Colombian presidents’ running for a second term was removed in 2005, Uribe became the first president to be reelected. See Simons 2004.
119. Quoted in Tate 2015, 221.
120. Over the last ten years, Mexico has experienced a staggering rise in cartels and drug-related violence.
121. In 2004, only eight hundred U.S. military personnel and six hundred private contractors were in Colombia (Shifter 2012, 5).
122. Negotiations began in 2012 with full support from President Obama (Casey 2016).
123. Quoted in Tate 2015, 222.
124. Almost 40 percent of Colombian cocaine is now directed toward European markets (UNODC 2013).