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CHAPTER 8

**THE CONTINUING
PULL OF THE POLAR
STAR: COLOMBIAN
FOREIGN POLICY
IN THE POST-COLD
WAR ERA***

STEPHEN J. RANDALL

INTRODUCTION

The tension between ideology and pragmatism in the making of foreign policy exists to some degree in all nations, including Colombia. Some analysts would point to the fact that Colombia has largely adhered to a close relationship with the United States since World War I as evidence of a predominantly conservative ideological orientation in the nation's foreign policy. That perspective would be further reinforced by the fact that during the Cold War years Colombian governments, without exception, adhered to the Western, anti-Communist position dominated by the United States. There were administrations during which that orientation was more pronounced than others, as for instance during the conservative-dominated 1950s, when Colombia was the only Latin American country to commit troops to the Korean War, and other administrations that adhered to a more multilateral position, such as the governments of Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966–1970) or Alfonso López Michelsen (1970–1974), which opened up trade relationships with Soviet bloc countries and took a moderate position on Cuba's place in hemispheric

1 affairs. However, overall there is little debate over the fact that Colombian
2 governments in the Cold War years were intensely anti-Communist.

3 Yet, as this chapter suggests, the orientation of Colombian foreign
4 policy in the post-1945 years was driven largely by pragmatic consider-
5 ations, in particular the realistic perspective that the United States was
6 the hegemonic power in the hemisphere, with the result that it was in
7 Colombian interests to maintain a reasonably balanced and positive rela-
8 tionship with the “polar star.” Colombian foreign policy has thus been
9 predominantly pragmatic, but this does not mean that it was devoid of
10 values and ideas. Colombian leaders, regardless of party affiliation, have
11 placed a high degree of importance on the nation’s adherence to the
12 principles of international law.

13 Foreign policy has also been multilateral in its orientation, consis-
14 tent with the policies that most smaller nations tend to pursue, and
15 Colombia has been a strong supporter of the United Nations and the
16 Organization of American States (OAS). The country’s foreign policy
17 has also tended to be dominated by a small foreign-policy elite, of which
18 the president has without exception been the most significant player.
19 Many Colombian presidents have viewed themselves as essentially their
20 own foreign ministers, at least in terms of setting the agenda, leaving
21 Congress and public opinion with little real influence and the Foreign
22 and Defense ministries with the responsibility to implement rather than
23 design policy. This chapter focuses on Colombian foreign policy from the
24 1990s to 2010, a year in which the two terms of President Alvaro Uribe
25 Vélez will come to an end; but the chapter also places those years in a
26 larger historical context in order to stress the continuities in Colombian
27 foreign policy.

28 29 **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

30
31 Colombian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War must be under-
32 stood within the larger context of its evolution since World War I.¹
33 Over the past century two fundamental forces have shaped Colombian
34 foreign policy. The first and foremost has been relations with the United
35 States, a relationship that has been above all economic, strategic, and
36 pragmatic rather than ideological, even though there have often been
37 shared values and shared assumptions about the nature of the world in
38 which they operated. To the extent that Colombian policymakers have
39 adhered to principles in foreign policy it has been the unwavering com-
40 mitment to international law; yet that commitment has not imposed
41 any degree of rigidity in the Colombian approach to its international
42 relations. The loss of Panama in the first decade of the twentieth century,

1 for which Colombians continue to hold U.S. actions responsible even if
2 they grudgingly acknowledge Colombian mismanagement, represented
3 a significant turning point in Colombia's external relations. Colombian
4 leaders recognized they had a choice between pragmatism, which would
5 align Colombian interests with the interests of the United States as the
6 hemispheric and ultimately global superpower, or they could pursue poli-
7 cies that would be more balanced and multilateral in nature. They might
8 even have pursued a kind of Bolivarian vision of leadership within Latin
9 America, a notion long dormant but which Hugo Chávez has rekindled
10 in Venezuela. Colombian leaders chose the pragmatic course, with the
11 result that since the World War I era, relations with the United States
12 have dominated Colombia's orientation even during those administra-
13 tions that have sought to play more significant roles on the regional and
14 world stage.

15 Other forces that have driven Colombian foreign policy have been
16 the internal insurgency since the late 1940s and the international impli-
17 cations of illegal narcotics cultivation and trafficking since the 1970s.
18 Both factors, the guerrilla insurgency and the narcotics industry, have
19 been politically and economically destabilizing forces domestically, but
20 they have also contributed to regional security challenges and to tensions
21 with Colombia's immediate neighbors.² Responding to those challenges
22 has served primarily to reinforce Colombia's ties to the United States at
23 the same time that, perhaps paradoxically, they have been sources of fric-
24 tion between the two nations. In this sense Colombia is hardly unique.
25 Middle powers tend to be consistently torn between responding to the
26 demands of their hegemon at the same time that they seek to engage the
27 larger world. As with other middle powers that have a high degree of
28 dependency on a single nation, Colombia has consistently sought to bal-
29 ance the dominance of the United States with a quest for multilateral ties
30 and commitment to major international organizations, such as the UN,
31 the OAS, the Andean group, and to support such international agencies
32 as the International Court of Justice.

33 Such an orientation has been driven primarily by realpolitik and a
34 belief in the fundamental importance of international law. Whatever the
35 factors that led Colombian elites to choose the course they did over the
36 past century, these were Colombian choices as much as decisions driven
37 by Washington, but the latitude within which those choices were made
38 was very limited. The result has been a high degree of economic, military,
39 and political dependency on the United States, a dependency that, in the
40 decade on which this chapter focuses, has significantly increased.³

41 Colombia's economic linkages have reinforced its foreign-policy
42 orientation. The United States has traditionally been the dominant trade

1 partner, but regional trade also represents an important component of
2 the Colombian economy, in particular the relationship with Venezuela,
3 which is the second largest market for Colombian products. In 2007,
4 for instance, the United States exported more than \$8.5 billion in goods
5 to Colombia and imported more than \$9.4 billion.⁴ By contrast, total
6 Colombian trade with Venezuela in that year was approximately \$4.1
7 billion, while with Brazil it was \$2.5 billion, with Mexico \$3.3 billion,
8 and with Germany \$1.5 billion.⁵ It is evident where Colombia's primary
9 trade interests reside, and the protection as well as expansion of that
10 market has been a logical foreign-policy goal, including the negotiation
11 of a still to be ratified Free Trade Agreement with the United States.

12 In addition to the consistent, even if sometimes reluctant, adherence to
13 the "Polar Star" fixation that has characterized Colombian foreign policy,
14 scholars have identified other features of Colombian policy formation
15 that have determined its orientation. One factor has been the extreme
16 elitism of policy formation, normally limited to the president and an
17 inner circle of advisors. Although Congress has committees that debate
18 foreign policy they have had relatively little impact on policy. That has
19 also been true of the Advisory Commission of the Ministry of Foreign
20 Relations, composed of all former presidents and a few appointees.⁶ Nor
21 has the Foreign Ministry exercised a degree of influence equal to that of
22 the British Foreign Office or the U.S. Department of State.

23 As in other nations, the importance of military issues in the
24 Colombian context has further eroded the influence of the Foreign
25 Ministry and increased the relative importance of other ministries,
26 particularly Defense. Nor has domestic public opinion tended to be a
27 significant factor in policy formation. It is arguable that in the decades
28 since drugs trafficking and the domestic insurgency became a major
29 international issue, foreign opinion has been a far more significant force
30 in shaping Colombian policy responses on such critical issues as human
31 rights than has domestic public opinion, including even such orga-
32 nized entities as the trade unions, the coffee federation, and ANDI, the
33 industrial association.⁷

34 Preoccupation with the relationship with the United States has
35 not precluded some administrations from pursuing more multilateral
36 policies, an approach that in the Cold War years tended to be more
37 characteristic of Liberal than of Conservative governments. That mul-
38 tilateralism was evident in the orientation of President Carlos Lleras
39 Restrepo (1966–1970), who sought to open diplomatic and commercial
40 ties with the Soviet Union and other countries of Eastern Europe from
41 1968. Lleras's position was strongly supported by his foreign minister
42 and later president Alfonso López Michelsen (1974–1978), who also

1 supported normalization of relations with Cuba, with the result that once
 2 the OAS reversed its earlier policy of isolating Cuba, López's adminis-
 3 tration established full diplomatic relations with Castro's government.
 4 López Michelsen and most of his presidential successors recognized that
 5 Colombia had paid a high price for its opposition to Fidel Castro under
 6 Carlos Lleras Camargo, especially given the Cuban links to the ELN
 7 guerrillas (National Liberation Army) and Castro's capacity to play a
 8 broker role in the region (which continued into the twenty-first century
 9 during the Uribe crisis with Ecuador and Venezuela). Certainly the Lleras
 10 and López Michelsen approaches were driven more by the pragmatic
 11 desire to diversify Colombian trade and international relations than by
 12 any ideological empathy for Cuba or the countries directly within the
 13 Soviet sphere.

14 Virgilio Barco as president (1986–1990) took an even more pro-
 15 nounced direction in his government's foreign policy, at times appearing
 16 to take positions that would be deliberately opposite to those of the
 17 United States. His administration, along with other members of the
 18 nonaligned movement, opposed the U.S. bombing of Libya, opposed
 19 U.S. intervention in Panama in 1989 to overthrow Manuel Noriega, and
 20 criticized Israel's occupation of Arab territory. Colombian governments
 21 in the 1980s also pursued through the Contadora Group a negotiated
 22 settlement of the Central American crisis and specifically the U.S.-backed
 23 Contra war against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.⁸ Such
 24 approaches derived less from ideological opposition to the United States
 25 than from Colombia's consistent opposition to interventionism.

26 The end of the Cold War alleviated tensions over foreign-policy ori-
 27 entation between the more traditionally anti-Communist Conservative
 28 and Liberal parties, a tension that at times in the past had imposed
 29 some degree of constraint on strictly pragmatic Colombian policy. César
 30 Gaviria Trujillo (1990–1994) came to power as the Cold War ended.
 31 In his inaugural address he called on Colombia to recognize the new
 32 international reality as an opportunity to put divisive international
 33 politics aside and focus on economic issues.⁹ In practice his administra-
 34 tion, led in the international arena by foreign ministers Luis Fernando
 35 Jaramillo and subsequently Noemí Sanín (1991–1994), pursued poli-
 36 cies similar to those of the Barco administration, further opening the
 37 economy to the international community, supporting international
 38 law, and strengthening regional and global linkages. In 1991 his gov-
 39 ernment reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba, a decision that
 40 reflected the presidentialist nature of Colombian policymaking, since
 41 there was a negative reaction from Colombian Conservatives as well as
 42 some Liberals, from the military, and some sectors of the press. To some

1 degree the decision to restore relations with Cuba did reflect the specific
 2 orientation of the Barco administration, but taking into consideration a
 3 longer view of Colombian policy toward the place of Cuba in the inter-
 4 American system, the decision was consistent with perceived Colombian
 5 principles and the national interest.¹⁰ On the whole, the administration
 6 pressed forward with a strong internationalist orientation. As the foreign
 7 minister, Noemí Sanín was vigorous in pursuing a prominent place for
 8 Colombia in the international arena, seeking a seat on the UN Security
 9 Council, obtaining for Colombia the presidency of the G-77 as well as
 10 the nonaligned movement, and effectively lobbying for President Gaviria
 11 to be elected secretary-general of the OAS at the end of his presidential
 12 term. In 1994 Colombia also joined the newly established Association of
 13 Caribbean States, consistent with a role that López Michelsen had earlier
 14 viewed as a logical one for the country. The association included Cuba
 15 but none of the U.S. dependencies.¹¹

17 **YEARS OF CRISIS: THE SAMPER ADMINISTRATION**

18
 19 The election of the Liberal Ernesto Samper-Pizano as president in 1994
 20 ushered in a four-year period of uncertainty and tensions with the
 21 United States. He came to power with the stated intention of pursuing
 22 the multilateralist and pragmatic foreign policies of his Liberal predeces-
 23 sor, and his appointees as foreign minister, Rodrigo Pardo (1994–1995)
 24 and María Emma Mejía Vélez (1995–1998), were equally committed to
 25 those goals. Unfortunately, the early allegations that Samper’s campaign
 26 had accepted funds from the Cali narcotics cartel severely compromised
 27 his government’s credibility both domestically and abroad. This develop-
 28 ment was particularly unfortunate since Samper’s first foreign minister,
 29 Rodrigo Pardo, who resigned in 1995 during the crisis, brought lengthy
 30 foreign-policy experience, expertise, and insight to the position.¹² At
 31 the outset of his tenure as foreign minister, Pardo indicated in an inter-
 32 view that the government’s priority was the traditional emphasis on the
 33 basic principles of Colombian foreign relations: peaceful resolution of
 34 conflict; respect for international law; nonintervention; and the self-
 35 determination of people. The secondary goals were to continue with the
 36 previous government’s pursuit of further integration with Latin America
 37 and the Caribbean and the increased “universalization” of Colombia’s
 38 international relations.¹³ Pardo added that there would also be atten-
 39 tion to some of the nontraditional issues that had gained increased sig-
 40 nificance in Colombian foreign relations, including narcotics trafficking,
 41 international trade, the environment, and human rights. On the issue of
 42 relations with the United States, he suggested that he believed that two

1 friendly nations could disagree on issues but still work constructively
2 together. He also contended that it was critical that narcotics trafficking
3 not become the all-consuming issue in the country's international rela-
4 tions given the greater importance of trade liberalization, investment,
5 and social progress. Pardo also added a significant observation on the
6 relative significance of foreign policy in Colombian politics and society,
7 noting that it was not an electoral issue, nor was it an issue in the rela-
8 tionship between the presidency and Congress, and that the Colombian
9 political elite had not become engaged in the issues.¹⁴

10 Pardo's successor, María Emma Mejía, had little choice except to focus
11 on improving relations with the United States as well as with Venezuela,
12 although the concerns over Venezuelan relations did not intensify until
13 the election of Hugo Chávez as Venezuelan president in 1998, at the end
14 of the Samper presidency. Mejía stressed in a 1998 interview that she was
15 concerned that the United States might engage in sales of more advanced
16 fighter aircraft to Venezuela, something that she felt would destabilize the
17 bilateral relationship, might require Colombia to improve its weapons
18 systems, and in the process divert resources from badly needed social and
19 economic programs. She also expressed the Colombian government's
20 consistent perspective that in spite of the Clinton administration's deci-
21 sion to lift sanctions against Colombia on the sale of military equipment
22 for reasons of national security, the decertification process had been
23 immensely damaging to the bilateral relationship.¹⁵

24 The Samper administration from the outset indicated a commitment
25 to maintaining the neoliberal trade and investment policies of previous
26 governments, continuing to expand the country's international engage-
27 ment, and collaborating with the United States and Colombia's immediate
28 neighbors to minimize the international impact of combined guerrilla
29 insurgency and drug-trafficking. In spite of the presidentialist nature
30 of Colombian policymaking and the increasingly beleaguered nature of
31 the Samper administration, these foreign-policy goals reflected a general
32 consensus among Colombian elites over the national interest. Revelations
33 about Samper's relationship with the Cali Cartel, however, rapidly weak-
34 ened his government's capacity to achieve its goals. Relations with the
35 United States thus began on a sour note and remained that way throughout
36 his four years in office. U.S. policy became increasingly aggressive, pressing
37 his administration to address human rights violations, the war on drugs,
38 and allegations of corruption in the civilian and military sectors. The
39 Clinton administration went so far as to deny the president a visa in 1996
40 and decertify the country for failing to meet U.S. expectations in terms
41 of human rights and the war on drugs.¹⁶ Such policies effectively denied
42 the legitimacy of Samper's government and destabilized the government at

1 a time that strong leadership and credibility was needed. The bilateral rela-
2 tionship was made even more acute by the fact that the U.S. ambassador
3 for a portion of the Samper administration, Myles Frechette (1994–1997),
4 was particularly outspoken publicly and interventionist on issues that while
5 domestic in nature also impacted U.S. interests.¹⁷

6 What U.S. officials appear to have neglected, failed to understand, or
7 ignored in the Samper years was that given the presidentialist system of
8 government in Colombia, by undermining Samper, who though weak-
9 ened domestically and internationally, remained in power, they were in
10 fact acting in a way that reduced the likelihood of achieving their own
11 policy goals, goals that were not going to be achieved without a strong
12 Colombian executive with both domestic and international support. By
13 the time President Samper left office in August 1998, to be succeeded by
14 the Conservative Party candidate Andrés Pastrana Arango, U.S. officials
15 appeared to have grasped that dilemma. At the same time, the Samper
16 experience once again underlined the extent to which Colombian domes-
17 tic and foreign policy remained highly dependent on the United States.
18 Unlike the presidencies of Carlos Lleras Restrepo and Alfonso López
19 Michelsen, or even that of Gaviria that preceded his, the Samper admin-
20 istration had neither the will nor the latitude to pursue a more aggressive
21 multilateral foreign policy, hamstrung as it was by its lack of domestic
22 and international credibility.

23 24 THE PASTRANA TRANSITION

25 Domestic and international observers viewed the election of Andrés
26 Pastrana to the Presidency in 1998 as an opportunity to restore some
27 degree of normalcy to Colombian politics, and in particular to its rela-
28 tions with the United States. On one level there was little change in the
29 fundamentals of Colombian foreign policy from Samper to Pastrana.
30 Certainly there was no ideological shift, in part because although
31 Pastrana was the official candidate of the Conservative party, he was in
32 fact the candidate of a Conservative-Liberal coalition, *Gran Alianza por*
33 *el cambio*. What changed was the attitude of the Clinton administration
34 toward Colombia's new government. Thus, relations with the United
35 States continued to dominate the agenda, but the relationship shifted
36 from one of confrontation and distrust under Samper to close collabora-
37 tion under Pastrana. Pastrana tended to pursue a dual policy.

38 On the one hand, in an effort to defuse the domestic conflict and
39 reduce its impact on international relations, he pursued dialogue with
40 FARC as part of a larger strategy of "diplomacy for peace." Rather than
41 turn initially to the United States for support of his peace initiative,
42

1 he sought support from Colombia's immediate neighbors and from
2 European countries. In the critical year 2001 Colombia held the chair of
3 the UN Security Council, and the foreign minister Fernandez de Soto
4 was secretary-general of the Andean Community in 2002.¹⁸ Pastrana also
5 took the initiative to pay an official visit to Cuba, the only Colombian
6 president to do so, thus seeking to offset years of bitterness on Fidel
7 Castro's part.

8 Ultimately, however, it was the ties with the United States that
9 dominated. The most critical initiative undertaken by the Pastrana
10 administration was the development in 1999 and implementation the
11 following year of what became Plan Colombia. The initiative came from
12 the Pastrana administration and its original concept, as presented in
13 1998, was a broad-based one, designed to address social and economic
14 challenges in the country as well as to undermine the production and
15 distribution of illegal drugs. Even after his inauguration, President
16 Pastrana did not appear to have viewed the initiative as one that would
17 involve the further militarization of the conflict against the guerrillas or
18 aerial fumigation of illicit crops. Indeed, the administration had serious
19 doubts about the efficacy of aerial spraying.¹⁹ The orientation changed
20 significantly once serious negotiations began with the Clinton adminis-
21 tration. When completed, the Clinton administration's aid package to
22 Colombia targeted the war on drugs, and the majority of the funds were
23 directed to the Colombian military and police to enhance their capacity
24 to meet U.S. and, presumably, Colombian goals. Between 2000, when
25 Plan Colombia aid began to flow into Colombia, and 2008, the country
26 received approximately \$600 million per annum in U.S. support. By
27 mid-2003 the United States had provided \$2.5 billion in military, eco-
28 nomic, and humanitarian aid to Colombia, while Colombian taxpayers
29 had contributed more than \$4 billion to the plan.²⁰

30 In contrast with its approach to the issue of international narcotics
31 traffic, the Pastrana administration viewed the insurgency as a domestic
32 issue and pursued negotiations with FARC.²¹ In April 2000, speaking
33 before the Association of Newspaper Editors in Washington, Pastrana
34 stressed the international implications of the war on drugs, not the
35 guerrilla insurgency:

36
37
38 There is a growing awareness in Colombia, the United States and around
39 the world, that the threat of drug trafficking is no longer a national or a
40 regional issue . . . I have taken the message of greater burden-sharing in the
41 fight against drugs to the international community . . . I have called our
42 efforts "Diplomacy for Peace," because if we have learned anything from
the recent progress in Northern Ireland, Central America and the Middle

1 East, it is that the international community must be actively engaged in
2 order for peace to prevail.²²

3
4 This focus evolved again after 9/11 with the Bush administration's
5 shift to a focus on counterterrorism, eliminating the distinction between
6 rolling back the guerrillas on the one hand and eradicating drug crops
7 and controlling narcotics trafficking on the other. Before the end of the
8 Pastrana administration, with the failure of negotiations with FARC, it
9 was evident that there was a clear contention that one could not control
10 narcotics without destroying the guerrillas, who both benefited from and
11 supported the industry.²³

12
13 **ÁLVARO URIBE VÉLEZ AND THE POLITICS OF**
14 **DEMOCRATIC SECURITY**
15

16 The election of the independent Liberal Álvaro Uribe Vélez in 2002
17 inaugurated a decidedly new chapter in Colombian foreign policy,
18 a policy focus that was even more closely oriented toward the goals of
19 U.S. policy than at any previous time in Colombian history. As with
20 previous administrations, Uribe's foreign policy was to a large extent a
21 projection of the domestic situation. It was also consistent with the long-
22 established primacy of the bilateral relationship with the United States,
23 even if Uribe took that relationship to new heights. He, like his predeces-
24 sors, identified the linkage with the United States as in the Colombian
25 national interest. Even more than those presidents who preceded him in
26 recent years, Uribe's foreign policies have been definitively presidentialist
27 in nature, and his government has been widely viewed as highly central-
28 ized and conservative, verging on the autocratic.

29 Yet, distinctions of left and right, do not readily apply to Uribe. His
30 officials stress that any attempts to define Uribe in ideological terms are
31 misleading. His is a pragmatist, and his efforts in early 2009 to build
32 closer links with Brazil and President Lula have been precisely that, to
33 create a counterweight against the regional influence of Chávez, who
34 like Uribe embodies many of the characteristics of the traditional Latin
35 American *caudillo*.

36 The earlier crisis of legitimacy of the Samper government and the
37 implementation of Plan Colombia had provided the United States with
38 an opportunity to wield greater influence in Colombian domestic poli-
39 cies, but the Uribe government pressed ahead far more vigorously with
40 what has come to be considered the internationalization of the domestic
41 conflict. Uribe's policies led, to use a now popular term, "intervention
42 by invitation,"²⁴ which Arelene Tickner has argued undermined national

1 autonomy and compromised Colombia's relations with its neighbors, in
2 particular Ecuador and Venezuela.²⁵ The Uribe administration came to
3 be viewed as the closest partner of the United States in Latin America
4 during the Republican administration of George W. Bush, endorsing
5 the Bush administration's war on terror in the aftermath of 9/11 and
6 supporting the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. His administration vigorously
7 pursued the conflict against FARC, supported the war on drugs and
8 continued to benefit from U.S. assistance under Plan Colombia. U.S.
9 forces also assumed a more direct role in the counter-insurgency efforts,²⁶
10 while President Uribe also provided full cooperation to U.S. authorities
11 on extradition requests.

12 The Uribe administration continued to press, against consider-
13 able opposition in the U.S. Congress, for ratification of a Free Trade
14 Agreement. Uribe stressed in an address to the Council on Foreign
15 Relations in September 2008 that the agreement was not as important
16 to trade as it was to encourage foreign investment in Colombia. "With a
17 Free Trade Agreement approved," he argued, "many investors from sev-
18 eral countries in the world will come to make investments."²⁷ However,
19 the agreement remained an elusive goal. Although the Bush administra-
20 tion was understandably supportive of the agreement, the administration
21 was unable to convince the majority Democratic Party, and the newly
22 elected administration of Barack Obama has continued to emphasize its
23 concerns with Colombian human rights.²⁸

24 Analysts have tended to present the orientation and policies of the
25 Uribe administration as indicative of an ideological as well as tactical
26 shift, in part because of the perceived similarities between the worldviews
27 of presidents Bush and Uribe.²⁹ The events of 9/11 made it possible to
28 view the internal Colombian guerrilla insurgency as part of the interna-
29 tional terrorist threat, and that perception was adopted not only by the
30 Bush administration but also by European countries and Canada. There
31 was also a shift in style under the Uribe presidency, which fits more
32 clearly into the presidentialist, centralized, model of policymaking than
33 that of his two immediate predecessors. That orientation was embodied
34 not only in Uribe's approach to foreign policy, but in his capacity to
35 have the Constitutional Court permit him to run for reelection in 2006,
36 a departure from Colombia's longstanding constitutional practice and
37 one that led such former presidents as Lopez Michelsen to criticize the
38 decision publicly.

39 Uribe's first appointment as foreign minister was Carolina Barco
40 Isakson, who was born and primarily educated in the United States. Her
41 selection in itself spoke of the importance the newly elected president
42 placed on the bilateral relationship. Barco served with considerable

1 distinction until 2006 when she was appointed ambassador to the United
2 States, a further signal of the importance of the relationship. Her three
3 successors between 2006 and 2008 were less successful, in part because
4 of the growing domestic and international concerns over the ties of indi-
5 viduals close to the President with the paramilitary groups.³⁰

6 Uribe's appointments of ambassadors to the United States reflected
7 his recognition of the need to have representation in Washington that
8 had the respect and the ear of both the executive and Congress. Former
9 President Andrés Pastrana, closely identified with the Clinton admin-
10 istration and with a generally pro-United States position, served as
11 ambassador briefly in 2005–2006 in an effort to strengthen Colombia's
12 image in Washington.³¹ Shortly after the election of Barack Obama as
13 president-elect of the United States, Pastrana indicated that Colombia
14 had lost a significant opportunity to conclude the Free Trade Agreement
15 while the Republicans were in control of the White House and were
16 stronger in Congress. Colombia's only hope, he argued, was to seek
17 to restore some degree of bipartisan support for such an agreement in
18 Congress, in return for Colombian support for Plan Colombia and the
19 U.S. counternarcotics program.³²

20 President Uribe came to be widely viewed as the closest ally in Latin
21 America of the Bush administration. As a member of the UN Security
22 Council, Colombia supported the Bush administration's Iraq policies
23 and the UN resolutions on the issue of Weapons of Mass Destruction.
24 As a show of support for the often beleaguered Colombian president,
25 President Bush twice visited Colombia during his presidency, once to
26 Cartagena in 2004 and on the second occasion in 2007 for a short, high
27 security, seven-hour visit to Bogota, the first to the Colombian capital by
28 a serving U.S. president since 1982.³³ Although Uribe's support for the
29 War on Terror and for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 paralleled the poli-
30 cies of Tony Blair's Labour government in Great Britain, it was a source
31 of some tension with other Latin American countries. Yet he worked
32 throughout his two terms in office to maintain strong ties with more
33 leftist Latin American governments, including Lula de Silva in Brazil. He
34 was a regular participant in multilateral and bilateral meetings with his
35 Latin American colleagues, he maintained relations with Cuba as well
36 as with the People's Republic of China, he concluded a trade agreement
37 with Mercosur in 2005, and the Free Trade Agreement that was negoti-
38 ated with the United States also included Peru and Ecuador.

39 Nonetheless, his vigorous and increasingly successful pursuit of the
40 war against FARC and his rather ambiguous policy toward the various
41 paramilitary organizations resulted in some serious regional challenges
42 for his government, particularly with Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. In 2004

1 there were rumors that Colombian paramilitaries were involved in a
2 plot to overthrow Chávez's government. In December of the same year,
3 a senior member of FARC, Rodrigo Granda, considered FARC's foreign
4 minister, was captured in Caracas while attending the Second Bolivarian
5 People's Congress, transported to Colombia, and arrested by Colombian
6 officials. Although the Venezuelan foreign ministry indicated that it
7 would have cooperated officially with Colombia in the arrest of Granda,
8 it viewed the private action as a violation of Venezuelan sovereignty,
9 recalled its ambassador and suspended bilateral commercial relations.
10 The Uribe government contended that Venezuela was knowingly harbor-
11 ing Colombian guerrillas, and the Bush administration strongly endorsed
12 the Colombian position. Cuba, Brazil and Peru worked to mediate
13 the dispute and in February the following year, Uribe and Chávez
14 resolved the conflict at a bilateral summit, thus restoring commercial
15 relations.

16 More serious were the reactions to the early 2008 Colombian military
17 incursion into Ecuadoran territory to attack a major FARC base, and
18 the killing of Raul Reyes, FARC's second in command, along with a
19 number of other guerrillas. The action created a regional crisis. Ecuador
20 withdrew its ambassador, while Chávez ordered the deployment of sev-
21 eral battalions of Venezuelan troops and tanks to the Colombian border
22 and warned Colombian authorities that any comparable incursion into
23 Venezuelan territory would be a cause of war. The Venezuelan minis-
24 ter of defense presented the mobilization not as an action against the
25 Colombian people but against U.S. expansionism. The only hemispheric
26 government to publicly support Uribe was the Bush administration. The
27 OAS on March 5 passed a resolution declaring the Colombian military
28 raid a violation of Ecuador's sovereignty, although in an effort to allow
29 both countries to save face, the resolution did not explicitly condemn
30 the Colombian action. The resolution did not satisfy President Chávez,
31 however, and bilateral tensions persisted, although Colombia's defense
32 minister Juan Manuel Santos did not respond to the Venezuelan military
33 mobilization.³⁴

34 Within days of the crisis, Latin American leaders met in a summit
35 in the Dominican Republic in an effort to resolve the dispute before
36 it could escalate further. It was not until July that tensions eased when
37 Uribe and Chávez met in Paraguaná, Venezuela. Both parties were driven
38 by practical economic considerations as well as the need for a resolution
39 of the conflict. Colombian-Venezuelan bilateral trade was valued at some
40 \$6 billion per annum, with Venezuela relying on significant imports of
41 foodstuffs, natural gas, and manufactured goods from Colombia, where
42 those enterprises were a significant source of employment.³⁵

1 The crisis with Venezuela and Ecuador did not divert Uribe from his
2 efforts to defeat FARC and to press ahead with the demobilization of the
3 paramilitaries. In response to persistent criticism by Colombian as well
4 as international groups for an overly lenient approach to the demobiliza-
5 tion, in May 2008 his government extradited to the United States four-
6 teen already imprisoned paramilitary leaders, including the major figure
7 of Salvatore Mancuso. The move was in part an effort to defuse allega-
8 tions of paramilitary ties to senior members of his government, Congress,
9 and his own family. Although the extradition was also an effort to ensure
10 that the paramilitaries would receive punitive judicial treatment in the
11 United States on drug-trafficking charges, the action left the administra-
12 tion open to the criticism that the paramilitary leaders would neither be
13 punished for their human rights violations, nor their victims and victims'
14 families compensated.³⁶

15 The Venezuelan crisis also raised the issue of Colombia's capacity to
16 pursue a multilateral foreign policy in the Andean region. When he met
17 with the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in September 2008,
18 President Uribe was asked: "What is the room for multilateral action in
19 the context of the challenges in the region—the recent violence in Bolivia,
20 the tensions that arose between Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela in the
21 context of the Reyes situation?" In response, Uribe indicated that he pre-
22 ferred not to speak about the nation's neighbors, but rather the challenges
23 Colombia faced from the guerrillas, drugs traffickers, and paramilitaries.
24 At the same time he stressed that it was important in the region to sup-
25 port other democratic governments, as for instance that of Evo Morales,
26 who had recently been confronted by violent opposition. He studiously
27 avoided any reference to Hugo Chávez and Venezuela. Reflecting his
28 objective of balancing Colombian foreign relations in the region, Uribe
29 also pursued a major initiative to strengthen relations with Brazil in an
30 effort not only to enhance economic relations, but also in recognition of
31 Brazil's armament industry's importance to Colombian security.

32 The two terms of the Uribe presidency are drawing to a close as the
33 final draft of this chapter is written, and it is likely that there is too little
34 distance from those years to draw any final conclusions about the suc-
35 cesses and failures of his foreign policies. At the same time, it can be
36 said that his government pursued in an almost single-minded manner
37 its intention to contain and destroy guerrilla insurgencies within the
38 country and to demobilize and reinsert armed combatants into the main-
39 stream of society. Those policies contributed to serious diplomatic and
40 economic tensions with Ecuador and Venezuela but solid relations with
41 Brazil, Panama, and the United States during the presidency of George
42 W. Bush. With the election of Barack Obama and the dominance of the

1 Democratic Party in the U.S. Congress, however, the aggressive policies
 2 pursued by Uribe, which have brought so much domestic success, have
 3 led to negative reactions in the United States and Canada to what is
 4 perceived to be a weak human rights record, to the extent that neither of
 5 the North American nations have ratified already negotiated free-trade
 6 agreements with Colombia. Historians should refrain from attempting to
 7 predict what the future will bring, but in the case of Colombia it is rea-
 8 sonably safe to suggest that continuity in the direction, values, conduct,
 9 and control of foreign policy is far more likely than discontinuity.

CONCLUSION

11
 12
 13 In the post–Cold War years it is evident that Colombian foreign policy
 14 has been fundamentally pragmatic in its orientation, even during the
 15 administration of Álvaro Uribe Vélez, who has been viewed as the most
 16 ideologically oriented of the past three presidents. It could be argued that
 17 the continued effort to defeat the guerrilla insurgency is a remnant of the
 18 Cold War, which would also help explain the fact that only the Uribe
 19 government in Latin America supported the Bush administration’s war
 20 in Iraq. Yet, even support for the Iraq war should be viewed as based on
 21 pragmatic rather than ideological factors, and there are contradictions to
 22 this, such as the Colombian vote in the UN General Assembly in 2007
 23 to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination,
 24 a vote that was opposed by the United States and Israel.³⁷

25 Colombian foreign policy has sought to adhere consistently to inter-
 26 national law and multilateralism, in spite of the dominant influence of
 27 the United States. To a significant degree, practical domestic political
 28 considerations have driven foreign policy, in particular, because the two
 29 dominant domestic issues, drugs trafficking and the guerrilla insurgency,
 30 have had international implications. Although a link between the narcot-
 31 ics cartels and the guerrillas, particularly FARC, had long been identified
 32 by both Colombian and U.S. officials, it was not until the Bush admin-
 33 istration and the post-9/11 environment that Colombia was caught up in
 34 the War on Terror, and this response was based on pragmatic rather than
 35 ideological considerations.

36 Colombian policymakers have also sought to respond positively to the
 37 international community’s more general concerns with human rights.
 38 In addressing these issues, Colombian officials consistently sought, with
 39 varying degrees of success, to adhere to their basic foreign-policy prin-
 40 ciples of respect for international law and the international system, as
 41 well as balance the response to U.S. goals and demands with the need to
 42 address domestic challenges.

1 As the orientation of Colombian foreign policy has since World War I
 2 been premised on the assumption that it is in the national interest to main-
 3 tain a positive relationship with the United States, it is difficult to escape
 4 the conclusion that the pragmatism that has characterized Colombian
 5 policy is a permanent feature. Such pragmatism has at times, of course,
 6 been tempered by ideology, as for instance in Colombia's definitive adher-
 7 ence to the West during the Cold War and its anti-Communist domestic
 8 policies. It would be mistaken, however, to confuse pragmatism in the
 9 Colombian case with any tendency to be inconsistent in foreign policy.
 10 On the contrary, Colombian policy has been remarkably consistent.

11 NOTES

12
 13
 14 *The author would like to express his appreciation to a number of individuals
 15 who kindly gave their time to discuss Colombian foreign policy: former presi-
 16 dent Cesar Gaviria; foreign minister Jaime Bermudez, vice-minister of foreign
 17 relations Clemencia Forero, former vice-minister Camilo Reyes, former foreign
 18 minister Guillermo Fernandez de Soto, Senator Rodrigo Rivera, and Rodrigo
 19 Botero, former finance minister. Above all, the author is grateful to his long-
 20 time friend and colleague Alfonso López Caballero for his generous assistance
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 22 at the University of Calgary and a graduate of Universidad Externado de
 23 Colombia, provided excellent assistance with the initial literature review for this
 24 chapter.

- 25 1. For two insightful synthetic assessments of Colombian foreign policy and
 26 scholarship in the field see: Arlene Tickner, "Colombia: U.S. subordi-
 27 nate, Autonomous Actor, or Something in Between," in Frank Mora and
 28 Jeanne Hey, eds., *Latin American and Caribbean Foreign Policy* (Boulder:
 29 Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 165–84; Roberto Gonzalez Arana, "La
 30 Política Exterior de Colombia a finales del Siglo XX," *Investigacion y*
 31 *Desarrollo* 12, no. 2 (2004), 258–85.
- 32 2. For discussion on the regional implications of the Colombian secu-
 33 rity challenges, see the following: María Clara Izaza, "Colombia y sus
 34 vecinos," pp. 63–68, and Fernando Ribadeneira, "Relaciones Colombo-
 35 Ecuatorianas," pp. 69–76, in Martha Ardila, compilador, *Colombia y la*
 36 *seguridad hemisférica* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2001).
 37 Luz del Socorro Ramírez, "Colombia y sus vecinos," *Nueva Sociedad*, no.
 38 192 (July–August, 2004), 144–56; Socorro Ramírez, "Colombia-Brasil:
 39 Distante Vecinidad se Fortalece en la Seguridad y el Comercio," *Análisis*
 40 *Político*. No. 58 (September–December, 2006), 3–34; Socorro Ramírez,
 41 "El gobierno de Uribe y los países vecinos," *Análisis Político*, no. 57
 42 (May–August, 2006), 65–84; Richard Millet, "Colombia's conflicts: the
 Spill-Over Effects of a Wider War," in *The North-South Agenda*, no. 57
 (2002).

- 1 3. For discussion of Colombian dependency, see: Gerhard Drekonja, *Retos de*
2 *la política exterior colombiana* (Bogotá: CEREC-CERI, 1983); Drekonja,
3 “Autonomía periférica redefinida: América Latina en la década de los
4 noventa,” in María Mercedes Gómez, Gerhard Drekonja, Juan Gabriel
5 Toklatian, Leonardo Carvajal H. “Redefiniendo la autonomía en política
6 internacional,” *Documentos Ocasionales* (CEI), 31 (July–September,
7 1993); Fernando Enrique Cardoso y Enzo Faletto, *Dependencia y desar-*
8 *rollo en América Latina. Ensayo de interpretación sociológica* (Mexico D.F.:
9 Siglo XXI, 1969); Helio Jaguaribe, “Autonomía periférica y hegemonía
10 centrada,” *Estudios Internacionales*, 46 (April–June, 1979), 91–130;
11 Tickner, “Colombia: U.S. subordinate.” Not all are agreed that depen-
12 dency is a negative. See, for instance, the analysis by Carlos Escudé, *El*
13 *realismo de los Estados débiles* (Buenos Aires: GEL, 1995) as referenced
14 by Tickner, “Intervención por invitación: Claves de la política exterior
15 colombiana y sus debilidades principales,” *Colombia Internacional*,
16 no. 65 (January–June, 2007), 90–111.
- 17 4. <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c3010.html#2007>.
18 Accessed December 18, 2008. Note that Colombia has been a member
19 of the World Trade Organization since 1995.
- 20 5. [http://www.mincomercio.gov.co/eContent/NewsDetail.asp?ID=764&](http://www.mincomercio.gov.co/eContent/NewsDetail.asp?ID=764&IDCompany=1)
21 [IDCompany=1](http://www.mincomercio.gov.co/eContent/NewsDetail.asp?ID=764&IDCompany=1). Colombian export data in this data set includes only the
22 period January to August, 2007.
- 23 6. Socorro Ramírez, and Luís Alberto Restrepo (compiladores), *Colombia:*
24 *entre la reinsertión y el aislamiento* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombres Editores,
25 1997), p. 68.
- 26 7. See Tickner, “Colombia: U.S. subordinate.” On Silva, see http://juanvaldez.com/menu/news/Releases/Colombian_Coffee_Growers_Election.pdf.
- 27 8. Arana, “La Política Exterior de Colombia,” p. 275. On López Michelsen
28 as both foreign minister and president, see Stephen J. Randall, *Alfonso*
29 *López Michelsen, su vida su época* (Bogotá: Villegas Editores, 2007).
30 Colombian relations with Cuba quickly became strained, however, when
31 Cuba supported a failed M-19 initiative to establish a rural insurgency.
32 The Liberal government of Julio César Turbay Ayala broke relations in
33 1981.
- 34 9. Author interview with former President Gaviria, Bogotá, February 16,
35 2009.
- 36 10. Arana, “La Política Exterior de Colombia,” p. 277.
- 37 11. Colombia, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministra Noemí Sanín),
38 *Actuar en el mundo: la política exterior de Colombia frente al siglo*
39 *XXI* (Bogotá: MRE, 1993). Alberto Lleras Camargo was the first
40 secretary-general of the OAS. Gaviria served two terms as secretary-
41 general, 1994–1999 and 1999–2004. See also Randall, *Alfonso López*
42 *Michelsen, su vida su época*.
12. See *Washington Post*, March 21, 1996.
13. See Arana, “Política Exterior,” p. 266n.2, 274–75. On the nonaligned
movement, see República de Colombia, Ministerio de Relaciones

- 1 Exteriores, *La política exterior de Colombia y el movimiento de Países No*
 2 *Alineados* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1995); Ramirez y Restrepo (compi-
 3 ladores), *Colombia: entre la reinserción y el aislamiento* (1997). For early
 4 analyses of the Colombian relationship with nonhemispheric regions,
 5 see José Luis Ramírez, *Las Relaciones Internacionales de Colombia con el*
 6 *Medio Oriente: Evolución, Desarrollo y Perspectivas* (Universidad de Los
 7 Andes: CEI, Nov-dic. De 1988); Dora Rothlisberger, *Las Relaciones*
 8 *Internacionales de Colombia con los Principales Países Asiáticos de la Cuenca*
 9 *del Pacífico* (Universidad de Los Andes: CEI, Enero-Febrero de 1989).
 10 On Colombian security issues and the European relationship, see Diego
 11 Cardona C., Bernard Labatut, Stephanie Lavaux, and Rubén Sánchez,
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 13 Universidad del Rosario, 2004).
14. Rodrigo Pardo, "Algunos aspectos de la política exterior colombiana en
 14 la administración Samper," *Colombia Internacional*, no. 27 (September,
 15 1994), 3–8.
 15. Interview with Maria Emma Mejia, *Army Times*, Defense News, April
 16 27–May 3, 1998, <http://www.colombiasupport.net/199804/0427AT.html>.
 17 Accessed November 17, 2008. The author also met with Mejia as
 18 foreign minister in 1997 when she expressed similar views on relations
 19 with the United States.
 20. Robert Gelbard, "Certification for Drug Producing Countries," March 7,
 21 1997, testimony before the House of Representatives, International
 22 Relations Committee, Sub-Committee on the Western Hemisphere.
 23. On Zuñiga's resignation, see *New York Times* March 12, 1996. On the
 24 policy implications of U.S. certification, see Juan Gabriel Tokatlian,
 25 "Condicionalidad y Certificación: El caso de Colombia," *Nueva*
 26 *Sociedad*, no. 148 (March–April, 1997), 98–107.
 27. See Guillermo Fernández de Soto, *La Nueva Integración Andina*
 28 (Comunidad Andina, 2003).
 29. Author interview with Fernández de Soto, February 17, 2009.
 30. Russell Crandall notes the irony of the fact that although Plan Colombia
 31 was a Clinton initiative, the actual military aid in the form of two coun-
 32 ternarcotics brigades and helicopters was delivered by the Bush adminis-
 33 tration. See *Driven By Drugs: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia* (Boulder: Lynne
 34 Rienner, 2002), p. 165. The data on Plan Colombia is from the foreign
 35 minister Carolina Barco's address to the Council on Foreign Relations,
 36 September 29, 2003, http://www.cfr.org/publication/6326/address_by_the_honorable_carolina_barco.
 37 Accessed December 16, 2008.
 38. After his presidency Pastrana wrote about the collapse of the negotiations
 39 with FARC. See Andres Pastrana Arango, *La Palabra bajo fuego* (Bogotá:
 40 Planeta, 2005).
 41. Pastrana address, April 12, 2000, <http://www.asne.org/kiosk/archive/convention/2000/pastrana.htm>.
 42 Accessed November 28, 2008. On Pastrana, see Diana Marcela Rojas, "La política exterior del gobierno
 Pastrana en tres actos," *Análisis Político*, no. 46 (May–August, 2002), and

- 1 Rojas, "Balance de la política internacional del gobierno Uribe," *Análisis*
 2 *Político*, no. 57 (May–August, 2006), 85–105.
- 3 23. Diana Marcela Rojas, "Balance de la política internacional del gobierno
 4 Uribe," *Análisis Político*, no. 57 (May–August, 2006), 89.
- 5 24. Leonardo Carvajal y Rodrigo Pardo, "La internacionalización del
 6 conflicto doméstico y los procesos de paz," in Martha Ardila y Diego
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 8 (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2001).
- 9 25. Arlene Tickner has argued effectively that even during those admin-
 10 istrations that had sought to expand Colombian foreign relations
 11 internationally, relations with the United States remained paramount.
 12 See, for instance, Tickner, "Intervención por invitación: Claves de la
 13 política exterior colombiana y sus debilidades principales," *Colombia*
 14 *Internacional*, revista no. 65 (January–June, 2007), 90–111.
- 15 26. This increase was approved by the U.S. Congress. U.S. forces par-
 16 ticipated primarily in Plan Patriota, which was a major offensive in the
 17 Putumayo region against FARC strongholds.
- 18 27. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/17336/meeting_with_president_alvaro_](http://www.cfr.org/publication/17336/meeting_with_president_alvaro_uribe_velez_of_colombia.html)
 19 [uribe_velez_of_colombia.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/17336/meeting_with_president_alvaro_uribe_velez_of_colombia.html). Accessed December 17, 2008.
- 20 28. Canada on the other hand concluded a Free Trade Agreement with
 21 Colombia in 2008, an agreement that was actively pursued by the Uribe
 22 administration to offset the opposition from the U.S. Democratic Party.
 23 Author discussions with Rodrigo Botero, former Colombian Finance
 24 Minister, 2007–2008.
- 25 29. See, for instance, Rojas, *Análisis Político*, no. 57 (May–August, 2006), 92.
- 26 30. Maria Consuelo Araujo served only briefly in 2006–2007, and was
 27 succeeded by Fernando Araujo, who in turn was succeeded in 2008 by
 28 Jaime Bermúdez, a former Colombian ambassador to Argentina.
- 29 31. Pastrana resigned in 2006 in protest against President Uribe's offer of the
 30 Spanish ambassadorship to Ernesto Samper.
- 31 32. Interview with Pastrana, *El Tiempo*, November 10, 2008
- 32 33. *New York Times*, March 12, 2007. On the Bush visit to Bogotá, see *El*
 33 *Tiempo*, 3 de febrero de 2007; *El Tiempo* editorialized on the Bush visit:
 34 "Seis años después de que Bush prometió que América Latina sería clave en
 35 su política exterior, el mandatario estadounidense emprende una gira con-
 36 tinental que muchos han calificado no solo de tardía sino de irrelevante."
 37 March 11, 2007.
- 38 34. *New York Times*, March 6, 2008
- 39 35. *New York Times*, July 12, 2008.
- 40 36. Between 2002 and 2008 Uribe's government extradited approximately
 41 seven hundred Colombians to the United States. *New York Times*, May 14,
 42 2008.
- 43 37. <http://domino.un.org>. Accessed February 17, 2009.