

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF JAMES T. HILL, GENERAL, US ARMY RETIRED

TO THE SENATE FINACE COMMITTEE, 11 MAY 2011

I served as the Combatant Commander, United States Southern Command from August 2002 until November 2004, responsible for all US military activity in South and Central America and the Caribbean. I assumed my command within days of the inauguration of the President of the Republic of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe. At the beginning of President Uribe's first term, in the nascent stages of Plan Colombia, it is not hyperbole, exaggeration or overstatement to describe Colombia of August 2002 as a failing or even failed state. At its very best it was a dysfunctional state.

On his inaugural day only an equipment malfunction stopped FARC mortar rockets from raining down on the assembled crowd. Colombians could not safely drive throughout the country side without fear of kidnapping. One illegal armed group, the FARC, held former presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, captive along with hundreds of others. Three armed and very deadly insurgent groups, the FARC, ELN and AUC vied for control of the countryside. All these groups were fueled and funded through drug money. Colombia was the homicide and kidnapping capital of the world. Colombia in August 2002 was simply one of, if not the, most dangerous and violent nation in the world.

This lack of security, the inability of government to provide a safe environment for its citizens to work and live caused the concomitant deterioration of social and economic norms. Taxes were not paid. Wealthy Colombians abandoned the country in droves, taking their money to Miami and other parts of the US. Foreign investment, one of the drivers of an emerging economy, was non-existent. Huge tracks of the country were controlled by the illegals causing population displacement on a grand scale. Coca growth and cocaine production fueled the fire that threatened to destroy the second oldest democracy in the Americas.

Into this maelstrom stepped President Uribe, armed with great, personal leadership qualities, backed up by the commitment of the Colombian people tired of violence and demanding change and supported by the United States, determined through the funding of Plan Colombia to preserve Colombia's independence and stem the flow of cocaine into the US. What has transpired over the last decade, under the leadership of President Uribe, a man for whom I have enormous respect, and now President Santos, is a success story for both Colombia and the United States with few historical parallels.

US investment through Plan Colombia has been \$8B over the last decade. But to put those dollars in perspective, this is about two week's expenditure in Iraq. For further comparison, annual USG funding for Colombia amounts to less than 5% of what Colombia spends on its own defense annually. And what did we get out of it? The Colombian armed forces are now a fully capable force, able to counter FARC, ELN and other illegal armed groups. They have made great strides in respect for human rights and the rule of law; they do not tolerate extrajudicial killings. The FARC, while still an active terrorist organization, has been reduced by approximately 50% (from 20k in 2002 to about 8-9k in 2010); ELN is virtually non-existent; AUC demobilized, though some have become members of criminal gangs. Homicides down 48%; kidnappings down 91%; attacks down 73%; attacks against infrastructure down 88%. Attacks against labor unionists have dropped significantly in the past decade---from 194 homicides in 2002 to approximately 51 in 2010 and there is no indication that the murders are state sponsored or state tolerated. Cocaine production continues, but the two tiered approach of eradication at the source and international interdiction efforts in the transit zone have stopped enormous amounts of cocaine reaching the user in the US. We will never stop the drug trade; there is simply too much money and profit involved for too many people. But we have stopped cocaine trafficking and narco-terrorists from creating a narco-state in Colombia. I say that is \$8B dollars well spent.

President Uribe, by necessity, had to focus on security concerns. Colombia's success in this area enables the Santos administration to work socioeconomic and development issues through its National Consolidation Plan. As outlined in the US-Colombia High-Level Dialogue we now have a broad set of mechanisms to

advance our shared interests and values and a forum to engage on a broad range of non-security issues. The National Consolidation Plan is supportive of that dialogue. Colombia's National Consolidation Plan is a comprehensive reexamination of its whole-of-government approach to reestablishing state presence and the rule of law throughout the country. It builds on earlier work done through the Coordination Center for Integrated Action, developed during Uribe's first term, with our support. President Santos' transformative legislative agenda, highlighted by land restitution, victims' reparations, and judicial reform initiatives, aims to lay the foundation for lasting peace by tackling the root causes (social inequality, corruption, judicial inefficiency) of the decades-old Colombian internal conflict. This is classic counter-insurgency doctrine that accepts the fact that government cannot succeed without reform and the support of the populace cannot be ensured without meaningful reform. Simply put, building upon a foundation of greatly improved security, it is the natural progression of good governance begun in August 2002.

I commend to the Committee the Dear Colleague Letter from Senator Lugar, dated February 8, 2011 and entitled "Losing Jobs and Alienating Friends: The Consequences of Falling Behind on Free Trade With Colombia and Panama." This excellent study, written by Senior Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff member for Latin America and the Caribbean, Carl Meacham, makes the case for FTA ratification as well as any effort I have seen. Given that as context, let me make my case for the strategic importance of Colombia.

In my 27 months of command I visited every country in Central and South America, save Venezuela. If we were discussing our personal life I would say, using an analogy, that we have many acquaintances in the region, but few really good friends. Colombia is one of those tried and true, lifelong friends we all seek in our personal lives. It makes no sense to damage the friendship, to tarnish and diminish the steadfastness of the Colombian people. If we fail to ratify FTA we tell our friends we really don't care all that much for them, that we have a one-sided relationship. If we fail to ratify we do so at exactly the time that Colombia is emerging as a regional leader and US partner. Colombia is the only stable actor in the Andean Ridge. It helps provide political leverage in our dealings with quixotic

states like Ecuador and counter radical-populism in Venezuela. Colombian armed forces are involved in regional engagement activities in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Their engagement activities in Central America are particularly important because I believe Central America is the single greatest security threat facing the US in the region because of the destabilization potential of violent gang activity. They were involved in HA/DR activities in Haiti and Costa Rica last year. Colombia has become a key partner in regional security cooperation helping countries throughout the Americas to more effectively confront transnational criminal organizations.

The US-Colombian relationship begun in August 2002 as an effort to defend democracy in Colombia, to stabilize a failing state, paid for partially with Plan Colombia dollars and the sacrifice and blood of the Colombian people, has paid huge dividends. Ours is a maturing, increasingly sophisticated political relationship, based on true partnership and valuable to both sides. Make no mistake; FTA ratification is at the heart of this relationship. Failure to ratify will make a strong relationship weaker, decreasing our ability to meet our security, economic and political goals in the region. Failure to ratify, using a sports analogy, would be like snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. I strongly urge the Senate to ratify FTA for Colombia. Let's not waste a decade's worth of success.