



COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES

"Colombia: A Democracy Getting Stronger"

June 13, 2005

Featured Guests: **Brigadier General Carlos Quiroga**, Colombian Army and Director of the Colombian Superior War College. **Colonel Ricardo Vargas**, Colombian Army, Advanced Military Studies Course, Colombian Superior War College.

Presentation: ["Colombia: A Democracy Getting Stronger" \(Microsoft Powerpoint\)](#)

Brigadier General Carlos Quiroga led a delegation of students from the Colombian Superior War College's Advanced Military Studies Course (CAEM). The students represent all services and the national police. Upon completion of this course in December 2005, they will be promoted to brigadier general or rear admiral.

The CAEM students developed this presentation for use during their recent trip to Europe and the United States. General Quiroga and Colonel Ricardo Vargas addressed and answered questions from an audience at three locations: the National Defense University and via VTC at Headquarters, U.S. Southern Command and the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, Fort Benning, Georgia. Several students joined Colonel Vargas to provide insights into the strengthening of Colombia's democracy. The presentation emphasized five themes that are outlined below. We have attached selected slides from their presentation in English as indicators of progress to date in Colombia.

- ***Narco-trafficking funds terrorism, and terrorism is the main threat to democracy.*** The threat to Colombia's democracy today is neither ideological, nor political, nor separatist, nor religious, nor ethnic. Nor is it an internal conflict.¹ The threat has undergone a metamorphosis from Marxist/Leninist insurgent movements that sought to overthrow the government during the Cold War to contemporary narco-terrorist organizations that seek a status quo in which they exercise authority and control in areas of Colombia tied to the cultivation, production and distribution of cocaine and heroin. The FARC, ELN, and AUC challenge the political and economic capacity of the state through drug trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping, extortion, and trafficking in arms, ammunitions and explosives, and the use of terror to intimidate and coerce Colombian society to sue for peace on their terms.
- ***The "Policy of Democratic Defense and Safety"² involves the entire nation not just the armed forces and national police.*** The Uribe Administration's approach emphasizes citizen safety, elimination of ungoverned space and consolidation of the national territory, strengthening public institutions, particularly the public forces, and efficient, transparent and responsible management of national resources. Policy implementation engages the entire nation in the fight against narco-terrorism and the defense of democracy.
- ***Colombia needs the help of the international community.*** Of first importance, successful reduction of the drug trade requires integrated action by the international community especially in heavy drug-consuming countries in North America and Europe. Greater cooperation is needed. The military and police, for example, would benefit from broader information exchanges. Secondly, Colombia needs more trade and foreign investment. While the Uribe government has adopted cooperative strategies with trading partners, new markets are needed for Colombian products, and they could be accompanied by preferential tariffs. Money laundering is being curtailed, opening the way to stronger foreign investments.
- ***The demobilization process, despite flaws, is the best path to take towards peace.*** The government has opened negotiations to give narco-terrorists from the political left and right who choose a life-style under law a means for reinsertion into Colombian society and political participation. The government has demands for negotiations to proceed: an immediate cessation of hostilities and a surrender of weapons. Some paramilitary units have entered the process. The fruits of disarmament can already be seen in less fighting, less terrorism, fewer massacres, and less narcotics trafficking. Every peace process must achieve a three-way balance between justice, ending hostilities and saving lives. The ultimate solution will not be perfect: some impunity will exist. Some illegal groups would rather continue to fight than go to jail. Colombia simply has to do the best that it can. The demobilization will continue within a democratic framework.
- ***Victory means peace through long-term political rather than military means.*** Colombian democracy is a participatory, multi-party political system that respects human rights and appreciates diversity. President Uribe's Democratic Defense and Safety Policy is reestablishing domestic sovereignty throughout the country in order to provide citizen security, improve the quality of life, revive the economy, and foster institutional credibility at all levels of government. While Colombia still has a long way to go, the preliminary results are positive, and there is a new sense of hope. However, the absolute numbers of narco-terrorists related violence and crime are still too high. These indicators will not disappear in the near-term. The end of the conflict will neither come in the short term, nor by a specified date. But today there is a belief that the government's comprehensive strategy will achieve peace and that every citizen will enjoy full safety.

¹ The Colombian presentation did not characterize the situation in the country. In keeping with their traditional practice, Colombian authorities have sought to treat the conflict as a law and order issue, not wanted to give combatants on the left or right legal status. Members of these armed groups are often referred to as bandits, criminals, outlaws, insurrectionists, private militias, and now narco-terrorists.

² "Política de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional" is usually translated as "Democratic Security Policy." "Seguridad" means both "security" and "safety." The students' translation, "safety," suggests how the administration views the situation.

The INSS Colleagues for the Americas Seminar Series is a program of monthly meetings that commenced in 1994 to further research on hemispheric security and defense issues and to contribute to the professional education of United States and foreign practitioners.

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