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**MEMORANDUM FOR:** **DR. RICHARD DOWNIE, Director**  
**National Defense University – Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies**  
**Ft. McNair, DC**

**CC:** **MG (Ret.) JOHN THOMPSON, Dean of Students & Administration**  
**National Defense University – Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies**  
**Ft. McNair, DC**

**COLONEL MICHAEL MEESE, Department Head Social Sciences**  
**United States Military Academy, West Point, NY**

**COLONEL CINDY JEBB, Acting Department Head Social Sciences**  
**United States Military Academy, West Point, NY**

**SUBJECT:** After Action Report—General Barry R McCaffrey USA (Ret)  
**VISIT COLOMBIA 27-31 March 2011**

- I. PURPOSE:** This memo provides an independent assessment of the political, economic, drug, human rights, and security situation in Colombia in support of the National Defense University academic mission.
- My initial objective in this visit was to deliver the Keynote Address for the third International Symposium of Military Academies (ISODOMA) in Bogotá at the invitation of the Colombian CHOD Admiral Edgar Augusto Cely Núñez. The conference brought together 22 military academies from throughout the world (China, Kenya, France, Republic of Korea, Canada, etc.) for a one week conference on challenges in the development of young officers.
  - In addition, at the invitation of the Colombian Government and with the approval of US Southern Command, I performed an assessment of the broader strategic situation in Colombia. I received a series of briefings in Washington prior to departure from Inter-agency representatives, human rights representatives, the National Defense University, the former President of Colombia Álvaro Uribe, and the Colombian Embassy.
  - In Colombia, I received US Embassy Country Team briefings, presentations by the Colombian National Police, presentations by the Colombian Armed Forces and the Minister of Defense, one-on-one seminars with three Human Rights Organizations, conducted meetings with private Colombian citizens and former senior military officials, and held a long meeting with a very experienced U.S. missionary.
  - I flew to a distant province for meetings with a combat zone mayor and the Colombian National Police local commander. I also received briefings from a division commander, brigade commander, and a special operations commander in a contested area.
  - I had an extended conversation with a senior US intelligence official, senior DEA official and senior U.S. law enforcement advisor. I also met with Colombian intellectuals, university professors, and a major Colombian TV commentator.

- Finally, I was honored to have an extended conversation with President Santos and his Chief-of-staff in Casa Nariño.

## II. SOURCES:

### A. Principles:

- 1.) **President Juan Manuel Santos:** Private meeting in Bogota, Colombia.
- 2.) **Former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez:** Private meeting in Washington, DC.
- 3.) **United States Ambassador to Colombia P. Michael McKinley:** Briefings by United States Ambassador and senior staff.
- 4.) **Colombian Ambassador to the United States -- Gabriel Silva Lujan:** Briefings by the Colombian Ambassador and senior staff.
- 5.) **Executive Director, Ideas Para la Paz, Ms. Maria Victoria Llorente:** Briefing - Human Rights Group/NGOs. Bogota.
- 6.) **Advisor, Nuevo Arcos Iris, Mr. Luis Eduardo Celis Méndez:** Briefing - Human Rights Group/NGOs. Bogota.
- 7.) **Director, The Conflict Analysis Resource Centre (CERAC), Mr. Jorge Alberto Restrepo Torres:** Briefing - Human Rights Group/NGOs. Bogota.
- 8.) **Senior Associate for Regional Security Policy, The Washington Office of Latin America, Mr. Adam Isacson:** Briefing - Human Rights Group/NGOs. Washington, DC.
- 9.) **Minister of Defense, Mr. Rodrigo Rivera Salazar:** Briefings by Minister of Defense and senior staff. Bogota.
- 10.) **Commander of Colombian National Army, General Alejandro Navas Ramos:** Briefings by Commander of National Army. Bogota.
- 11.) **Chief of Staff to the President, Dr. Juan Carlos Pinzon Bueno:** Briefings by Chief of Staff. Bogota.
- 12.) **Citizen Security Director, Colombian National Police, Brigadier General José Leon:** Briefings by Colombian National Police Senior Staff. Bogota.
- 13.) **Chief of Plans, Colombian National Police, Brigadier General Janio Leon:** Briefings by Colombian National Police Senior Staff. Bogota.

### B. Additional Sources:

- 1.) **Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, Major General Jamie Esguerra Santos:** Apiay, Colombia. Briefing.
- 2.) **Commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Brigadier General Alfonso Salguero:** Apiay, Colombia. Briefing.
- 3.) **Commander of Joint Task Force Omega, Brigadier General Javier Alberto Florez:** Apiay, Colombia. Briefing.

- 4.) **Commander of the Fast Deployment Force (FUDRA), Brigadier General Navarro:** Apiay, Colombia. Briefing.
- 5.) **Deputy Commander of Apiay Air Base, Colonel Garcia:** Apiay, Colombia. Briefing.
- 6.) **Mayor & Police Chief near Apiay Air Force Base:** Apiay, Colombia. Briefing.
- 7.) **Naval Attaché, Foreign Commercial Service, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Commander Mark Asuncion:** Country Team Working Dinner.
- 8.) **Coast Guard and Police Attaché, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Commander Brian Wetzler:** Country Team Working Dinner.
- 9.) **Andean Region Director, Drug Enforcement Agency, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Mr. Jay Bergman:** Country Team Working Dinner.
- 10.) **Political Counselor, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Mr. Mark Wells:** Country Team Working Dinner.
- 11.) **Senior Intelligence Officer, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia:** Country Team Working Dinner.
- 12.) **Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Mr. Peter Holloway:** Country Team Briefings.
- 13.) **Senior Defense Attaché, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Colonel Paul Murray:** Country Team Briefings.
- 14.) **Assistant Defense Attaché, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Lieutenant Colonel Will McGhee:** Country Team Briefings.
- 15.) **Director, Narcotics Affairs Section, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Mr. Dan Foote:** Country Team Briefings.
- 16.) **Attorney, Department of Justice, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Mr. Paul Vaky:** Country Team Briefing.
- 17.) **Colombia Mission Director, USAID, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Dr. Ken Yamashita:** Country Team Briefing.
- 18.) **Naval Section Chief, US MILGROUP Colombia, Captain Glen Rosen:** Country Team Briefing.
- 19.) **Economic Section, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Mr. Timothy Stater:** Country Team Briefing.
- 20.) **Office of Agricultural Affairs, Embassy of the United States, Bogotá, Colombia, Mr. Joseph Lopez:** Country Team Briefing.
- 21.) **Head of Verdad Colombia, Mr. Miguel Posada:** Working Lunch. Bogota.
- 22.) **Professor, Universidad del Rosario, Mr. Vicente Torrijos:** Working Dinner. Bogota.
- 23.) **Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Andean Affairs, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Mr. Jeffrey DeLaurentis:** State Department Briefing. Washington, DC.

- 24.) Senior Country Director, Office of the Secretary of Defense Policy, Western Hemisphere Affairs, Mr. Juan Cardenas:** NDU Seminar Briefings. Washington, DC.
- 25.) Defense Attaché, Colombian Embassy of the United States, Admiral Guillermo Barrera:** NDU Seminar Briefings.
- 26.) Colombian OAS Ambassador Luis Alfonso Hoyos:** NDU Seminar Briefing. Washington, DC.
- 27.) Chief of Defense Chair and Professor of National Security Affairs, National Defense University Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, General Carlos Ospina:** NDU Seminar Briefing. Washington, DC.
- 28.) Assistant Professor of National Security Affairs, National Defense University Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, Dr. David Spencer:** NDU Seminar Briefing. Washington, DC.
- 29.) Visiting Scholar, National Defense University Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, Colonel Juan Carlos Gomez:** NDU Seminar Briefing. Washington, DC.
- 30.) Vice Dean, United States Military Academy, Colonel Daniel Ragsdale:** USMA Seminar Briefing. West Point.
- 31.) G3 Operations Officer, United States Military Academy, Colonel Daniel Miller:** USMA Seminar Briefing. West Point.
- 32.) LTC Tania Chacho, Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences:** USMA Briefing. West Point.

### **III. THE BOTTOM LINE:**

#### **A. LEADERSHIP:**

- Colombia has undergone a transformation of dramatic positive change in this huge (the size of Texas and California), rich in resources (coal, oil, minerals, agriculture), and violent nation. Colombia is now emerging from sixty years of cruel internal conflict marked by unspeakable atrocities committed against its people by the FARC, the ELN, internal criminal organizations, and sadly all too frequently by its own security forces.
- President Pastrana set up the conditions for peace from 1998 to 2002 with his sincere but ultimately futile attempts to end the internal insurrection by the FARC and the ELN. He created the political conditions with which President Uribe organized the Colombian people to fight.
- In eight years, Uribe broke the back of the FARC and the ELN, disarmed the AUC militias, energized and strengthened the Police and the Army, confronted Ecuadorian and Venezuelan sanctuaries, and dramatically reduced the power of the drug cartels. He also broke the despair of the Colombian people. He will be a national hero for the next hundred years in Colombia.
- President Santos, who served brilliantly throughout the Uribe regime as the Defense Minister, was elected on a massive wave of popularity based on his campaign promises to: consolidate the nation to its borders; return land to the homeless who were forced into refugee status by the cartels and the militias; build a culture of accountability and integrity by creating a legal system that works; and force Colombia from isolation by opening bridges to Venezuela and Ecuador.
- President Santos' most important challenge will be solving the terrible inequality (Gini Coefficient 2010 is 0.585) and extreme poverty (16%) that afflict the rural areas and disproportionately Colombians of African

(10.6%) and Indigenous (3.4%) descent. Finally, he must create a respect for human rights and address restitution for the thousands of victims of abuse. He will also set the initial strategy for a twenty year campaign to build a judicial system and a prison system that can actually work. He must then hold accountable those who have committed terrible crimes against the Colombian people.

- Juan Manuel Santos is a public servant of immense talent and integrity, patriotic dedication, and a man of unswerving personal courage.

## **B. THE COLOMBIAN SECURITY FORCES:**

- The Colombian Armed Forces (260,000 personnel) are the most respected institution in the nation with a favorable poll rating of 79%. They have suffered 5,500 Killed-in-action and 17,000 wounded-in-action since 2002. They are without question the most competent and battle-hardened force in Latin-America. Their tactical and operational leadership is excellent. In general, their senior leadership is responsive to political authority and now accepts and will enforce the rule of law. However, their history involves disgraceful incidents of human rights abuses, most egregiously from 2004 through 2008 with thousands of extrajudicial murders (perhaps more than 3000 murdered) known as “false positives.” They are fearful in the era now beginning that they will be the target of political vengeance by the international community and the Colombian legal system for their actions during the brutal struggle against the FARC and the ELN.
- The Colombian National Police (115,000 personnel) are the most effective law enforcement organization, bar none, in Latin-America. However, corruption and penetration from drug and other criminal organizations is still a major challenge at all levels of the force. In general, they have now created a law-based culture with a focus on protection of the people. They are a highly respected institution by the Colombian people. They are viewed widely by other international police forces as extremely competent and are helping train and advise many other regional (Mexico and El Salvador) and international (Afghanistan) organizations.
- The security of the Colombian people is now greatly improved. Homicides have dropped 46% since 2002. There has been an 86% reduction in homicides of union members. 10,510 people are now part of the personal protection program with security guards (14 percent of participants are union members). There has been a 51% decrease just in 2010 of mine warfare, anti-personnel incidents, and accidents. Kidnappings have plummeted. All of Colombia’s roads are now open to vehicle and bus traffic.
- The FARC has been stunned and reduced by desertions and combat action to a force of some 8,000 fighters. However, they are NOT yet a defeated force. The FARC is still present in 200 of Colombia’s 1,100 municipalities. (The ELN are down to 2,500 fighters and are past the point of recovering.) The FARC are now struggling with active sanctuaries in Venezuela and Ecuador and a renewed focus on criminal action to resource their efforts. They have almost zero credibility with the Colombian people who do not want a negotiated settlement which brings the FARC into the political system – unless they are disarmed and re-integrated. The FARC is returning to assassinations, urban militias, snipers, and political action. They are a de facto major drug criminal organization.
- The cruel AUC armed organizations are now for all practical purposes neutralized. Some 31,000 of their armed fighters have been demobilized. Their connections to the Armed Forces and many governors, mayors, and congressmen have been severed. 30 Congressmen, 11 Governors, 25 Mayors have been jailed; others are under investigation.
- The principal threat to the security of the Colombian people is now crime. There are some 14-16 major criminal groups (BACRIM) with perhaps as many as 6,000 plus armed members. 14% are previous members of the AUC militias. They are heavily armed with automatic weapons and directly involved with drug and criminal operations. As a general statement, the Colombian judicial system and penal system with 139 national prisons with 77,000 prisoners -- 34% overcrowded -- and almost 6,000 poorly trained prison guards is totally inadequate to deal successfully and lawfully with the massive criminal threat they face. It will take decades to build the required capacity.

### **C. THE DRUG THREAT TO COLOMBIA:**

- The anti-drug strategy of Colombia has been an enormous success since the 2000 start of Plan Colombia. There has been a 61% drop in the production of cocaine to 270 tons in 2009. The reduction of cocaine production would not have been possible without the success of the aerial eradication program. Much of this remaining cocaine now goes out through Venezuela headed to West Africa and then to Europe. Heroin production in Colombia has also been dramatically reduced. More than 1,100 major drug cartel defendants have been extradited to the United States to face trial and imprisonment.
- However, the production of drugs and criminal activity still remains a blowtorch of corruption and violence threatening Colombian institutions and the rule of law. 1.6 million Colombians are now addicted to drugs. Colombia remains the world's largest producer of cocaine. 90% of the cocaine and 60% of the heroin seized in the United States came from or through Colombia.
- We must not be complacent about the Colombia drug menace. Cocaine is the source of huge evil in the world and remains the principal threat to Colombia becoming a nation under the rule of law. No democratic institutions can withstand the huge corrupting threat of addiction and criminal activity that comes from cocaine and heroin.

### **D. THE HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGE IN COLOMBIA:**

- As in our own Civil War, it will be a hundred years before Colombia erases the malignancies of the sixty years of cruel internal struggle. There are a million internal refugees. 400,000 Colombians were pushed into Ecuador or Venezuela to escape the violence.
- The endless war has been characterized by thousands of forced disappearances, torture, summary executions, recruitment of child soldiers, sexual crimes against women, political killings, kidnappings, attacks against human rights activists, and killings of teachers and trade unionists – principally by the FARC, the AUC, and the ELN. Through December of 2010, the Justice and Peace Law (JPL) process where AUC leaders confess their crimes and surrender assets in negotiations for reduced criminal sentences has helped clarify “38,000 crimes involving 50,000 victims, and led to the exhumation of 2,800 murdered victims.”
- Sadly the Colombian Security Forces were all too frequently accused of similar atrocities with unlawful killings, torture and mistreatment of detainees, impunity, insecure prisons, and harassment of human rights activists. Fifty-one officers have been dismissed since 2008. The Prosecutor General is now processing more than 1,000 cases of extra-judicial killings. They have convicted more than 157 personnel to include General officers. One hundred prosecutors are struggling with an active case load of 5,586 cases. The Colombian military have transferred more than 250 human rights cases to the civilian justice system.
- Fortunately, the human rights trend lines are moving strongly in the right direction. Murder of union leaders by unknown assailants has decreased from more than 200 per year in the early 2000's to 26 murdered last year. Alleged murders of civilians by the Armed Forces have dropped from 300+ in 2008 to less than 20 in 2009. It appears to have stopped nearly completely in 2010. Colombia has a dreadful history of violence, which appears to be ending. The prognosis for country-wide rule of law is perhaps as positive as ever in the nation's history.

### **E. LAND RESTITUTION AND VICTIM COMPENSATION:**

- President Santos has stated that land restitution and victim compensation will be central issues his administration will address. Land reform is a prerequisite to ending the seemingly endless internal war. Santos' immense personal popularity and political skill give him the tools to pull this off. However, he currently lacks the administrative and legal bureaucracy to achieve his aim. It will take a decade to do this fairly. Santos has as the central purpose of his first term returning two million hectares, roughly half of the

land stolen over the past twenty years (principally by the AUC and drug cartels) to rightful owners. His strategy is to build on the Uribe success of “democratic security” and pivot to “democratic prosperity.” Essentially Santos wants to restore the Colombian history of “the family farm.”

- The compensation of the potentially hundreds of thousands of victims of sixty years of internal war victims will be equally if not more complex and subject to possible new injustices and corruption.
- The bottom line is that as many as four million people were displaced during the past 30 years by war. 10,000 square miles of land are potentially in dispute. The Colombian government will now try to sort out this thicket of injustice and restore the displaced to their historic property.

#### **F. THE COLOMBIAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT:**

- Attached as tab 4, is my statement and testimony to a recent congressional hearing on the Free Trade Agreement. It is shameful in my view that the United States has not completed congressional approval of this FTA since it was signed four years ago in November 2006. The Andean Trade Preference Act has also been allowed to expire in February 2011. Colombia has historically been the closest ally of the United States in the Americas. They are the third most populous nation in South America with 45 million people. They are a rapidly growing economy (4.3% last year) with huge coal and oil reserves. 60,000 Americans live in Colombia, which is a three hour flight from Miami.
- Because of our harmful failure to act on FTA --- the Colombians are now rapidly increasing trade with Brazil, Canada, China, and Argentina. China has become Colombia’s second largest trading partner. China increased exports to Colombia 224% in just in the first nine months of 2010. (China displaced the U.S. as Brazil’s largest trading partner last year.) Our market share of Colombia’s agricultural sector fell from 75% to 25% just in the last two years. When Colombia signs the trade agreement with Canada this summer we will lose all our grain export trade completely.

What are we thinking?

#### **IV. SUMMARY:**

It was a matter of great personal pride to see the enormous progress made by Colombia since my last visit in 2006. There is no shortage of courage or leadership in the Santos administration. These people need and deserve our support, both political and economic. Colombia is a success story of enormous magnitude for US foreign policy. In the years since we began serious support in 2000, we have spent a fraction of one month’s burn rate from Afghanistan.

We have an excellent Embassy Team in Bogotá. President Santos and the Colombians are now in the process of consolidating victory. The coming three years are crucial. We cannot fall short at this critical juncture.

Barry R McCaffrey  
General, USA (Retired)