

2
Drugs. Oil and War by Peter Dale Scott: (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002)

Scott's Thesis:

I shall argue in this book that covert operations, when they generate or reinforce autonomous political power, almost always outlast the specific purpose for which they were designed. Instead they enlarge and become part of the hostile forces the United States has to contend with.

To put it in terms I find more precise, parapolitics, the exercise of power by covert means, tends to metastasize into deep politics, an interplay of unacknowledged forces over which the original parapolitical agent no longer has control. This is the heart of the analysis.
(.p. xiii)

Columbia: A Case Study

1. Columbia has a feudal social structure with a wealthy overclass that oppresses the lower classes. Small unaffiliated bands of banditos (primitive rebels) offer some resistance to this state of affairs.
2. Occidental Petroleum discovers large oil reserves in Columbia.
3. Eyeing the oil and fearing Castro's revolution will spread to other parts of Latin America, the Kennedy Administration initiates an era of counter terror inflicted by professionally trained paramilitary units.
4. In response to the U.S. created paramilitary units, the small bands of "revolutionaries" coalesce into a national movement (which eventually becomes FARC and ELN) to counter the "autodefensas," as the paramilitaries are called.
5. The "autodefensas" become assets of the Columbia state security apparatus. They are also employed by large corporations to bust unions and protect corporate assets. In June, 2001 a security firm employed by Occidental led an ill conceived raid on FARC directing helicopter gunships that killed 18 civilians.
6. In 1981 Columbia's major drug traffickers, collaborating with the Columbian army, established a training school for a nationwide counter terrorist network (Death to Kidnappers or MAS). This was a response to FARC's preferred means of fund-raising--kidnapping for ransome. MAS plays an overtly political role as a criminal extension of the army, notably frustrating the peace agreement between FARC and Columbia's president in the 1980's, killing over 700 FARC. The intent is to drive FARC out of the oil bearing regions and into a remote zone of the Amazon region that the government has ceded to FARC, which administers the area under its political arm, the Union Patriótica.
7. The Department of Defense and CIA involvement with paramilitaries that began in the 1960's survives today in the "War on Drugs," a cover for the promulgation of narco-trafficking which helps to finance covert operations. The idea is to portray the FARC as narco-guerrillas, financing left-wing revolution with the proceeds gained from

drug trafficking. Apparently FARC taxes coca growers in the area it administers. Its take is estimated at 2.5%, compared with the 40% cut that goes to paramilitaries affiliated with the Colombian government and the CIA. Santiago Ocampo, head of the Cali drug cartel was also the head of MAS. The same Mossad operatives who worked for him in the Cali cartel and MAS also worked for the Contras in Nicaragua and the Guatemalan army. All of this is a frustration to the DEA which finds many of its cases against international drug traffickers subverted by government prosecutors in on the fix.

8. In April 1986 V. P. George Bush used National Security Decision Directive 221 to define drug trafficking as a national security matter, allowing for the use of U.S. troops in Columbia in alliance with the CIA--an executive equivalent of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 which led to the direct involvement of the U.S. military in Vietnam's civil war. Allegedly hard intelligence data, since discredited, linked the Sandinistas, Fidel Castro, the FARC, and the Medellin drug cartel to a 1985 assault on Columbia's Palace of Justice that killed 100 people, including 12 Supreme Court Justices, and destroyed all U.S. extradition requests for Columbia's major drug traffickers. (In contrast with the Cali cartel, the Medellin cartel opposed the Colombian government rather than cooperate with it as the Cali cartel did. "Thus the vigorous prosecution of the Medellin cartel both abetted and protected the on-going continuity of interest linking anti-FARC terrorists, the Cali cartel, and the CIA.")
9. This puts the enforcement wing of the U.S. Government, the DEA, on a collision course with the ideologues in the CIA and the National Security Council. The first is trying to fight drug trafficking, the second, to use drug trafficking to fund activities designed to defeat leftist guerrillas. The ideologues have the upper hand.

The result of their machinations has been increased violence, with the institutionalization of the relationship of law enforcement to rival cartels, a decentralization of the drug trade in Columbia and possible shift in control to cartels in Mexico whose profits from drug exports "probably represent 75% of source-country export earnings." (The Underground Empire, Mills, Dell 1978). According to Scott,

The true purpose of most of these campaigns, like the current Plan Columbia, has not been the hopeless ideal of eradication. It has been to alter market share: to target specific enemies and thus ensure that the drug traffic remains under the control of those traffickers who are allies of the Colombian state security apparatus and/or the CIA. This confirms the judgment of Senate investigator Jack Blum a decade ago, that America, instead of battling a narcotics conspiracy, has "in a subtle way...become part of that conspiracy. (Southern Air Transport, a former(?) CIA owned transport, alights in Columbia, unloads guns and loads cocaine to sell in LA)

10. Plan Columbia allocates an aid package of \$1.6 billion, 95% of which is military aid--"a human rights veneer to mask a military reality." During the period this program has been in effect, drug exports to the U.S. have more than doubled, according to Robert White, former U.S. ambassador to Columbia.
11. The "autodefensas" are the chief stumbling block to peace talks between FARC and the elements of the Colombian government which seek a deal with the guerrillas. Anyone who speaks out against the violence--citizens, politicians, human rights workers, ngo's--have become military targets.

12. Analogies with Vietnam abound.

The facts are eerily similar: from military advisers, high-tech listening posts, defoliation programs, river boats, and helicopters, to assaults on the countryside that displace hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Equally similar are the interests and lobbies: the helicopter and herbicide industries, the oil companies, and the Pentagon seeking new bases in the area. One hears the same geopolitical rhetoric about sea lanes and natural resources. Professional think tanks, such as RAND and FPRI, are reinforcing the madness in Washington, with their proposals on how to make an ill-starred policy even worse. And there is the same ominous background of deep rooted links to local drug kingpins--as in Afghanistan, Peru, Haiti, Honduras, and Kosovo.

All of the analogies with Vietnam--and there are many-- derive from one fundamental similarity: demands from major U.S. oil corporations for increased security have led the U.S. government still further into a de facto alliance with local right-wing forces involved in drug trafficking.

In thus pointing at the deep politics of oil and drugs, I do not mean to suggest that other interests and lobbies are irrelevant. But drugs and oil have this in common: they exert powerful influences over a broad spectrum, often beneath the surface.

We have seen that large-scale dysfunctional policies, like the so called war on drugs, are not amenable to rational criticism. They tend instead to metastasize from a policy into a bureaucratic habit: a habit in which failure, predictably, becomes a case for escalation:

Another factor driving government policy is the need to supply business for underutilized support services. With the trend growing to outsource sensitive work, these assets, particularly military transport, must be kept busy to remain solvent. Plan Columbia is regarded as the El Dorado for air freight. Scott concludes:

Unfortunately in Columbia we have not targeted the largest enemy. Though its role has increased, FARC is still more marginal to this international threat than right-wing former CIA assets and their successors, that are central to it. This country's perception of the problem has been perverted by five decades of false U.S. propaganda about communist drug trafficking, propaganda designed to veil U.S. assistance and protection to a world of right-wing anticommunist traffickers. The new onslaught of hype about the narco-guerrilla menace is only the latest effort from those who have not outgrown the worst habits of the Cold War..