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Unidad 6, Almanaque

Paz Colombia

Plan Colombia

00:02

With the presidential election, you're more likely to hear international stories about China or Russia or some other big players. So, it's nice to see the NFALD topic for 2016-2017 be about Latin America.

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Specifically, the resolution is that the United States federal government should substantially reduce the role of U.S. Southern Command in Latin America. While it might be easy for you to conceptualize what Latin America is, you may not have heard of U.S. Southern Command, also known as SOUTH COM. SOUTH COM is a joint military operation that has an area of responsibility from the southern border of Mexico, all the way down to the south-most tip of South America and also including the Caribbean Islands. What SOUTHCOM does is a number of military and humanitarian aid projects. Some of these projects include counter-narcotics, anti-terrorism, and other humanitarian aid relief. So, when you're talking about this area, it makes sense to target the largest recipient of this aid and that would be Colombia. Plan Colombia is the name given to the aid package that has cost the United States 10 billion dollars over 15 years. Plan Colombia is also uniquely relevant to today because just recently, the government of Colombia and the rebel group known as FARC, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, just came to a peace agreement. So, changing the conditions of Plan Colombia seems like a really relevant topic today. If you want to get a little bit tricky about it, you can even have the President of the United States invoke the Leahy Law, which forbids U.S. military aid going to countries that have not prosecuted human rights abusers. The Leahy Law is in effect until the country uses effective measures that are taken to prosecute these human rights abusers.

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In response to the peace agreement, the White House has stated that it plans to implement what's known as Peace Colombia and that is a 450-million-dollar aid package that would go towards things like increasing state presence in rural communities. Many people think that this is just an extension of Plan Colombia, so the plan itself is something that is very relevant for discussion. if you are on the affirmative and you are running Plan Columbia, there are a couple of advantages that seem pretty likely. The first one would be human rights. One of the most consistent criticisms of Plan Colombia was the human rights abuses that are a result of the aid package. People who make accusations of human rights abuses point to collaboration between military and paramilitary units in Colombia. paramilitary units are people who aren't really in the military, like they're not on the payrolls but they still act in a way that is to benefit the government's goals. Some of the other human rights abuses that have been noted are extrajudicial killings that have been taking place. in fact, it's estimated that over 200,000 people have died in the fighting between FARC and the Colombian government and over 600,000 people have been victimized. The same people that make the accusations of human rights abuses also point out that Plan Colombia uniquely incentivized the killing of guerrilla combatants. Changing the aid package known as Plan Colombia would directly affect the human rights abuses right on face. Couple this with the peace agreement that just took place and this looks like a gesture of good faith on behalf of the United States Government. Considering that FARC has agreed to the anti-narcotics strategy of the Colombian government, it shouldn't be as costly or dangerous to enforce their counter-narcotics strategy. Plus, invoking the Leahy Law would put pressure to prosecute human rights abusers and instill greater faith in the justice system of Colombia. The second advantage could be that of herbicide. Colombia has been using an herbicide known as glyphosate for the entirety of Plan Colombia. Glyphosate is an herbicide that is produced by the Monsanto Company and it is used in a lot of their Roundup Products. Just recently the World Health Organization labeled it as a carcinogen. Now there is a little bit of dispute about this because the Environmental Protection Agency of the United States came out of saying that it wasn't a carcinogen but then they revoked that particular bit of research. Other research institutes have pointed out glyphosate contaminates land, water, and air, and can even get into the food supply. Some have even found that it leads to skeletal and visceral abnormalities. Some other research institutes have found that it leads to the dilation of hearts. Last year, Colombia said that it would stop the aerial fumigation that it had been doing for nearly a decade, but just this April that same government said that they're going to continue the use of it with manual spraying. That means the same chemicals are going to be put back into the ground and potentially contaminate people's food supply. Considering that Plan Colombia is primarily a counter-narcotics aid package, it has gone to funding much of this and the United States government has actually put pressure on the Colombian government in order to continue the use of this particular product. Without Plan Colombia, the most likely back-up plan would be to just go around and manually rip out coca crops. The Colombian government has found that this is much more effective than using herbicide because it actually rips out the roots from the ground, whereas the herbicide leaves the roots and they grow back afterwards.

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When you're talking about Latin America, it makes sense to go for the biggest target and our largest aid package goes to Colombia. That aid package is primarily known as Plan Colombia and right now might be a unique time to discontinue that policy. Keep in mind this is just one strategy; there are dozens of ways that you can construct a case on this year's topic for the National Forensics Association. But I hope I've given you something to think about.



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