

THE UNITED STATES AGENDA FOR COLOMBIA

Noam Chomsky (OOA Advisory Board Member)

In 1999, Colombia became the leading recipient of US military and police assistance, replacing Turkey (Israel and Egypt are in a separate category). The figure is scheduled to increase sharply for the next two years. Through the 1990s, Colombia has been the leading recipient of US military aid in Latin America, and has also compiled the worst human rights record, in accord with a well-established correlation.

In Colombia, the military armed and trained by the US has not crushed domestic resistance, though it continues to produce its regular annual toll of atrocities. Each year, some 300,000 new refugees are driven from their homes, with a death toll of about 3000 and many horrible massacres. The great majority of atrocities are attributed to the paramilitary forces that are closely linked to the military, as documented once again by Human Rights Watch (February 2000). The Colombian Commission of Jurists reported last September that the rate of killings had increased by almost 20% over the preceding year, and that the proportion attributable to the paramilitaries had risen from 46% in 1995 to almost 80% in 1998, continuing through 1999. Forced displacement in 1998 was 20% above 1997, and increased in 1999 in some regions according to Human Rights Watch.

Colombia now has the largest displaced population in the world, after Sudan and Angola. Prominent human rights activists continue to flee abroad under death threats, including now the courageous head of the Church-based human rights group Justice and Peace, Fr. Javier Giraldo, who has played an outstanding role in defending human rights. The AFL-CIO reports (Feb. 2000) that several trade unionists are murdered every week, mostly by paramilitaries supported by the government security forces. Hailed as a leading democracy by Clinton and other US leaders, Colombia permitted a challenge to the elite system of power-sharing by an independent political party, which, however, faced certain difficulties, such as the assassination of about 3000 activists, including presidential candidates, mayors, and legislators.

Meanwhile, shameful socioeconomic

conditions persist and may even have intensified, leaving much of the population in misery in a rich country with concentration of wealth and land-ownership that is high even by outrageous Latin American standards. The president of the Colombian Permanent Committee for Human Rights, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Alfredo Vasquez Carrizosa, writes that it is "poverty and insufficient land reform" that "have made Colombia one of the most tragic countries of Latin America," though as elsewhere, "violence has been exacerbated by external factors," primarily the initiatives of the Kennedy Administration, which "took great pains to transform our regular armies into counterinsurgency brigades," ushering in "what is known in Latin America as the National Security Doctrine," which is not concerned with "defense against an external enemy" but

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rather "the internal enemy." The new "strategy of the death squads" accords the military "the right to fight and to exterminate social workers, trade unionists, men and women who are not supportive of the establishment, and who are assumed to be communist extremists."

As part of its strategy of converting the Latin American military from "hemispheric defense" to "internal security"—meaning war against the domestic population—Kennedy dispatched a military mission to Colombia in 1962 headed by Special Forces General William Yarborough. He proposed "reforms" to enable the security forces to "as necessary execute paramilitary, sabotage and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents"—the "communist extremists" to whom Vasquez Carrizosa alludes.

Social Protest Criminalized

In Colombia, a governmental commission concluded that "the criminalization of social protest" is one of the "principal factors which permit and encourage violations of human rights" by the mili-

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tary and police authorities and their paramilitary collaborators. Ten years ago, as US-backed state terror was increasing sharply, the Minister of Defense called for "total war in the political, economic, and social arenas," while another high military official explained that guerrillas were of secondary importance: "the real danger" is "what the insurgents have called the political and psychological war," the war "to control the popular elements" and "to manipulate the masses." The "subversives" hope to influence unions, universities, media, and so on. "Every individual who in one or another manner supports the goals of the enemy must be considered a traitor and treated in that manner," a 1963 military manual prescribed, as the Kennedy initiatives were moving into high gear. Since the official goals of the guerrillas are social democratic (whatever their actual goals may be), the circle of treachery targeted for terror operations is wide.

The Kennedy-Yarborough strategy was developed and applied broadly in the years that followed. Violent repression spread throughout the hemisphere, reaching its awesome peak in Central America in the 1980s. Colombia's advance to first-rank among the criminal states south of the border is in part the result of the decline in US-backed state terror in Central America. As in Turkey ten years later, its primary aims were achieved, leaving in its wake a "culture of terror" that "domesticates the expectations of the majority" and undermines any aspiration towards "alternatives that differ from those of the powerful" in the words of Salvadoran Jesuits who learned the lessons from bitter experience; those who survived the US assault, that is. In Colombia, the problem of establishing approved forms of "stability" remains, and is even becoming more severe. The correlation with increasing arms shipments is familiar.

Arms for Colombia

The sharp increase in arms shipped to Colombia is officially justified in terms of the “drug war,” a claim taken seriously by few competent analysts, even apart from the instructive historical pattern, barely sampled here. As many have observed, the military themselves are heavily involved in narcotrafficking, and their paramilitary associates—who openly proclaim their reliance on narcotrafficking—are not the targets of the planned operations. The targets are guerrilla forces based on the peasantry and calling for internal social change, which would interfere with integration of Colombia into the global system on the terms that the US demands, dominated by elite elements linked to US power interests that are accorded free access to Colombia's valuable resources, including oil.

Coca

But let us put these matters aside and consider a few other questions. Why do peasants in Colombia grow coca, not other crops? Colombia was once a major wheat producer. That was undermined in the 1950s by US “Food for Peace” aid, a program that provided taxpayer subsidies to US agribusiness and counterpart funds for US client states, used commonly for military spending and counterinsurgency. A year before President Bush announced the “drug war” with great fanfare (once again), the international coffee agreement was suspended under US pressure, on grounds of “fair trade violations.” The result was a fall of prices of more than 40% within two months for Colombia's leading legal export.

Globalization

Further background is discussed by the late political economist Susan Strange in her last book. In the 1960s, the G77 governments of the Third World (now over 130, accounting for 80% of the world's population) initiated a call for a “new international economic order” in which the concerns of the large majority of people of the world would be addressed. Specific proposals were formulated by UNCTAD, established by the UN to address such concerns. But these plans scarcely even had to be dismissed. Official “globalization” is designed to cater to the needs of a different sector, namely its designers—hardly a surprise, any more than the fact that in standard dogma “globalization” is depicted as an inexorable process to which “there is no alternative.”

One early UNCTAD proposal was a program for stabilizing commodity

prices, a practice that is standard within the industrial countries by one or another form of subsidy. In 1996, Congress passed the “Freedom to Farm Act” to liberate American agriculture from the “East German socialist programs of the New Deal,” as Newt Gingrich put it. Subsidies quickly tripled, reaching a record \$23 billion in 1999. The market does work its magic, however: the taxpayer subsidies go disproportionately to large agribusiness and the “corporate oligopolies” that dominate the input and output side, as Nicholas Kristof correctly observed in the NY Times. Those with market power in the food chain (from energy corporations to restaurant chains) are enjoying great profits while the “agricultural crisis,” which is real, is concentrated among smaller farmers in the middle of the chain, who produce the food.

But the devices used by the rich to ensure that they are protected by the nanny state are not available to the poor. The UNCTAD initiative was quickly shot down, and the organization has been largely marginalized and tamed, along

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with others that reflect the interests of the global majority to some extent. Reviewing these events, Strange observes that farmers were therefore compelled to turn to crops for which there is a stable market. Large-scale agribusiness can tolerate fluctuation of commodity prices, compensating for temporary losses elsewhere. Poor peasants cannot tell their children: “don't worry, maybe you'll be able to eat next year.” The result, Strange continues, was that drug entrepreneurs could easily “find farmers eager to grow coca, cannabis or opium,” for which there is always a ready market in the rich societies.

The programs of the US and the global institutions it dominates are constructed to magnify these effects. The current Clinton plan for Colombia includes only token funding for alternative crops; others are to take care of constructive approaches, while the US concentrates on military operations—which, incidentally, happen to benefit the high-tech industries that produce military equipment and have been lobbying for the escalation. Furthermore, IMF-World Bank programs demand that countries open their borders to a flood of (massively subsidized) agricultural products from the rich countries, with the obvious effect of under-

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mining local production. And peasants are instructed to become “rational,” producing for the export market and seeking the highest prices—which translates as “coca, cannabis, opium.” Having learned their lessons properly, they are rewarded by attack by military gunships while their fields are destroyed by chemical and biological warfare, courtesy of Washington.

Another question lurks not too far in the background. Just what right does the US have to carry out these operations in other countries to destroy a crop it doesn't like? We can put aside the cynical response that the governments requested this “assistance”; if they hadn't, they wouldn't be the governments for long. The number of Colombians who die from US-produced lethal drugs exceeds the number of North Americans who die from cocaine, and is far greater relative to the populations. In East Asia, US-produced lethal drugs are causing millions of deaths. These countries are compelled not only to accept the products but also advertising for them, under threat of severe trade sanctions; the Colombian cartels, in contrast, are not permitted to fund huge advertising campaigns in which a Joe Camel counterpart extols the wonders of cocaine. Does China, then, have the right to carry out military, chemical, and biological warfare in North

Carolina? If not, why not?

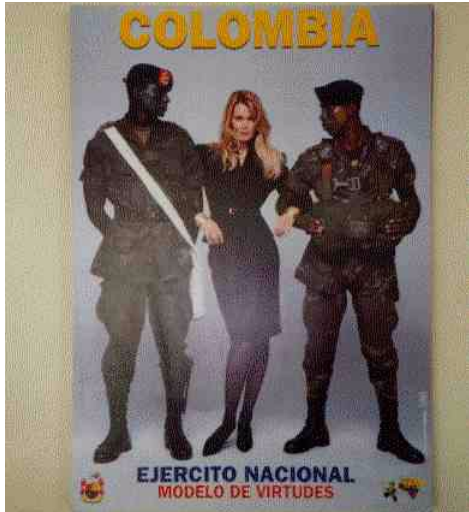
Yet another question has to do with the alleged concern over drug use. The seriousness of that concern was illustrated when a House Committee was considering the Clinton proposals. It rejected an amendment proposed by California Democrat Nancy Pelosi calling for funding of drug demand reduction services. It is well known that these are far more effective than forceful measures. A Rand study funded by the US Army and the government drug control agencies found that funds spent on domestic drug treatment were 23 times as effective as “source country control” (Clinton's Colombia Plan), 11 times as effective as interdiction, and 7 times as effective as domestic law enforcement. But that path will not be followed. Rather, the “drug war” targets poor peasants abroad and poor people at home; by the use of force, not constructive measures to alleviate problems at a fraction of the cost. We might also ask why there are no Delta Force raids on US banks and chemical corporations, though it is no secret that they too are engaged in the narcotrafficking business.

The next question is: why the “drug war,” in its specific form? An answer is implicit in an observation of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, one of the few Senators to pay close attention to social statistics. By adopting these measures, he observed, “we are choosing to have

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an intense crime problem concentrated among minorities." And why should that choice be made in a period when a domestic form of "structural adjustment" is being imposed? Answers do not seem too hard to find. [Note: A section titled "The Case of Turkey" was removed from this article to fit it into the newsletter. Please see the full article, under "Newsletter" at the OOA Website].

Are you an Office of the Americas Member? If we have not heard from you in the past year, please renew your membership. See the form at the bottom of this page.



"The National Army, a model of virtues." Photo taken from within the bowels of the Colombian "Pentagon."

Statement from new Board Member and Outreach Coordinator, Patrice Wagonhurst

I first attended an Office of the Americas event at the Unitarian Church in Santa Monica in 1995 after spending a year working as a journalist in Guatemala. I remember feeling such warmth and enthusiasm in that room, and my admiration for the OOA has grown ever since. The energy of the OOA family has always amazed me. Everyone involved has contributed to my journey as an activist and student of the movement.

I am honored beyond belief to be a new board member for the OOA. I truly admire every member of the board and the active volunteers as well. I am honored to join the OOA family and to learn from all of you, and hopefully to contribute my skills and energy to the organization.

One of the ways I am helping the OOA is to act as "outreach coordinator." A primary goal of our outreach strategy is to create effective action tools. We are in the process of identifying a key group of volunteers who will form the Urgent Action Network, a rapid response system for events, action alerts etc. The Urgent Action Network will not only mobilize volunteers for OOA sponsored events and actions, but for other groups, such as:

- Homies Unidos, an organization of former gang members who are now peace makers. With substantial risk, they recruit and train young people in Los Angeles and in San Salvador to be productive members of society.
- The Living Wage Coalition. OOA is part of a local and international movement among service workers. In Santa Monica the group is known as SMART.
- The Fair Trade Network. A local organization working for "NO TO WTO" and promoting principles of fair trade. These and other OOA related works can be found on the OOA web-site: www.officeoftheamericas.org

We witnessed the power of email and organizing in Seattle and D.C. and we are now actively trying to get everyone possible on an OOA email list for relevant events.

Since the second goal is to expand OOA's capacity to collaborate with other groups, we must be present at the many events and coalition meetings. In view of the fact that Theresa can only be in one place at a time, I will be representing OOA at various functions. We are hoping to have others join us as OOA representatives, as well. Let us know if you are interested.

Thanks to all of you for fighting for social justice! ¡La OOA está presente!

Nominate OOA for Working Assets Grant

Working Assets offers grants to nonprofit groups judged to be worthy. If you think Office of the Americas is worthy of such a grant please nominate us. We qualify under their issue area of...

"Peace and International Freedom."

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- being of national and international scope.
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- you may add your own reasons.

Please send in your letter of nomination before June 30, 2000 to:

*Working Assets, Donations Manager
101 Market Street, Suite 700
San Francisco, CA 94105*

Many thanks!

End the Cruel Embargo of Cuba! Take Action Today!

Leone Hankey

Today we have the greatest chance yet of bringing to an end the harshest aspects of the US government's shameful and unlawful "low-intensity" war against Cuba that has lasted for forty years and taken a terrible toll on the lives and health of its people. Representative Jose Serrano of New York has brought a series of measures before Congress that pierce the cruelest aspects of the embargo, including measures to lift the travel ban and the ban on the sale of food and medicine.

In the last few months, the Elian Gonzalez tragedy has led many people to take a new look at the discriminatory US policy toward Cuba and the result is that the vast majority of the public now favors an end to the embargo. This has created a window of opportunity for us to educate people and even more importantly, turn this public opinion into activism to end the sanctions. This legislative fight is a tough fight, but it's one we can win if we work hard right now and it will save lives!

The United Nations has condemned the sanctions against food and medicine as a violation of human rights year after year. The UN finds that the US embargo has created malnutrition, low birth weight in infants and neuropathy. This act of war (the embargo) has also had an impact on water safety resulting in a rise in water-borne disease fatalities as well as shortages and absences of necessary medicines, including antibiotics. Most of the world's insulin supply is manufactured in Puerto Rico and subject to the embargo, putting diabetics at perpetual risk. Children undergoing chemotherapy face shortages of anti-nausea drugs.

The vote is imminent, so call your own Congressional Representative, as well as Representatives Brad Sherman (Sherman Oaks) and Loretta Sanchez (Garden Grove) today at 877-722-7494 (toll-free) or 202-224-3121 and tell them to co-sponsor and vote for the anti-embargo bills. OOA serves on the Board of The Disarm Education Fund and is proud to be part of the Disarm Cuban Medical Project which in the last year has delivered \$25 million of medical supplies to Cuba to save lives and build hope and friendship between the American and Cuban people. Disarm works hand in hand with Office of The Americas and other peace and social justice organizations working to turn around the repressive US foreign policy toward Latin America. Even if these life-saving bills pass, we will still have a long way to go!

For more information on how you can help, contact www.disarm.org, or call West Coast Director Leone Sandra Hankey at 323-931-3669.

OFFICE OF THE AMERICAS IN ACTION

Arrange presentation by Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia at Loyola/Marymount University. Extensive personal meeting with him regarding his plans now that he is Emeritus and free to work throughout the hemisphere with his macro-ecumenical movement SICSAL (The International Christian Secretariat in Solidarity with the People of Latin America; Oscar A. Romero).

Met at length with the new mayor of Santa Elena de Usulután, El Salvador, Nicolás Alfredo Barrera. Our hope is to establish a sister city program with this impoverished community.

Press Conference and demonstration at Ramparts Division of LAPD with Tom Hayden regarding the constructive work of the peace and rehabilitation project Homies Unidos.

Met with U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley suggesting a curriculum of Peace Studies in all of our public schools, colleges and universities. Strongly urged him to make any exams by the Educational Testing Service optional.

OOA organized a fund raiser for Homies Unidos. Geraldo Rivera covered the event and it aired nationally.

The third edition of *Guerrillas of Peace* will be available within two weeks. It is published by toExcel, <iUniverse.com>. The book *Guerrillas of Peace on the Air* (a compilation of Blase's radio commentaries) will be available in the fall of 2000 published by Red Hen Press. Thanks to all who assisted in this project. Call us if you would like to know more about this publishing venture.

OOA is an active member of the Fair Trade Network and is working to reject the anti-democratic, centralized greed of the World Trade Organization.

OOA works directly with the Coalition for a Living Wage helping to defeat a corporate attempt to create a deceptive parallel organization designed to destroy workers rights.

Our members were an integral part of the recent union victory for the workers at the

Miramar Hotel and the Journey for Justice March (700 people marched in pouring rain to celebrate the Workers' Rights movement).

Presentations

OOA spoke at the following locations on themes including: Abolishing the War System, Globalization and U.S. Policy in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Cuba and Iraq.

- To the Associated Students of the University of Colorado at Boulder.
- To the Associated Students of Ventura College on the Departure of the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Chiapas, Mexico.
- To the Associated Students of Occidental College.
- To the National Council of Senior Citizens.
- To the Art Institute of Los Angeles.
- To the Thursday Night Forum.
- To the Peace Center Coalition.
- To the Alliance for Democracy.
- Interview with Warren Olney on KCRW.

Media One has reestablished WORLD FOCUS, a scheduled Office of the Americas television program. The program will air in the South Bay and Harbor area as well as selected cable areas. Call if you can place it on your cable station.

Needed: Computer volunteers to do word processing and data base entries.

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Members receive OOA's quarterly newsletter and the satisfaction of being part of an international movement for peace and justice.

Sustainers receive monthly mailings of OOA issues, activities and special events.

I pledge: \$_____ each month quarter year other _____ for OOA's work.

Enclosed is my first pledge of: \$ _____ (all contributions are tax-deductible).

Enclosed is my membership contribution:

Founder/\$1,000 Patron/\$500 Sponsor/\$250 Donor/\$200 Friend/\$100

Family/\$35 Individual/\$25 Limited income/\$10

Please send me information on your volunteer program. Please remove me from your mailing list.

I would like an OOA speaker for a house / church / organization meeting.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip: _____

FAX: _____ Email: _____

Note: FAX and Email addresses are assurances that you will receive more notices of special events.