


10-20-2000

# Trends. Spillover: Is United States Government Military Aid to Colombia All Wet?

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## Recommended Citation

Editor (2000) "Trends. Spillover: Is United States Government Military Aid to Colombia All Wet?," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 14 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol9/iss14/6>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. Spillover: Is United States Government Military Aid to Colombia All Wet?

Author: Editor

Volume: 9

Issue: 14

Date: 2000-10-20

Keywords: Colombia, Military Aid, Spillover, United States

Plan Colombia is conceived by Colombian President Andres Pastrana as a comprehensive economic, socio-cultural, political, and military approach to managing the threat from adversaries variously labeled by overlapping constructs such as illicit drug traffickers, leftist guerrillas, and rightist paramilitaries. At present, the most controversial component of the Plan with the least support is the military aid to be provided by the United States Government (USG).

This controversy revolves around the Issue of spillover. Spillover denotes the consequence of military, paramilitary, and law enforcement activities in Colombia not being contained within Colombia's borders but widening in geographical scope into some or all of the five countries most proximal to Colombia-- viz., Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama. And the international consensus appears to be that USG military aid will induce spillover.

However, a case also can be made that spillover can occur in the absence of USG military aid. In fact, spillover already is occurring based on government and mass media reports from Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador. And USG military aid might be conceived as something that could even deter, curtail, or minimize spillover.

So there may be spillover whether or not there is USG military aid. So why be against the aid based on its facilitation or deterrence of spillover? A psychological answer is that most people have a response set to perceive causality between variables based on such factors as the variables' spatial contiguity, semantic linkages, temporal relationship, and embeddedness in various belief systems. A rationale for this response set may be one of terror management--i.e, avoiding the existential anguish of a meaningless world. Here, the spillover is of deep-seated psychological need into so-called rational and logical calculus. (See Anderson, C. A., & Lindsay, J. J. (1998). The development, perseverance, and change of naive theories. *Social Cognition*, 16, 8-30; Brugger, P., & Graves, R. E. (1997). Testing vs. believing hypotheses: Magical ideation in the judgement of contingencies. *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry*, 2, 251-272; Graesser, A. C., & Bertus, E. L. (1998). The construction of causal inferences while reading expository texts on science and technology. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 2, 247-269; Hilton, D.J. (1998). Causal judgment and explanation. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 15, 22-34; Rohter, L. (October 18, 2000). U.S. aid to Colombia worries hemisphere's defense leaders. *The New York Times*, p. A8; Weber, E. (1998). The practical functions and epistemology of causal beliefs. *Communication and Cognition*, 31, 297-324; White, P.A. (1999). Toward a causal realist account of causal understanding. *American Journal of Psychology*, 112, 605-642.) (Keywords: Colombia, Military Aid, Spillover, United States.)