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THE U.S. WAR ON DRUGS IN LATIN AMERICA:  
WHAT IS THE METHOD TO THE MADNESS?

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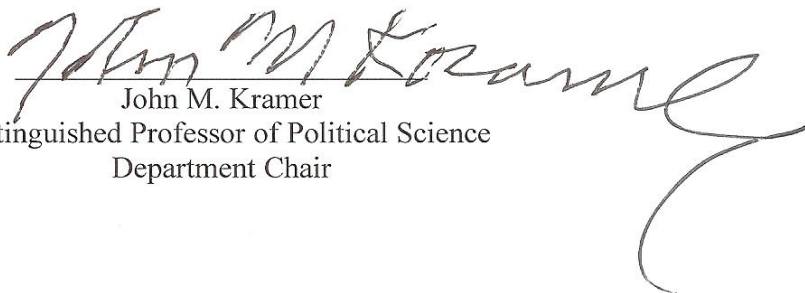
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## The U.S. War on Drugs in Latin America:

### What is the Method to the Madness?

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## **Introduction**

Albert Einstein is credited with defining insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Based on this definition, the U.S. War on Drugs in Latin America is insane. For over four decades, U.S. policymakers have continued to implement the same types of supply-side policies, which academic researchers widely posit as failing to achieve policy goals both domestically and abroad. Neither the production, supply, or transit of illegal drugs has been reduced, nor has domestic demand decreased. Furthermore, the U.S. has spent over \$1 trillion on interdiction policies that cost taxpayers over \$51 billion annually (Coyne & Hall, 2017). Costly supply-side policies that do not achieve goals present a conundrum that begs resolution. Why has the United States continued to pursue a counterdrug strategy in Latin America that has been largely futile?

Answering this question is the goal of this paper. In order to do so, this paper will first provide background that defines the U.S. War on Drugs. It will also describe key supply-side tactics and policies. Additionally, it aims to demonstrate the overall ineffectiveness of the war and present existing schools of thought as to why the U.S. has continued to implement failing policies in Latin America. The schools of thought will then be used to articulate competing hypotheses. The hypotheses will be tested through empirical research in order to determine the explanatory power of each as it relates to the continuity of U.S. counterdrug policy in Latin America.

## **Background**

The United States adopted an anti-drug campaign when former President Richard Nixon officially declared a “War on Drugs” in 1971. Nixon regarded illegal drugs as “public enemy

number one,” presumably due to an increase in recreational drug use in the 1960s. However, the War on Drugs may have been launched as a political assault against certain groups, specifically African Americans and hippies, as indicated by John Ehrlichman, a top advisor to Nixon (LoBianco, 2016). Regardless of true motivation, concern over the negative effects of domestic drug use on society and the economy began to increase. Powerful international drug organizations, most prominently the Medellín cartel, also posed a threat at the time. Due to these concerns, former President Ronald Reagan declared drug trafficking a national security threat in 1986 (Bagley & Tokatlian, 1992, pp. 215-216). This declaration initiated the U.S. securitization of drugs (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 47).

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 created the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). The ONDCP is also referred to as the “drug czar” office and operates as advisor to the president on issues related to drug control. It prepares the “National Drug Control Strategy,” which is an annual report summarizing the current administration’s plans to decrease illicit drug use, production, trafficking, narcotics-related violence and crime, and associated health risks (The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy). The “National Drug Control Strategy 1989” reinforced U.S. securitization efforts, by maintaining that most American citizens agreed that drugs were the most pressing national security threat at the time (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 48).

The crack cocaine epidemic and related violence in the mid-1980s were pivotal in the formation of many hard-line anti-drug policies in the United States (Youngers and Rosin, 2005, p. 2). Determination of narcotics trafficking as a national security issue resulted in tougher drug laws, greater military involvement, heightened interdiction efforts at the borders and overseas, and broader anti-drug measures in Latin American and other source and transit countries (Bagley

& Tokatlian, 1992, p. 216). Latin America and the Caribbean provided almost all of the cocaine and marijuana, as well as 40 percent of the heroin, smuggled into the U.S. on an annual basis, which heightened concerns for national security (Bagley & Tokatlian, 1992, p. 216). Thus, the War on Drugs developed a supply-side focus.

At the conceptual level, the War on Drugs is a U.S. governmental campaign aimed at reducing significantly the production and availability of illicit drugs via policies of prohibition (Youngers & Rosen, 2005, p. 1). Domestically, the preferred methods against the production, distribution, and use of illicit drugs include strict laws, improved law enforcement, and increased incarceration (Youngers & Rosen, 2005, p. 3). Overseas, these prohibition policies have generated extensive military aid and intervention to curb drug production and intercept transnational shipments, in order to reduce the supply of illicit drugs (Youngers & Rosen, 2005, p. 3). The majority of federal funding has been spent on the supply side, based on the economic theory that limiting supply makes narcotics trafficking costlier, thereby driving up prices for American consumers and making a drug habit harder to maintain. “Proponents of drug prohibition claim that such policies reduce drug-related crime, decrease drug-related disease and overdose, and are an effective means of disrupting and dismantling organized criminal enterprises” (Coyne & Hall, 2017, p. 1). In reality, however, prohibition policies do not achieve the intended goals both domestically and overseas. This paper focuses on continual supply-side efforts that are specific to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, which have not only proven to be ineffective, but also produce negative consequences.

## **Major U.S. Supply-Side Tactics/Policies**

### *Eradication*

U.S. policy in Latin America and the Caribbean aims to reduce supply by subduing illicit drug production. Eradication, or physical destruction, of crops is a strategy used by the United States to decrease the production of illicit drugs in source countries. Eradication may occur by force or be encouraged voluntarily by the following three methods: manual plant removal, the use of herbicides, or biological control using pathogens or predators (Crop Control Policies (Drugs), 2001). The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) provides assistance to Colombia, Peru, and Guatemala for their own aerial and manual eradication programs (U.S. Department of State). The coca leaf and opium poppy, used to produce cocaine and heroin respectively, have been prime targets (Youngers & Rosin, 2005, p. 3). Marijuana has also been a target of crop control measures.

The “National Drug Control Strategy 1991” recommends that manual or herbicidal eradication efforts, crop substitution, alternative income options, and developmental projects that heighten living standards and produce income take place when feasible (Crop Control Policies (Drugs), 2001). U.S. government officials assert that eliminating drugs at the source through eradication is the most cost-effective supply-side strategy. The source of illicit drugs is viewed as the most commercially vulnerable link in the grower-to-user chain (Crop Control Policies (Drugs), 2001). “Our international counternarcotics programs target the first three links of the grower-to-user chain: cultivation, processing, and transit” (Youngers & Rosin, 2005, p. 3).

### *Interdiction*

U.S. policy also aims to reduce supply through interdiction. Drug interdiction involves attempts to interrupt illegal drugs in the process of being smuggled by land, air, or sea from

producing countries into the United States (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010). The U.S. Army, Air Force, and Navy, along with Coast Guard counternarcotics teams, are regularly deployed to track down and capture drug smugglers (The Associated Press, 2013). Modern technology aids in their efforts. For instance, the Coast Guard uses drones to locate vessels transporting drugs (Lopez & Goodman, 2017). The U.S. military also trains Latin American militaries and law enforcement agents, in order to build a large, well-equipped network to stem the flow of illicit drugs coming into the U.S. from Latin America (The Associated Press, 2013).

Interdiction aims to make the drug business costlier for traffickers. Increased costs to drug traffickers result in higher retail prices, which should, in turn, decrease consumption by Americans. Additionally, interdiction efforts attempt to increase the difficulty of smuggling and adequately punish the guilty parties (Drug Interdiction, 2001). These efforts supply intelligence that is used to identify, target, and eventually dismantle drug trafficking organizations (DTOs).

#### *Dismantling Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs)*

In the early 1980s, the U.S. military became increasingly involved in interdiction efforts to help law enforcement agencies attack the threat of powerful DTOs (Seelke, Wyler, Beittel, & Sullivan, 2011). Many arrests and extraditions, as well as the seizure of drugs, guns, and cash have resulted from U.S. efforts to dismantle these complex organizations. U.S. federal agencies and allies share intel and investigatory leads to exploit the vulnerabilities of DTOs (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2015, p. 74). In addition, the U.S. has channeled aid, by providing training and equipment, so Latin American countries may help in the fight.

U.S. efforts to dismantle DTOs include attacking their financial infrastructures. According to the “National Drug Control Strategy 2015,” U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies identify and target illicit financial activities and money laundering networks utilized by



DTOs (p. 74). The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), for example, maintains interagency liaisons with the U.S. Treasury to connect the flow of illicit drug proceeds to DTOs and facilitate the dissemination of information (Drug Enforcement Administration). It also works with the financial services industry and its domestic and foreign law enforcement counterparts to share financial information, exchange intelligence, and conduct joint investigations (Drug Enforcement Administration). National financial program initiatives target the monetary flow back to international drug supply sources (Drug Enforcement Administration, n.d.). Financial Investigation Teams (FITs) carry out these initiatives, as well as conduct more complex financial investigations (Drug Enforcement Administration). DEA Special Agents work in liaison with the ONDCP, Department of Defense (DOD), and the Intelligence Community. The DEA has financial units in many foreign countries that aid in international money laundering investigations (Drug Enforcement Administration). Indeed, many governmental agencies work to identify and trace illicit drug proceeds in order to uncover money laundering activities to help dismantle DTOs.

#### *Andean Initiative*

The supply-side tactics described above receive funding from federal anti-drug policies, such as the Andean Initiative. Former President George H. W. Bush is responsible for launching the Andean Initiative in 1989, as part of his administration's national strategy to intensify the fight against illegal drugs. Bush's national strategy was formed in response to the growing power of Colombian DTOs, especially the Medellín and Cali cartels (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 48). The U.S. had been supplying anti-drug aid to Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, the world's largest cocaine producers, since the early 1970s, but an increase in domestic cocaine consumption and the powerful DTOs in the 1980s elicited more aid to these countries (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 48).

The Andean Initiative allocated \$2.2 billion over five years to limit the production of drugs in the Andean region. Its main goal was to empower Latin American military and police forces to perform counterdrug initiatives, by providing U.S. training and support to those willing to do so (Youngers & Rosin, 2005, p. 3). The Andean Initiative document refers to the real and widespread damage and violence connected to the illicit drug trade, thus providing justification for U.S. foreign actions and policies in Latin America (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 48).

### *Plan Colombia*

The militarization of counterdrug policies that began with the Andean Initiative significantly increased throughout the 1990s. Joint efforts by the U.S. and Colombia managed to break down the Medellín and Cali cartels, but smaller DTOs surfaced and insurgents became involved in drug trafficking (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 51). As a result, there was a major increase in coca cultivation and production in Colombia, despite a large-scale herbicide spraying program implemented at the request of the United States (Isacson, 2005, p. 45).

The Colombian drug and security crisis was the basis for Plan Colombia, an initiative announced in 1999 by Colombian President Andrés Pastrana. Plan Colombia was a six-year \$7.5 billion aid package designating \$3.5 billion to be provided by the international community (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 51). Former President Bill Clinton promoted shared responsibility with Colombia in the drug war. He claimed that contributions to Plan Colombia would serve the purposes of drug interdiction and democracy development in Colombia (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 53). However, the adopted version of Plan Colombia indicated increased militarization. U.S. assistance was primarily in the form of military training and equipment, even though President Pastrana proposed a comprehensive plan for national reconstruction (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 53). Former President George W. Bush's administration continued to approve aid under Plan

Colombia. It repackaged military and economic aid for Colombia and neighboring countries under the Andean Regional Initiative (ARI), thus maintaining efforts that began under Clinton's administration (Isacson, 2005, p. 46).

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the focus of Plan Colombia shifted. U.S. counterdrug aid was redirected toward "narco-guerrilla" and "narco-terrorism" efforts (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 54). The terrorism threat created an environment that allowed for greater securitization of illicit drugs by the United States. Plan Colombia existed in its initial form until 2015. Peace talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a guerrilla movement, resulted in a new program called Peace Colombia, but the U.S. maintains a heavy presence in the country.

#### *Mérida Initiative*

The collapse of major drug cartels in Colombia increased the significance of Mexican DTOs as a national security threat because Mexico became the main transit location for cocaine exported from the Andean Region (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 55). Former President George W. Bush agreed with Mexico's President Felipe Calderón's hard-line approach to drug trafficking, which was funding extensive military and law enforcement efforts (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 55). In 2007, both presidents agreed to the development of the Mérida Initiative, a cooperative security initiative with Mexico and Central America designed to combat drug trafficking, transnational crime, and terrorist threats in the Western Hemisphere (U.S. Department of State, 2007). This initiative continued the trend of a supply-side focus for foreign drug control policies in Latin America, as the majority of U.S. aid was designated for law enforcement and military equipment (Vorobyeva, 2015, p. 56).

#### *Other Initiatives and Programs*

In 2010, under former President Barack Obama's Administration, Congress split the portion of the Mérida Initiative designated for Central America into a separate initiative (Seelke, Wyler, Beittel, & Sullivan, 2011). The Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) supplies training and equipment to combat security threats to the seven Central American countries of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

Also in 2010, Obama designated the following Caribbean nations as prominent drug producer and transit countries for illicit drugs coming into the United States: the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica (Seelke, Wyler, Beittel, & Sullivan, 2011). The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) extends increased military and economic aid to the region to fight transnational crime and narcotics trafficking, as well as for social justice and education programs (Seelke, Wyler, Beittel, & Sullivan, 2011).

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) is responsible for a wide array of counternarcotics assistance programs for Latin America and the Caribbean. The DOD provides training and equipment to security forces participating in anti-drug efforts through the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), which are regional combatant commands (Seelke, Wyler, Beittel, & Sullivan, 2011).

### **Effectiveness of U.S. Supply-Side Tactics/Policies**

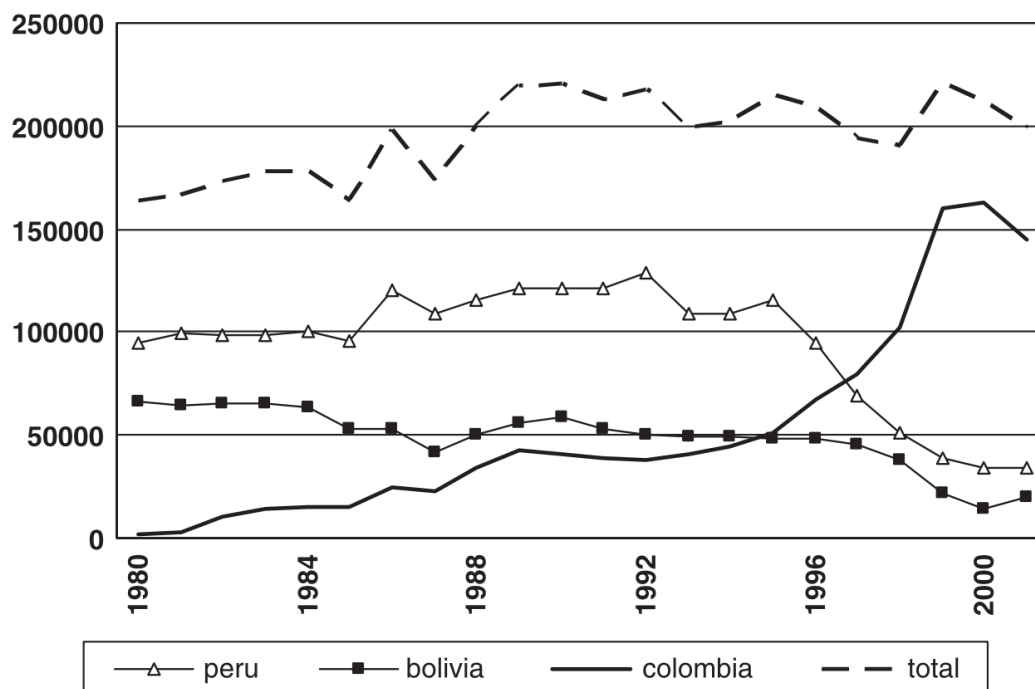
U.S. counterdrug efforts have focused on combating illicit drugs at the source for decades, so it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of supply-side tactics and the policies that fund them. Eradication and interdiction efforts, combined with efforts to dismantle DTOs and halt money laundering activities, have yielded some positive results in the Andean region. For example, crop-control programs and successful interdiction efforts that began in the late 1980s in

Peru and Bolivia caused coca cultivation to decrease to all-time lows. Furthermore, U.S. anti-drug policies have managed to dismantle DTOs, such as the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia.

However, “partial victories” of the drug war have caused negative consequences, like the “balloon effect” (Bagley, 2015, p. 8). Scholars and policy experts define the “balloon effect” as a government’s effort to impede drug cultivation or trafficking in one country, triggering it to “balloon out” to other countries or regions (Bagley & Rosen, 2015, p. 412). Figure 1 below provides evidence of the “balloon effect.”

**Figure 1:**

Total Coca Production and Coca Production by Country (Measured in Hectares of Coca Cultivated)



Source: Rouse and Arce

The graph shows coca production in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia combined, as well as a breakdown by individual country, during the 1980s and 1990s. An abrupt shift in coca cultivation from Peru and Bolivia to Colombia is apparent in the mid-1990s, while total coca

production in the region remained largely consistent with a gradual increase (Rouse & Arce, 2006). Focused U.S. anti-drug efforts to combat cultivation in Peru and Bolivia caused it to “balloon out” into Colombia (Rouse & Arce, 2006). The drug industry effectively restructured its operations and began growing more coca in Colombia. Additionally, coca cultivation statistics vary within countries, due to “partial victories” from eradication efforts. Increases in these efforts cause significant drops in coca cultivation initially, but growers adjust over time by replanting, scattering their plots, or growing in ungoverned areas, which causes cultivation to regain momentum (Isacson, 2016). Overall, coca cultivation shifts from one area to another within a country and also “balloons out” to other countries, which negates any progress made from governmental efforts.

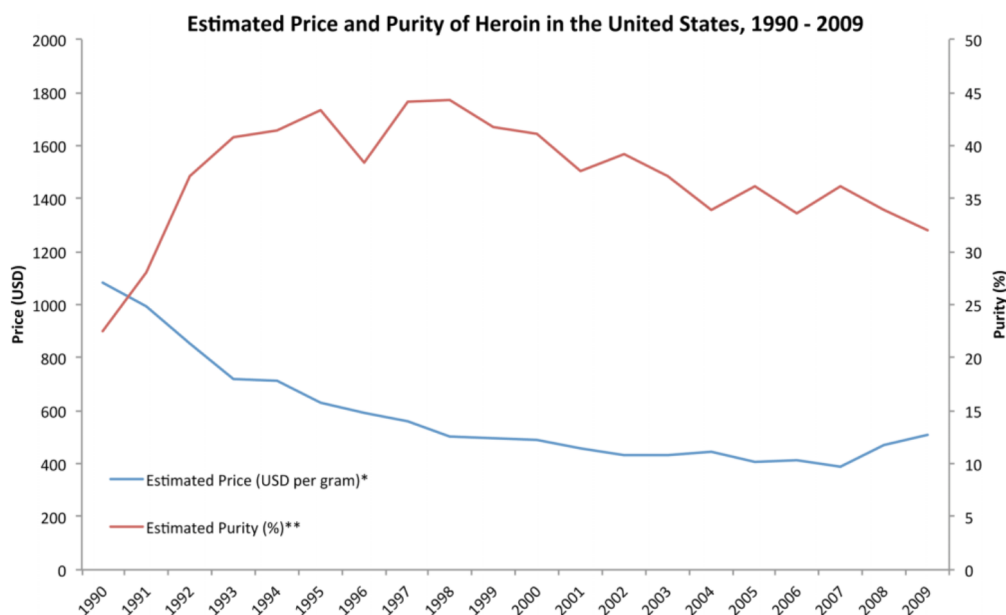
Another negative consequence is the “cockroach effect,” or the “fragmentation of criminal drug-trafficking organizations in a manner akin to turning on the lights in a kitchen and witnessing the cockroaches disperse” (Bagley & Rosen, 2015, p. 415). A multitude of smaller DTOs were quick to take advantage of the drug business left behind when the larger cartels in Colombia were dismantled. Additionally, the established smuggling routes of the Medellín and Cali cartels, which were basically shut down by law enforcement and military efforts, were abandoned for new routes through Panama and Central America (Bagley, 2015, p. 8). Over time, smuggling routes just shift from one area to another and new personnel fill the void when DTOs are demolished.

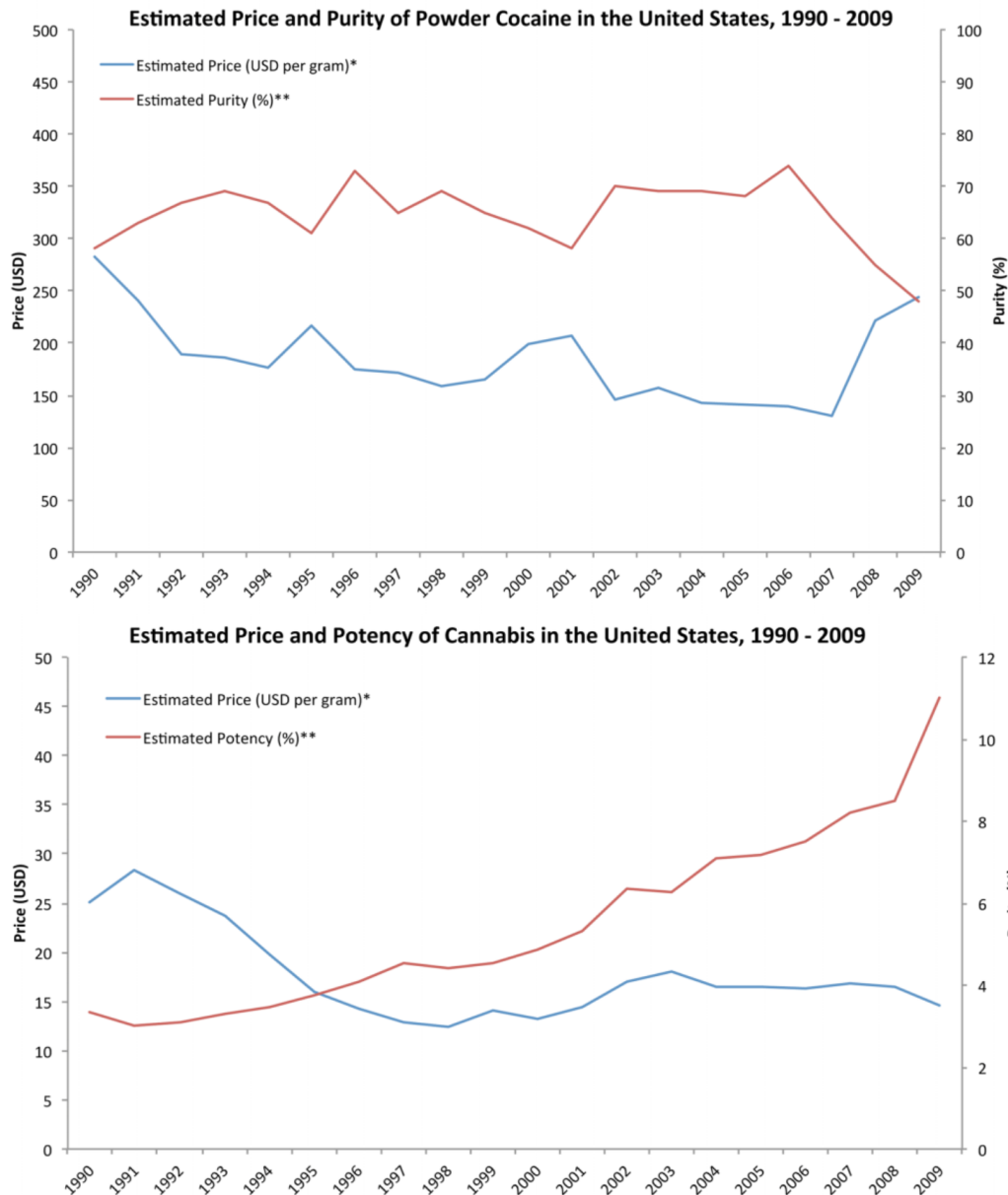
Drug-related money laundering also presents a challenge to U.S. governmental agencies. According to the DEA, through the combined efforts of all federal agencies only about \$1 billion of the estimated \$65 billion that Americans spend annually on illicit drugs is seized per year in the United States (Tokatlian, 2013). Therefore, confiscation is limited as an effective tool for

curbing drug-related money laundering. Overall, U.S. anti-drug policies in Latin America and the Caribbean are failing to make a serious dent in illicit drug production or narcotics trafficking.

Most importantly, despite an increase in investment in supply-reduction efforts based on enforcement and aimed at interrupting global drug supply, illicit drug prices have overall decreased while drug purity has overall increased since 1990 (Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, et al., 2013, p. 1). Data from the DEA's System To Retrieve Information from Drug Evidence (STRIDE) surveillance system reveal that the retail street prices of heroin, cocaine, and cannabis declined between 1990 and 2007, when adjusted for inflation and purity (Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, et al., 2013, p. 2). The statistics are detailed in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2:**





Source: Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, 2013

The retail prices of heroin, cocaine and cannabis in the U.S. decreased 81 percent, 80 percent, and 86 percent, respectively (Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, et al., 2013, p. 4). Over the same time frame, the purity of heroin and cocaine, and the potency of cannabis in the U.S. increased by 60 percent, 11 percent, and 161 percent, respectively (Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, et al., 2013, p. 2).

Furthermore, an increasing amount of illicit drug seizures over time has failed to reduce supply. From 1990 to 2010, data from STRIDE show that the amount of cannabis seized by the



DEA both in, and destined for, the U.S. increased 465 percent, the amount of cocaine seized fluctuated but decreased overall by 49 percent, and the amount of heroin seized increased 29 percent (Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, et al., 2013, p. 4). From 1990 to 2007, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that cocaine seizures in the Andean region decreased 81 percent, but seizures of coca leaf increased 188 percent (Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, et al., 2013, p. 5). “In summary, longitudinal illegal drug surveillance systems demonstrate a general global pattern of falling drug prices and increasing drug purity and potency, alongside a relatively consistent pattern of increasing seizures of illegal drugs” (Werb, Kerr, Nosyk, et al., 2013, p. 7). It is clear from this data that eradication and interdiction efforts are unsuccessful, because illicit drug prices are not increasing and supply is plentiful.

The lack of effectiveness of anti-drug tactics and policies in Latin America is especially concerning because these efforts generate extremely high social costs, to include rising drug usage rates, overcrowded prisons, and flourishing organized crime and violence (Youngers, 2011). For decades the U.S. has continued to be the country with the largest consumption rate of illicit drugs, with a rough value that may top as high as \$150 billion per year (Bagley, 2015, p. 2). Increasing law enforcement, in an attempt to make drugs costlier and more difficult to obtain, has failed (Self, 2013). Overcrowded prisons are a negative side effect, as the number of drug dealers incarcerated in the U.S. has increased by a factor of 15 over the last four decades (Self, 2013). In 2014, more than 50 percent of inmates in American prisons were imprisoned for drug-related offenses and that percentage has increased fairly consistently over decades, from 16 percent in 1970 (Miles, 2014). Arresting key players, in order to dismantle DTOs, has not been effective, but it has caused “bloody struggles for control” (Drug Policy Alliance, 2017). Ongoing human rights issues are also a problem. In Latin American source and transit countries,

militarization of the drug war has resulted in serious human rights violations by law enforcement and armed forces over the years. These violations include extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, and violent conflict with farmers over eradication (Griggs & Zamora, 2014). Also, law enforcement officers often disproportionately target young people, immigrants, and sex workers, resulting in over-incarceration in the region (Griggs & Zamora, 2014).

The Latin American drug war has weakened institutions, as well. Regionally, drug-related corruption has furthered the weakening of national and local government institutions, judiciaries, and law enforcement (Youngers, 2005, p. 339). Additionally, scholarly case studies have concluded that, “U.S. drug control policies have contributed to confusing military and law enforcement functions, militarizing local police forces, and bringing the military into a domestic law enforcement role” (Youngers, 2005, p. 340). Concerns over the failure of U.S. drug control policies in Latin America has generated significant scholarly research as to why the United States has continued to pursue such costly strategies.

## **Literature Review**

### *Bureaucratic Inertia*

A review of the literature reveals different schools of thought, such as bureaucratic inertia, that may provide the answer to such a perplexing question (Bagley & Tokatlian 1992; Isacson 2005; Crandall 2002, 2014). Policymakers originally designed supply-side, anti-drug strategies based on a realist view of the international system, however bureaucratic inertia has perpetuated them. Supporters of realism believe that threats to national security warrant the use of all national power resources, including force (Bagley & Tokatlian, 1992, p. 216). When illicit drugs were declared a national security threat, the U.S. began to impose its hegemonic power on

Latin American countries (Isacson, 2005, p. 15). The realist perspective dictates that the U.S. has both the right and obligation, as a hegemonic power, to necessitate cooperation from subordinated states on issues like the drug war (Bagley & Tokatlian, 1992, pp. 216-217). This realist-based protocol for responding to national security threats led to the militarization of the War on Drugs. In turn, this militarization causes problems in the U.S. foreign policymaking process. Specifically, many government officials are motivated to vie for anti-drug budget operating funds that are dispersed among a large number of programs and agencies, which inevitably keeps failed strategies from receiving the necessary reforms (Isacson, 2005, p. 16). Such motivation can be attributed to bureaucratic inertia because officials are consumed with the funding process for status-quo strategies.

Scholars postulate that bureaucratic pressure from within the U.S. government will continue to prioritize the maintenance of existing drug war protocol, especially interdiction efforts in the Andean region, mainly because the War on Drugs has become institutionalized in the policy process (Crandall, 2002, p. 6). As a result, continuous funding of anti-drug initiatives will be necessary. “The U.S. war on drugs has taken on a life of its own, an inertial drive that will continue regardless of its success in actually reducing the amount of illegal drugs that enter the United States” (Crandall, 2002, p. 7). The U.S. has employed the efforts of the U.S. Navy, Border Patrol, Coast Guard, and DEA in international anti-drug efforts for so many years that it is routine. Furthermore, the major objective of SOUTHCOM, despite initial resistance by the Pentagon, is to overpower the drug war (Crandall, 2014). “There is and will continue to be an inertial and almost impregnable military-narcotics-industrial complex, especially on the international side of the drug war” (Crandall, 2014). While the drug war may have been launched because illicit drugs were deemed a national security threat, the literature indicates that it has

continued due to bureaucratic inertia. Therefore, bureaucratic inertia must be considered as a reason for the continuation of ineffective anti-drug strategies in Latin America.

### *Domestic Politics*

Domestic politics also appears in the literature as a guiding factor behind continued support of failing anti-drug strategies in Latin America (Bagley & Tokatlian 1992; Youngers 2005; Kurtz-Phelan 2012). Scholars credit the built-in feature of pluralism, “short-run domestic political criteria, partisan posturing, and electoral cycles,” as the driving force behind supply-side anti-drug strategies, instead of a long-term cost-benefit analysis (Bagley & Tokatlian, 1992, p. 220). The democratic nature of the United States government leads to drug control policies that are crafted with the voter in mind, as well as produce results in the short-term that can justify budgets (Youngers, 2005, p. 341). Politicians believe that voters will more likely support them if they appear tough on drugs versus admitting that billions of taxpayer dollars have been wasted on failing strategies (Youngers, 2005, p. 341). Accordingly, there exists an “iron law of domestic politics,” which postulates that voters support hard-line anti-drug policies and punish politicians who back alternative policies (Kurtz-Phelan, 2012). The literature suggests that domestic politics, especially the opinion of voters, must be examined as rationale behind the maintenance of unsuccessful drug control strategies in Latin America.

### *Hegemonic Status*

The literature also proposes that U.S. hegemony in Latin America may be a driving force behind anti-drug policies (Stokes 2005; Draitser 2015; Reiss 2010; Alvarez 2014). U.S. intervention in Latin American countries aims to stabilize a specified set of economic, social, and political alignments within those countries, as well as in the international system as a whole (Stokes, 2005, p. 122). Such stability helps maintain the dominant status of the United States in

the international system. Therefore, U.S. policy is geared toward undermining any threats to hegemony.

According to the literature, the War on Drugs serves as a pretext under which the U.S. has tried to maintain its hegemonic status, but other justifications include the Cold War conflict and terrorism (Stokes, 2005, p. 122). The U.S. has responded to recent growth in the political, economic, and cultural independence of Latin American countries, especially Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, with more military involvement in the region to maintain and further its hegemonic status (Draitser, 2015). Scholars posit that furthering U.S. hegemony is an unstated goal of the drug war.

The certification process, which became a law in 1986, acts as a tool to criminalize challenges to the dominant status of the United States in Latin America (Reiss, 2010). It requires the president to identify major drug-producing and trafficking countries yearly and certify that they have effectively cooperated with international drug control agreements during the previous 12 months. Decertification allows the U.S. to impose multiple punishments, such as cutting aid and denying trade preferences. Scholars assert that political tensions between the U.S. and Latin American countries, such as Venezuela and Bolivia, have determined decertification, instead of ineffective drug control (Reiss, 2010). In this way, the certification process may be used to weaken challenges to U.S. hegemony. As the United States is currently expanding the same failing anti-drug strategies into Central America that it has implemented in other Latin American regions for decades, activists view this as a continued effort to maintain U.S. hegemony in the region through force (Alvarez, 2014). Therefore, hegemonic status is worthy of testing as motivation for continued implementation of failing supply-side strategies in the Latin American drug war.

## **Hypotheses Formulation and Data Collection**

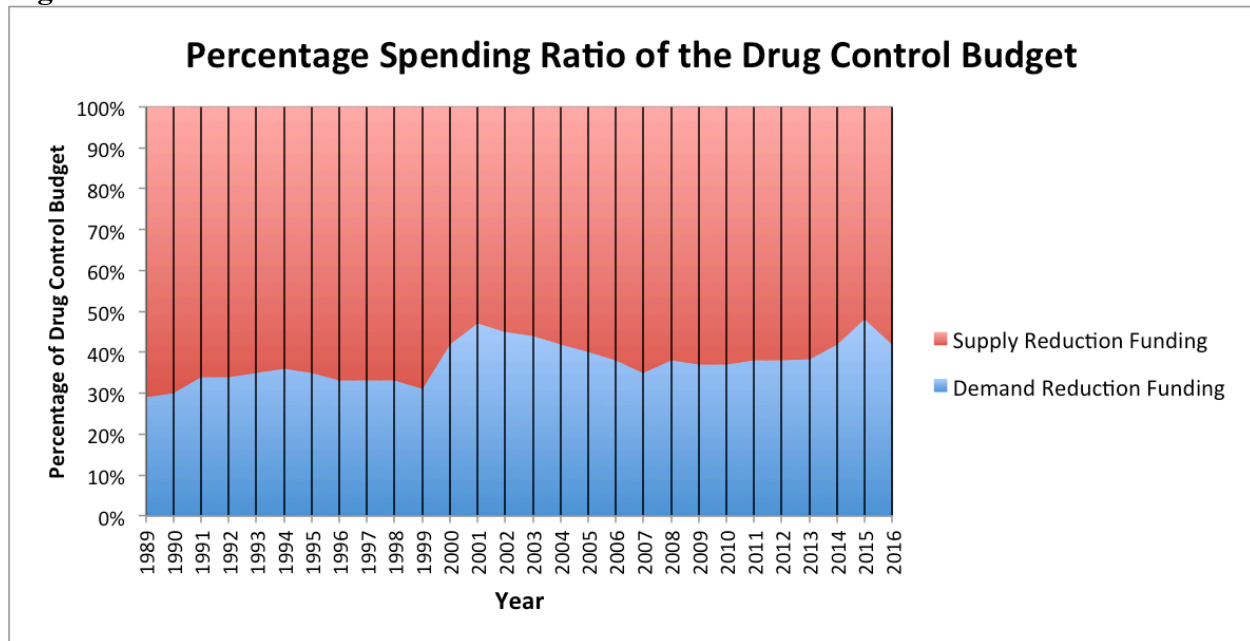
As detailed in the previous section, a review of the literature reveals three significant schools of thought regarding the reasoning behind U.S. maintenance of a largely futile counterdrug strategy in Latin America. Bureaucratic inertia, domestic politics, and hegemonic status provide an underlying basis for the formulation of testable hypotheses. Hypotheses related to these schools of thought are articulated below, followed by chosen methodology and empirical research to test each one as it relates to the multi-decade drug war.

*Hypothesis 1: Bureaucratic inertia has driven the continuation of a supply-side focus of the War on Drugs.*

For purposes of this paper, bureaucratic inertia will be defined to include all functions of the government, not limited to executive branch agencies and departments. Hypothesis 1 will be tested using economic data, specifically the distribution of the federal anti-drug budget between supply reduction efforts and demand reduction efforts from 1989 to 2016. This time period extends from publication of the first “National Drug Control Strategy” until the last finalized budget was available. In addition, funding for the supply reduction subcategories of interdiction, international, and domestic law enforcement will be analyzed. Lastly, congressional hearing testimonies will be examined to establish support for bureaucratic inertia as the reason behind the statistics.

The graph below details the percentage spending ratio between supply reduction efforts and demand reduction efforts of the federal drug control budget from 1989-2016.

**Figure 3:**

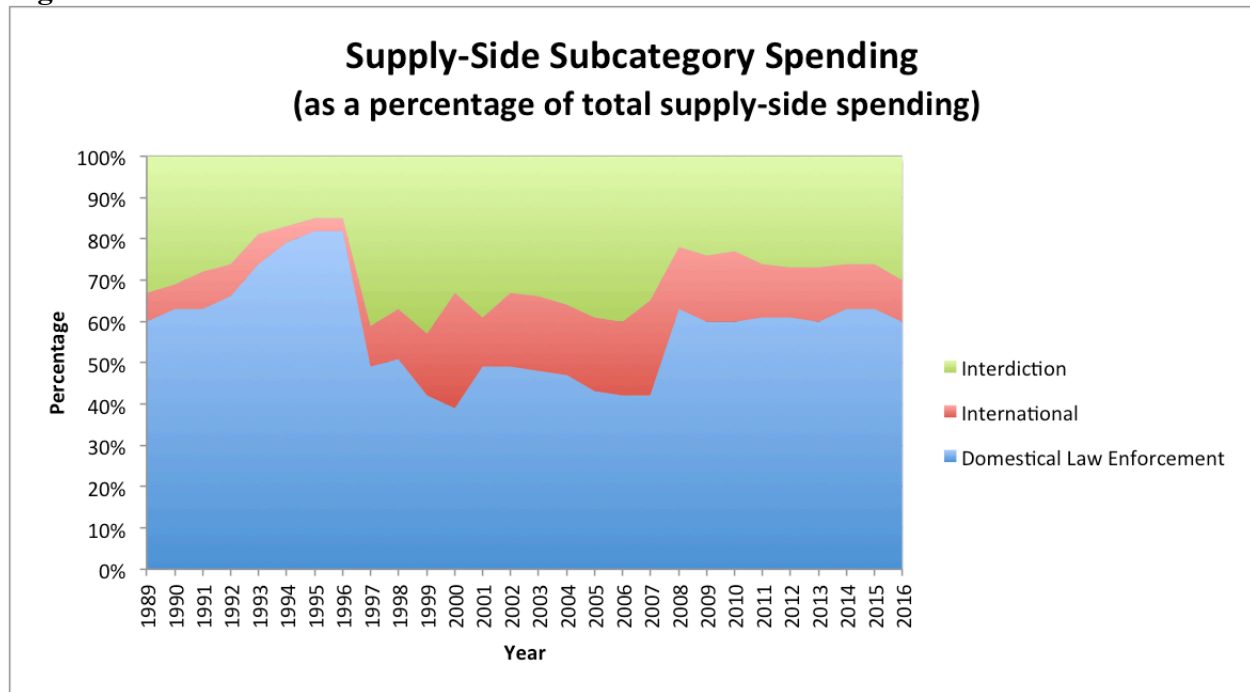


Source: The White House, ONDCP (1990; 2001; 2005; 2009; 2016)

Since 1989, supply reduction efforts have received the bulk of federal funding. The ratio of supply-to-demand funding, at its closest, is 52 to 48. The ratio, at its furthest apart, is 71 to 29. The average ratio from 1989 to 2016 is 62 to 38, supply to demand, demonstrating a consistently larger portion of the federal drug control budget being spent on the supply side. There are evident peaks in the graph that depict more demand-side funding. However, even at its closest in 2015, supply-side funding still outweighed the demand side by more than \$100 million. Therefore, the ratio of supply-to-demand funding is largely consistent overall.

Additionally, it is noteworthy to examine the budgetary spending for the interdiction, international, and domestic law enforcement subcategories of supply-side efforts over the same time period, which is graphed below.

**Figure 4:**



Source: The White House, ONDCP (1990; 2001; 2005; 2009; 2016)

There are evident peaks and valleys within all three supply-side subcategories. However, the interdiction and international subcategories deserve the main focus due to the prevalence of these efforts in Latin American countries. These subcategories are defined by the ONDCP to include certain efforts. Interdiction funding contributes to federal law enforcement agencies, the military, the intelligence community, and international allies collaborating to disrupt or intercept shipments of illicit drugs, precursors, and associated proceeds (The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2017). Whereas, international funding supports efforts of the U.S. government and its international partners to dismantle DTOs, disrupt drug production and develop holistic alternatives, fortify criminal justice systems and law enforcement in Latin America, and fight transnational organized crime (The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2017). Both subcategories experienced dramatic shifts in funding received over the time period. For example, funding for Plan Colombia in 2000 drastically increased spending on international operations from \$774.7 million in 1999 to \$1,619.2 million in 2000 (The White



House, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2005). The budget for supply reduction efforts predominantly follows an increasing trend over the time period, with money being shifted around to different subcategories in order to fund various projects like Plan Colombia (The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2005).

Analysis of Figure 3 presented above supports the bureaucratic inertia school of thought because it depicts a largely consistent ratio between supply-reduction efforts and demand-reduction efforts over the decades-long drug war. A largely consistent ratio since 1989 indicates that the U.S. government has not veered from its course of funding supply-side tactics over demand-side tactics regardless of effectiveness. However, analysis of Figure 4 draws attention to shifts within funding of the subcategories of international and interdiction that may not be fully attributable to bureaucratic inertia.

Congressional hearing testimonies provide support for bureaucratic inertia as a reason for the supply-side focus of federal counternarcotics funding. For example, during the 1989 hearing “International Drug Control” before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Chairman Joseph Biden declares U.S. efforts to battle DTOs as “somewhat chaotic, clumsy, and often counterproductive...[and furthermore] we have had little success in any administration.” The stated goal of the hearing was to review the progress, or lack thereof, in the fight against drug cartels and identify both successes and failures (International Drug Control, 1989). Senator Strom Thurmond then testifies as to his strong support for interdiction and highlights the need for greater innovation in eradication methods and ways to dismantle DTOs. It is noteworthy that, despite Biden’s recognition of counterproductive efforts in the fight against DTOs, the same types of supply-side strategies receive support. In fact, Thurmond stresses, “I believe that with continued efforts, we can beat the drug epidemic. However, our efforts to end this drug problem

must be relentless” (International Drug Control, 1989). Rather than discussing change, Thurmond calls for a ramp up of current efforts in order to obtain success.

The 1993 nomination hearing of Lee Patrick Brown to be Director of the ONDCP, before the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, also contains testimony that indicates bureaucratic inertia. Brown states, “the truth is that despite having made some progress on some fronts, the drug epidemic continues to rage...The amount of drugs entering the country continues to grow. As one drug cartel abroad reaches its demise, another comes on to the international scene” (Nomination of Lee Patrick Brown, 1993). Brown admits to failure of supply-side policies in reducing the supply of drugs coming into the U.S. but does not suggest a change in focus. Instead he later declares, “Our drug policy will always be intermixed with our concerns overseas. It must remain a foreign policy priority. We must continue to use our diplomatic, political, economic, enforcement, and interdiction efforts to cut the supply of drugs...” (Nomination of Lee Patrick Brown, 1993).

During the 1995 “Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War” hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, former Judge Robert Bonner, who also previously served as head of the DEA, gives testimony supportive of bureaucratic inertia as well. He refers to illicit drugs as a national security threat that should be combated with the strategies that caused sharp declines in drug use from the mid-1980s to 1992 (Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War, 1995, pp. 40-41). He highlights previous success associated with supply-side strategies. Bonner asserts,

“when it comes to drug law enforcement and interdiction, the Clinton Administration is quick to disclaim its effectiveness...when these efforts are focused, for example from 1990 and 1992, the wholesale price of cocaine in the U.S. increased substantially...and demand went down. A simple economics 101 lesson of supply and demand, a lesson you

can bet the Colombian drug cartels know well” (Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War, 1995, p. 44).

Bonner stresses the importance of continuing with law enforcement and interdiction efforts focused against production and distribution organizations because he views these efforts as effective drug enforcement tactics that worked in the past (Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War, 1995, p. 44). However, Bonner is referring to a relatively short time period in the course of a decades-long drug war, which has been fought mainly with supply-side strategies that have demonstrably failed at both driving up the price of illicit drugs and decreasing demand.

John P. Walters, former acting Director and Deputy Director of the ONDCP, echoes Bonner’s sentiment. He testifies that the Clinton administration erred in claiming the need to emphasize treatment and de-emphasize interdiction and effective control at the source (Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War, 1995, p.18). Walters’ main point is that treatment cannot be effective with “floods of illegal drugs on our streets,” therefore; supply-side strategies must be continually emphasized (Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War, 1995, p. 18). Indicative of bureaucratic inertia, Walters calls for continuation of interdiction and eradication methods that have proven largely futile in reducing the supply of illicit drugs coming into the U.S. from the Latin American region.

Excerpts from the 1998 hearing entitled “Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States” before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate also convey continual U.S. commitment to supply-side strategies, due to the perceived illicit drug threat. According to Louis Freeh, former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), drug trafficking is a national security threat that caused more devastation to U.S. communities

than extremist groups or foreign powers had at the time (Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States, 1998, p. 39). Freeh states that the most effective way for the FBI to dismantle DTOs is to continue employing the Enterprise Theory of Investigation, an approach involving long-term investigations, attacks on the command and control structures of DTOs, and prosecutorial tools (Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States, 1998, pp.39-40). Freeh refers to the success in dismantling the Organization of Juan Garcia Abrego (JGAO) in Mexico as reasoning to continue these supply-side FBI tactics (Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States, 1998, p. 40). Freeh's reference to a single success in the midst of a decades-long drug war suggests a tendency to perpetuate the status quo because the rationale does not justify continuance of such predominantly ineffective tactics.

Another excerpt of the 1998 hearing includes a statement from Lieutenant General Patrick Hughes, former Defense Intelligence Agency Director, which supports Hypothesis 1. Hughes outlines some successes in reducing the supply of heroin and cocaine but acknowledges that the reduction is not significant. He contends, however, that if the counterdrug operations "can be sustained in the source and transit zones, it is much more likely that [they] ultimately will reduce the supply of drugs in the United States" (Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States, 1998, p 173). Hughes calls for the continuation of supply-side strategies in anticipation of eventual success.

In 2009, representatives of the U.S. Department of Justice testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform during a hearing entitled, "The Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels and U.S. National Security." The testimony refers to Mexican drug cartels as an organized crime threat to the U.S. and responsible for "the scourge of illicit drugs and accompanying violence" in both the U.S. and Mexico (The Rise of Mexican

Drug Cartels and U.S. National Security, 2009, p.1). The representatives conclude that the U.S. must build on current law enforcement strategies in order to fight the operations of the Mexican drug cartels, such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and profit smuggling (The Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels and U.S. National Security, 2009. p. 23). Further support of bureaucratic inertia is present in the following excerpt, “for more than a quarter-century, the principal law enforcement agencies in the United States have recognized that the best way to fight...criminal organizations is through intelligence-based, prosecutor-led task forces” (The Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels And U.S. National Security, 2009, p. 9). The Justice Department views intelligence-based targeting as the foundation for success based on the method’s previous success in dismantling other transnational organized criminal groups, like the mafia in the 1980s and 1990s (The Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels And U.S. National Security, 2009). This hearing is another example of government officials calling for the continuation of ineffective supply-side strategies.

As outlined above, congressional hearing transcripts reveal testimonies of pertinent government officials that support bureaucratic inertia as reasoning behind consistent supply-side strategies. The testimonies call for continuation of such strategies after declaring them counterproductive or by citing temporary or minimal successes. Furthermore, Bonner and Freeh still classify illicit drugs as a national security threat over two decades after a War on Drugs was declared, which would not be warranted if the strategies in place had achieved success. Therefore, classifying illicit drugs as a national security threat decades later may be interpreted as an indirect admission of failure. These official testimonies reveal an unavoidable tendency of policymakers to perpetuate established methods in fighting illicit drug supply irrelevant to outcome.

Hypothesis 2: Voter preference influences policy decisions regarding anti-drug laws.

For purposes of this paper, Hypothesis 2 addresses a certain type of domestic politics, specifically voter preference. This hypothesis will be tested using public opinion data from 1972 through 2018, such as opinions regarding the effectiveness of the drug war and funding for foreign anti-drug strategies. Changes, or lack thereof, in counterdrug strategies relative to public opinion will be examined. Additionally, congressional hearing testimonies will be analyzed for references to voter preference regarding anti-drug strategies.

To begin with, it is important to consider public opinion regarding a basic question relevant to testing Hypothesis 2. Voters are periodically asked whether or not America is winning the drug war. In 2001, 74 percent of those surveyed declared that, “we are losing” (Pew Research Center, 2001). The chart below details similar results from four separate Rasmussen Reports surveys posing the same question.

**Figure 5:**

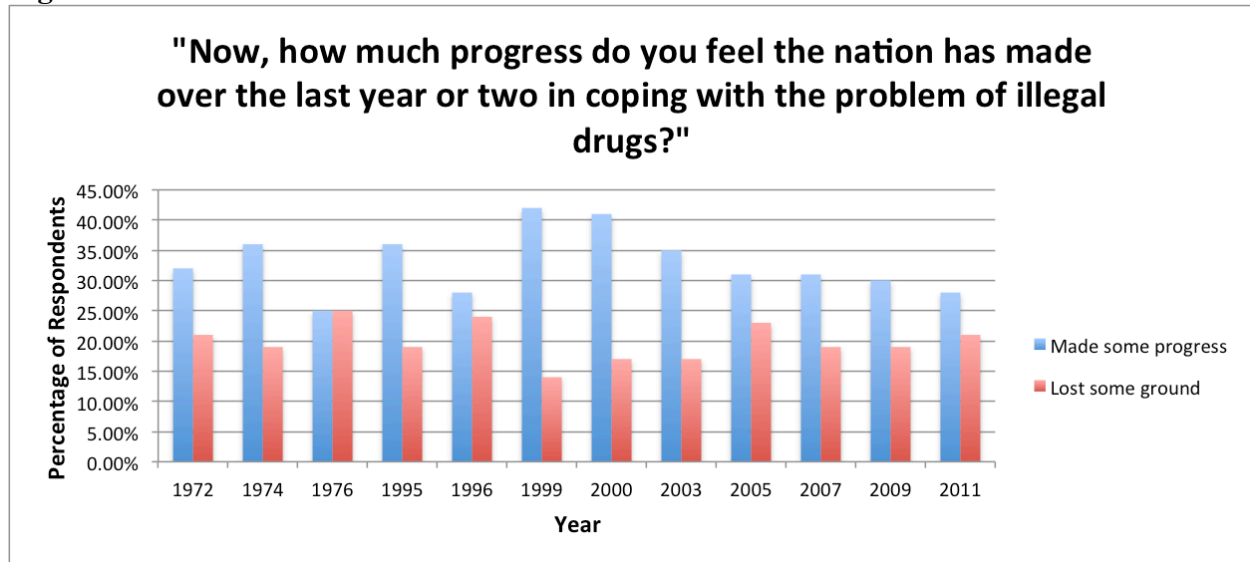
	2012	2013	2015	2018
<b>Winning</b>	7%	4%	10%	9%
<b>Losing</b>	82%	82%	77%	75%
<b>Undecided</b>	12%	13%	13%	15%

Source: Rasmussen Reports (2012; 2013; 2015; 2018)

A large percentage of respondents view the drug war as a failure in all four years, ranging from 75 percent to 82 percent (Rasmussen Reports, 2012; 2013; 2015; 2018). This public opinion data does not correlate to counterdrug policy decisions, because no significant changes have been made in the strategies to fight a war that has been viewed by the public as an overall failure since 2001.

However, other voter preference data could possibly influence the policymaking process. For example, the graph below highlights two noteworthy responses from a Gallup Poll conducted certain years from 1972 to 2011.

**Figure 6:**



Source: Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics (2011)

The poll prompted respondents with the following question, “Now, how much progress do you feel the nation has made over the last year or two in coping with the problem of illegal drugs?” (Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2011). The two most relevant responses indicating a specific opinion on U.S. progress in the War on Drugs include “made some progress” or “lost some ground.” A larger percentage of respondents claimed that the U.S. had “made some progress” than “lost some ground” in every poll, except in 1976 when the percentages were equal (Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2011). The highest disparity between those who viewed it as “made some progress” or “lost some ground,” in 1999, is 42 percent to 14 percent, respectively (Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2011). Results from this Gallup Poll indicate that the American public viewed the counternarcotics strategy in place throughout this time period as having success more so than not. In other words, the tactics are capable of providing “some progress” in specific battles, but are still not winning the war. As a result,

policymakers could interpret the results as fuel to continue on the same path, with hopes of eventually winning the War on Drugs. However, it is also possible that policymakers could use this data to justify their own actions, without considering it in the policymaking process at all. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a definite link between voter preference and the decisions of policymakers based on this poll.

A 2001 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press survey provides a good example of public support for supply reduction strategies. When asked the “most effective actions the government could take to control the use of drugs,” 52 percent of respondents said “stop the illegal importation of drugs from other countries” and 49 percent stated “arrest people who sell illegal drugs in the country” (Office of Justice Programs, 2003). The numbers in support of demand reduction efforts were not as high. Only 36 percent responded “provide drug treatment programs for drug users,” and 35 percent said “educate Americans about the dangers of using illegal drugs” (Office of Justice Programs, 2003). The 2001 data convey that the public prioritized interdiction and arresting drug dealers over establishing more treatment programs and decriminalization of certain drugs.

Comparison of the 2001 response percentages to those in 1988 reveals noteworthy insight, as the chart below indicates.

**Figure 7:**

... Yet Still Takes the Hard Line		
	1988	2001
<i>Government should emphasize ...</i>	%	%
Stopping drug importation	66	52
Arresting drug dealers	59	49
Providing drug treatment	--	36
Educating about drugs	51	35
Arresting drug users	37	30

Source: Pew Research Center (2001)



From 1988 to 2001, the percentages of respondents declaring all anti-drug strategies listed in the chart as “very effective” declined. Specifically, the “very effective” rating of interdiction went down from 66 percent to 52 percent, even though it continued to be viewed as the best counterdrug tactic (Pew Research Center, 2001). Likewise, the effectiveness rating of “arresting drug dealers” declined from 59 percent to 49 percent (Pew Research Center, 2001). Despite declines in the effectiveness rating of these supply reduction tactics, a greater percentage of Americans thought that the government should emphasize them over demand reduction efforts in 1988 and 2001 (Pew Research Center, 2001). The data suggest a correlation between voter preference of supply-side strategies and the decisions of policy makers because more federal funding has been funneled towards supply-side efforts since 1989 (See Figure 3).

A narrower picture of how Americans view supply-side strategies is also available from the 2001 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Concerning the amount of financial aid that the U.S. should provide to source countries, 42 percent of respondents stated it should provide “less” than the current level and only 11 percent said that it should provide “more” (Pew Research Center, 2001). Thirty-six percent responded that the U.S. should provide the “same as now” (Pew Research Center, 2001). However, public opinion on providing military assistance to drug-producing countries was less decisive, with 23 percent agreeing that the U.S. should provide “more” and 28 percent that it should provide “less” (Pew Research Center, 2001). Thirty-seven percent agreed that the U.S. should provide “same as now” (Pew Research Center, 2001). It is difficult to link voter preference to policies, such as Plan Colombia, based on this survey. Plan Colombia consisted primarily of U.S. military assistance and generated a spike in interdiction and international funding in the years following 2001 (See Figure 4). According to the survey, Americans were divided as to how much foreign military

assistance should be provided to source countries and 42 percent voted for a decrease in financial aid, as well. Therefore, public opinion was most likely not an influencing factor in decisions regarding such counterdrug policies like Plan Colombia.

Congressional hearing testimonies provide another means to test Hypothesis 2. In the 1989 “International Drug Control” hearing, Senator Thurmond cites public opinion as backing for intensifying supply-side strategies. Thurmond argues, “a nationwide poll released by George Gallup and the National Drug Policy Director, William Bennett, shows that Americans are fed up with the importation, distribution and use of illegal drugs. They want action to end this scourge” (International Drug Control, 1989). He puts forward that Americans want drug dealers and drug users to be prosecuted and heavily punished, plus foreign drug operations to be aggressively pursued (International Drug Control, 1989). These statements show intent to produce a compelling argument in favor of supply-side tactics supposedly built on the basis of U.S. public opinion.

In the 1995 “Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War” hearing, Lee Brown, former director of ONDCP, defends President Clinton’s national strategy. According to Brown, the strategy continues to “redirect international efforts in source countries” in order to provide “smarter and tougher enforcement activities in U.S. ports of entry and at our borders” (Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War, 1995, p. 58). He stresses that domestic law enforcement is an integral part of supply reduction efforts, which help achieve demand reduction goals. Furthermore, Brown tells committee members that “...this strategy is a product of your constituents. They want policing, they want prevention, as well as punishment. I suggest in closing...let’s do what the American people tell us they want. Let’s do what we know will work. Let’s do what will make a

difference” (Effectiveness of the National Drug Control Strategy and the Status of the Drug War, 1995, pg. 58). Brown’s testimony reveals a possible link between voter opinion and counterdrug policymaking because he asserts that Clinton’s strategy, which is mainly centered on the supply subcategory of domestic law enforcement, is a “product” of the American people that needs to continue.

The 1996 “Drug Policy, Drug Trends” congressional record, during the 104th Congress, offers testimony for testing Hypothesis 2. Chuck Grassley, Chairman of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, references a 1996 poll claiming 80 percent of Americans viewed “stopping the flow of illegal drugs to the United States as their primary foreign policy concern,” in support of his concern that the drug issue was no longer on the Clinton administration’s agenda (Drug Policy, Drug Trends, 1996). In addition, Grassley stresses that 94 percent of the American public viewed drug abuse as a “crisis” or “serious problem” in the same poll (Drug Policy, Drug Trends, 1996). With public opinion data as the backbone of his argument, Grassley appeals to policy leaders to pay attention to voter preference. He contends, “Congress is listening, probably because we are closer to the grassroots. We have a responsibility in the process of representative government to keep our ear to the grassroots. I think most do” (Drug Policy, Drug Trends, 1996). Grassley’s testimony, in contrast to Brown’s, does not support the claim that voter preference influences anti-drug policy decisions, because he expresses concern that policy leaders were not listening to the American people at the time. However, Grassley’s testimony does not rule out voter preference, as his concerns were solely based on Clinton’s administration.

Overall, the congressional hearing testimonies detailed above show intent to influence the decisions of policy makers with references to voter preference. However, they do not provide a conclusive connection between public opinion and U.S. counterdrug strategy.

*Hypothesis 3: U.S. supply-side policies in Latin America have been continued as a mechanism through which to maintain regional hegemony, as well as attempting to curb the supply of illicit drugs.*

For purposes of this paper, hegemony will be defined as a leading or dominant role in maintaining international order. In order to test Hypothesis 3, four case studies will be examined to see if U.S. supply-side counterdrug policies serve to maintain U.S. regional hegemony, as well as attempting to curb the supply of illicit drugs. Specific cases must be used to test this hypothesis because hegemonic motivation is difficult to prove over the course of the multi-decade drug war. Examining potential threats or concerns posed by particular countries to U.S. regional hegemony will provide windows of insight into the logic behind using counterdrug policies partly to maintain hegemonic status. The cases that will be tested are Mexico (Mérida Initiative), Colombia (Plan Colombia), Peru (Andean Initiative), and Bolivia (Andean Initiative).

If U.S. regional hegemonic motivation is apparent at all, it is expected to be relatively easier to distinguish in the cases of Mexico and Colombia. This expectation is based on the level of militarization of the drug war that significantly increased with Plan Colombia, intensified after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and continued with the Mérida Initiative because militarization is “an inseparable part of hegemony” (Du Boff, 2003). Peru and Bolivia are being tested to establish whether or not maintenance of U.S. regional hegemony may also be a motivating factor behind policies designating large amounts of counterdrug aid, void of a significantly higher level of militarization.

The cases of Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia will also be examined for factors that threaten democratic development because such factors may ultimately challenge U.S. hegemonic power in the international system. Promoting and establishing democracy is a global U.S. “hegemonic pursuit” (Rourke & Boyer, 2009). Theorists who support such a strong relationship between democratic development and hegemony often refer to the “democratic peace theory,” which posits that “democracies tend not to fight with one another but instead are generally highly integrated, both economically and politically” (Rourke & Boyer, 2009). Therefore, supporting and developing democratic institutions in foreign countries is considered a priority for maintaining U.S. hegemony (Rourke & Boyer, 2009). Specifically, in Latin America, “preserving and strengthening democracy is our primary strategic interest...Cocaine trafficking, economic instability, and insurgencies all contribute to threaten democracy in the Andes” (National Security Council, Interagency Working Group, 1989). Thus, the cases of Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia will be analyzed for the presence of illicit drug trafficking, economic problems, and insurgent threats because these factors affect democratic development in the country and potentially the hegemonic status of the United States.

Threats to democratic development and militarization are part of a two-prong criterion that will be used to test Hypothesis 3 because they act as complementary factors in the case of foreign counterdrug strategy. Militarization is primarily utilized to gain entry and influence via the respective militaries of source and transit countries. Once established, U.S. influence is then advanced to develop or protect democracy within these countries. Therefore, as stated previously, each case study below will be tested for both criteria.

## Mexico

Mexico provides a relevant case study due to the high level of militarization associated with the Mérida Initiative and presence of powerful drug cartels. Official statements regarding the Mérida Initiative provide support that Mexican drug cartels threaten the security of Mexico, as well as the United States. In the 2010 “Assessing the Mérida Initiative: A Report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO)” hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Michael T. McCaul, a subcommittee member, testifies about a discussion with former Mexican President Calderon during a previous visit to Mexico. Calderon reportedly stated that security was his main problem when asking for military assistance from the United States (Assessing the Merida Initiative, 2010). McCaul elaborates,

“Since that visit, though, about 25,000 people have died in Mexico at the hands of the drug cartels. In recent weeks, we have seen that violence escalate, the U.S. Consular Office in Juarez being under attack, under siege; Nuevo Laredo; and this past week...a car bomb, in a sort of Iraq-Afghanistan style, went off in Juarez, just south of the border from El Paso, Texas, my home State. Their expanding expertise reinforces the belief that the cartels are actively working with terrorist organizations” (Assessing the Merida Initiative, 2010).

McCaul’s testimony reveals a significant threat to U.S. security from the illicit activity and violence of Mexican drug cartels because of their close proximity to the U.S. border and connection with terrorist organizations. McCaul also indicates a desire for U.S. influence in Mexico’s fight against drug cartels, by admitting his pleasure that the U.S. is able to implement a counterdrug policy to honor Calderon’s request for military assistance (Assessing the Merida Initiative, 2010). It appears from this testimony that the U.S. aims to advance its own security agenda by linking the Mérida Initiative to antiterrorism goals, thus maintaining its dominant role in the region as well as international order.

Evidence of U.S. desire to weave the maintenance of regional influence into the Mérida Initiative is also apparent in the 2008 “Building an Enduring Engagement in Latin America” speech, given by Thomas A. Shannon, Jr., former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. In discussing this initiative, Shannon highlights the significance of the U.S., Mexico, and Central American countries having a “shared security agenda” that is “directly linked to social and economic development and the consolidation of democratic institutions” (Shannon, 2008). He continues, “I think we have been successful in building a security agenda...[and] can have a degree of dialogue and cooperation that will actually improve security in the United States, but also security in Mexico and Central America and link it through the...Counter-Drug Initiative to the entire region” (Shannon, 2008). Shannon indicates that the counterdrug efforts of the Mérida Initiative are paramount to improving regional security, which also contributes to securing “North America as a shared economic space” (Shannon, 2008). In other words, the Mérida Initiative helps to protect “this \$15 trillion economy” (Shannon, 2008). By removing barriers to the commercial and trading relationships between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, anti-drug initiatives in Latin America are actually “armoring NAFTA,” the North American Free Trade Agreement (Shannon, 2008). Therefore, Shannon’s speech provides support that the counterdrug policy in Mexico partly serves to improve security in the U.S., Mexico, and Central America, but also to entrench America’s regional hegemonic economic position.

### Colombia

Counterdrug policy in Colombia may also partly serve to maintain hegemonic status because it provides the initial example of significantly increased militarization as part of a U.S. foreign anti-drug initiative. In a 1998 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, General

Charles Wilhelm, who was Commander of SOUTHCOM, explains the rationale behind the initiative that was developing for Colombia at the time. Wilhelm begins his testimony by highlighting the significance of Latin American and Caribbean regions to U.S. national interests, mainly through trade and as oil suppliers (Twenty-first Century Security Threats, 1998). He then comments about the Western Hemisphere's transition to democracy. Wilhelm stresses,

“However, the roots of democracy are not deeply anchored and will require support and role modeling to become institutionalized. These nations are struggling to counter the threats of terrorism, international organized crime, and drug trafficking. We must remain actively engaged in this region to deter aggression, foster peaceful conflict resolution, and encourage democratic development while promoting stability and prosperity” (Twenty-first Century Security Threats, 1998).

He indicates that the U.S. aimed to maintain its regional influence through Plan Colombia, not just reduce the supply of drugs from source countries. The desire to spread U.S. influence in the region is most evident when he refers to Latin America and the Caribbean as requiring “support and role modeling” from active U.S. engagement to institutionalize the “roots of democracy” (Twenty-first Century Security Threats, 1998). Wilhelm conveys U.S. concern about illicit drug trafficking, terrorist groups, and economic interests in the region, all of which threaten democratic development and potentially hegemony.

Wilhelm later describes Colombia as “plagued by violent insurgencies, paramilitary forces, and drug trafficking,” with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) using “narcotrafficking, kidnapping and extortion to bankroll their operations” (Twenty-first Century Security Threats, 1998). He contends that the threats of these forces to Colombia and its bordering countries and, ultimately, U.S. national interests requires SOUTHCOM to have “modest numbers of the right kinds of troops, with the right skills, performing the right missions, in the right places, at the right times” (Twenty-first Century Security Threats, 1998). Wilhelm's testimony conveys that the U.S. deemed Colombia



as requiring more aid than other Latin American countries at the time, due to rogue forces threatening the institutionalization of democracy in the region. Therefore, Plan Colombia, indeed, may have been implemented to partly maintain regional hegemony.

General James T. Hill, another former Commander of SOUTHCOM, expands on Wilhelm's view of Plan Colombia's purpose in a later hearing. In the 2004 House Committee on Government Reform hearing entitled "The War Against Drugs and Thugs," Hill discusses his optimistic view of the initiative's successes, specifically in terms of ultimately achieving broader goals than those related to narcotics. In support of continuing Plan Colombia, Hill states,

"...we must maintain our steady, patient support in order to reinforce the successes we have seen and to guarantee a tangible return on the significant investment our country has made to our democratic neighbor...Assisting Colombia in their fight continues to be in our own best interest. A secure Colombia will benefit fully from democratic processes and economic growth, prevent narcoterrorist spillover, and serve as a regional example" (The War Against Drugs and Thugs, 2004).

He indirectly refers to all factors that challenge democratic development to include illicit drug trafficking, terrorist threats, and economic instability. Furthermore, by referring to Colombia as having the potential to "serve as a regional example," Hill expresses U.S. interest in spreading democratic influence throughout the entire Latin American region with the aid provided by Plan Colombia (The War Against Drugs and Thugs, 2004). This interest falls outside of the scope of solely combatting the source of illicit drugs.

General Hill also chaired an independent task force that released a report in 2008 entitled "U.S.-Latin American Relations: A New Direction for a New Reality." The report was sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and includes insight that supports maintenance of U.S. regional hegemony as partly responsible for the drug war in Latin America. The report finds that, "U.S. policy can no longer be based on the assumption that the United States is the most

important outside actor in Latin America. If there was an era of U.S. hegemony in Latin America, it is over” (Barshefsky & Hill, 2008). Furthermore, the framework of U.S. policy has not adapted to “reflect the new reality” (Barshefsky & Hill, 2008). The report identifies four new areas that should be added to the “traditional tenets of U.S. policy” of “opening economies, strengthening democracies, and fighting drug production and trafficking” (Barshefsky & Hill, 2008). The findings support the assertion that U.S. supply-side anti-drug policies have been based on the assumption that the U.S. is the most important influence in Latin America. While this assertion does not prove that these policies have been continued, in part, to maintain U.S. regional hegemony, it is nevertheless important in assessing Hypothesis 3. It stands to reason that the U.S. would not want to lose its assumed hegemonic status in Latin America and, therefore, would consider the benefits of maintaining regional influence when developing anti-drug initiatives.

Additionally, a statement made by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, at the 68th United Nations General Assembly in 2013, provides perspective from a Latin American leader that supports Hypothesis 3. Although Santos’ insight does not reflect a first-hand account of U.S. intentions regarding counterdrug policy, it is still noteworthy in testing Hypothesis 3, considering the policies directly affect Colombia. Citing the failure of the drug war and the need for cooperative change, Santos declares, “if we act together with a comprehensive and modern vision—free of ideological and political biases—imagine how much harm and how much violence we could avoid” (Carlson, 2013). This statement suggests that the U.S. is forcing American ideals on Latin American countries via drug policy, thereby encroaching on their individual sovereignty.

## Peru

While the cases of Colombia and Mexico provide the most logical sources to uncover hegemonic motivation behind foreign counterdrug policies due to the militarization-hegemony link, the case of Peru differs. Peru received a large amount of U.S. counterdrug aid without a significant increase in militarization. Prior to developing the Andean Initiative, the State Department drafted a report that was written in 1989 by the Office of Andean Affairs' Edward Vasquez for consideration by the National Security Council. The report highlights the fact that Latin American leaders at the time would not "cede their sovereignty by allowing the US to directly attack the traffickers" (Vasquez, 1989). Therefore, U.S. military involvement was minimal as compared to Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative.

The State Department report references a "developing relationship among Sendero Luminoso and the Peruvian traffickers and coca-growing peasants" that warns of more paramilitary conflict (Vasquez, 1989). However, Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path, a terrorist organization that aims to overthrow the Peruvian government and its neoliberalist focus, is not indicated as a threat to U.S. regional hegemony. Vasquez states, "...in Peru it will have to mean a greater role for the Peruvian military in safeguarding police anti-drug operations from Sendero's attack" (Vasquez, 1989). The U.S., according to Vasquez, would provide financial and technical assistance, but Peru would be responsible for employing the use of its police forces and army personnel for most of the counterdrug missions on the ground (Vasquez, 1989). Therefore, this report provides evidence that the U.S. was not likely motivated by the threat of Shining Path to use the Andean Initiative to defend its regional hegemony in Peru. However, it does not rule out other possible threats.

Support that Peru suffered from economic problems during the development of the Andean Initiative is found in a 1989 National Security Council interagency working group draft entitled “Strategy for Narcotics Control in the Andean Region.” According to the draft, “Peru is on the verge of economic collapse” with \$16 billion in external debt and inflation that was almost 2000 percent in 1988 (National Security Council, Interagency Working Group, 1989). Furthermore, Peru’s economic crisis outweighs narcotics control on its political agenda. In addition, Shining Path has “capitalized on...narcotics control attempts to align themselves with campesinos against Lima” (National Security Council, Interagency Working Group, 1989). This alignment has resulted in the murder of government officials, law enforcement personnel, and coca eradication workers (National Security Council, Interagency Working Group, 1989). Therefore, this draft reveals that Peru is plagued domestically by all three factors that challenge democratic development and could ultimately challenge U.S. hegemonic status. Overall, official government statements are inconclusive in support of Hypothesis 3 in the case of Peru.

### Bolivia

In addition to Peru, Bolivia provides another example of a Latin American country receiving a large amount of U.S. counterdrug aid through the Andean Initiative, which did not include a significant increase in militarization. The 1989 National Security Council interagency working group draft entitled “Strategy for Narcotics Control in the Andean Region,” which was previously referred to in Peru’s case study, contains information specific to Bolivia as well. According to the draft, the government of Bolivia “exhibits weak political will in narcotics control,” but there are fewer violent DTOs than in Colombia and no major connections between insurgents and drug traffickers (National Security Council, Interagency Working Group, 1989). Furthermore, there is no reference to an economic crisis in Bolivia as an impediment to progress

like there is for Peru (National Security Council, Interagency Working Group, 1989). In sum, the only factor present in Bolivia that threatens democratic development and potentially U.S. hegemonic status is illicit drug trafficking. Therefore, this report supports Bolivia as a case in which there are no signs that the Andean Initiative served partly to maintain U.S. hegemony.

Testing the case of Bolivia, as it relates to the Andean Initiative, did not uncover any other official statements or documents that would support that this counterdrug initiative had hegemonic undertones. The lack of support underscores the claim that Bolivia presents a case in which a large amount of U.S. counterdrug aid was given to a Latin American country, through a major initiative, for the sole purpose of reducing the supply of illicit drugs and to fight drug trafficking. Due to the Bolivian case study, it is logical to assert that hegemonic maintenance is a partial motivating factor in certain, but not all, counterdrug initiatives over the course of the decades-long drug war.

## **Discussion**

### *Bureaucratic Inertia*

This paper will now shift focus to the explanatory power of the data collected in determining which school(s) of thought help(s) explain the maintenance of the drug war in Latin America. To begin with, the economic data collected to test Hypothesis 1 support bureaucratic inertia as a contributing factor from 1989 until present. The data reveal the effect of annual incremental bureaucratic budgeting that expands on line items already in the budget, thereby allowing for drug control policies to be continuously funded without major assessment of their effectiveness. However, shifts within the supply-side subcategories present exceptions. Various shifts within supply funding result from initiatives, such as Plan Colombia. Since changes in the

appropriation of funding for these region-specific initiatives cannot be explained by the concept of bureaucratic inertia, because they cause deviations from status quo supply-side funding, these data counter the hypothesis.

In contrast, congressional hearing testimonies across decades of the drug war support Hypothesis 1. Specific references to temporary or minor successes prove insignificant in relation to long-term trends, thus revealing the tendency of government officials to stretch the value of such successes just to continue with established supply-side strategies. For example, reference to sharp declines in drug use from the mid-1980s to 1992 holds true, as the estimated number of illicit drug users ages 12 twelve years and older went from approximately 23 million in 1985 to 12 million in 1992 (The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2016). However, from 1992 to 2014, the figure steadily increased reaching approximately 27 million in 2014 (The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2016). Congressional hearing testimonies that refer to blips in overall trends, such as the number of illicit drug users, have served as fuel for perpetuating established drug control policies.

Testimony also highlights the singular success of dismantling the JGAO Mexican cartel as reason to continue supply-side strategies. However, dismantling relatively smaller cartels, such as the JGAO, has not contributed to success in the overall drug war. In fact, dismantling the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia, much larger players in the drug war by far, has not reduced the supply of illicit drugs coming into the U.S. from Latin America. This is not to say that dismantling cartels is not an important U.S. effort, but the strategy has been unsuccessful in achieving the stated goal of the drug war. Therefore, the concept of bureaucratic inertia lends support as to why government officials cite insignificant successes in support of supply-side tactics and policies.

Even more noteworthy are the testimonies that admit failure, either directly or indirectly, regarding the drug war but maintain support for the strategies that have led to such failure. Considering that such support is not based on any level of success, bureaucratic inertia is evidently playing a major role. Policies are being prolonged and carried forward without regard to existing results.

### *Domestic Politics*

Data collected regarding the role of voter preference in maintenance of supply-side drug war strategies reveal far more inconsistent results than data for bureaucratic inertia. One noteworthy correlation can be made from the data in Figure 7. Specifically, the public preferred supply reduction efforts over demand reduction efforts in 1988 and 2001, which agrees with the continual supply-side focus of the drug war. However, it is difficult to prove a causal relationship between the opinion polls and policy decisions. Furthermore, despite public preference of supply-side strategies, the 2001 figures show inconsistency in opinions about how much money the U.S. should be allocating to them. The other polls that were tested for a voter preference link to drug control strategies in Latin America indicate either zero or possible correlation. The inconsistency is underscored when comparing positive public opinion of the war as having “made some progress” to negative public opinion of the war as failing (See Figure 5 and Figure 6). Testing voter preference is especially difficult considering that polls worded identically and repeated often were not discovered during research for this paper. With lack of equally comparable opinion polls concerning the drug war, it is difficult to link voter preference to the decisions of policymakers. It is also apparent that policymakers would not be able to find an adequate amount of equally comparable data in order to effectively base policy decisions on public opinion.

Congressional hearing testimonies do not offer much in the way of explanatory power for voter preference either. Official statements are suggestive, in that they do not reveal definitive support for supply-side efforts. For example, quoting that 80 percent of Americans view “stopping the flow of illegal drugs to the United States” as their main concern does not clarify whether they prefer supply reduction efforts or demand reduction efforts, or a specific combination of both, in order to accomplish the goal. The best support for this hypothesis is the statement that domestic law enforcement, as an integral component of supply reduction efforts, is a “product” of public opinion, because it suggests that a causal relationship produced the strategy. However, the testimony does not offer hard data to back up the claim. Overall, the testimonies simply reveal intent to sway the decisions of policymakers with references to the opinions of voters.

Discussion of domestic politics would not be complete without considering the apparent “shift in public support toward exploring demand-side, treatment-based approaches to reducing drug use and addiction” that has been indicated in polls as early as 2008 (Madden, 2008). Assuming that Hypothesis 2 is valid and voter preference is actually considered in the policymaking process, then it would follow that there would have been a significant increase in the percentage of funding for demand efforts. As indicated by Figure 3, this has not occurred because supply reduction efforts continue to dominate the budgetary ratio. Therefore, it is even more difficult to draw a correlation between voter preference and the anti-drug policy decisions based on this apparent shift in public opinion.

### *Hegemonic Status*

Data collected for Hypothesis 3, which asserts that hegemonic status plays a partial role in maintenance of the drug war in Latin America, provide patchy support. In the cases of Mexico



and Colombia, regarding the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia respectively, there is a significant increase in militarization that is linked to hegemonic motivation. Additionally, when official statements are scrutinized for broader intentions, there are hegemonic undertones as well. For instance, stating that the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia will help reinforce security in Mexico and Colombia, thus allowing these countries to advance economic interests and role model democratic ideals and institutions for the entire region, is indicative of hegemonic motivation. These assertions suggest hegemonic motivation because economic instability is posited as a contributing factor that undermines U.S. hegemonic interest in establishing and strengthening democracy in Latin America. Furthermore, official statements indicate that the close proximity of Mexican DTOs to the U.S.-Mexico border and the FARC and ELN in Colombia were threats to U.S. regional hegemony during the launching of Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative. As previously discussed, such organizations undermine hegemony because drug trafficking and insurgencies are posited as threats to democratic development and thus U.S. hegemonic power. Overall, the cases of Mexico and Colombia support hegemonic status as a partial motivating factor in U.S. foreign counterdrug policies.

However, the case of Peru is inconclusive. The Andean Initiative did not include a significant increase in militarization, which is linked to hegemonic pursuit. Furthermore, official statements conflict. One report details evidence of difficulties with prioritizing narcotics control, an insurgency threat, and economic instability, all of which are referenced as threats to democratic development and U.S. hegemonic status. However, another report indicates that Shining Path is not a significant threat to U.S. hegemonic status and calls for U.S. military involvement in the form of financial and technical assistance to the Peruvian military, instead of direct involvement. Interestingly, though, the fact that Peru was not receptive to direct U.S.

military involvement at the time may have been a major factor as to why the Andean Initiative simply called for financial and technical assistance. In fact, according to former drug czar, William Bennett, the U.S. military training that was provided to Colombians through the Andean Initiative would have also taken place in Peru if the country was receptive to it (United Press International, 1989). Therefore, official reports do not make a strong case for maintenance of U.S. hegemonic status as a partial motivating factor of the Andean Initiative, but do not make a strong case for ruling it out either.

While Peru's case is inconclusive, the case study of Bolivia does not support Hypothesis 3 as being valid over the entirety of the multi-decade drug war. The Andean Initiative did not supply a significantly increased level of direct U.S. militarization in Bolivia. Plus, an official document only designates drug trafficking as a threat in the country. The document highlights that there are no major connections between drug trafficking and insurgents or economic instability that would motivate the U.S. to use the Andean Initiative to protect its hegemonic status. Finally, a lack of other official statements or documents to support Hypothesis 3 is noteworthy. Overall, the Andean Initiative, as it relates to Bolivia, effectively rules out U.S. hegemonic status as a partial motivator for U.S. counterdrug policy over the course of the whole drug war.

### *Final Results*

Discussion of the data collected for all three hypotheses allows for a reasonable comparison of the explanatory power of each one regarding the continuance of supply-side strategies in the drug war. The school of thought with the least explanatory power is domestic politics, specifically voter preference. It is unreasonable that Congress would be able to develop foreign counterdrug strategies based on random public opinion polls that are not equally

comparable and often contain conflicting data. Also, congressional testimonies are merely suggestive and do not offer a direct correlation between voter preference and the formulation and continuance of counterdrug efforts in Latin America.

In contrast, the school of thought that possesses the most explanatory power, at least for the majority of the time since the start of the drug war, is the concept of bureaucratic inertia. Budgetary ratio data and congressional testimonies spanning across the time period support this argument. However, there are specific points in time that cannot be explained by bureaucratic inertia, as detailed through shifts in the appropriation of supply-side funding (See Figure 4). Since the very nature of inertia, remaining unchanged or displaying inaction, cannot account for the creation of brand new policies that caused shifts in the appropriation of supply-side funding, they must have another explanation.

After testing Hypothesis 3, it is likely that the Mérida Initiative, Plan Colombia, and possibly the Andean Initiative as it pertains to Peru served partly to maintain or bolster U.S. hegemony in unstable Latin American regions. The data indicate U.S. concern for all three threats to democratic development, especially in Mexico and Colombia and to a lesser degree in Peru. However, data support that the Andean Initiative as it pertains to Bolivia does not have hegemonic undertones because the U.S. is simply concerned with the threat of drug trafficking. While maintenance of hegemony can explain certain initiatives, the concept of bureaucratic inertia offers a consistent explanation for the perpetuation of U.S. counterdrug tactics and policies in Latin America outside of policies designed with hegemonic motivation.

## **Conclusion**

The question bears repeating. Why has the U.S. continued to pursue a counterdrug strategy in Latin America that has been largely futile? The most logical answer is bureaucratic inertia laced with maintenance of U.S. regional hegemony. In determining the answer, this paper examined the background behind the supply-side strategies that the U.S. has continued to implement since the launch of the War on Drugs and completed an analysis of their effectiveness. A review of academic literature revealed support for bureaucratic inertia, domestic politics, and hegemonic status as potential answers. Therefore, these schools of thought were the basis for the formulation of three different hypotheses, which were thoroughly tested via empirical research as to their explanatory power in answering the question. While this research did not reveal a link between domestic politics and the failing drug war, it did find a very strong connection between bureaucratic inertia and supply-side strategies over the course of the entire multi-decade war. Hegemonic status also appeared to be a partial motivator in certain policies as well.

This conclusion leads to an important takeaway. Bureaucratic inertia can be a negative side effect of an illicit drug problem. Perhaps, recent changes in some U.S. state laws concerning the legalization of marijuana could provide a way to disrupt the inertial nature of the federal drug control strategy based on prohibition. It will be interesting to monitor whether or not such state action will prompt change in counterdrug policy. However, based on research for this paper, bureaucratic inertia will most likely prove to be too ingrained in the national policymaking process to be affected by the legalization of marijuana in some states. Looking forward, further research should be conducted to determine how to keep ineffective counterdrug policies from becoming so easily entrenched in the bureaucratic process. If the same policies continue for

another four decades or more without success, imagine the devastation that illicit drugs will cause in the Western Hemisphere.

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