

WOODROW WILSON CENTER

Latin American Program

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM WOOD

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P R O C E E D I N G S

LEE H. HAMILTON: Good morning to all of you. Good morning. Thank you very much for coming to the Wilson Center this morning. We're delighted to have you here.

It's my pleasure to welcome Ambassador William Wood back to the Wilson Center for another visit. Before I introduce him, let me simply say that I appreciate very much the extraordinary leadership of Cindy Arnson on the Colombia issues that we have here at the Center in the Latin American Program. And in a few minutes, I will leave in her very able hands the job of conducting the meeting and the Q and A session that will follow the ambassador's remarks.

The U.S.-Colombian relationship is, of course, as you all know, extremely important to the security of both countries and to the Western Hemisphere. In Colombia, we face a myriad of challenges in countering violence, terrorism, trafficking in narcotics, encouraging human rights and economic development and the rule of law.

A year ago, we were very pleased to host Ambassador Wood at a conference assessing the Colombian government's progress on the peace process with the paramilitaries, and this year we're pleased to hear his assessment of the current and future challenges of U.S. policy in Colombia.

As the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, William Wood has probably one of the toughest jobs in the United States Foreign Service. I had thought before he came this morning that he presided over the second largest embassy in the U.S. panoply of embassies. He told me it's the largest. And I thought probably the Iraqi embassy was larger, but he corrected me.

William Wood presented his credentials to President Uribe on August 13, 2003. Prior to his appointment as ambassador, he served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Acting Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of International Organizations. He is a 25-year veteran of the Foreign Service, in Uruguay,

Argentina, El Salvador, Italy, and he was the chief U.S. negotiator on the UN Security Council.

In Washington, he has served on the policy planning staff for Latin America and as expert on Latin America for the Under Secretary of Political Affairs. He has received numerous awards, including the Distinguished Service Award in 2002, which is the highest award offered by the Department of State.

Mr. Ambassador, we're delighted to have you back at the Wilson Center again. We look forward to your comments this morning.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Congressman, thank you very much. I am delighted to be here and I would like to thank the Center and you and Cindy for inviting me and, in fact, inviting me back, which is actually much more of a compliment.

I don't intend to make a long presentation because I was hoping that we could have a conversation about the things that are most of interest to the audience. I see lots of familiar faces and some of them are familiar from good,

healthy tussles, so I'm looking forward to good questions.

Just to quickly run through where I think we are in terms of the three principal U.S. goals. In counter-drug policy, we are attempting to end the more than 3,000 U.S. deaths per year that are directly related to drugs coming from Colombia. That is more American deaths than we suffered in the World Trade Towers. It is more American deaths than we suffer in any equivalent time period in Iraq. These are ruined lives in our schools and our towns and our suburbs and our cities. And if government actually has any core function whatsoever, it should be to keep people safe at home.

Counter-terror is our second principal goal. There are more than 25,000 active terrorists in Colombia, and an unknown additional number of militia, fellow travelers, sympathizers, supporters and otherwise. Bogotá is closer to Miami than it is to Brasilia, so this is an American issue. It's our neighborhood.

The terrorists in Colombia are not only skilled in terrorist operations, but they are skilled in document fraud, money laundering and the financing of terrorism, transportation of arms and drugs. And, of course, they are deeply involved in narcotics trafficking.

One of the real breakthroughs in our policy in Colombia occurred in 2002 when the Congress approved what is referred to as expanded authority, permitting us to use counter-drug funding in the counter-terror fight. This has allowed our twin-goals--counter-drug, counter-terror--to match up with the Colombian government's twin goals--counter-drug, counter-terror--and has permitted a level of coordination and cooperation that we never had before.

Our third goal is to assist Colombia to be the sort of firm ground for democracy, decency, development, and stability in an increasingly troubled region. Venezuela is going through a complicated period. Both Bolivia and Ecuador are

ruled by presidents who were not elected as presidents.

In the Bolivian case, the current president not elected to be president succeeds a predecessor who was not elected to be president. In Peru, President Toledo, God bless him, has slipped back into single-digit popularity.

Brazil is the second largest consumer of cocaine in the world. We estimate, and we don't really know, that--estimates for the Andean drug trade range from \$2 billion to \$12 billion a year. So with that variance, you can tell we don't know what we're talking about.

With that kind of money involved, the small democracies of Central America and the Caribbean, as much as they may wish to stand tall, they can't really; they don't have the monetary or the political strength to resist a concerted effort by these bad guys. So we're looking at Colombia as an important element of stability and decency and democracy in the region.

As Lee Hamilton said, the embassy in Bogotá is the largest embassy in the world--and it is not policies that make for a large embassy. We have policies everywhere. It's programs. The embassy is responsible for 148 helicopters, for 50 fixed-wing aircraft. We have the largest law enforcement component of any embassy in the world. I, for instance, am the only ambassador that I'm aware of that has a full-time staff polygrapher, which is very helpful at evaluation time.

We have 450 military, more or less, in Colombia. That includes Marine security guards and sort of standard embassy staff. The Congress very generously increased the cap on military personnel in Colombia--trainers and planners and things like that--from 400 to 800 in the last round. In fact, we have only gone beyond the old cap for a period of about three weeks, and that was only by about 40 military personnel, and we are now back below that cap.

We're trying to keep it as lean and mean as we can, with some success, but not complete success.

We also have, by the way, the largest human rights program in the world. We have the largest UN human rights office in the world. We don't always see eye to eye, but we certainly agree that human rights is a fundamental element of what we're looking for in Colombia.

Aid has been circulating around \$575 million a year, of which about \$465 million have been from the Andean counter-drug initiative, another \$90 million or so from FMF [Foreign Military Sales Financing], and a little bit more in IMET [International Military Education and Training]. And that's the heart of our aid program.

So how are we doing? Well, I think you're all aware of sort of the social statistics. Under the Uribe administration, homicides are down by 19 percent. That's individual homicides. Massacre victims, which are defined as homicides in group killings, are down by 62 percent, so that the level of homicide in Colombia is at the lowest point it has been in 17 years.

Kidnappings are down by 39 percent, terror attacks are down by 42 percent, and new internal displacements are down by 46 percent. Colombia has the third largest population of internally displaced in the world, after Sudan and the Congo. This is two-and-a-half hours away from the United States-- desperate people.

On the counter-drug side, in 2003, in both eradication and interdiction--we set a record, preventing 270 metric tons of cocaine and heroin from reaching their target market. And in the year 2004, we knocked that record into a cocked hat. In 2004, we went from 270 metric tons prevented from reaching market to 475 metric tons. We think that in 2004, for the first time ever, we can say that more than half of Colombian production did not make it to market.

We believe that over the course of Plan Colombia and a little bit before that, cocaine production in Colombia has fallen from a high point of somewhere above 700 metric tons per year to a current 430 metric tons per year, so that, in fact,

we may have destroyed an entire year's worth of production last year, but we're not sure. Heroin production has gone from a high point of over 7.5 metric tons to 3.8 metric tons.

Now, I want to emphasize that I include decimal points in there simply to prove that I have a sense of humor. We really don't know. The two best sets of numbers in the world on cocaine production are the U.S. numbers and the UN numbers, and they differ by 40 percent. They agree with each other in terms of trend line, but we don't know what the universe is.

In one province, the province of Nariño, the U.S. numbers, the most conservative numbers in the world, estimated 6,000 hectares of coca growth as of December 31, 2004. In the first quarter of the year 2005, our fumigation operation destroyed 48,000 hectares, a difference of a factor of 8. This is hard, and we can discuss later the technical reasons why this is so hard to get hold of. It has to do with mountainous terrain, it has to do with constant cloud cover, it has to do with the fact

that we're dealing with bad guys who actually see it in their interest to conceal this stuff from us and they're real good at it.

But we know that we are making first downs. We don't know whether we're working on a football field of 100 yards or 120 yards, or maybe 80 yards. So we don't know how close we are to the goal line, but we know that the rule of the game is if you keep making first downs, you cross the goal line. So in that environment of analytical uncertainty as to the length of the football field, there is one element of absolutely rock-hard certainty, and that is that we're making first downs. We are beating the enemy and we've just got to keep on keeping on--a phrase from my lost youth.

Under President Uribe, more than 60 senior FARC, ELN and paramilitary leaders and financiers have been killed or captured. For those who are concerned about the paramilitaries in particular, in any given time frame under Uribe, more than twice as many paramilitaries have been killed or captured as

during any equivalent time frame under the previous Pastrana administration.

There are now more than 7,000 deserters from all terrorist groups. In addition, there are roughly 5,000 demobilized in the peace process with the paramilitary, and following the Don Berna episode of a couple of weeks ago, there is the promise of another 4- to 6,000, which means that under the Uribe administration that we can identify 7,000, plus 5,000, plus 4,000 to 6,000--5,000--or between 17,000 and 18,000 active terrorists will be taken off the field of battle through desertions or a demobilization program.

By way of comparison--and this isn't my parish, so I don't know the real number--but the press reported that there were 3,000 terrorists in Fallujah, so we're talking six times as many.

Plan Patriota in south central Colombia has maintained for a year now 17,000 troops in dense, hostile jungle. It has cleared 400 FARC encampments, many of them small, but in one case sort of a mini-Holiday Inn, complete with fully-

stocked bar, swimming pool and air conditioning, where the FARC got together with narco-traffickers to conduct business in comparative comfort.

They took down a FARC house. It was a house and it had a swimming pool, and it had a swimming pool in the shape of a guitar. Now, why you would build a swimming pool in the shape of a guitar sort of eludes me, but that's what the shape of the swimming pool was. They have taken down 0 clubs with satellite TVs and computer systems. They have taken down hospitals with fully-stocked operating theaters, and they have interdicted plank roads running through the jungle of more than 80 kilometers in length. That's a lot of planks. This is the FARC homeland. The FARC has been doing business for 40 years. They've had a lot of time to build plank roads.

Of course, in the previous phase of Plan Patriota, the government succeeded in clearing out the FARC forces from the Cundinamarca region, which is the department in which Bogotá is located. We have not had a terrorist incident in Bogotá in a

year, and I can tell you I pay attention to that stuff because I have 400 family members in the embassy.

That doesn't mean, by the way, that there haven't been attempted terrorist incidents. They just haven't ever reached a point where a finger could be wrapped around a trigger or a finger could be put on a detonator. The bad guys keep trying.

Elsewhere, other population centers are also safer. Medellín and Barranquilla, the second and the fourth cities of Colombia, are much, much safer than they have been. Up until three weeks ago, I was going to say that Cartageña hadn't had a terrorist incident in two years. But, in fact, two bombs went off about three weeks ago in Cartageña, didn't hurt anybody, but those were the first terrorist incidents in two years in Cartageña.

In Cali, the third city of Colombia, violence has increased, and that is because there is a head-to-head gang fight between two factions of the Norte del Valle drug cartel. The faction run by Don Diego and the faction run by Sopi are

responsible for more than 400 deaths, mostly of each other's factions. And the third member of the Norte del Valle triumvirate is a guy named Scratchy, and Scratchy is in the klink in Havana; he was captured in Cuba for having traveled on false documents.

Under President Uribe, there have been more than 215 Colombians extradited, including in recent months the two most senior members of the FARC ever captured or the two most important members of the FARC ever captured, "Simón Trinidad" and "Sonia," Simon Trinidad now going through trial in Florida and Sonia now going through trial here in Washington; and the two most powerful ex-drug lords in the world, Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orujuela, who are going through their trials in Florida at the moment.

I would note that extradition of Colombian nationals to the United States, according to the most recent Gallup poll, enjoys 43 percent popularity, 43 percent approval in Colombia. That means that this is a difficult political decision for President Uribe. We are doing everything we can

to make it as easy a political decision for him as we can. But in spite of his high popularity, that doesn't mean that when he makes difficult decisions with which we agree he isn't taking a cost, and that's always important to remember. This isn't easy for him either.

Shifting direction a little bit, free trade agreement negotiations, a tenth round, just were completed in Ecuador. Life is getting a little bit more complicated because of the change in government in Ecuador, because Peru still has not resolved some of its important investment disputes. But I would say overall about the negotiations that there has been very good progress in every area except agriculture, which is, of course, the most difficult. And I think that there is just a structural issue there, and that is, I think that the Andeans do not believe that the United States will be in a position to make hard decisions on agriculture until after CAFTA has passed or is concluded, and if the United States isn't for its part prepared to make hard decisions on the

agricultural side, they don't completely understand why they should make the hard decisions now.

So that is sort of my structural look at the free trade agreement. I'm not sure that anybody in the United States Government or in Colombia would agree with that analysis. But I give it to you for what it's worth. But what it means is that I think that there is no overriding impediment to concluding an Andean free trade agreement once the correlation of external forces becomes right.

I can't talk about Colombia without talking about the U.S. hostages. We believe they are still alive. We believe they are still healthy. We hold twice-weekly meetings inside the embassy to make sure that we know exactly what is going on, that we have the best possible information, that there is no possibility that we are failing to follow up on. In February, on February 13th, they celebrated their second year of captivity by the FARC. They are now the longest-held U.S. hostages in the world. They are three of 63 hostages that the FARC is holding

without seeking ransom but simply as political chips.

We are completely dedicated to the most rapid and safe return of the hostages consistent with U.S. policy, which is that we don't negotiate. We have, for instance, developed in the embassy something that is now going to become a package for all embassies in the world, which is a standard repatriation set of procedures. We did this in coordination with USARSO so that if one or all of the U.S. hostages come into our hands, we know who controls the airplane, who does the medical debrief, who does the psychological debrief, how we deal with the press. We are absolutely dedicated to not leaving any stone unturned in this regard. I might add that we have gotten absolutely ideal cooperation from the Colombians, from the Colombian Government, including the public promise by President Uribe that there will be no hostage exchange that does not include the Americans. And I can't talk about the other elements of cooperation. All I can tell you, it's that good.

One of the topics that we're obviously going to want to discuss in the Q & A is the peace process. Obviously that is a very important issue, and unless it goes into extra innings, this should be the last week of this session of the Colombian Congress, which means that whatever they're going to pass in this session, they are going to pass before June 20th.

That is sort of the nickel tour of where I think we are at the moment, so why don't I stop there and just open it up for questions, if that is all right with you, Cindy.

MS. ARNISON: Thank you, Ambassador Wood.

We are open for questions now. We would like to ask that people identify themselves before asking their question. In the back.

MR. ADAMS: My name is Paul Adams. I'm with the Council on Hemispheric Affairs. My question for you, sir, is: There's no evidence that the U.S. military has been involved in combat operations with the FARC, and with this in mind, did the Leahy-Dodd amendments, their rescinding,

actually, indicate President Bush's interest in combat relations or combat with Colombia--with the FARC in Colombia? Or did that indicate some type of de facto law where he doesn't actually--where he wants to participate--increase military operations in Colombia?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: There is no plan, there is no intention, and there is no practice of the U.S. patrolling, engaging in combat, or otherwise, in Colombia, with one slight exception, which you have already seen, and that is, when the U.S. hostages were taken. The U.S. can provide slightly more direct assistance in the search for the hostages. None of that is going on right now, but past authorities relating to assistance to U.S. hostages are slightly broader than the authorities relating directly to assistance.

Right now, we deploy only to the capital city or to headquarters of a brigade or a large battalion size, and we do not leave the confines of the base. The nature of our assistance in Colombia is advice, equipment, training. We do not patrol.

We do not--anytime where a shot is fired at us in anger, we consider it to be a failure, and anytime that we--and we have, to my knowledge, not fired any shots in anger.

So I can tell you that there is no intention, no plan, no thought of U.S. involvement in combat.

MARGARET DALY HAYES: Yesterday in the mail I received my edition of *Foreign Policy* magazine, which has its brand-new indicator of failed states developed in conjunction with the Fund for Peace. And in South America, the one state that is signaled as in a critical situation is Colombia. By the way, Bolivia, which just failed, is not even on the list. So I have serious concerns about the indicators, but nevertheless that image of Colombia as a crisis state is very different from the very much more upbeat presentation that you have made.

Can you talk about the "state of the state" in Colombia? And then, what needs to be done to get

that more positive picture across in the media and in policy circles?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: I think it's a great question because the state of the state at the end of the day is the thing that we are all talking about. Every country has got problems. The question is, have you got decent, strong national institutions to respond to them? And certainly, without drawing any invidious comparisons, I think that in spite of facing the most direct and longest-lived threats in the region, Colombia also enjoys the strongest institutions, the deepest political consensus, and the best leadership in the region, the most popular leadership in the region.

What do I think are some of the important variables? Breadth of political debate. The debate in Colombia is by every measure completely open. In essence, the only thing you can't do is advocate for terrorism, for terrorist violence.

The activity of the political parties, both pro-government and opposed to the government, is a

constant daily reality. They are moving and grooving.

The governmental process, which like all governmental processes, never seems to move far enough or fast enough on any given issue for any given observer, actually sort of moves kind of far and kind of fast and kind of clunks along. And it does it through a very transparent process. As you know, President Uribe is not a member of any organized political party. You've got elements of a number of political parties in his coalition, in his ad hoc coalition, which means that all members of the other political parties kind of phase in and out, and there are, as far as I can tell, almost no secrets in Colombia. I've tried to keep a secret and I failed miserably once.

There are, of course, huge problems, and these are threats to labor organizers, legitimate labor organizers, and, frankly, in some cases some illegitimate labor organizers. There are threats to journalists. There are threats to human rights defenders. There are threats to the population.

There are parts of the country that are unquestionably still being victimized by terror groups.

I think that one of the happier statistics is that the number of new internal displacements has gone down, and gone down pretty dramatically, which means that people in the countryside, at any rate, are feeling themselves to be under less pressure than they used to. That's part of what it means. The other part of what it means is that a lot of them who wanted to move have already moved, frankly.

Colombia, unlike the United States, has, as far as I can tell, about 39 independent branches of government, which kind of complicates life a lot. For instance, it has the procurator general, which essentially is a constitutionally-mandated special counsel. It's sort of like a permanent Ken Starr. And I'm not taking a position on Ken Starr, and I'm not taking a position on the idea. All I'm telling you is it's got this institution of this guy whose only job is to find things wrong with the government. And he's quite capable and active and

very good at what he does. The prosecutor general is not part of the government. He is himself an independent authority under the constitution. It's a very complicated, lawyerly, European-based structure, with all kinds of confusions, and there are some huge holes.

Some years ago, the entire military justice system was gutted under a previous administration, and the judges who specialized in military justice were fired. The lawyers who specialized in military justice were told to go find other work. And the lack of a military justice system is, from our point of view, one of the huge holes, and it has contributed to the sense of lack of accountability and lack of formal punishment of military--or, I might add, formal exoneration of military accused of laundering. And one of our highest priorities is try to fix that.

A failed state? Well, I've been in failed states. I've seen failed states. Colombia doesn't feel like a failed state. Neither we, the United States Government, think of it that way nor, for

instance, does the private sector. Governor Bush just about three and a half months ago led the largest trade delegation in Florida's history to Colombia, where they spent three days in what I can only describe as an orgy of contract signing.

People are optimistic about Colombia. We think it represents comparatively firm ground, which is exactly the opposite of the concept of a failed state. It's got a ways to go. It's not where it should be, but it's pretty--

MS. DALY HAYES: That's the image that's going to be mailed out to, you know, consumers across this country.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Some people will buy anything.

MS. ARNISON: A lot of hands. Phil, Carl, Myles, in that order, and we'll keep going.

MS. BRYAN: I'm going to circulate this mike so that people in the overflow room can hear.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: There's an overflow room?

MS. ARNISON: There's an overflow room.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: What am I--Mick Jagger?

[Laughter.]

AMBASSADOR WOOD: No, I'm not. Let me tell you, I'm not. The age is right, but other than that, no.

MR. McLEAN: Phil McLean, CSIS, and other affiliations. Ambassador--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Both sacred and profane.

MR. McLEAN: Both sacred and profane, exactly. Ambassador, following up really on Margaret's question, you talk about the depth and breadth of the political institutions. But reflecting just my reading of the Colombian press and conversations with Colombians, there is a great fear--I don't know if it's a generalized fear or just among journalists and thinkers--that, in fact, the country very much could get itself back in the hands of the narco-traffickers. There is this bill on peace and reconciliation that shows a lot of signs of allowing the paras who, let's say it, they're basically a narco-trafficker organization, allowing them--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Well, they're as many bad things as it is possible to be.

MR. McLEAN: But allowing them to find some way of giving themselves a political status. Obviously I know the President, I've talked to him, have had the assurances from him. But the question is: What is the U.S. line on this thing that would help Colombia get past this anxiety they have about the fact that narcos [inaudible]?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: I am, of course, completely familiar with the argument that says that the paramilitaries are increasing their political influence in Colombia, their vile, violent, brutal, anti-democratic, political influence in Colombia. And I got to tell you, I don't understand the argument. If the question is, do they have political influence through corruption, through corrupt payoffs, through intimidation, through, in fact, a reservoir of wrong-headed genuine support, I completely agree. The notion that somehow they have more today than they had four years ago or eight years ago or ten years ago is the part that confuses

me. You bet they have political influence. You bet they're corrupt. You bet they're intimidating. Absolutely. They are not more corrupt, they are not more brutal, they are not more intimidating than they were at their high point when they had more people, when they had more money, when they had a more unified chain of command.

We have seen one of their historic leaders, Carlos Castaño, in the great Latin America phrase, "disappeared." It's a transitive verb. We have seen others of their senior leaders knocking off others of their senior leaders. We have seen the peace process produce divisions among the paramilitary leadership.

I might add we have seen some other things. We have seen Salvatore Mancuso, Mr. Báez appear in the Congress of Colombia and receive applause.

Now, this is something everybody has got to reckon with. These so-and-sos went to the Congress of Colombia and received applause. This is a real problem.

In December, the demobilization of a paramilitary bloc in Córdoba was physically prevented by the cattle raisers there; the bloc was not permitted to demobilize because the FARC had been in that part of Córdoba. The cattle raisers knew what the FARC was like, and they preferred the paramilitaries. This is a problem.

So if the question is, do the paramilitaries exercise a malign influence over the society, wherever they are found? You bet. The question is, is that malign influence increasing or decreasing, and I would argue that it is decreasing.

Salvatore Mancuso today is surviving not because he is protected by his own troops. He has no troops. He demobilized. He is surviving today because he is surrounded by the government who is protecting him while he goes back and he pushes the other paramilitary leadership to participate in the peace process. Now, is this a good thing or a bad thing? Tough to say. But the government has decided that a reduction in violence against

civilians is an important goal of the Uribe administration.

I started out my career doing human rights. I was in Uruguay at a time when Uruguay was under a military dictatorship and had more political prisoners per capita than Cuba. And my memory of those days is of walking in to the government with a long list of people who had been captured and trying to get them out.

Our entire orientation in those days was that human rights was meant to protect the innocent. Somehow in Colombia, the human rights debate has shifted away from protection of the innocent and defined human rights as punishment of the guilty, even though that may, in fact, imply a breakdown in the peace process and continued violence against the innocent.

We may be finding ourselves in a position where some will say, 'sorry, this peace isn't good enough, we prefer continued conflict.' A very difficult position to find yourself in, particularly when the peace process is the product of a

government that, like all governments, has some flaws but is certainly the outcome of an intense national and international debate over the provisions of the peace and justice law, is certainly the product of a polity that, with the exception of the two extremes of the bell curve, actually represents a pretty diverse political conglomerate of ideologies and views and certainly comes in the face of a level of violence directed against civilians that urges, pleads, and begs for a solution.

So if the question is are the bad guys going to get more than they deserve out of the peace process? You bet, and I hate it. But is the peace process going to provide to the innocents what they so desperately need? I think so. And, you know, I'm perfectly willing to debate the notion that there should not be peace in the Middle East until all Palestinian terrorists have been tried, found guilty, and jailed for an appropriate amount of time. I don't think that is a tenable proposition, but I'm perfectly willing to debate the issue. All

I ask is that we take the situation in Colombia as seriously as we take the situation in the Middle East, the Sudan--I don't notice a lot of guys going to jail in the Sudan. Are we interested in protecting the innocent by developing peace? Or are we interested--are we only interested in punishing the guilty? Are we willing to--to what degree are we willing to put peace at risk for justice? And how do we find the right balance? Because that's the real question. How do we find the right balance? And President Uribe has been absolutely explicit in his public statements. He is searching for the right balance between peace and justice because he is seeking--and I said this in my presentation here a year ago--because he is seeking two goals simultaneously, peace and justice. Neither goal will be served perfectly, but we'll see how it works.

I assume that that answer is going to generate a certain amount of--but I think actually Cindy had a sequence, so, Cindy--

MS. ARNSON: Okay. Why don't we take questions--why don't we take three questions or comments directly related to this point of the paramilitary peace process, and then we'll go back to Carl.

MS. MARINER: Joanne Mariner from Human Rights Watch, the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch. Just with regard to your point, I'm glad you made the point recognizing that the paramilitaries enjoy substantial de facto political influence and power in Colombia.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: And have for 15 years.

MS. MARINER: Certainly that's very true. What our concern is with regard to this law that's pending now in the Colombian Congress and has a good chance of being passed soon is it will allow the paramilitaries to convert this de facto power into de jure political power because any fair reading of this draft law shows that it has almost no possibility of allowing these guys to be prosecuted. It will protect them from extradition, and it will essentially launder their criminal records and allow

them to become political figures in Colombia, which is a very likely and possible event. And, in fact, when I was in Medellín just a few months ago, I met the head of the paramilitaries in Medellín, the local leader, who is already planning his run for Congress.

Now, you made reference to global comparisons. How would the U.S. react, for example, if al Qaeda in Pakistan was converting its de facto political power into de jure political power by putting people up for Congress there? I think we'd be outraged. And I think in Colombia we should be similarly concerned.

MS. ARNSON: Okay. Eric, why don't you follow on this.

MR. OLSON: Eric Olson, Amnesty International. How are you, Ambassador Wood?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Good to see you again.

MR. OLSON: It seems to--it seems to me that it depends also on your sort of accepting at face value the good will of the paramilitaries to demobilize and become law-abiding citizens. The

problem is that since they declared their own cease-fire back in December of 2002, over 2,000 civilians have been killed by the paramilitaries. We know that in the [inaudible] there has been a [inaudible] incursion of paramilitaries--there has been a whole incursion of paramilitaries along with the military that supposedly is securing the area, and that the paramilitaries have taken control of enormous territories traditionally held by Afro-Colombians, and the concern of Afro-Colombians in the [inaudible] is that as the paramilitaries are, "demobilized," they retain control of those territories, they retain control of all, you know, the economic opportunities and that the civilians who have lived there forever lose whatever rights they have.

So, to me, this does anything but protect the innocent. It guarantees impunity for those who continually violate the rights of civilians. It's not as you suggest, I think, somehow protecting the innocent. It's doing exactly the opposite.

MS. ARNSON: Carl?

MR. MEACHAM: Carl Meacham, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with Senator Lugar. Nice to see you again. You know, first, you know, we appreciate your coming up here to answer a lot of these concerns that we have. As you know, there is a lot of talk in Congress about this issue right now evidenced by, one, the letter that my boss sent to President Uribe, as well as the letter that Senators Dodd, Biden, and some important other Senators sent-

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AMBASSADOR WOOD: All Senators are important.

MR. MEACHAM: All Senators. All Senators.
[Laughter.]

MR. MEACHAM: I think it's important to emphasize what the concern is. We've been at this for about five years now--over five years, with Plan Colombia for five years. A little over \$3 billion has been invested in this issue.

You know, on the demobilization, it just seems that we can do better. Confession isn't required in this deal. Disclosure of information

and turnover of illegal assets, you know, you don't lose benefits if you don't do those things. Top commanders' benefits are not conditioned on groups' compliance with cease-fire, cessation of criminal activity. I mean, there's a lot of things that we can do better here, and I think the feeling from a lot of members in Congress is that are we going to be back here next year fixing the mistakes of the current agreement. We don't want to be doing that. We don't want, you know, Plan Colombia Five. We want things to improve, and I think things have improved in many aspects in Colombia. But I think that this is a situation where we can do better and all members are very activated by what's been happening, and we're hoping that we can influence this process a little bit more because, you know, the good will of the American people has a limit.

MS. ARNSON: Let's take one last question or comment on this point. Mark Schneider, International Crisis Group.

MR. SCHNEIDER: I was in the overflow room, but I had to come down.

[Laughter.]

AMBASSADOR WOOD: No, no. Wherever you are, Mark, that's actually the main room.

MR. SCHNEIDER: Thanks, by the way, for being willing to respond to the questions.

I'm concerned on this issue the way you phrased it in terms of it's either human rights or justice. It seems to me--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: I don't think I phrased it that way, thanks.

MR. SCHNEIDER: To some degree--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: I think actually preservation of life has a lot to do with human rights--

MR. SCHNEIDER: You said--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: --but go ahead.

MR. SCHNEIDER: You said, as I recall, that the--it's a question of whether you prefer protecting the human rights of innocent civilians or bringing to justice those who are responsible for violations, to some degree. And it seems to me that we need--a year ago you came here and said that the

law that was being presented was adequate. Virtually everybody viewed that as being totally unacceptable from left to right, including Uribe's own party leaders--or let's say those who support him in the Senate.

Today, we're still faced with a law which, as Carl just laid out, simply does not do the job. And the problem is, as Eric says, it could well be to make permanent the political power and control of the paramilitary. And in that way, in a sense, do what hasn't occurred, which is legitimize impunity and put us in the awkward position, it seems to me, of setting out for the next decade or so a situation in which those who carried out atrocities and mass crimes against humanity are not only let off the hook but, in fact, are given an opportunity to control the political process. That seems to me to be a great concern.

The one other thing in the same general area that you mentioned, you mentioned that there were fewer IDPs.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Fewer new IDPs.

MR. SCHNEIDER: Fewer new IDPs. There were 136,000, according to the State Department last year. You can't get very many when you've got 2.7 million already having been displaced--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Down to about two, actually, but, anyway.

MR. SCHNEIDER: The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights says 2.6 million, if you add another 136,000, you get to 2.7. The--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Right, if you assume nobody ever comes out the other end of the tunnel, but go ahead.

MR. SCHNEIDER: The question, it seems to me, is whether in your presentation--and, granted, you have a position, that there's a certain skirting of the negative. For example, you just gave us an indication that there's a reduction in IDPs. You didn't mention that there were 2.6 million and that there's an increase last year of 136,000. That's a substantial, continuing exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis in--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: No question.

MR. SCHNEIDER: And across the same thing with respect to the human rights issue, if you look at what the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said when she was in Colombia.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Yeah.

MR. SCHNEIDER: She raised serious questions about this paramilitary demobilization as exacerbating the human rights situation and the situation with respect to the rule of law in the future. And you seem to be downplaying it. That bothers me.

MS. ARNISON: Okay. Let's give Ambassador Wood to reply to--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Okay. Again, I-- actually, there weren't so many questions.

[Laughter.]

AMBASSADOR WOOD: But I'm delighted to try to respond to the questions that I think I heard.

First, I don't know -- [tape ends].

-- thankfully, I am not the primary decision-maker as to where the right balance between peace and justice is. I am not the primary

decision-maker as to where the right balance between preservation of the innocent and punishment of the guilty is. Fortunately, our ally in the north of South America, Colombia, is a democracy. Mark said that almost everybody opposes the law. Actually, almost everybody is going to vote for the law and in favor of it. So, I mean, if you got--Mark, my turn. If you've actually got most of the votes, sort of the nature of a parliamentary system is that means you must have something approaching the support. At least I hope they vote for it.

My concern, as you all know, has been there has been no law for a long time, and I think that they need a framework. My concern has been that, in fact, there hasn't been enough focus on implementation. And I think that we will get a workable law, but because implementation has been delayed for so long, I'm very concerned about the implementation aspect. And I have some statistics I can go through if you want me to.

Let me only describe for you the debate, the discussions that I've had in Colombia on this

subject, with a very senior government official who is directly involved in the process. And he said to me, 'Bill, there are basically two ideas for the demobilization process. Idea one, think of it as a corral. It can have a narrow gate or a wide gate. A narrow gate is one in which there are all kinds of prerequisites before you enter the peace process, full confession, full listing of properties.' Those are really the two most important ones, I think. And he said, 'Antanas Mockus, the former mayor of Bogotá, university head, among other things, published a book in which he talked about the character of Colombia. And he said that it is an element of the character of Colombians that they believe that neither God nor the law is watching them. They believe that safety can be found by flying below the radar and never being noticed.'

Right now we don't know who 85 percent of the paramilitaries are. We know a couple leaders, but 85 percent, we don't know who they are. And if we set the barrier high, if we have what is basically a threatening process, those 85 percent of

people aren't going to come in. They're going to melt away, and we're never going to know who they were. And some percentage of them will go home, but another percentage of them will go do what so many have done, simply join another armed band, because that's the only life they know.

So that's the argument against the corral with the narrow gate. The argument in favor of the corral with the wide gate is, as you might imagine, the mirror image, that is, you get a lot of people, they come in, they admit to membership in an illegal organization, so now you've got them confessing to a punishable crime. You take their photo. You get their fingerprints. You find out where they come from, which is also, by the way, where they're likely to go back to. You get a sworn renunciation of terrorism, and you begin them on a process of re-socialization.

If they fail to adhere to the process of re-socialization, you've got their confession to a punishable crime, and you've got their identification. They are available to you because

you're paying them a small reinsertion stipend every month. You know where they are constantly if they want to get the stipend. And if they don't collect the stipend, then they're out of the reinsertion process. And you go through this. And is it going to be 100 percent perfect? No. Is anything in the world 100 percent perfect? No.

But the debate among the leaders--and this more than any particular position is the thing I want to communicate. The debate among the leadership in the government and the Colombian Congress is not 'how can we let these guys off scot-free?' It is 'what's the best way that we can do this to get the maximum amount of peace consistent with the maximum amount of justice.'

I believe it is a debate in Colombia that is occurring in good faith among people who are interested in preserving and strengthening a democracy founded on decent values. They've got a hell of a decision to make. As you know, under normal circumstances there is no legal framework for these processes. Under normal circumstances you cut

the deal and you bring it back to the society. In fact, because they have gone for a legal structure, they have exposed the elements of the discussion to public debate in a way that doesn't usually occur in the peace process.

I don't know what the solution here is. As I say, the United States, we have been quite straightforward as to what we want, and we always couch it in terms of values, not in terms of provisions in the law. We want transparency, we want justice, we want peace, we want effective implementation, we want dismantlement of the organizations. And I can assure you that I have those conversations on a daily basis in Colombia.

I think that they're going to produce a workable law and a workable peace process, which is going to have flaws because everything has flaws. I don't believe that there is any sentiment in the government for preserving or magnifying paramilitary power. I think there is a recognition that they are dealing with a power that exists, which is why it's difficult.

Again, the question I would--I am not necessarily urging everyone to agree with the government of Colombia's position. I think this is a hard call. I'm not urging anyone to agree with our position. I am, however, urging everyone to take it real seriously and ask yourself seriously to what degree are you willing to jeopardize the possible demobilization of paramilitary troops, the turning over of guns, the separation of leadership from cadre, because that's what we are seeing. We are seeing the turning over of weapons, and we are seeing the separation of leadership from cadre. To what degree are you willing to jeopardize that in favor of something else?

These are hard calls. I am perfectly familiar with the notion that any compromise with evil simply promotes more evil. And that is an intellectually respectable position. I don't actually think it's a pragmatically respectable position, but that's a judgment I'm making. And that's not what I'm asking. I'm not asking you to agree with me. I am asking you to understand that

there are weights on both sides of the balance here and a very difficult decision, and I ask you to bring the same kind of judgment to it that you would bring to Sudan or the Middle East or Sierra Leone or Central African Empire or East Timor or whatever.

I am unaware of any peace process that is not unique in the world. They're all hard. They're all involved, difficult decisions, and my only request is we approach it as a difficult decision, not as a cookbook, not talking about international standards for peace processes, of which there are none. I mean, I invite anybody to tell me where they're written down. I invite anybody to tell me which peace process adhered to those standards and which peace process failed to adhere to those standards and which were the peace processes that produced peace but failed to meet international standards and which peace processes adhered to the standards and failed to produce peace.

I mean, you want to do a study on it, feel free to do a study. But I did peace processes for a long time in the UN, and I can tell you that it is

just not clear where such standards exist when you're dealing with powerful, violent, brutal groups, as, for instance, in Sudan or, for instance, in Sri Lanka or elsewhere. This is a hard one, and it deserves our best thinking. And that's all I ask.

I'm exhausted.

[Laughter.]

MS. ARNISON: Myles?

MR. FRECHETTE: I'm Myles Frechette, a trade and business consultant. Ambassador, you talked about the strength of the institutions of Colombia a little while ago, and, you know, I won't try to repeat your exact words, but the thrust was you felt they were very strong. But, you know, I have trouble believing that. Public opinion polls in Colombia tell you that on the low end of everybody's regard were the political parties and the Congress. People in Congress claim, some of them--I don't know if it's true--that the paramilitary have some relationship with 30 percent of the members of the Congress. The United States

Government is spending millions of dollars on judicial reform, and the reason is that we don't think it works and neither do the Colombian people.

So I wonder if you'd care to rephrase your statement about the strength of the institutions. I'm not quarreling with Colombia, the presidency. I admire President Uribe, too, but I just find it difficult to believe that the Congress and the justice system in Colombia are the strengths that you said they were.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Well, I guess first I would say that, of course, Myles, you were Ambassador in Bogotá at a time when the institutions were possibly under--

MR. FRECHETTE: Yes, but I still [inaudible].

AMBASSADOR WOOD: I know, but at a time when the institutions were under perhaps their most direct frontal assault.

MR. FRECHETTE: I still read the press, Mr. Ambassador. I--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: I'm trying to say something nice to you, Myles.

[Laughter.]

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Let me say it to you. And I think you did a great job. Actually, the polls are, as of the end of December, the AUC has 10 percent support and 84 percent negative; the FARC has 3 percent; and the ELN has 2 percent. The labor unions have 39 percent support and 46 percent negative. The Congress has 41 percent, and 45 percent negatives. The United States comes in just slightly above the Colombian Congress at 46 percent positive and 41 percent negative. The most popular institution are the military forces, at 82 percent positive and 14 percent negative. Álvaro Uribe is slightly below the military forces at 74 percent positive and 19 percent negative, and the police almost the same at 74 percent positive and 21 percent negative. Plan Colombia comes in at 73 percent positive, 17 percent negative, and the Catholic Church is slightly under that. The United Nations is slight under that. Human rights NGOs are

slightly under that. The procurator general is slightly under that and so on. That's the Gallup poll.

If the question is, does Colombia have great--does Colombia have as good institutions as the United States, the answer is no.

MR. FRECHETTE: That's not what you said, that's not what I'm asking, Mr. Ambassador. You said they had very strong institutions. Would you mind being a little more explicit than that?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Sure. I invite you to look at its neighbors. I said--I don't believe actually I said "very strong institutions." I said they had strong institutions that represented a good place for us to work to build--help them build stronger institutions and firm territory in that part of the world.

Now, if you look at the region, Venezuela is, to use a completely neutral term, polarized. Two of the other three Andean governments have just ousted their chief executive. Another one has very low popularity. There does seem to be a deeper

political consensus, a functioning Congress, a functioning executive. There is a justice reform program going on that, in fact, will make--I mean, the justice system that you didn't like is the justice system that is actually prevalent in all of those other countries and not being reformed. So the fact that they are capable of deciding in favor of a judicial reform is possibly a demonstration of institutional strength.

I noted that there was not an adequate military justice system. They are moving in that direction. I hope that that is a demonstration of institutional strength.

Now, I don't know what--I mean, I don't actually think this is a pass-fail exam. Are the institutions in Colombia perfect? Obviously not. I think you would find--are they strong enough to make decisions? Are they strong enough to establish a relationship of confidence with the population? Are they strong enough to confront in a serious way deeply serious problems? And are they strong enough to find fault with themselves and attempt to move to

improve themselves, whether it be in the area of market economy, judiciary, constitutional reform to allow re-election of a popular president, judicial review of governmental actions, free press, free activity of democratic opposition? I think you got to say, yeah, they are.

I mean, they've got problems. I don't disagree with that. They have been under serious assault, possibly more direct assault than others. And they seem to be intact. Are they all they can be, they could be? No. But a failed state? Don't think so. A polity, a rudderless polity? I don't think so. A polity without the ability to make hard decisions? Don't think so. A polity in which the word--that doesn't understand the word "democracy?" I don't think so.

So if I'm forced to give them a pass-fail, I give them a pass. But, more importantly, I think, they're not perfect and they're improving. And I hope that the same could be said about the United States. I think it can. I think I can be said about anybody.

MR. FRECHETTE: Do you think the Congress in Colombia [inaudible] measure that in some way?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: No. But is that your definition of an inadequate--

MR. FRECHETTE: [inaudible] failed state.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: No, no, but is that your definition of an inadequate institution? I mean, for instance, on October 28, 2003, there were local and regional elections, not congressional elections, and lots of center-left opposition candidates were elected. Now, I don't know whether you think that's an improvement or a lack of improvement, but it certainly leavened the political [inaudible]--

MR. FRECHETTE: The first time in Colombian history, Mr. Ambassador, that some leftists have been elected to [inaudible]. Look at the mayor of Bogotá. I'm not arguing that, and I'm not arguing [inaudible]--

AMBASSADOR WOOD: And we have congressional elections coming up in March, and we'll see what happens in the congressional elections in March. But, Myles, I don't understand what your point is.

MR. FRECHETTE: My point is that you gave a very strong endorsement of the institutions in Colombia, and I personally believe you've just backed away from that in your explanation to me, and I thank you.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Okay. I feel good, too.

[Laughter.]

MS. ARNSON: One more?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: Yeah, one last.

MS. ARNSON: One last one. This gentleman over here next to Eric.

MR. ORTIZ: Good morning. My name is Rodney Ortiz. I work for the [inaudible] Center of the AFL-CIO. And you mentioned about the troubles that labor leaders face in Colombia, and my question is on a specific case. Miguel Fernández is one of 40 trade unionists that came here to the United States in an exchange program due to death threats, and a couple of months after his return, in March, he received several death threats in which we [inaudible] international campaign. And the Minister of Interior after that agreed to provide

some safety measures. But after that promise by the Minister of Interior, they haven't fulfilled those measures that were granted to him, were supposed to give him, and over the last two weeks, he has received four more death threats. So can you please contact the Minister of Interior, Dr. Bustamante, and talk about Miguel Fernández's specific case, and also contact Colombian authorities to look into this matter and bring to justice the people who are behind this?

AMBASSADOR WOOD: I am familiar with the case. I am not familiar, I regret to say, with the most recent developments. We had understood that, in fact, he was receiving the protections that were promised. And if he is not, we will be glad to look into it. No problem.

MR. ORTIZ: Thank you very much.

AMBASSADOR WOOD: That was a yes.

MS. ARNSON: Okay. Ambassador Wood, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

[Applause.]