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## PREFACE

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Drug trafficking and political disintegration in Colombia could confront the United States, if present trends continue, with the most serious foreign and security policy crisis in the Western Hemisphere since the Central American wars of the 1980s. The first question is why Colombia matters. U.S. policy toward Colombia has been driven to a large extent by counter-narcotics considerations, but the situation in that South American country is a national security as much as a drug policy problem. Colombia is a strategically important country. It is South America's fourth largest country in area and the second largest in population. It is the only South American country with coastlines on both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and it is contiguous to the Caribbean basin, Central America, Venezuela and its oil fields, and Panama and the Canal. Colombia also has some of the largest untapped petroleum reserves in the Western Hemisphere. Colombia's trajectory will also influence the direction of broader trends in the unstable Andean region and beyond.

This study, conducted in Project AIR FORCE's Strategy and Doctrine Program, examines

- the sources of instability in Colombia;
- the objectives, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses of the major Colombian actors—government, guerrillas, and paramilitaries—and the balance of forces among them; and
- the impact of the U.S. assistance program.

The study concludes with possible scenarios for Colombia and the implications of these scenarios for the security and stability of neighboring states and U.S. regional security interests.

This research was sponsored by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations, U.S. Air Force (AF/XO), and the Director of Strategic Planning, U.S. Air Force (AF/XPX). It is part of a larger study, entitled “New Challenges for the U.S. Air Force,” that reviews “off-baseline” scenarios and threats—those receiving little attention in the defense community—for the purpose of identifying weak links in potential U.S. Air Force operations. Concurrent research is examining potential vulnerabilities and remedies in the deployment and employment of aerospace forces.

This report should be of value to the national security community and interested members of the general public, especially those with an interest in Latin America and the future of hemispheric relations. Comments are welcome and should be sent to the authors or to the project leader, David Shlapak. Research was completed in January 2001.

## **PROJECT AIR FORCE**

Project AIR FORCE, a division of RAND, is the United States Air Force’s Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) for studies and analyses. It provides the Air Force with independent analyses of policy alternatives affecting the development, employment, combat readiness, and support of current and future aerospace forces. Research is performed in four programs: Aerospace Force Development; Manpower, Personnel, and Training; Resource Management; and Strategy and Doctrine.