



eradicating the coca and opium poppy plants used to make cocaine and heroin, respectively, while helping the Colombian government end its civil war, reduce human rights abuses, and reestablish political stability through aid to its military and police forces. There was beauty in the Plan's simplicity: eliminating the plants which produced the drugs that generated black market funding for its civil war would almost solve all the problems facing Colombia simultaneously. And while President Bush has expanded Plan Colombia's vision—along with renaming it The Andean Initiative—to include the deconstruction of all "terrorist groups" operating in Colombia, he's kept the other stated goals in place. Yet Plan Colombia may not have been fueled by a sense of U.S. good heartedness and justice nearly as much as it was by the push of big business. The war in Colombia had been raging for more than 30 years, after all, before the U.S. decided to get involved. Cocaine use had already peaked during the crack epidemic of the late 1980s and '90s that swept across the United States like a bad wind and was on the decline long before intervention in Colombia became a White House imperative. But in 1996, the U.S.-Colombia Business Partnership was founded to represent U.S. companies with interests in Colombia, and a well-financed lobbying effort for just such intervention began. The companies represented by the Business Partnership included the Occidental Petroleum Corp, the Enron Corp, Texaco (now merging with Chevron) and BP Amoco among others. Each of those companies had huge stakes in Colombia and all had suffered financial losses because of the war. As nearly all the funding for Plan Colombia was toward military ends, the early winners in the final \$1.3 billion Plan Colombia sweepstakes that Congress approved as an emergency measure in 2000 were three military contractors: Sikorsky Helicopters, Bell Helicopter Textron Corp and DynCorp. Sikorsky, of Stratford, Conn, secured a \$360 million contract for 30 Black Hawk helicopters; the Ft. Worth-based Bell got a \$66 million contract for 33 of its Huey helicopters, and DynCorp had an ongoing contract upgraded and renewed for two years for nearly \$600 million. Thus DynCorp, a company which primarily utilizes former military personnel for its government contracts worldwide became the lynchpin of Plan Colombia. Their contract calls for them to help in drug interdiction, troop and supply transport, reconnaissance, search and rescue missions, aircraft maintenance, helicopter and crop-dusting pilot training and a host of other jobs. Most importantly, DynCorp was given the lucrative aerial fumigation contract to eliminate all the coca plants and poppy growing in Colombia. Monsanto, the pharmaceutical giant from St. Louis which had provided Agent Orange as a defoliant during the Viet Nam war was also a beneficiary as one of its products, Roundup—glyphosate—was chosen as the Plan Colombia herbicide.

The biggest potential winners in the Plan Colombia sweepstakes though, the oil companies and the Houston-based Halliburton (formerly CEO'd by vice-president Dick Cheney), which provides their equipment and expertise, would have to wait a while for their payoff, but when it comes it will be a good one. The U.S. Geological Survey Hollin-Napo Unit, part of the World Petroleum Resource Assessment 2000 was released just prior to the passage of Plan Colombia in April 2000. What it indicated was that there were between 130 and 300 commercially viable but undiscovered oil fields in the region covering Southern Colombia, northeastern Ecuador and northwestern Peru. The heaviest concentration of those lay in Putumayo in Colombia and across the river in Sucumbios, Ecuador. Estimates as to the size of the fields began at a minimum of 1 million barrels—less is not considered commercially viable—and topped out at 750 million barrels. But those estimates may be low: One of the fields pinpointed in the Hollin-Napo Survey was discovered earlier this year—the Ishpingo-Tamococho-Tiputini, or ITT oil field in the Yasuni National Park—and has 1.41 billion barrels of proven reserves. 15 foreign companies are currently bidding on the rights to develop it and extract the oil. The ITT field alone "doubles Ecuador's known oil reserves", according to Leslie Wirpsa, a graduate Fellow in Human Rights at Stanford, who is studying oil in the region.

There are problems standing in the way of most of the oil exploration in both Putumayo and Sucumbios, however. In Colombia there is the civil war and coca; in Ecuador much of the oil rich land is either ancestral indigenous lands, or within the boundaries of Yasuni National Park, the Limoncocha Biological Reserve or the Cuyabeno Reserve, incursions into all of which have drawn protests from local and foreign environmentalists. Another issue that exists in both Putumayo and Sucumbios is the difficulty of pinpointing oil reserves because of the thick jungle canopy that covers much of the region. Satellite photography, an invaluable tool in oil exploration, cannot see through forests. Gordon Staples, Research and Product Developer for RADARSAT, a Canadian Satellite Imaging company says that "In the dense forests of Central Canada geologists see variation in forest-type which implies geological formation—they can read the topology despite not seeing it. But in areas of dense tropical jungle the geology is that much more complex. In other words, the differentiation between oil deposits and subsurface water deposits is considerably easier if there is no ground cover." Coca in Colombia There are more than 200 species in the Erythroxylaceae, or coca, family, but only two have a high enough cocaine alkaloid content to have any commercial value: Bolivian coca and Colombian coca. Both species have been cultivated for at least 3,000 years and the plant's leaves have traditionally been utilized for religious, social and medicinal reasons. But until recently, only Bolivian coca was used in the manufacture of cocaine. It grows well in the moist tropical forests on the eastern slopes of the Andes mountains in Bolivia and Peru and has an alkaloid content considerably higher than Colombian coca.

Despite its lower alkaloid content, during the mid-1990s, when Colombia overtook Peru as the world's number one producer of coca, Colombian coca was pressed into commercial use because Bolivian coca doesn't grow there. Colombian coca grew well on either mountain slopes or in the sweltering lowland jungle and was particularly draught resistant. With a lesser alkaloid content, meeting 70-80% of the world's demand for cocaine necessitated growing more acreage than was needed with Bolivian coca, which led to major increases in acreage under cultivation in the last 10 years. Colombia, for instance, was estimated to be growing about 250,000 acres as late as 1998. But State Department numbers suggest that during 2001, Colombia had roughly 420,000 acres under

cultivation, an increase of 40% over four years. That increase, much of which has taken place in the southern Colombian state of Putumayo, has been a perfect accident for generating numbers that justify Plan Colombia's key stated component of coca eradication in the media, and therefore the US public's eyes. Coca Eradication In the year prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia, a U.S.-financed coca eradication project already in place—which utilized DynCorp's services under the direction of the Colombian police—saw more than 160,615 acres, about 230 square miles, of coca fumigated by the Colombians, who claimed that 85% of the plants sprayed died. A U.S.-CIA assessment of their work stated that their numbers were unjustified, claiming that only 25% of the fumigated plants were actually killed. Colombian authorities were indignant, claiming that what the US, which relied exclusively on satellite images rather than ground checks, was seeing on their images were new shrubs and grass reclaiming the jungle floor, rather than coca. The issue is important because coca takes a considerable time to reach an age when it can begin to be harvested commercially—three years from seed and at least 6-8 months from cuttings. If the US assessment was correct, most of the plants would continue to produce cocaine alkaloid, as well as cuttings for new plantings. If the Colombian assessment was correct, not only would the area sprayed be almost devoid of coca for between one and three years, there might not even be enough healthy plants remaining to produce the cuttings necessary to regenerate the sprayed area.

But utilizing the numbers discrepancy, when Plan Colombia went into effect, the US made sure that DynCorp was firmly at the helm of the fumigation effort, rather than an adjunct to the Colombian police. During 2001, the first year spraying was done under the banner of Plan Colombia, US Ambassador to Colombia Anne Patterson estimated that 198,000 acres of coca were fumigated, much of that in Putumayo. But with the onset of Plan Colombia came the onset of problems for the people in the region. Farmers claimed that despite US assurances from the State Department that spraying would be pinpoint and only utilized on coca crops of more than seven acres, thousands of people with small family farms were sprayed as well, got sick and were ultimately displaced by the spraying. Additionally, there were complaints of animals dying and food crops poisoned. The U.S. denied the allegations, insisting that the product being used, a variant of Monsanto's household herbicide Roundup, was safe. On April 30, 2001, shortly after Plan Colombia's coca fumigation began, William R. Brownfield, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs wrote in the Philadelphia Inquirer that "The agent used in aerial eradication is the herbicide glyphosate... It is one of the least harmful herbicides to appear on the world market". Accounts claiming that glyphosate causes damage to humans, animals and the environment are unfounded.

Deputy Assistant Brownfield was either misinformed or lying. Four months before he opined in the Inquirer, Dutch journalist Marjon van Royen had published an admission by the State Department in the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad, that it wasn't Roundup, but Roundup Ultra that was being utilized in the spraying in Colombia. Additionally, the State Department admitted that a Colombian product called Cosmoflux was added to the spray mixture as a surfactant to help keep the herbicide on the plant long enough to do its work. But with their admissions, the State Department was quick to add that both Roundup Ultra and Cosmoflux were approved by the US Environmental Protection Agency. That was nonsense. The EPA had never heard of Cosmoflux and according to a spokesperson even now they have not tested it: "We don't examine products made for use in a foreign country." The question of whether it was Roundup or Roundup Ultra that was being used, and the presence of Cosmoflux is not a minor one in the context of the collateral damage spraying might do to food crops, animals and people. Roundup Ultra is considerably stronger than the regular Roundup found in garden centers. It was only approved for use in the US in November 2001, and then only for certain commercial, non-agricultural applications. The handling instructions correspond to the highest Environmental Protection Agency toxicity rating, Class 1, while common Roundup falls into the lower, Class 3 rating. Aside from Roundup Ultra's toxicity, there is also the question of the chemical formulation of Cosmoflux. Scientists who have requested the Cosmoflux formula to conduct such testing have been told by the State Department that the information is "proprietary" and "classified". Despite US denial that Roundup Ultra combined with Cosmoflux is hazardous to humans and animals in Colombia, the warning label of common Roundup alone suggests otherwise.

Regarding humans: "Do not allow workers into treated areas for a period of four hours." Regarding animals: "We recommend that grazing animals such as horses, cattle, sheep, goats, rabbits, tortoises and fowl remain out of the treated area for two weeks." Regarding plant life: "Avoid contact of herbicide to foliage, green stems, exposed non-woody roots or fruit of crops, desirable plants, and trees because severe injury or destruction is likely to result." The Roundup label makes particular note of drift as well, under a section boldly headlined "ATTENTION," in which it is stated in capital letters: "AVOID DRIFT. EXTREME CARE MUST BE USED WHEN APPLYING THIS PRODUCT TO PREVENT INJURY TO DESIRABLE PLANTS AND CROPS." Those warnings were more accurate than Deputy Assistant Brownfield's assessment of the damage the fumigation campaign was doing. Two health and environmental studies were carried out after complaints from campesinos and indigenous people were made shortly after Plan Colombia spraying began: one in southern Colombian department of Putumayo and the other in the northern Ecuador province of Sucumbios. The Colombian study, by biologist Elsa Nivia between February and April of 2001 indicated that more than four thousand people in Putumayo were suffering from acute eye irritation, respiratory problems, heart arrhythmias, skin lesions and rashes, temporary paralysis and temporary blindness among other health problems. Additionally, thousands of animals had died, and food crops were destroyed. The Ecuadorian study, done in May and June of the same year under the direction of Dr. Adolpho Mondonaldo was even more revealing, as Ecuador was not supposed to be sprayed or affected by drift. Dr. Mondonaldo, studying villages at

distances of two, five and ten kilometers from the Putumayo river on the Ecuadorian side found that 100% those living within two and five kilometers of the river suffered the identical symptoms as those living in Putumayo, Colombia. Among those people living 10 kilometers from the river 89% suffered identical symptoms. And as in Colombia, damage to food crops was severe, reaching 85-90% reduction in production. The US State Department did not officially respond to the studies, but had already shown a disregard for reports that people, animals and food crops were being affected by the spraying when it released a report in early December, 2000 that noted: "As their illegal lives have been affected by the spraying, these persons do not give objective information." On August 29 of 2002 U.S. Embassy officials in Quito, Ecuador again challenged the studies, conceding that they did seem to indicate that Ecuadorians in the studied areas did suffer a variety of Health problems, but that the study did not provide much in the way of proof about what might be causing those problems. Dr. Maldonado responded by noting, "If we have a series of pathologies that occur with great frequency near a particular point and decrease as the distance from that point increases, it means there is something at that point. That's just common sense, especially if the symptoms differ completely from pathologies found in other areas with similar characteristics." The complaints were not coming from those with what the US described as "commercial plantations" more than seven acres. The vast majority came from farmers who, as a CIA 2002 bulletin titled "Coca Factsheet, A Primer" noted, had less than one hectare (about 2.5 acres) of coca under cultivation. (One of the reasons for having such small plots, according to the same factsheet, is that "it can take up to almost 300 man days to harvest one hectare.") And the complaints were not coming only from what the Colombian government repeatedly called "environmental extremists." In the Spring of 2001, the German government complained that chemical drift had destroyed several fishponds they'd underwritten; Colombia's own Human Rights Ombudsman office contacted the State Department to call for an end to the fumigation. Klaus Nyholm, chief of the United Nations drug control efforts in Colombia weighed in as well, claiming that the spraying was driving coca farmers to clear new areas of virgin jungle in which to grow. The indigenous peoples of Putumayo also complained bitterly about the spraying in an open letter to the Colombian and US governments and several environmental groups. The letter, dated July 10, 2002, was titled "SOS From the Indigenous Peoples of Putumayo." It was signed by members of 13 distinct tribal groups and reads, in part, "We hold the Colombian government responsible for the misery, hunger, destruction and violence that fumigation causes in our territories. Fumigation is death. Fumigation is ethnocide. Glyphosate kills. It destroys food crops and pastureland and contaminates the water. The indigenous people of Putumayo reject the cultivation of illicit crops. But we equally reject the violent methods with which it is combatted." The closest the US has come to accepting that there might be problems came on September 5, 2002, when the Bush Administration, presented a report on the health and environmental risks of glyphosate to Congress. In it, it was noted that aerial spraying of herbicide "may cause eye irritation to farmers on the ground" but poses no "unreasonable risks or adverse affects" to humans or the environment. According to a Bush Administration official the irritation felt "as if you had baby shampoo in your eyes. It goes away after 72 hours." (Johnson and Johnson, makers of Johnson's Baby Shampoo refused to respond to the allegation that their shampoo could cause 72-hours of painful eye irritation in babies.) Environmentalists railed against the report's results, noting that the Administration was investigating its own program with no outside oversight. In addition to the problems caused directly by the spraying of the toxic Roundup Ultra-Cosmoflux herbicide mix, according to the product's safety sheet, when Roundup is burned "4% of the volume released into the air is acetonitrile." Acetonitrile is methyl cyanide (CH<sub>3</sub>CN), which is metabolized into hydrogen cyanide (HCN) by the human body, the same gas used in the Nazi death camps. It is so dangerous to humans that the safety instructions include a caution that "When burned, stay out of smoke," and goes on to note that "firefighters or others who may be exposed to vapors or products of combustion should wear full protective clothing and self-contained breathing apparatus." Drug Enforcement Administration documents produced in connection with early glyphosate spraying of Colombian marijuana fields list some of the hazards of inhaling burning glyphosate as "chest pains, cough, abdominal cramps, dyspnea [difficulty breathing], nausea, headache, chills, lassitude and fatigue." Other DEA documents conceded additional health problems include "pale to ashen-grey skin, shallow pulse, hypotension, transient paralysis and tachynea." The issue is important because the coca growers in Colombia, like the farmers throughout Amazonia, utilize the slash-and-burn method of agriculture: they cut a section of forest and burn the vegetation on it to produce potash, which enhances soil nutrients. "There are no tractors here," says Sister Carmen of Sucumbios, who was raised in Colombia. "The people also cut and burn their fields after spraying and we think they are suffering for breathing of those burning chemicals. But there are large interests here at work, political and economic interests." The State Department's Rebecca Brown-Thompson was unaware that 4% of the volume released in burning glyphosate would metabolize into hydrogen cyanide. "But then why is that a problem?" Told that the farmers in the region were slash-and-burn agriculturalists, she pleaded ignorance. "I didn't know that. They really do that there?" Where Is The Cocaine Coming From? Because the coca plant is very slow growing, two questions come to mind when thinking about all the plants the U.S. has paid to have eradicated in Colombia: Where do the new plants come from and when do they have time to mature? According to State Department documents, the Bolivian coca plant, takes three years from seed to first harvest. Colombian coca, grows considerably faster because it is planted from cuttings, not seed. The CIA's "Coca Fact Sheet" suggests that when planted from cuttings it can be harvested in as little as 6-8 months. The same CIA Fact Sheet suggests there are between 14,000 and 45,000 plants per hectare (about 2.5 acres) of coca. If that averaged out to 20,000 plants per hectare, there

would be 8,000 plants per acre. In 2002, under the aegis of Plan Colombia, more than 250,000 acres of coca were destroyed in Colombia. In 2003, that number is being increased to nearly 400,000, or almost every acre of coca under cultivation in Colombia. At 8,000 plants per, that comes to 3,200,000,000 plants. That's three billion, two hundred million plants. Cuttings come from mother plants. If a mother plant was capable of producing a startlingly high 1,000 cuttings per annum, there would still need to be 3,200,000 mother plants somewhere. Where are that many mother plants being kept? And even if there were such enormous greenhouses in Colombia, there would still be the question of distribution: How would anyone distribute three billion cuttings without being noticed? Those questions were posed to the State Department, which had no real answer.

"I've never thought of that before," said Rebecca Brown-Thompson. "Why don't you ask the Drug Enforcement Administration?" A DEA spokesman responded with: "I get what you're getting at, the numbers don't add up. But Plan Colombia has nothing to do with the DEA. That's State Department all the way."

The reason there is no answer is that there are no cuttings. There might be some, of course, but not three billion, not three million. Colombian coca growing, on the scale it's grown to during the last decade, is now done like it is done in Bolivia and Peru, from seed. Which means it takes three years to grow. And since we've been wiping out more and more of the crop annually, there are fewer and fewer mature plants to harvest. Next year, if we're being told the truth, there won't be any. Which means there won't be a harvest in Colombia. That should wipe out the world's coca supply for at least three years, at a minimum, by which time any stored cocaine will have hit the streets and been used up. The world ought to be coca dry. But will it be? Thus far, street prices for cocaine have not increased in the past several years. According to (TKTKTKTK) here in Ft. Worth, the price... Which suggests that the elimination of coca from southern Colombia has no effect on world supply. Which means that the coca that produces the world supply is grown elsewhere, maybe in unsprayed, protected valleys, or that Peru and Bolivia are still producing sufficient supplies, despite a reduction in their crops.

Of course, that would suggest that Plan Colombia is a sham. That would reinforce the idea that the spraying of southern Colombia and the collateral damage it's causing—displacement of thousands of people, loss of legal crops and animals and rainforest defoliation—is being done for other ends. Drift The issue of herbicide drift dovetails into the idea that coca eradication in Southern Colombia is not a genuine issue at all. The drift problem from the fumigation campaign has reached the point where Sister Carmen says the "frontier region has changed drastically since Plan Colombia's inception."

Cesar Cerda, a Qichua Indian whose village in Sucumbios is near the Putumayo frontier says "the planes come to the river, sometimes they come to our side and spray. Even when they don't the spray comes across the river and kills our food. Our platanos, our yucca, our coffee is all gone. Even our animals are dead, and there are no animals to hunt in the forest because they have gone somewhere else." Asked if he or his representatives had complained to the government, Cerda said they had. "They won't come because they say there is no problem here. Why? Because they have made pacts with the United States. But the truth is that life on the river has changed since Plan Colombia started." Sister Carmen says that both the church where she works and the indigenous groups have sent repeated requests to Quito, Ecuador's capital, asking for an investigation of the drift that has come into Ecuador. "They always promise they will send someone but they never have. Our government backs Plan Colombia, so why should they come? In whose interest would it be to investigate the complaints of the victims?"

Despite official denials, the drift of glyphosate affected so many people that a class-action lawsuit on behalf of the people of Sucumbios against DynCorp was filed by the International Labor Rights Fund in September, 2001. The suit alleges that the drift in Ecuador is purposeful, rather than the result of pilot error or an accident of wind. Among the allegations in the lawsuit are that "the American oil industry maintains a lobbying group in Washington D.C. under the name the U.S.-Colombia Business Partnership that lobbies the Congress of the United States, and the Executive Offices and related agencies of the United States, for continuous funding and expansion of Plan Colombia." Plaintiffs further allege on good faith, information and belief that contributing members to the U.S.-Colombia Business Partnership, include Texaco, Inc., Occidental Petroleum and B.P. Amoco, which have or expect to have oil interests in the region of Ecuador where Plaintiffs reside... Plaintiffs allege that the spraying of Plaintiffs' persons, lands and livestock with toxic fumigants is nothing less than an act of mercenary war carried out surreptitiously by the DynCorp Defendants... The State Department's Brown-Thompson says the suit is unfounded. "We use satellite imagery to pinpoint areas to be sprayed, then send in planes to verify the presence of large areas of illegal crops," she says. "After that, the crops are sprayed, and subsequently those sprayed areas are checked to see that no additional crops were affected." Calls to several crop-dusting companies in the US southwest found that to limit drift, spraying is done at an altitude that was equal to the height of the plant being sprayed. But reports from Colombia and comments from the US State department indicate that the spraying in Plan Colombia is generally being done at heights of 50-100 feet. Crop-dusters, as a point of pride, like to touch the plants they are spraying.

"The planes are never more than one-to-three feet from the ground when we're spraying cotton, maybe 5 feet when it's corn," said one pilot at Ballards Crop Dusting in Winter, Texas. Asked how much drift would occur with a plane flying at 10 feet, the pilot said, "at least 50 feet on either side of the plane." Corky Wilson, owners of Wilson Aerial Spray in Lockney, Texas, agreed. "Hell, if you're flying at 10 feet you're not crop dusting. You're burning. The only time we do that in Texas is to kill mesquite trees."

