

US-COLOMBIA INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CASE OF PLAN COLOMBIA

RELAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS EUA-COLÔMBIA: O CASO DO PLAN COLOMBIA

RELACIONES INTERNACIONALES ESTADOS UNIDOS-COLOMBIA: EL CASO DEL PLAN COLOMBIA

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ABSTRACT: In the second half of the 20th century, the Colombian state was concerned with containing the guerrilla insurgency, promoting internal peace and restructuring its power. The weakening of the state, maximized by drug trafficking led by guerrilla and paramilitary groups, sparked discussions about the establishment of a security plan involving the United States and Colombia, entitled Plan Colombia in 1999. Bill Clinton's US policy, inserted in a conjuncture of war on illicit activities, aimed at interrupting the institutionalization of violence in the Colombian State, as well as containing the impacts of drug sales in adjacent territories. The majority of investments came from the US government, which would remain maximized due to the episodes of 2001 – when the “war on terrorism” converted the plan into a fight against narcoterrorism. This article aims to analyze Plan Colombia in the dynamics of International Relations between the US and Latin America.

KEYWORDS: International relations. Plan Colombia. United States. Drug trafficking.

RESUMO: Na segunda metade do século XX, o Estado colombiano preocupava-se em conter a insurgência das guerrilhas, propiciar a paz interna e reestruturar seu poder. O enfraquecimento estatal, maximizado pelo narcotráfico conduzido por grupos guerrilheiros e paramilitares, suscitou discussões acerca da instauração de um plano de segurança envolvendo os Estados Unidos e a Colômbia, intitulado como Plan Colombia em 1999. A política estadunidense de Bill Clinton, inserida em uma conjuntura de guerra aos ilícitos, visou interromper a institucionalização da violência no Estado colombiano, bem como conter os impactos da comercialização de drogas nos territórios adjacentes. Os investimentos majoritários foram provenientes do governo norte-americano, os quais permaneceriam maximizados em função dos episódios de 2001 – quando a “guerra ao terrorismo” converteu o plano como uma luta contra o narcoterrorismo. O presente artigo visa analisar o Plan Colombia na dinâmica das Relações Internacionais entre os EUA e a América Latina.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Relações internacionais. Plan Colombia. Estados Unidos. Narcotráfico.

RESUMEN: En la segunda mitad del siglo XX, el Estado colombiano se preocupó por contener la insurgencia guerrillera, promover la paz interna y reestructurar su poder. El

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debilitamiento del Estado, maximizado por el narcotráfico liderado por la guerrilla y los grupos paramilitares, provocó discusiones sobre el establecimiento de un plan de seguridad entre Estados Unidos y Colombia, denominado Plan Colombia en 1999. La política estadounidense de Bill Clinton, insertada en una coyuntura de guerra sobre actividades ilícitas, encaminadas a interrumpir la institucionalización de la violencia en el Estado colombiano, así como a contener los impactos de la venta de drogas en territorios colindantes. La mayoría de las inversiones provinieron del gobierno de Estados Unidos, que se mantendría maximizado debido a los episodios de 2001, cuando la “guerra contra el terrorismo” convirtió el plan en una lucha contra el narcoterrorismo. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el Plan Colombia en la dinámica de las Relaciones Internacionales entre Estados Unidos y América Latina.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Relaciones internacionales. Plan Colombia. Estados Unidos. El tráfico de drogas.*

Introduction

The theme of International Relations, as suggested by César Augusto Niño González (2016), remains composed of a complex and dynamic framework, especially due to the multiplicity of actors that make up the social world. International architecture, therefore, does not remain restricted solely to the performance of state apparatuses, but is subordinated to personal influences, responsible for composing international organizations and multinational companies – which end up complementing the game of power relations. International Relations correspond to a “[...] such a complex area due to the simple fact of being made up of actors that makes it too dynamic” (NIÑO GONZÁLEZ, 2016, p. 12; our translation). Although it emerged with the primary purpose of apprehending the war conflicts between States, the field ended up composing “[...] a sector of social reality, that of human relations understood by their "international" quality, and at the same time designates the scientific consideration of those relations” (NIÑO GONZÁLEZ, 2016, p. 13; our translation). International Relations, therefore, refers to the relationships between human individuals and collectivities that often transcend the limits of the political community of the State.

Based on soft movements – called soft power and apprehended by theorists such as Joseph S. Nye Jr (2010) and Francisco Guadalupe Torres Castillo (2008) – or on more forceful actions – named as hard power by scholars Caio Barbosa Martinelli (2016) and Bruno Cardoso Reis (2011) –, International Relations have as a framework the interactions of individual or institutional actors in the international system, whose interests are manifested in their power relations. Although we do not aim to maximize debates about international policies based on the principles of biopower (FOUCAULT, 1999), the state of exception

(AGAMBEN, 2008) or necropolitics (MBEMBE, 2018), it remains consensual that International Relations have acquired multiple characteristics over the course of the last centuries, often carried out by ambassadors or mediation agencies. The trajectory of the Western world from the 19th century onwards raises the plurality of interests and ideological principles that guided the foreign policies of modern States – when certain States try to impose their interests above others according to the international conjuncture.

Regarding interstate relations on the American continent, the implicit or explicit interference of the US government in Latin America remained maximized from the 1900s onwards, inaugurated by the Spanish-American conflict of 1898 and the international blockade of Venezuelan ports (STUART, 2011). North American interests mediated the contact of the “brother from the north” with other locations on the continent, whether in favor of mercantile ideals or ideological principles. In fact, “The first nation that emerged along the lines of liberal democracy on the American continent is also the one that most strongly imposes its presence in Latin America even today” (VILLAÇA, 2011, p. 65, our translation). The bibliography dedicated to the theme of International Relations between the United States and the countries of Latin America is mostly dedicated to the 20th century, especially regarding US mediation in Latin American military coups inserted in the anti-communism Cold War (DREIFUSS, 1981).

The political myths that constitute the North American expansionist policy remain numerous to legitimize the country's mild and forceful interventions in Latin American governments, especially regarding the divine providence of *Manifest Destiny* dedicated to the mission of civilizing. Although a promoter of Western order or policing, the influence of the United States in Latin America remained characterized by notorious contrasts – to the detriment of the “image of a coherent and homogeneous North American international policy” (VILLAÇA, 2011, p. 67, our translation). The complexity of interstate relations subjugated by US interests was not always manifested in war campaigns – such as the landing of US troops in Cuban territory in the revolutionary conjuncture –, but was also expressed in bargains and negotiations, shaped by strategies constituted by discourses and symbolic elaborations – such as Daniella Maria Barandier Toscano (2017) had raised about an educational cooperation between the US government and Brazil in an attempt to shape Brazilian symbolic capital in relation to the “brother of the north”.

Evidently, the policies of economic stabilization – such as the financial control of inflation – and political stabilization – especially regarding support for representative democracies – formed part of North American International Relations around Latin America

from the 1990s onwards. The apparent “calm” established with the end of the capitalism-socialism conflict would remain broken with *Plan Colombia*, signed in 1999 between then US President Bill Clinton and Colombian President Andrés Pastrana Arango in favor of ending drug trafficking and under the aegis of continental security. The plan predisposed the involvement of adjacent countries – such as Brazil and Peru – in the neutralization of Colombian guerrillas and drug trafficking (VILLAÇA, 2011). The indispensability of promoting the pacification of Colombia and containing the insurgency of the guerrillas and paramilitaries constituted the main justification for the construction of the US-Colombian agreement.

Despite the changes in US foreign interference as a result of the events of 2001 and the military invasion of Iraq in 2003, *Plan Colombia* converged the characteristics of US international policy towards Latin America in the context of the dawn of the 21st century: a power that simultaneously shares the character of soft and hard, based on high financial investment in favor of the defeat of a terrorist enemy and that often relies on outsourced military personnel. Such a framework would legitimize the anti-terrorist aura of the plan, driven by the fight against “narco-terrorism” in the region – whose implications transcended Latin America and reverberated in the economy and criminality of the northern and European “civilization”. The forcefulness of the US troops was added to the economic incentives in favor of Colombian society harmed by the violence of illicit trafficking, uniting hard and soft power in order to promote internal peace and combat the sale of local drugs to US and Europeans consumers.

In the course of this work, we will discuss the *Plan Colombia* monopolized in the concepts of International Relations - especially regarding the terminologies soft power and hard power. We will approach *Plan Colombia* as a manifestation of North American International Relations towards Latin America in the context of the dawn of the Third Millennium, imbued by a conjuncture of war on terrorism and the fight against human rights violations.

***Plan Colombia* in US-Colombia international relations**

Political instability has been a defining feature of Colombia since the 19th century. The antagonisms between conservatives and liberals marked the policy of the century, being maximized in the course of the 1900s through the rise of the Thousand Days War (1899-1902). The internal disputes would spread internationally with Panamanian emancipation

mediated by the US intervention of Theodore Roosevelt – interested in controlling an interoceanic channel of a strategic nature. In fact, “The separation of the territories in question was the result of an expansionist US policy, and not of an agreement between the parties involved or the result of any manifestation of the population” (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 03-04, our translation).

Although Panamanian emancipation took place only in 1903, the Colombian state would recognize Panama only in 1921, upon payment of 25 million dollars by the US government in order to repair the damage caused by the division. The transaction would ratify the unconditional alignment between the US and Colombia, which was carried out in 1918 under the terms of the *Respice Polum Doctrine*, which was decisive in the bilateral relations of both countries during most of the 20th century (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018). The US intervention would also manifest itself in the assassination of the leftist leader Jorge Gaitán in line with the command of the Colombian Conservative Party in 1948, which culminated in the emergence of broad social movements called *Bogotazo*. In fact, on 9 April 1948, the Colombian population took to the streets to destroy buildings and demand the overthrow of the government associated with “Yankee imperialism”. The social opposition had been strongly repressed in Colombia from these episodes, manifested by aggressions, deaths, torture and looting. Such an interim in Colombian history would remain called *La Violencia*, a period of civil war based on the US National Security Doctrine – “in which the US encouraged, through financial, logistical and technical support to the Colombian military, the fight against leftist movements and social groups” (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 05, our translation).

A prominent military target consisted of the guerrilla groups that emerged as a result of the end of the Second World War, guided by the ideals of the Communist Party that had stimulated the defense of the Colombian peasantry – greatly harmed by the expansionism of North American landowners. Guerrilla groups articulated proposals adjacent to the Colombian State and contributed to maximize the historic political instability. The creation of the Frente Nacional in 1958 – a government system based on bipartisanship, in which there would be an alternation of power between liberals and conservatives for sixteen years – did not eliminate inter-party conflicts and institutionalized violence, contributing to the strengthening of guerrilla movements, which they reacted in disagreement with the State through kidnappings and had drug trafficking as their source of investment. Believing that the National Front would only be an elitist agreement to contain democracy, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (1964) and the National Liberation Army (1965) gained increasing strength and

organized themselves independently of government authorities. Drug trafficking was the main financier of the guerrilla movements.

As the guerrillas grew stronger, the Colombian State published Decree 3398 and Law 48 in 1968, allowing the population to create self-defense organizations and armies. In fact, “As a consequence, in the 1970s, armed groups were formed, mostly with conservative, traditional and anti-communist ideals, which gave rise to paramilitary associations, supported by the Armed Forces and the Colombian economic elite” (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 07, our translation). Paramilitary groups also took advantage of drug trafficking as a mechanism of power and self-financing, demonstrating the outsourcing of security by the Colombian government. Corruption and violence are set against the backdrop of the drug economy, which has driven Colombia's politics and economy for thirty years, imposing its corrosive effects on a society whose violence was institutionalized. In fact, drug trafficking fed the protagonists of the armed conflict that threatened to transcend the country's legal borders, harming US influence in Colombian politics and economy - which justifies the subsequent US attempt to eliminate drug production and trade through *Plan Colombia*.

With Ronald Reagan's rise to the US presidency, drug trafficking would become a primeval object of international concern, intensifying the war on drugs. The Narcotics and National Security directive identified drug trafficking as a new regional threat and militarized the fight against drug trafficking, associating leftist guerrillas with the cocaine trade in 1986. Under Bill Clinton (1993-2001), the war on drugs would remain legitimized with the *Certification* mechanism, according to which Latin American countries linked to the USA had military responsibility in the eradication of the production and trafficking of illicit products that prospered in their respective domains. Nations that did not comply with the determination would face sanctions from the US government and international economic institutions. The intent remained visible: to contain the proliferation of drug trafficking in Latin America and limit it to Colombia, making it a simpler local case to resolve. Thus, “countries such as Peru and Bolivia, which had high levels of coca cultivation, intensified their military efforts to eliminate plantations, causing the 'balloon effect' in the Andean region, which culminated in the transfer of drug trafficking to Colombian territory” (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 08). In this context, in 1999, the USA and Colombia began to articulate a plan to contain drug trafficking based on exponential funding and the military apparatus, in order to contain its expansion in both countries. In fact, pacifying Colombia proved to be essential to restore US intervention in Latin America, threatened by a new *internal enemy*: terrorism. Presidents Andrés Pastrana and Bill Clinton were protagonists in the creation of *Plan Colombia*.

As suggested by Nerissa Krebs Farret (2014), the *Copenhagen School* provided a new paradigm in International Relations through the *Securitization Theory*, according to which an international theme that threatened the security and existence of States and that had an emergency nature would require external measures and interstate interventions in order to solve a problem that a particular country was not able to solve. Drug trafficking intensified in the 1950s would be considered a transnational organized crime subject to securitization, being a protagonist in the maintenance of the drug industry – the second largest in the world, superimposed only by the arms industry (FARRET, 2014). The *Securitization Territory* would support the establishment of the bilateral plan in 1999, as it took drug trafficking as an international problem that demanded external economic and military intervention. The North American role in *Plan Colombia* is limited to a historical network of influences between the “brother of the North” and Latin American countries from the dawn of the 20th century and which took different formats during the course of the century. The narcotics trade would replace Marxism in North American concerns about Latin America, above all by financing political-military groups that did not adhere to their interests in the locality.

The political and socio-economic situation in Colombia in the 1990s corresponded to a weakened State, unable to contain drug trafficking in the country. The substantial maximization of coca cultivation would make the internationalization of the Colombian drug trafficking problem inevitable. Regarding *Plan Colombia*, Noam Chomsky (2000) corroborates that in the course of 1999, Colombia would become the main recipient country of US military and police assistance, overlapping Turkey and other countries in the Latin America – reaching the reception of 300 million dollars from the “brother of the north”. Many of the justifications rest on a structural violence inherent to Colombian society, classified as having the worst rate of human rights violations at that juncture (CHOMSKY, 2000). In theory, such a plan consisted of a program of the Colombian government with a chronologically stipulated duration of six years, through which 7,500 million dollars would be injected by the US into the military apparatus of the State of Colombia and 6 million dollars would be provided by the IMF, the Europe and the World Bank to finance social and economic programs in that country. The interests rested, notoriously, on the containment of the trade and consumption of Colombian drugs around the world – a fact that justifies the initial writing of the plan in the English language, which is easier for western rulers to access.

[...] five main factors opened space on the discussion and the need to implement Plan Colombia, namely: the difficulty of the Colombian State to contain cartels such as those in Medellin and Cali and, later, the micro

cartels dispersed in different regions of the country; the cycle of expansion of economic resources caused by the spread and intensification of drug trafficking, which increased violence, spread corruption and, consequently, increased the power of paramilitaries and guerrillas in Colombia; the withdrawal of the “Certification” mechanism, under which the United States applied sanctions and pressures to Latin American countries at the same time as they monitored their stimuli in the fight against drug trafficking, characterizing the territory as a “narcodemocracy”, depreciating the image of Colombia abroad; the interests of economic, political and social groups in the policy of internationalization of the doctrine of annihilation of drug trafficking, benefiting its purposes; and the need for foreign assistance to face national confrontations (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 11-12, our translation).

The Colombian vision of the plan was aimed at negotiating with insurgent groups, containing drug trafficking and, above all, addressing the roots of national problems, reforming and restructuring their institutions. For Colombia, economic strengthening, the maximization of democracy, the existence of an adequate health system and universal access to education were the fundamental instruments for the reduction of violence and for the resumption of the rule of law - projects that would count on the international funding. For Andrés Pastrana, therefore, *Plan Colombia* would provide pacification, prosperity and the strengthening of the Colombian State. External investments would be divided into a triad of objectives: the containment of drug trafficking – representing around 50% of collections –, socioeconomic growth and the strengthening of state institutions. Such efforts, outlined by Andrés Pastrana in the signing of the plan, would be effectively practiced in the government of Álvaro Uribe, who looked to the Colombian Armed Forces for a way to solve the problem of drug trafficking. According to initial estimates, six years would be needed for the restructuring of peace and prosperity in the country.

Many investments were directed to social programs, such as the one entitled *Famílias em Ação* – implemented by the Social Support Network (*Rede de Apoio Social* - RAS) with the aim of providing quality of life for the population. Thus, “RAS was also responsible for other programs that granted subsidies to more than 500,000 Colombian families in order to encourage an improvement in food and education in the communities” (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 14, our translation). However, the main focus of *Plan Colombia* was the elimination of coca plantations. The Colombian region of Putumayo corresponded to the main territory responsible for the cultivation of the plant in the country, stimulating the fumigation of planting areas and, at the same time, the search for the replacement of coca with other crops. Several socio-economic projects aimed at indigenous people and peasants were created for this purpose.

The redirection of the plan would be due to the changes in the international scenario caused by the terrorist attacks on the US in 2001 – which marked changes in US security policy, responsible for identifying terrorism as the main threat to the political stability of the continent. The strategic mechanisms adopted began to focus on the military fight against drug trafficking, putting the former socio-economic policies for the eradication of structural problems in second place (GODOY, 2003). Internally, Alvaro Uribe adopted a government strategy called “democratic security”, acting through an attempt to demobilize the paramilitaries through negotiations and aiming to eliminate the guerrillas through military force, especially in the southern regions of Colombia – always supported economically and militarily by the American government. It can be seen that the US employed a more incisive foreign policy in the post-2001 context of combating Colombian drug trafficking, given its association with terrorism and its transformation into America's internal enemy. Hard power manifested itself above all in the deployment of US troops and in the training of local soldiers, intervening in Colombian politics in a legitimate manner in the eyes of the international community.

Still in an article immediately following the implementation of Plan Colombia, Chomsky (2000) raises the atrocities inherent to the actions of the US military, culminating in the annual expulsion of 300,000 refugees and the massacre of 3,000 lives. The violence remained mostly attributed to Colombian paramilitary forces, such as those subordinated to the power of Carlos Castaño – dedicated to combating Marxist guerrillas, as indicated in an interview with journalist Jeremy McDermott in 2002. The fact is that reports published by the UN in 2000 show that the US military participated in the massacres directly or indirectly through their omission, allowing paramilitary atrocities (CHOMSKY, 2000). American sponsorship of violence was identified in the year after the plan was created, allowing us to understand why the homicide rate was maximized by 20% in 1999.

Plan Colombia was a prominent manifestation of the US policy on the war on drugs, associating Colombia as the main responsible for the growth of illicit consumption in North American territory. The strategy, however, culminated in an increase in local mortality and did not prioritize structural changes in Colombian society, implying in the extension of the problems of Latin American drug trafficking. In fact, the war on drugs constituted a maneuver for US interference in Latin America in order to maintain its hegemony on the American continent. Coca plantations were maximized during the implementation of the plan – especially from 2007 onwards –, representing a setback in the containment policies adopted at the time. Thus, “[...] the strategy was not able to solve the structural issue of the illicit drug

culture, based on the historic Colombian conflict, inequality, lack of opportunities and poverty in the country” (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 16, our translation). The attempt to eradicate the protagonists of drug trafficking and the consequent militarization of the conflict resulted in the growth of the war industry, enabling the “market of violence” that ended up contributing to the extension of the drug trade in Colombia.

Anti-drug policies in Latin America would change again as a result of changes in the US political landscape in 2007 – due to the Democrats' victory for the US Congress. The US political ideology – now based on protectionist ideals – would change relations with Latin American countries, leading to a reduction in investments in *Plan Colombia* and promoting the rejuvenation of drug trafficking in the country. According to Marcelo Santos (2010), the new US perspective on Colombia remained justified by the Colombian government's low dedication to combating human rights violations in its domain, as well as its reduced interest in containing paramilitary and guerrilla groups. It is noted that the application of the plan has changed according to the domestic political situation of the USA, either by financing the socio-economic and military development of Colombia, or by reducing its investments in the country.

The trend, therefore, consisted of the resumption of drug production and trade in Colombia from 2007 onwards, as well as its expansion in the Bolivian and Peruvian territories that until then had eradicated the cultivation of narcotic plants. The growth of drug trafficking, in a way, aimed to meet the broad demand for drugs among Americans and Europeans – the main consumers of Latin American drugs and who saw the profitability of their commercialization in the “civilized world”. The cartels would be relocated to the less populated areas of Colombia, increasingly integrating the daily lives of peasants and maximizing violence and mortality in the country. Therefore, “With Plan Colombia, the consequence would be the same, only the transition of the problem of drug trafficking to different areas, more susceptible to its development” (CAIXETA; MENDONÇA, 2018, p. 19, our translation).

It is noted that the attempt to solve drug trafficking as an isolated issue of Colombian political history was not a successful choice, given the inefficiency of disregarding the peculiar characteristics of a unique society. *Plan Colombia* ended up postponing the consequences of drug trafficking and hiding its impacts on local society. The Colombian conflict is still unresolved and internal disputes continued even after the dissolution of Colombia's main guerrilla group in 2016 – the FARC. The plan ended up building a negative view of the country on the international scene, associated with drug trafficking and excessive

violence. In fact, *Plan Colombia* was just one more episode of US international policy in Latin America that has yet to be finalized. Only the future will allow us to assess the actual implications of the plan in Colombia and in the Western world.

Final considerations

Political and economic interests converged to legitimize the military intervention of the “brother of the north” in Colombian territory. Although the focus of investments has changed during the implementation of the plan, the interests of the US government have always been juxtaposed with those of the Colombian State – especially regarding the aim of improving the population's quality of life. However, due to the marginalization of structural problems, *Plan Colombia* would only end up postponing the country's problems and accentuating mortality and violence. In fact, the fight against drug trafficking aimed solely at re-establishing US influence damaged by Colombian guerrillas and paramilitaries. Currently, the cartels remain widespread in Colombia and adjacent countries, funding political-military organizations that are averse to the determinations of the Colombian State and to the influences of the North American government.

The pre-eminence of the theme becomes visible. Contemporaneity, as suggested by Andreza da Silva Galdioli (2008), remains marked by the penetration of Western culture and the concept of the Nation-State in the most diverse regions of the world, fostering broad debates about the universalization of Western culture. The context, in fact, implies a necessary approach to themes such as imperialism, hegemony and power, especially regarding US foreign policy – defined either as soft power or hard power. The US government's own cultural diplomacy was a prominent tool in international relations between the US and Latin America, joining military intervention on certain occasions – as seen in the Colombian case in the 21st century. Much more than exhausting the topic, the present work will only be concluded with the development of the consequences of *Plan Colombia*.

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