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Colombia and the United States: The Making of an Inter-American Alliance, 1939–1960

Bradley Coleman

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Colombia and the United States



**The Making of an Inter-
American Alliance, 1939-1960**

Bradley Lynn Coleman

NEW STUDIES IN U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mary Ann Heiss, editor

The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945–1965

AMY L. S. STAPLES

Colombia and the United States: The Making of an Inter-American Alliance, 1939–1960

BRADLEY LYNN COLEMAN

Colombia and the United States

*The Making of an
Inter-American Alliance,
1939–1960*



BRADLEY LYNN COLEMAN

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Contents

Preface	ix
Introduction: A Global History	xiii
Maps and Illustrations	xix
1 Solidarity and Cooperation, 1939–1945	1
2 Old Problems, New Possibilities, 1945–1950	43
3 The Korean War and the Americas, 1950–1951	71
4 The Fighting Alliance, 1951–1953	97
5 Continuity and Change, 1953–1957	138
6 The Partnership Transformed, 1958–1960	171
Epilogue	199
Essay on Archival Research	205
List of Abbreviations	211
Notes	213
Bibliography	272
Index	294

Introduction: A Global History

World War II and the cold war transformed U.S.-Colombian security relations. After decades of bilateral tension, the Western Hemisphere's leading democracies, Colombia and the United States, came together to defend the Americas during World War II. Although Colombia contributed less to the Allied victory than some other Latin American republics, Colombian-American cooperation promoted hemispheric solidarity, inter-American military readiness, and regional stability. Controversies surrounding economic development dominated U.S.-Latin American relations after 1945. Yet mounting Soviet-American competition encouraged hemispheric military collaboration. During a time of Colombian domestic discord, culminating in the collapse of democratic practices, the two countries converted wartime security measures into peacetime institutions. Then, Colombian and U.S. servicemen formed a successful fighting alliance in Korea. A Colombian infantry battalion and warship joined the U.S.-led UN Command in 1951. The only Latin American country to serve with the UN coalition, Colombia demonstrated to the United States its reliability in the campaign against international communism, setting the scene for greater postwar bilateral cooperation. Between 1953 and 1957, the two governments gradually shed their conventional defense affiliation in favor of a partnership designed to promote Colombian tranquility. Finally, in 1959, U.S. authorities dispatched a Special Survey Team to evaluate Colombia's internal security situation. The group's final report, the resurgence of Colombian democracy, Washington's heightened appreciation for Latin American insecurity following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and some intense Colombian lobbying completed the remodeling of the bilateral relationship. By 1960 the two countries had formed the basis of the modern internal security partnership.

This book examines the making of the Colombian-American alliance from 1939 to 1960, describing and analyzing bilateral cooperation as a dynamic multinational experience. While Colombia lacked the strength of the industrialized countries, it played a prominent role in collective security matters during World War II, the Korean War, and the 1956 Suez crisis. For that reason, the republic's security relationship with the United States is an ideal subject for a truly global history. Throughout



Political Map of Colombia

this study, comparative vignettes complement the international approach. Combining military and diplomatic history, it explores U.S.–Latin American relations, multinational coalitions, and international conflict through the intensive examination of U.S.–Colombian cooperation. Also, since Colombian and U.S. officials frequently connected hemispheric defense with Latin American internal stability, domestic law enforcement, and modernization, this study pursues a broad definition of security relations. By extension, it devotes attention to Colombian national history, particularly the intense political, social, economic, and religious convul-

sion known as *la Violencia* (1946–58). Employing multi-archival international research and making use of available Colombian sources, this book de-centers the great-power competition for Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In doing so, it exposes the North-South implications of two subjects, World War II and the cold war, which are traditionally studied on an East-West axis.

Overall, historians have devoted little attention to U.S.-Colombian relations. They consistently produce insightful work on the major World War II and cold war combatants while neglecting small countries such as Colombia. Some prominent writers have examined U.S.–Latin American relations, and their publications reflect scholarly trends relevant to this topic. Early historians of U.S. foreign relations, including Samuel Flagg Bemis, looked to hemispheric affairs to celebrate American exceptionalism. During the 1970s and 1980s, revisionist scholars like William Appleman Williams and Walter LaFeber found evidence of American economic imperialism in U.S. relations with its southern neighbors. Recently, Lester Langley and others have utilized cultural approaches and Latin American sources to write innovative histories. In doing so, they present a more complicated, and vastly more interesting, account of inter-American relations. Colombia, however, rarely appears in these histories. Scholars are often discouraged by the complexity of the Colombian experience, its apparent inconstancy with broader currents in Latin American history, and the relative scarcity of Colombian archival sources. For these reasons, David Bushnell wrote in 1993, “Colombia is today the least studied of the major Latin American countries, and probably the least understood.”¹ Bushnell’s observation is still valid.

As for Colombian-American security matters, English-language historians are largely silent. The classic study, *Colombia and the United States, 1765–1934* (1935), by E. Taylor Parks, does not reach the outbreak of World War II.² The only comprehensive treatment of bilateral relations, Stephen Randall’s *Colombia and the United States: Hegemony and Interdependence* (1992), provides only cursory coverage of military affairs.³ Bushnell looks at U.S.-Colombian relations during the Second World War, although his narrative ends in 1942.⁴ The English-language literature on Colombia and the Korean War includes only three articles and four master’s theses.⁵ Dennis Rempé’s pioneering research examines Colombian-American affairs between 1958 and 1960, albeit in ways unconnected to the World War II and Korean War alliance.⁶ Collectively, these works, while admirable, present an incomplete account of the Colombian-American partnership.

Spanish-language literature does not remedy this deficiency. In Colombia, talented scholars have focused on pressing economic, political, and social questions to the detriment of military and diplomatic history. Indeed, *la Violencia* generates far more literature than corresponding developments in Colombian foreign relations; most researchers ignore the Colombian military because of its historically minor domestic political role.⁷ The 1940s and 1950s are chronically understudied

for another logical reason: the Colombian archives contain few sources from the years of conservative rule, 1946 to 1957. Still, several authors address germane issues. Any study of the Colombian military begins with the collected works of General Álvaro Valencia Tovar, particularly his six-volume *Historia de las fuerzas militares de Colombia* (1993).⁸ Gonzalo Sánchez and César Torres Del Río offer impressive accounts of twentieth-century Colombian national security policy.⁹ Álvaro Tirado Mejía examines Colombian diplomacy in various international forums.¹⁰ Official histories and nationalistic memoirs document Colombia's experience in Korea.¹¹ But none of these works systematically explores Colombian-American cooperation or Colombia's foreign military relations. Those writers (whether in Spanish or English) who cover related topics too often portray the United States as a hegemonic power, fail to account for ideological variables, overlook domestic influences on foreign affairs, and disregard the multilateral dimensions of the bilateral partnership.

Recognizing these shortcomings, this global history of U.S.-Colombian relations concentrates on six major ideas. First, the Colombian-American alliance developed in a truly international setting. Rather than a simple bilateral affair, it must therefore be presented as a multinational event. Second, compatible values allowed the two countries to capitalize on shared opportunities. Colombia and the United States formed a broad-based partnership rooted in ideas such as democracy, liberty, Christianity, anticommunism, multilateralism, inter-American solidarity, and collective security. Third, beyond ideology, material incentives and self-interest stimulated Colombian-American cooperation. Colombian and U.S. officials wanted to create in Colombia a prosperous and secure republic. Fourth, internal affairs invariably shaped foreign relations. Importantly, *la Violencia* heavily influenced Colombian-American relations. Fifth, Colombians, not Americans, most often determined the conditions and pace of bilateral cooperation. Colombia was not a pawn of the more powerful United States. Finally, Colombia lay in a zone of transition between the areas of greatest U.S. influence in the Caribbean and Central America and the more distant neighbors of South America's southern cone. Rooted in the geography of the inter-American neighborhood, a mixture of independence and interdependence characterized U.S.-Colombian relations during World War II and the cold war.

Organized chronologically, this book covers six distinct periods. The first chapter examines the formation of the bilateral hemispheric defense partnership during World War II. Geopolitical, ideological, pragmatic, and political forces brought the two countries together; they simultaneously limited Colombia's wartime involvement. The second chapter shows how the republics carried their conventional partnership into the immediate postwar era, 1945 to 1950. Colombia's rising domestic turmoil overshadowed larger hemispheric economic disagreements and inspired U.S.-Colombian cooperation. Chapter 3 explores Latin America's response to the Korean War, U.S. efforts to convince Latin American govern-

ments to dispatch troops, and Colombia's decision to defend South Korea. The only Latin American country willing and able to fight, Colombia's contribution assumed heightened significance in the face of regional inaction. The next chapter follows the Colombian armed forces through the Korean War. The preexisting U.S.-Colombian military affiliation gave Colombian forces a major advantage over other small-nation units in Korea. The successful fighting alliance kept the two countries connected during a time when Colombian domestic unrest might have pulled the countries apart. Chapter 5 investigates continuity and change in Colombian-American relations from 1953 to 1957. Officials remained interested in collective defense, illustrated by Colombia's involvement in Middle Eastern peace-keeping. But American assistance followed the needs of the Colombian military, which began accepting new domestic responsibilities during that time. The final chapter evaluates the conversion of the Colombian-American partnership into a full-fledged internal security alliance between 1958 and 1960. A confluence of extraordinary national and international events altered the direction of the U.S.-Colombian security alliance. A short epilogue returns to the book's organizing themes and links this study to contemporary issues.

Today, U.S. involvement in Bogotá's campaign against leftist insurgents, right-wing paramilitaries, and narcotics traffickers has attracted considerable attention. In 2000 the U.S. government pledged \$1.7 billion in military assistance to support Colombian president Andrés Pastrana Arango's (1998–2002) ambitious state-building program, *Plan Colombia*. At that time, U.S. president William J. Clinton (1993–2001) and the U.S. Congress limited American military aid to counter-narcotics operations. The United States relaxed these restrictions after the September 2001 al Qaeda terrorist attacks. In August 2002 President George W. Bush (2001–) formally approved Colombia's use of U.S. assistance to combat insurgent and paramilitary groups the U.S. Department of State deemed terrorist organizations. As part of the arrangement, American special forces moved into Colombia, where they are now involved in nearly every aspect of Colombian domestic security.¹² These developments have stirred a lively debate over American involvement in Colombian internal affairs. Regrettably, that discussion has been conducted in an ahistorical fashion that leaves many with the impression that Colombian-American cooperation is a recent occurrence. In fact, as this study shows, the current partnership began during World War II.¹³

Maps and Illustrations

Political Map of Colombia	xvi
The Colombian destroyer ARC <i>Antioquia</i> in the Panama Canal, 1934	6
President Eduardo Santos (1938–42)	8
Political Map of the Western Hemisphere, 1939	10
Presidents Alfonso López (1934–38, 1942–45) and Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933–45)	14
Latin American military leaders with General George C. Marshall, 1940	17
Colombian military pilots in the United States, 1942	28
U.S. Army Lend-Lease motor vehicles outside Bogotá, 1943	30
U.S. diplomats at the Bogotá Conference, 1948	54
The <i>nueve de abril</i> in Bogotá, 1948	56
Secretary of State Dean Acheson with Colombian ambassador Gonzalo Restrepo	60
Map of the Korean Conflict, 1950–51	73
Ambassador Eduardo Zuleta (1949–55)	81
President Laureano Gómez (1950–53)	87
Colombian sailors in Hawaii, March 1951	99
Map of the 8th U.S. Army Advance, 1951	112
Colombian infantrymen defend a ridge in central Korea, 1951	115
Colombian troops fire at an enemy position, 1951	116
Colombia Battalion Headquarters Company, 1951	117
President Harry S. Truman (1945–53)	125
Colombian troops at Port Said, Egypt, 1956	145
Map of the UN Emergency Force, 1957	147
Lieutenant Colonel Gustavo Rojas Pinilla	149
Vice President Richard Nixon in Bogotá, 1958	173
Presidents Alberto Lleras (1945–46, 1958–62) and Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–61), 1960	196

Solidarity and Cooperation, 1939–1945

In 1938 U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered three U.S. Army bombers to Colombia. The airplanes and crew, a U.S. government spokesman said, symbolized “the solidarity and community of interest between the two republics” during the inauguration of Colombian president Eduardo Santos.¹ The B-17s landed at Techo Airport outside Bogotá around 11:00 A.M. on 5 August. They taxied across the field before parking near the airport terminal. A huge crowd of spectators cheered when the flight commander, Major Vincent J. Maloy, and his men jumped down from the “flying fortresses.” Over the days that followed, the aviators mixed with hundreds of Colombian citizens, servicemen, and elected officials. They attended formal and informal events, including a bullfight with the mayor of Bogotá. The uniformed Americans inspired “great popular enthusiasm” at cocktail parties and state socials.² On 7 August, after the inauguration, President Santos thanked the U.S. flyers for coming to the ceremony. The president then delivered a proposal to special U.S. envoy Jefferson Caffery, also in Bogotá for the inauguration. Impressed by the airmen, Santos asked if the United States would send military advisers to Colombia. American training missions, Santos reasoned, would improve Colombian military capabilities and promote bilateral cooperation during a time of international insecurity. Delighted by the proposition, Ambassador Caffery relayed the invitation to Washington that night.³ The first U.S. advisers arrived in Colombia just five months later.

The Santos overture launched the Colombian-American security partnership. During World War II, Colombia and the United States designed and implemented a program of bilateral cooperation that included conventional security and counterespionage measures. The republics also collaborated on a variety of pressing diplomatic and economic matters. Together, these activities promoted regional tranquility, secured the Panama Canal, stabilized Colombia, and encouraged Colombian state-building. The country’s wartime contribution, combined with the efforts of the other Latin American republics, allowed the United States to focus

on overseas operations. Latin Americans advanced the Allied cause by protecting Washington's southern flank. Within this larger hemispheric effort, shared values, geographic proximity, and Colombian internal affairs shaped the U.S.-Colombian alliance. World War II, in turn, promoted the integration of U.S. and Colombian institutions with important long-term political, economic, and military consequences. Opening an era of concentrated bilateral cooperation, the global conflict produced a system of Colombian-American cooperation that made future undertakings feasible. It likewise represented a major departure from the years of controversy preceding the war.

The Republics before World War II

The Colombian-American relationship began before World War II and produced a burst of conflict, but it also revealed the possibility for successful collaboration. U.S. political and social philosophers inspired Latin American revolutionaries during the early 1800s. American merchants smuggled military equipment to armies fighting Spanish rule. In 1822 U.S. diplomats formally recognized Gran Colombia (now Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela), the first Latin American state acknowledged by the United States. Although Britain then dominated Latin American markets, Colombia and the United States signed their first trade agreement in 1826. The volume of Colombian-American commerce thereafter exceeded expectations in both countries. Around the same time, Colombian officials accepted U.S. opposition to the recolonization of the Americas as an expression of hemispheric sovereignty. The U.S. government generally appreciated Colombian president Simón Bolívar's effort to form an inter-American confederation, even though major cultural, economic, and political differences still separated the countries. In any case, more than foreign affairs, Colombia's internal compartmentalization concerned Bogotá during the early national period. The rough landscape divided the population, weakened the federal government, and limited internal communications; tremendous internal diversities precluded the spread of national sentiment. Venezuela and Ecuador left the union by 1830. A new constitution in Bogotá created the Republic of New Granada in 1833.⁴

A competitive two-party political system soon developed in New Granada, the legacies of which brought disastrous consequences in the 1940s and 1950s. At first, clear ideological differences separated the political groups. The Liberal Party campaigned for free trade, a decentralized government, and the separation of church and state. The Conservative Party embraced the Spanish colonial legacy, authoritarianism, and the Catholic Church. While the parties differed on some important issues, they had much in common. Elites endlessly debated political philosophy but refused to disrupt the prevailing economic and social order. Controlled by

affluent citizens, parties enlisted Colombians of all classes and occupations. Family affiliations usually determined an individual's membership. Peasants typically followed their landlords to the ballot box. Accounting for persistent regional differences, political arrangements sometimes varied from one region to the next. But in most areas, more complex than a simple ideological contest, heated personal disputes quickly dominated Liberal-Conservative relations.

Like its political parties, Colombia's modern structure of government originated in the nineteenth century. The Constitution of 1886, drafted by a bipartisan national council, created a unitary republic, renamed the Republic of Colombia. A strong executive, selected by popular vote, introduced legislation, issued decrees, maintained public order, and commanded the armed forces. The president appointed department (state) governors, who then selected municipal officials such as city mayors. The sitting president, therefore, controlled—directly or indirectly—political and administrative offices throughout the country; the constitution did prohibit any individual from serving two consecutive terms as chief executive. The document gave legislative duties to a bicameral congress. Elected to serve four-year terms, senators and representatives passed laws; appointed judges; and selected a president designate, or vice president, to act as executive in extraordinary situations. The third branch of government, the judiciary, included a supreme court and council of state. The court administered the republic's legal system, while the council reviewed the constitutionality of the congressional legislation and presidential decrees. A durable document, the 1886 Constitution nurtured Colombian democratic institutions and provided for relative internal stability. Attaching a vast spoils system to the office of the presidency, it simultaneously fueled the Liberal-Conservative competition.⁵

As Colombia's reputation as Latin America's leading democracy grew, so too did its relationship with the United States. Bilateral trade and investment built stronger commercial ties, and Bogotá happily dispatched a delegation to the First International Conference of American States in Washington (1889–90). The conference created the International Bureau of the American Republics, later called the Pan American Union, to disseminate information and organize future inter-American consultations. Most often, Colombian and American interests converged in the Department of Panama. The Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty, negotiated in 1846, guaranteed U.S. transit across Colombia's strategic isthmus. American involvement in the region swelled following the Mexican-American War (1846–48), which expanded U.S. territory in the west. U.S. citizens who were headed to California often crossed the isthmus. American entrepreneurs built a railroad in Panama during the 1850s; others eyed the area as a possible site for an inter-oceanic canal. For Bogotá, the U.S. presence on the isthmus became a tremendous source of revenue, and joint Colombian-American development projects turned the region into showcase of inter-American cooperation. But at the same time, the

meeting place became a source of some tension. Many Americans thought Bogotá too weak to properly control the region. Some Colombians believed Americans threatened Colombian cultural and administrative power in the Department of Panama. Recurring lawlessness and political disarray reinforced apprehensions on both sides.⁶

Panama remained at the center of the Colombian-American relationship through the early twentieth century. As the United States became a formidable international force with global interests, the construction of an inter-oceanic canal surfaced as a key American objective in Latin America. Most Colombians, realizing the project would become a national treasure, also wanted to cut a waterway across the isthmus. Still, in 1869 the Colombian Congress, fearing a loss of sovereignty in the department, rejected a treaty that would have allowed the United States to build the passageway. The following year, a second agreement faltered in the U.S. Senate, which was busy investigating allegations of corruption surrounding the Ulysses S. Grant administration. When Americans turned their attention to Nicaragua as a possible site for the inter-oceanic route, Colombians took their aspiration for a canal to Europe. In 1879 Bogotá brought famed French canal-builder Ferdinand de Lesseps to Panama. When construction began in 1881, the U.S. government reactivated its dormant mission in Bogotá to monitor the work. In the face of uncompromising terrain, ravaging diseases, and Colombian instability, the canal project collapsed by the end of the decade, a failure that reopened the possibility of U.S.-Colombian collaboration.⁷

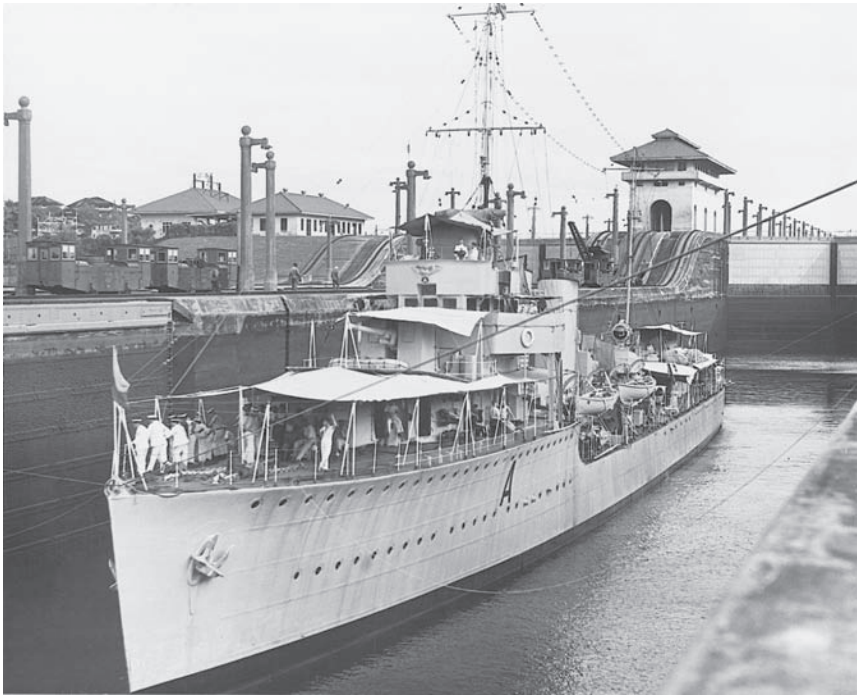
Colombia's civil disorder complicated the canal enterprise. The Thousand Days War began as a local Liberal uprising in Santander in 1899. A countrywide conflict between Liberals and Conservatives erupted soon thereafter. As pitched battles unfolded in central Colombia, Panamanian secessionists launched a vicious campaign against Colombian rule. To the separatists, Bogotá was a distant and unresponsive entity. The federal government collected heavy taxes from Panama without returning basic services. Panama, they asserted, would be stronger as an independent country. Losing its control over the region, Bogotá urged Washington to intervene on its behalf. In 1901 the United States landed troops, as it had on several occasions during the nineteenth century, to defend Colombian rule and protect American citizens and property. In November 1902 Liberal and Conservative leaders boarded a U.S. Navy battleship, the USS *Wisconsin*, to sign a peace agreement. Many assumed a U.S.-Colombian canal accord would soon follow. During the war, U.S. and Colombian diplomats had negotiated an agreement to build a canal in Panama. The U.S. Senate ratified the Hay-Herran Treaty in March 1903, but Colombian reservations quickly surfaced. Amid a swirl of political bickering, the Colombian Senate killed the treaty in August.

In the wake of the Colombian decision, President Theodore Roosevelt (1901–9) accused Bogotá of blocking the forward progress of civilization. He promptly re-

vised American policy toward Colombia. If another revolt erupted in Panama, the United States would act in the interest of regional stability, not Colombian sovereignty. American power had long supported Colombian control over the isthmus. Indeed, without U.S. assistance Bogotá might have lost Panama years before. When news of the new policy reached Panama, a Conservative minority, concerned that the United States would take the canal to Nicaragua, figured the opportunity for independence had arrived. While disappointed by the lack of explicit U.S. assistance, separatist Manuel Amador Guerrero and his followers rose against the government in Bogotá in November 1903. Unable to negotiate the dense jungle between Bogotá and Panama, Colombian government troops moving overland never reached the isthmus. American warships fettered the movement of Colombian seaborne forces, and when a Colombian commander in Panama threatened to kill American citizens, U.S. Marines moved ashore. Washington quickly recognized Panamanian independence, signed a treaty with the new government, and began building the Panama Canal.⁸

Colombia and the United States needed the next thirty years to undo the damage inflicted in 1903. At first, American collusion with Panamanian separatists spawned widespread anti-American sentiment in Colombia, precluding an early settlement of Colombian-American differences. Colombian citizens railed against Yankee gunboat diplomacy and commercial penetration. Some even attacked U.S. businessmen and missionaries working in the republic. Elected officials regularly denounced the United States in public settings. But Colombians could not sustain the intensity of their dissatisfaction. The country's history of compartmentalization, after all, partially explained the separation of Panama. In a move toward reconciliation, U.S. and Colombian diplomats negotiated the Thomson-Urrutia Treaty in 1914 that settled the Colombian-Panamanian border and transferred \$25 million to Bogotá for its territorial loss. Colombia recognized Panama's independence as part of the agreement. A short time later, President Marco Fidel Suárez (1918–21) theorized that since Colombia could not escape contact with the United States, Colombia should use the relationship to its advantage. The Suárez Doctrine helped Colombians discard the Panamanian controversy and capitalize on the inter-American commercial boom of the 1920s; the Suárez mindset guided Colombian foreign policy through World War II and the cold war. Also in the 1920s, U.S. policymakers adopted a new attitude toward Latin America. President Herbert Hoover (1929–33) embraced a program of noninterference, began pulling U.S. troops out of Nicaragua and Haiti, and calmly arbitrated a 1927 oil dispute with Mexico. These and other actions began the Good Neighbor Policy, a phrase Hoover coined during his 1929 goodwill tour of Latin America.⁹

Colombian-American friendship broadened during the decade before World War II. A 1930 Conservative Party split allowed the Liberal Party to capture the Colombian presidency. Liberal presidents Enrique Olaya Herrera (1930–34) and



The Colombian destroyer ARC *Antioquia* passes through the Panama Canal, June 1934. The separation of Panama temporarily damaged U.S.-Colombian relations. Opened in 1914, the canal nevertheless benefited both countries. The defense of the Panama Canal figured prominently in the minds of U.S. and Colombian authorities during World War II. (Source: Department of the Navy, NARA)

Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934–38) launched state-sponsored development programs, not unlike those under Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, that accelerated Colombian modernization. Colombian Liberals and American Democrats quickly established warm personal relationships based on philosophical compatibilities. Simultaneously, the Good Neighbor Policy flourished under President Roosevelt. At the Montevideo Conference in 1933, Secretary of State Cordell Hull renounced intervention as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. President Roosevelt visited Cartagena in 1934 and revised U.S. tariff laws to expand inter-American commerce. In December 1936 hemispheric officials at the Buenos Aires Conference accepted the principle of inter-American consultations to maintain regional peace and security. The delegates also adopted a general statement of inter-American solidarity.¹⁰ Cumulatively, Colombian president López observed, these changes in American policy “helped to create an atmosphere of active friendship” that permitted hemispheric collaboration during World War II.¹¹ In other words, by 1938 Colombia and the United States were ready to cooperate in the defense of the Americas.

The Inter-American Coalition

Nestled near the center of the Americas, adjacent to Panama Canal, Colombia emerged as an important U.S. ally during World War II. The same distance that had sparked conflict in 1903 encouraged wartime cooperation. The country's wartime strategic value resided in its proximity to the Panama Canal. Opened in 1914, the inter-oceanic passage created important lines of commerce, communication, and defense. It promoted international trade by shortening the distance between producers and markets and helped Colombia connect (for the first time) its Caribbean and Pacific coasts. Since the United States also relied on the canal to move U.S. naval assets between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the canal occupied a prominent place in the minds of U.S. strategic thinkers. The rise of air power after World War I complicated canal defense. American officers realized that just a modest airborne attack could close the canal until engineers repaired damaged locks and dams. In 1939 the Roosevelt administration concluded that the threat to the canal "could not be ignored," nor could the United States neglect Colombia.¹² The South American republic bordered Panama and controlled the coastal approaches at both ends of the canal. Hostile forces could easily strike the passage from Colombia. Even a rogue group, operating from the Colombian backlands, might render the Panama Canal inoperable, harming U.S. interests. Within the larger U.S.-led multinational wartime alliance, the U.S.-Colombian partnership therefore assumed special importance in the coalition against the Axis powers during World War II.¹³

Liberal president Eduardo Santos emerged as the chief architect of Colombian-American cooperation. Educated in Bogotá and Paris, Santos turned the fledgling daily *El Tiempo*, which he acquired in 1913, into the country's leading Liberal newspaper. He held assorted political posts during the 1920s and 1930s, notably as a Colombian senator and the governor of the Department of Santander. As Enrique Olaya Herrera's foreign minister, he headed the Colombian delegation at the historic Montevideo Conference and represented the republic at the League of Nations. A moderate Liberal, his tenure as president did not bring significant social or economic initiatives. He instead presided over the consolidation of reforms adopted between 1934 and 1937. Santos, however, devoted considerable attention to foreign relations, particularly Colombian-American cooperation. An "intelligent and forceful" man, considered by U.S. officials to be "the most powerful figure in the Liberal Party," Santos admired Roosevelt and the United States.¹⁴ He believed that democratic values made Colombia and the United States natural partners. Moreover, strongly committed to the idea of inter-American solidarity, he thought that the military, political, and economic security of each American republic depended on the welfare of the entire community. Over time, the countries of the Western Hemisphere had created a system of interdependence



Colombian president Eduardo Santos (1938–42). A strong proponent of Colombian-American cooperation, President Santos, pictured here in 1948, guided Colombia through the opening of World War II. (Source: New York World Telegram & Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, Library of Congress)

that demanded further inter-American collaboration. Conversely, President Santos detested foreign totalitarianism, the ideas and actions of which were incompatible with Colombia's republican principles. In November 1938 Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party mistreated three Colombian diplomats for collecting information on anti-Semitism in Germany. The entire incident merely reinforced the Colombian president's low opinion of the Nazi government.¹⁵ These convictions shaped Colombian foreign policy and determined Colombia's position at the December 1938 Lima Conference.

The subject of Nazi aggression occupied delegates at the Eighth Conference of American States. Earlier that year, Germany had annexed Austria and absorbed the Sudetenland. Secretary of State Hull arrived in Peru expecting inter-American officials to pass a clear, unanimous resolution on the subject of hemispheric solidarity, but he quickly encountered problems with the Argentine delegation. With strong ties to Europe, a large German population, and aspirations to become a major international actor, Argentina stubbornly opposed U.S. leadership. On the first day, Argentine foreign minister José María Cantilo, doubting U.S. resolve in the face of an Axis invasion, dismissed a proclamation of solidarity as unnecessary. The minister then went fishing in Chile, entrusting Argentina's interests to second-rate diplomats, leaving Hull with the impression that Argentina "did not attach too much importance to the conference."¹⁶ The U.S. delegation brushed off the Argentine antics and pushed for a declaration of solidarity. Colombian foreign minister Luis López de Mesa supported the declaration, as did the Brazilian and Mexican repre-

sentatives.¹⁷ After considerable debate, a few heated exchanges, and the personal intervention of Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas, the inter-American representatives approved the Lima Declaration. Slightly weakened to accommodate Argentine reservations, the document reaffirmed the sovereignty of the Americas, expressed the U.S. and Latin American intention to resist extra-continental aggression, and provided for further consultation as the international situation warranted. As part of the agreement, Foreign Minister López de Mesa (together with the Dominican representative) proposed a plan for the formation of an Association of American Nations. The Santos administration, in short, wanted to replace the Pan American Union with a stronger inter-American organization. Considering the problems they encountered passing a simple statement of solidarity in Lima, Colombian and U.S. officials decided to shelve the plan until conditions improved.¹⁸

U.S.-Colombian cooperation accelerated after the Lima Conference. In early 1939 the American military missions opened in Colombia. Planned since the Santos inauguration in August 1938, the advisory groups immediately began laying the foundation for wartime military cooperation. Also in January 1939, Bogotá and Washington elevated their foreign legations to embassy status. The move, recommended by Santos, increased communications and reflected the growing importance of the bilateral relationship to both countries. Spruille Braden arrived in Colombia that year as the first U.S. ambassador to Colombia. Miguel López Pumarejo served as Colombia's ambassador to the United States until Gabriel Turbay arrived in Washington in November.

President Santos discussed these and other international developments during his annual address to Congress in July 1939. The president reaffirmed Colombia's commitment to inter-American solidarity. He reviewed Colombian-American initiatives and reiterated the ongoing importance of bilateral cooperation. "The security of the Panama Canal is indispensable to the welfare of Colombia," Santos observed. The president pledged that "no one" would "be permitted to menace the security of the canal from Colombian soil."¹⁹ Colombian politicians and journalists responded favorably to the president's speech. Ambassador Braden, in frequent contact with Santos, remarked that he was "deeply moved" by the president's commitment to hemispheric unity.²⁰ The importance of inter-American solidarity, of course, intensified as the international situation worsened. In September 1939, after news of the outbreak of the European war reached Bogotá, the Colombian Congress voted overwhelmingly to support Santos's security program, including cooperation with the United States to defend the Panama Canal.

One month later, inter-American officials gathered in Panama to study the hemispheric implications of the European conflict. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, head of the U.S. delegation, worked harmoniously with Latin American officials. Most Latin American countries supported the U.S. program of accelerated economic collaboration in order to compensate for overseas instabilities,



Political Map of the Western Hemisphere, 1939. The U.S. Department of State prepared this map for the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the American States in Panama, October 1939. In the Declaration of Panama, inter-American officials proclaimed hostile action by non-American belligerent nations within the shaded zone unacceptable. (Source: U.S. Department of State)

especially the loss of foreign markets; the officials also endorsed a general statement of neutrality. Diplomats then adopted the Declaration of Panama, proclaiming that the "waters adjacent to the American continent" should be "free from the commission of any hostile act by any non-American belligerent nation."²¹ It designated a three hundred to one thousand mile perimeter around the Western Hemisphere, inside which it declared hostile action unacceptable.²²

Military developments in the spring of 1940 heightened inter-American anxiety. The spectacular German conquest of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France raised acute concerns among many hemispheric officials that Germany

would attempt to occupy western European colonies in the Caribbean. Facing this possibility, inter-American officials convened in Havana, Cuba, in July 1940. Secretary Hull proposed that the American republics both refuse to recognize any transfer of colonies and, if necessary, place the possessions under a joint inter-American trusteeship. Leopoldo Mezo of Argentina objected immediately, arguing that such action would constitute a declaration of war. Hull eventually pulled the Argentines into line, but only after direct communication with Argentina's acting president Ramón Castillo. The Colombian delegation, impressed by the need for "complete agreement and unity in action as well as theory," embraced the U.S. plan, and had in fact arrived in Cuba with an independent study of the problem that bore a striking resemblance to the U.S. initiative. Colombian diplomats played a key role promoting hemispheric unity in Havana, going to great lengths to make sure the meeting succeeded, efforts that earned Washington's gratitude.²³

The international conflagration swelled when Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. Around the same time, the tone of Japanese-American relations pointed toward the possibility of a war in the Pacific. That summer, in a private message to Roosevelt, President Santos reaffirmed his country's commitment to the "moral, religious, and political liberty" that Colombia and the United States cherished.²⁴ If the Axis powers prevailed, Santos told the Colombian Congress in July, "Colombia would pass automatically into a state of slavery." The republic needed to work with the United States to defend the Western Hemisphere, particularly the Panama Canal, which he described as "vital to the life of America and vital to the defense of the United States." The canal "constitutes for Colombia," he added, "an artery of communication whose interruption would occasion untold damage on this country."²⁵

The president's devotion to inter-American unity impressed U.S. authorities, but some Colombians nurtured reservations. Considering the Axis successes in 1940 and 1941, several influential Conservatives thought Germany would win the war. Open collaboration with the United States, they reasoned, might actually endanger Colombia. While Colombia had few economic ties to Germany, Bogotá's anti-Nazi position might preclude future trade with a German-controlled Europe. If Germany invaded the Americas, a neutral Colombia stood a fair chance of emerging unmolested. In addition, Conservative Party chief Laureano Gómez Castro had problems forgiving the United States for the separation of Panama. "The Panama Canal affair is over and we don't want to reopen it," he said, "but it cannot be forgotten."²⁶ A *New York Times* writer, nevertheless, concluded in June that Colombia was "the most likely of all South American republics to join hands with the United States in the case of war."²⁷ Indeed, Colombia responded quickly to Japan's attack on Hawaii in December 1941. Bogotá broke relations with Tokyo less than twenty-four hours after the Pearl Harbor raid. When Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, the Santos administration severed ties with Berlin and Rome.²⁸

An emergency inter-American meeting at Rio de Janeiro in January 1942 addressed problems connected with U.S. involvement in the war. Diplomats agreed to expand hemispheric defense activities and formed the Inter-American Defense Board "to study and recommend measures necessary" for continental defense.²⁹ Colombian and U.S. officials also drafted a decree that would have ended all relations between the American republics and the Axis powers. Many Latin American governments, like Colombia, broke with the Axis in December 1941; most Central American countries declared war on the Axis. But several South American countries, separated from U.S. forces by thousands of miles, refused to act, fearing that hostile diplomacy would provoke an invasion. Colombians hoped the Rio de Janeiro Conference would inspire a uniform response. Argentina and Chile, however, refused to accept the draft declaration. Instead of a binding declaration, attendees produced a resolution that merely encouraged Latin American governments to break with the Axis. Several uncommitted governments, notably Brazil, honored the recommendation, but others did not respond. Concerned that its long Pacific coast would be an easy target, Chile attempted to remain neutral. When a U.S. diplomat assured Chileans that the American fleet would protect their country, Foreign Minister Gabriel Rosetto asked: "What fleet? The one sunk at Pearl Harbor?"³⁰ Santiago finally embraced the Allied cause in 1943. Buenos Aires, likewise, resisted the Rio Conference recommendation, maintaining its relationship with Germany. Attempting to isolate Argentina, Washington declared Buenos Aires ineligible for U.S. economic and military assistance. Argentina responded by trying to buy military equipment from Germany. In 1945, when the outcome of the war became a forgone conclusion, Argentina sided with the United States to improve the chances of postwar bilateral cooperation.³¹

The German submarine campaign in American waters furthered Latin American involvement in World War II. Germany's sinking of Latin American vessels showed that the war affected all countries, not just the highly industrialized ones. In May 1942 a German submarine attacked a Mexican oil tanker in the Caribbean. Berlin responded to the Mexican protest by sinking another Mexican merchant ship. Soon thereafter, the Mexican Congress declared war on the Axis.³² During the first seven months of 1942 German U-boats in the Atlantic sank eleven Brazilian vessels, resulting in the loss of more than eighty seamen. Then, in August 1942, a concentrated Nazi campaign against Brazilian shipping sent six vessels and six hundred people, mostly civilian ocean-liner passengers and military personnel, to the bottom of the ocean. Rio de Janeiro promptly entered into a state of belligerency with the Axis countries. Other Latin American republics, including Colombia, followed a similar path.³³ In June 1942 a Nazi submarine torpedoed the Colombian Navy schooner *ARC Resolute* in the Caribbean. To make the incident more egregious, after the schooner sunk, the U-boat crew surfaced and began

machine-gunning survivors as they clung to their life rafts. The Santos administration condemned Germany and froze all Axis assets in Colombia but did not join the war as a belligerent. That final step came only after a second submarine attack and, even then, only as part of a growing internal political drama.³⁴

Between 1903 and 1940, Colombia enjoyed a period of orderly political, social, and economic development. A wave of interparty fighting followed the 1930 election, but a 1932–34 border war with Peru inspired Colombian nationalism and ended the domestic conflict. Partisan conflict, however, crept back into Colombian public affairs during World War II. Minor problems first surfaced during the Santos years. In October 1941, Conservatives used allegations of Liberal corruption to force several cabinet officials from the government.³⁵ Then, in 1942, the Liberal government tried revising the Concordat of 1887, an agreement with the Vatican that allowed the Roman Catholic Church special privileges inside Colombia. The move succeeded only in upsetting Catholic clerics and Conservative citizens. Within the Liberal ranks, the president's moderate social agenda upset those who wanted more radical change. The Liberal Party, in turn, divided between the *santistas* (Santos supporters) and the *lopistas* (López supporters). Backers of former president López wanted the government to push modernization and reform, much as it had during the mid-1930s. The hotly contested 1942 election matched López—despised by Conservatives—against Liberal-Conservative compromise candidate Carlos Arango Vélez. When López prevailed, the long-standing Liberal-Conservative feud seemed poised to erupt again.

Alfonso López had played an important role in Colombia prior to 1942. The son of a prominent Colombian banker, he studied in the United States and Britain. He later worked in New York City and founded a commercial bank in Colombia. López emerged as a major political and intellectual force at the 1929 Liberal Party convention, and he served as the Colombian minister in London during the early 1930s. As president from 1934 to 1938, he implemented the *revolución en marcha*, or “revolution on the march.” Although hardly “revolutionary,” his presidency brought major changes to Colombia. He employed a program of government economic planning, passed agrarian reform legislation, initiated public works projects, and introduced an income tax. López also managed to restructure the church-state relationship and secured universal male suffrage. Economic nationalism during his first presidency precipitated some hostilities toward U.S. interests in Colombia, especially the United Fruit Company. At times, the president's own behavior showed traces of anti-American sentiment. During the 1942 campaign, opponents charged that López would not do enough to support the inter-American war effort.³⁶ When the mercurial López prevailed, U.S. policymakers questioned the implication for U.S.-Colombian relations. To alleviate these concerns, president-elect López traveled to Washington in July 1942, a month before his inauguration, to assure U.S.



Colombian president-elect Alfonso López (1934–38, 1942–45) confers with President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933–45) on the White House lawn, July 1942. (Source: Office of War Information, NARA)

officials of his goodwill and support. The discussions convinced U.S. policymakers that the bilateral partnership would continue. The trip did nothing to end the political fighting that would carry Colombia into World War II.³⁷

Once in office, President López confronted a growing number of domestic critics. Predictably, Conservatives objected to every presidential word and deed, from tax policies to religious initiatives.³⁸ Colombian Conservatives despised López in the same way Republicans in the United States detested Roosevelt. Colombian labor turned against the president when he failed to respond to their demands for better working conditions, evidenced during the 1943 Bogotá transportation strike.³⁹ Rising tensions between the National Police and the Colombian Army also created problems. López favored the National Police, intending to build the police into a “Liberal counterweight” to the armed forces, which he believed loyal to the Conservative Party.⁴⁰ The Colombian National Police therefore received a disproportionate share of government funds and equipment during the first and second López administrations. Army officers resented their low status during the López years; corruption within the police forces put the president on the defensive.⁴¹ Then, serious accusations of bribery and fraud surfaced, suggesting that the president’s family and friends, particularly his son Alfonso López Michelsen,

had benefited from illegal wartime contracts and business dealings.⁴² At the same time, Liberal political maverick Jorge Eliécer Gaitán accelerated his campaign against Colombia's oligarchy. Still other Liberals criticized the president for not distributing the "spoils" of Liberal control evenly among various party components.⁴³ The López administration soon found itself in a tenuous position.

The situation deteriorated when, in July 1943, administration officials uncovered a plot to overthrow the government. López ordered the police arrest of several conspirators, including the popular Colombian boxer Francisco A. Pérez, known simply as "Mamatoco."⁴⁴ But instead of arresting Mamatoco, National Police officers knifed the man to death. The incident and inept government cover-up that followed brought criticism of the López administration to new heights.⁴⁵ That year, Conservatives and Liberals fought a vicious war of words. In September Liberal and Conservative legislators brawled on the floor of the Chamber of Representatives.⁴⁶ During the entirety of the 1943 session, Congress was "agitated and sterile" and accomplished little meaningful work. It barely managed to pass a budget for the next year, and did that only by working deep into the Christmas recess.⁴⁷ In late September a political commentator observed that the president had "completely lost" the political "prestige" he had carried with him into office in August 1942.⁴⁸ Then, in early November 1943, President López decided to leave Colombia to accompany his wife, diagnosed with cancer, to the United States for medical treatment. Although her illness would prove fatal, skeptics believed the trip was a maneuver to escape the domestic political controversy. On 19 November, just before President and Mrs. López went to New York City, the Colombian Congress transferred the presidency to Darío Echandía Olaya, who would serve as chief executive until López returned to Colombia.⁴⁹

The republic's final move toward belligerency came during this time of political reshuffling. On the night of 17 November, a German submarine attacked a Colombian warship, the ARC *Ruby*, in the waters between San Andrés Island and Cartagena. Four Colombian seamen died, and seven others suffered wounds. American merchant marines delivered survivors to safety. After a series of emergency cabinet meetings Echandía confiscated all Axis assets in Colombia. The administration then called Congress into a special session to consider a proclamation of belligerency. The Colombian Senate adopted the measure on 27 November, formally acknowledging the existence of conflict between Bogotá and Berlin, committing Colombia to increase its involvement in hemispheric defense. Thirteen Conservative senators voted against the measure; Gómez downplayed the U-boat attack in his opposition to the Liberal administration. Other Colombians wanted a stronger response—a declaration of war on Berlin. But Minister of Government Alberto Lleras Camargo and Foreign Minister Carlos Lozano y Lozano urged caution. Under the Colombian Constitution, a formal declaration automatically imposed a countrywide state of siege. The move would have limited civil liberties, perhaps

even delaying the elections scheduled for 1946. Liberal policymakers openly feared that such a declaration would “provoke a strong reaction from the Conservative minority” in Colombia.⁵⁰ The republic would “act internationally exactly as though it were in the war,” Foreign Minister Lozano explained. Only for “internal reasons” did the republic limit itself to a state of belligerency.⁵¹

As a result of the 1943 declaration, Colombia became a more active member of the international alliance against the Axis powers. While Colombia could not give “the coalition much material aid,” a *New York Times* editor wrote, the republic was “a welcomed member of the growing coalition of the United Nations” due to its “important strategic value” and “profound moral influence in Latin America.”⁵² But the Colombian declaration of belligerency was more than just a response to the sinking of a Colombian schooner. Prior to November 1943, López considered increasing Colombia’s part in the war through a belligerency declaration. One U.S. State Department official reported that the president hoped such a declaration would “divert public opinion from the Mamatoco case and [other] scandals” and “unite the country.”⁵³ Although López had not acted by the time he handed his presidential duties to Echandía, the idea survived among Liberal government officials. In similar situations, citizens in other Latin American countries erupted in anti-German protests after the sinking of their ships. In Colombia, however, reporters recorded “a surprising lack of interest on the part of the local populace.”⁵⁴ Even without public pressure, the Echandía administration jumped at the opportunity to expand its involvement in the war. In the United States, López signed the United Nations Declaration, a statement of Allied war aims, for the Colombian government in January 1944. The move failed to restore domestic political harmony. It did accelerate the pace of Colombian-American military cooperation.⁵⁵

Military Cooperation

As fighting in Europe, Asia, and the Pacific endangered the Americas, the United States and Latin America worked together to improve hemispheric defense capabilities. Between 1938 and 1941, U.S. diplomats advocated a multilateral approach to regional security. Sumner Welles and the Department of State expected that an inter-American military committee would organize and implement defense activities. The approach would advance the Good Neighbor Policy, extend multilateralism, and seemingly ensure widespread U.S.–Latin American cooperation. By contrast, U.S. military leaders considered the multinational strategy cumbersome, inefficient, and insecure. For practical reasons, military planners pushed regional security through bilateral relationships; some also feared that large inter-American organizations gave too much power to Latin America, diluting American influence and compromising American security. Between 1938 and 1941, the



Latin American military leaders visit U.S. Army chief of staff General George C. Marshall in Washington, October 1940. (Source: U.S. Information Agency, NARA)

U.S. government, unsure on the exact course to follow, mixed the two approaches. The State Department promoted international cooperation in various diplomatic settings while the U.S. military started building a network of bilateral relationships. Then, just before the 1942 Rio de Janeiro Conference, President Roosevelt expressed his preference for bilateral tactics. He wanted diplomats to create an Inter-American Defense Board but insisted that it serve only an advisory role. That decision accounted for the relative inactivity of the board during (and after) World War II and smoothed the path for the U.S. government to pursue its security goals in Latin America through bilateral arrangements.⁵⁶ The United States worked directly with individual countries to achieve stated objectives. In Colombia, U.S. officials encouraged the development of a military establishment capable of repelling “any probable minor attack from overseas.”⁵⁷

In 1939 two important staff tours promoted bilateral understanding, critical to accomplishing the Colombian-American military agenda in the years ahead. In April Colombian Army chief of staff General Luis Acevedo and other Colombian general officers traveled to the Canal Zone, inspected Fort Amador, studied Balboa harbor defenses, and watched an American air power demonstration. The Colombian officers visited the Panama Canal and observed a large U.S. Army field exercise at Fort Clayton. They then met Panama Canal Department commander

Major General David L. Stone at his Quarry Heights headquarters. During that session, the American general stressed the military and economic importance of the canal. He also explained to the Colombians how mock air raids consistently damaged the locks, spillway, and dams. In a real attack, even a minor enemy effort could render the passage inoperable. Speaking with Stone, the Colombian Army chief of staff conveyed Colombia's great interest in defending the canal and expressed a keen appreciation for American regional security concerns.⁵⁸

Two months later, in June 1939, General Stone led fifteen U.S. officers to Bogotá to survey Colombian military preparedness. The Americans attended infantry, artillery, and cavalry school maneuvers and inspected medical corps facilities and the institute of military geography. General Stone met with prominent military and political figures, including President Santos and his ministers. The conversations covered regional defense matters and helped officials from both countries better understand their shared responsibility in the event war came to the Americas. For his part, Stone left Colombia generally impressed with the readiness of the Colombian military, at least the army, and returned to Panama convinced that Colombia would help defend the Americas.⁵⁹ Colombian officers believed the visit successfully identified problems the two countries "held in common" and "enlivened mutual respect."⁶⁰ These talks, the first serious discussions concerning Colombian-American military collaboration, prepared both countries for future cooperation.

The exchange, like other wartime goodwill gestures, increased contact between the two militaries, nurtured bilateral confidence, made inter-American solidarity tangible, and showed Colombians that U.S. forces were close enough to help the country in the event of an emergency.⁶¹ Additionally, the visits brought real improvements in Colombian-American military relations. In May 1939, after the Panama visit, General Acevedo dismissed the German Army officer then serving as the director of the Colombian War Department Administration Division. In place of the German administrator, Bogotá asked Washington for an American to "efficiently collaborate with the military-aviation and naval missions" and "better install the administrative methods used by the United States Army."⁶² Concerned that the German had been working against American interests in Colombia, the Roosevelt administration gladly complied with the Colombian request. Then, following General Stone's trip to Colombia, the United States sent its first permanent military attaché to Bogotá. At the time of the visit, Colombia shared an attaché with its Central American neighbors: one American (stationed in Costa Rica) served the entire region. In June, President Santos asked Stone to send a full-time officer to Bogotá. Colombia would need the U.S. attaché, Santos believed, to orchestrate the Colombian-American response to the Axis challenge. Later that year, the first permanent U.S. military attaché to Colombia arrived in Bogotá to coordinate a variety of bilateral security measures.⁶³ The tours and these related

developments created an atmosphere of cooperation that served both countries during formal bilateral security negotiations the following year.

In early 1940 the Roosevelt administration decided to open discussions with its Latin American neighbors to determine how each state could best contribute to hemispheric defense. President Santos agreed to the talks on 24 May, and a detachment of U.S. military officials, headed by Major Matthew B. Ridgway, arrived in Bogotá in June. The first meeting produced an agreement on the principles of mutual defense. It also identified common security problems, especially with regard to the Panama Canal.⁶⁴ The second round of talks, held in Colombia in September 1940 under the direction of U.S. mission personnel, produced specific recommendations as to how each country might support the other. The Colombian-American discussions were cordial and productive. The only real problem came during the September meeting when U.S. Army officers raised their concerns about German espionage activities in Colombia, an intense U.S. fear the Colombians did not share. In the final September agreement, the Santos administration committed itself to prevent its territory from being used as a springboard for any attack on the Panama Canal.⁶⁵ The government would secure its territory against internal and external enemies. Colombia, likewise, vowed to participate in regional defense. In case of an Axis invasion of Colombia, the United States agreed to defend the South American republic. Should an extra-continental power attack elsewhere in the Americas, Bogotá pledged to open the republic to U.S. forces as necessary to meet the threat. In order to implement the agreement, the countries reiterated their dedication to improving the Colombian military.⁶⁶

During World War II, U.S. military advisers collaborated with Colombian officials in order to achieve fundamental Colombian-American security goals. Essential agents of Colombian-American cooperation, they also coordinated activities like the 1940 bilateral military talks. In 1938 Santos asked the United States for missions to help modernize the Colombian naval and air forces, thus improving Colombian security. Most likely, Santos also sought to avoid a repetition of the July 1938 Colombian air show calamity, during which a military aircraft crashed into a crowd of spectators, killing 53 and wounding 150; President López and President-elect Santos narrowly escaped injury.⁶⁷ The disaster confirmed Colombia's needs for foreign military assistance. Additionally, the Santos administration wanted American personnel in Colombia to encourage bilateral collaboration, provided that those men did not force unwanted military equipment on Colombia.⁶⁸ The Roosevelt administration assured Santos that U.S. policy forbade American advisers from pushing arms on foreign governments. Foreign Minister López de Mesa and Secretary of State Hull signed the mission contracts in Washington on 23 November 1938. The agreements authorized American servicemen to work with the Colombian military in an advisory capacity. Unlike the British and Swiss officers stationed in Colombia before 1938, American personnel would not hold rank in the Colombian armed

forces. In fact, the Colombian-American agreement barred U.S. advisers from commanding Colombian military units. The contracts did not specify the exact number of personnel that would work in Colombia. Instead, the teams would reflect the republic's need for expertise at any given moment. Finally, the Colombian government agreed to finance the mission's work, specifically salaries, travel, offices, and transportation.⁶⁹ Overall, the mission contracts gave Colombians great control over the size, disposition, and influence of the U.S. military missions.

The first mission contracts did not assign American advisers to Colombian ground forces. Between 1938 and 1940, Colombian policymakers, led by the nation's French-educated president, wanted the French Army to train Colombian artillery, cavalry, and infantry units. President Santos considered the French Army the most powerful in the world. Colombians, therefore, would benefit from an affiliation with France.⁷⁰ In early 1940, Paris sent three officers to teach at the Colombian military college. Bogotá worked to enlarge the size of the French presence in Colombia through May 1940.⁷¹ But Germany's stunning conquest of Western Europe forced the Santos administration to rethink its approach to improving the Colombian Army. Renewing the mission agreements with the United States in 1942, Bogotá asked Washington to add ground force experts to the groups already working in Colombia, an important development considering the army's size and influence within the Colombian military establishment.⁷²

The military mission agreements promised to raise Colombian military readiness during a time of great international upheaval. Most importantly, they initiated a program of military cooperation that connected the two countries in a mutually beneficial way. Colombian journalists broadly supported the government's decision to hire American military advisers. The leading Liberal newspaper, *El Tiempo*, owned and operated by President Santos and his brother, described Colombia's need for foreign assistance. It also explained the merits of working with the United States. Geographic proximity made the United States a natural source of military assistance. Moreover, Colombia and the United States shared a commitment to military subordination to civilian authority.⁷³ Reviewing the arrangement in June 1939, another Liberal paper, *El Espectador*, concluded that beyond the practical benefit to Colombia, the U.S. teams embodied the "mutual trust" and "friendly intercourse" between the two countries.⁷⁴ Conservative writers also supported the bilateral arrangement. Laureano Gómez's *El Siglo* printed several favorable front-page articles.⁷⁵ Yet in their campaign to harass the Liberal Party, some Conservatives objected to the arrangements for political gain. *Diario de la Costa* questioned the financial wisdom of contracting with foreign military advisers.⁷⁶ The Santos administration, it charged, did not know how to manage the country's economy. American excellence, *El Siglo* editorialized, lay in the "building of excellent highways . . . elevators, and moving pictures," not in its military strength. Perhaps a German military mission would better serve Colombia's interests.⁷⁷ These expres-

sions aside, Conservative and Liberal congressmen voted together to support the administration's decision to bring U.S. advisers to Colombia.

Americans were delighted to send military advisers to Colombia. A *Washington Post* writer claimed that the missions were “effective evidence of the growth of practical inter-American solidarity.” U.S. advisers started working in many Latin American countries during World War II. Yet Americans stationed in Colombia were invaluable, as the strategically located country “has been of the first importance” to U.S. security since the Panama Canal opened.⁷⁸ The U.S. War Department expected that the U.S. servicemen would standardize inter-American military practices, improve regional security, and foster hemispheric understanding. In Bogotá, Ambassador Braden thought that new missions would become a tremendous vehicle for Colombian-American cooperation. The Colombian president, he added, likely had a compelling secondary reason to request the missions. Braden thought Santos invited U.S. advisers to Colombia as an expression of confidence in American leadership. President Roosevelt found this sentiment “extremely gratifying” but hoped the missions would “prove their efficacy upon a purely professional basis.”⁷⁹ The first U.S. advisers set out to accomplish that very goal.

The U.S. military missions, arriving in Colombia in January 1939, found the small Colombian military woefully unprepared for modern warfare. Since independence, a distinct class of professional Colombian soldiers and sailors had played only a minor role in Colombian society, residing on the periphery of a deeply embedded constitutional system. During the nineteenth century, Colombians used personal relationships and wealth to acquire military commissions, much like their counterparts in the U.S. armed forces. In Colombia, the promotion and training systems lacked formal structure. Irregular militiamen (not career servicemen) most often decided the outcome of Colombia's internal conflicts. In the early twentieth century, the Rafael Reyes administration (1904–9), enacted a series of reforms that encouraged Colombian military professionalism. The government created service academies to educate and train officers and hired some foreign officers to promote military proficiency. Still, the government invested very little in its armed forces, and systemic problems persisted. The fight with Peru in the early 1930s exposed the military's ongoing weakness. Indeed, in 1939 the Colombian Army, the largest branch of the military, numbered just eighteen thousand troops and lacked proper equipment and training. U.S. advisers found Colombian naval and air forces in even worse condition. Colombian and American military personnel addressed these problems during World War II.⁸⁰

In 1939 American naval mission chief Captain Lawrence F. Reifsnider encountered a Colombian Navy incapable of serious operations. The republic had so neglected its two British-built destroyers (the heart of the Colombian fleet) that the ships could not move under their own power. The lightly armed schooners and patrol boats were not suitable for combat. After orienting themselves to their new

environment, the American naval mission concentrated on making the Colombian force ready for battle. At the request of the Colombian naval commanders, the U.S. advisers supervised the repair of the Colombian destroyers and outfitting of coastal vessels. American officers taught classes on maintenance and logistics; they also introduced Colombian sailors to U.S. naval customs, doctrine, and tactics. But certain realities of life in Colombia frustrated the Americans. Captain Reifsnider experienced difficulties communicating with the geographically scattered elements of the Colombian Navy. After several months at the Colombian naval base in Cartagena, he therefore moved the mission headquarters to Bogotá in order to improve relations with the Colombian high command. The U.S. group also lacked a sufficient numbers to meet all the Colombian requests for assistance. Indeed, only six American servicemen worked in the naval mission during its first year. The gradual enlargement of the advisory group eliminated that problem. By the time Captain James Richard Barry assumed command of mission in August 1941, over twenty U.S. Navy personnel worked in Colombia.⁸¹

The U.S. aviation mission found Colombian pilots lacking skills and resources. Unlike the U.S. Army Air Forces, the Colombian Air Force, established by President Suárez in 1919, functioned as an independent service branch. During its first decades of operation, however, the Colombian Air Force confronted a terrible shortage of qualified flyers, mechanics, and equipment. As late as 1941 the Colombians operated only thirteen unarmed aircraft. The badly maintained Colombian airfields posed great risks to incoming and outgoing flights. For example, in November 1941 two skilled American pilots demolished their P-40s trying to land at one Colombian installation. Led by Major Wallace E. Whitson, the American advisers labored to refurbish the existing air fleet but could find neither spare parts nor qualified mechanics in Colombia. Those aircraft that did fly quickly depleted Colombia's reserve of aviation fuel, a precious wartime commodity. The U.S. advisers made several trips to the Canal Zone to acquire basic supplies. They then started teaching a variety of courses at the Colombian mechanics school (in Madrid) and flight training center (in Cali). American airport engineers helped Colombian officials enlarge and improve several key airfields. Flight school commandant Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Santos Calvo and other talented Colombian officers capitalized on the opportunity to work with U.S. advisers. As a result, the readiness of the Colombian Air Force greatly improved by 1943. Still, the American aviation mission, then commanded by Colonel Charles D. Densford, considered the Colombian Air Force incapable of modern warfare.⁸²

Compared to air and naval units, the Colombian ground forces impressed the U.S. military advisers. U.S. officers believed that the Colombian Army, while small, simply needed better equipment and training. Beginning in 1942 U.S. instructors at Colombian service schools taught classes on subjects ranging from infantry tactics to leadership to conversational English. Lieutenant Colonel Ross Barr organized

seminars on camouflage, communications, fortification, and map reading. The experienced American infantry officer also introduced Colombians to a variety of American weapons. Together, Colombian and U.S. officers organized a quartermaster school, opened a motor vehicle training center, and started armored warfare classes. Some U.S. officers even worked with the Colombian Army Construction Division, creating engineer construction companies for internal development projects. During that work, U.S. military personnel had their first contact with Lieutenant Colonel Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, the chief of the Colombian Army engineering section and future president of Colombia. In 1944 American officers advised the Colombian general staff on the formation of a draft, making all young Colombian males eligible for two years of military duty. In practice, the system was imperfect: many illiterate soldiers spent most of their time on active duty learning how to read. It nonetheless began the American military's long-term investment in Colombian Army personnel practices. During World War II the greatest problem the mission encountered revolved around finding the right men to work with the Colombians. American personnel specialists, focused on supporting overseas U.S. combat units, often dispatched underqualified officers, men with little or no experience in Latin America, to Colombia. Too many Americans, for example, did not understand Spanish, rendering them "practically useless" as advisers to a Spanish-speaking army.⁸³ Nevertheless, Colombians benefited from the advisory network. They exploited American knowledge and experience to upgrade the Colombian forces.

While the Colombian military steadily improved during World War II, Colombian and American officials realized that the South American republic could not withstand a direct Axis strike without active U.S. military assistance. In 1940 American planners considered an invasion a real possibility; the Havana Conference and bilateral security talks addressed that very issue. After the war, Washington learned that Berlin did not intend to cross the ocean, or at least had no formal plans to attack the Western Hemisphere. But, at the time, Americans feared the worst, creating detailed operational plans for protecting Latin America. The most comprehensive study involved Brazil: U.S. military officers envisioned sending a hundred thousand troops to defend Brazil, the most likely target of a Nazi first strike, as it lay merely eighteen hundred nautical miles from Vichy-controlled French West Africa. The U.S. War Department devoted less attention to the defense of Colombia. The Germans, after all, would have to fight U.S. forces in the Caribbean before landing in Colombia. Nonetheless, the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command, formed in 1941 to defend the Panama Canal and surrounding area, developed a plan to hold Colombia. Since the American command, located in the Panama Canal Zone, lacked enough troops to occupy the entire republic, U.S. planners divided the contingency plan into two parts. In response to a German invasion through the Caribbean, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps would seize northern Colombia. American forces would concentrate their combat units around Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Santa Marta. Troops

from the 550th U.S. Airborne Infantry Battalion in Panama would simultaneously occupy and defend Bogotá. If the Japanese attacked Colombia from the west, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps would secure strategic locations on Colombia's Pacific coast; again, American airborne infantry would hold the Colombian capital. Overseas military developments made a U.S. move into Colombia unnecessary. Allied forces contained the Axis threat, and the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command retired the package. The entire exercise demonstrated the extent to which the United States would go to defend the Colombia from extra-continental aggression.⁸⁴

Short of an Axis invasion, American authorities did not want to send combat forces to Colombia. During the first months of the war, however, U.S. officers did attempt to post small airport security detachments in Colombia. In January 1941 the Colombian minister of war agreed to allow U.S. airplanes to fly over Colombian territory. Later that year the Santos government opened Colombian airfields to U.S. flyers. American pilots could refuel in Colombia, even stay in the republic overnight, as long as Washington notified Bogotá before the flights arrived. In the case of an emergency, distressed American aircrews could land without warning. To protect and service these planes, the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command wanted to station military service detachments in Colombia. On 22 December 1941, after the Pearl Harbor attack, the American ambassador took the proposal to the Colombian president. In principle, Santos agreed to let U.S. servicemen work at the airports. But he asked that the men either be assigned to the military missions already in Colombia or disguise themselves as civilian airline employees. The president said outright placement would violate Colombian sovereignty and "subject his administration to criticism and embarrassment."⁸⁵

As U.S. officers considered Bogotá's counterproposal, the Santos administration dispatched Colombian Army assistant chief of staff General Pablo Emilio López to Panama. Officially the Colombian military attaché in Panama, the general, in fact, worked as a liaison between the Colombian government and the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command. Beginning in February 1942, the question of U.S. service detachments in Colombia occupied much of the general's attention. In mid-March the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command decided that airport security details "should be in the uniform of the U.S. Army in order that it may be apparent to all the Nazi agents that solidarity of the nations of the Western Hemisphere is a very real thing." U.S. Army personnel in civilian clothes also raised certain legal problems, and made it "difficult for the U.S. Army to exercise proper control over" the men.⁸⁶ American officers raised the question with General López on 24 May 1942. In that meeting, the Colombian general restated his government's objection.⁸⁷ U.S. Caribbean Defense Command representatives broached the topic with López again on 28 May. "The United States wished to act in an open and frank manner and did not wish to masquerade in a manner similar to the Nazis."⁸⁸ The Colombian general

assured the Americans that the Colombian Army had secured the airfield. If the United States wanted to pursue the matter, he said, it should use formal diplomatic channels.⁸⁹ Unwilling to change their positions, the two sides could not reach a compromise. In the interim, Colombian forces demonstrated their ability to control the airfields, largely allaying U.S. concerns. The topic completely disappeared from bilateral conversations by mid-1943.

Bogotá agreed to open its territory to U.S. forces in an emergency but continued to guard Colombian sovereignty. Elsewhere in Latin America, some governments allowed the United States to build bases in their countries during World War II. Rio de Janeiro, for example, supported the construction of massive U.S. facilities in Brazil that allowed the United States to project its military power to Africa and Europe. Other governments, including Mexico City, refused American overtures. The Colombian position on airport security details, therefore, was not unique. Nor did it preclude U.S.-Colombian cooperation on other bilateral defense projects within Colombia. In 1942 Colombian authorities improved two strategic airfields that would have accommodated U.S. forces during an emergency. Colombian and U.S. officials then developed an Aircraft Warning System to alert the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command to the activities of hostile aircraft. Bogotá granted American forces permission to penetrate Colombian territory during regional security missions such as antisubmarine patrols. Colombian and American technicians also collaborated to upgrade Colombia's internal communications network in order to improve the flow of intelligence, such as information on the location of German submarines. In 1942 Bogotá granted the United States permission to station a seaplane tender in Cartagena; the unarmed U.S. ship moved to Barranquilla in 1943. In both ports, the U.S. naval vessel required only a freshwater pipeline. President López, however, hesitated when the U.S. Navy asked to send shore patrols into Colombian port cities, acquiescing only after a Colombian woman knifed a U.S. sailor in Barranquilla.⁹⁰ Concurrently, the U.S. Navy operated a small refueling station on Providencia Island, five hundred miles north of Cartagena. The eight-man unit and seaplane tender allowed American aircraft to conduct antisubmarine operations over a larger section of the Caribbean. The U.S. Navy donated its equipment and unused supplies to Colombia when it withdrew after the war.⁹¹

Colombian military forces also played a small part in regional defense. In December 1943, after Bogotá's declaration of belligerency, the Colombian minister of war brought the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command chief Lieutenant General George H. Brett to Colombia to discuss how the republic could improve its cooperation with the United States. President-designate Echandía hoped that the meeting, and a larger Colombian role in hemispheric defense, would help citizens understand the seriousness of the war.⁹² During the December meeting and a follow-up conference in Panama, Colombian and U.S. officers reviewed the disposition and readiness of

the Colombian armed forces. Many Colombian officers, including naval representative Lieutenant Commander Antonio J. Tanco, wanted Colombia to play an active role in hemispheric defense. After the conferences, Colombia increased the size of its army and strengthened its coastal garrisons; Colombian Army officers also joined U.S. forces in the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters as combat observers. From January 1944 onward, in conjunction with U.S. forces, the Colombian Navy undertook combat patrols between Santa Marta and Bahía Honda. Additionally, Colombian ships participated in search and rescue operations with U.S. forces. At the same time, nine Colombian military airplanes monitored the Colombian coastline between Barranquilla and Turbo, flights coordinated with American air power in Panama. Together, the commitment of Colombian forces to regional defense duties constituted only a small addition to the total volume of active forces in the region. They came as the real threat to the western Caribbean waned. Still, joint Colombian-American activities between 1944 and 1945 exposed both sides to the type of operational partnership that would flourish during the Korean War.⁹³

While Colombian servicemen undertook some regional security chores during World War II, Bogotá did not send forces overseas. In the early 1940s, some U.S. diplomats believed that Latin American militaries should join the fighting alliance. Latin American detachments would serve a larger inter-American political purpose, even if they had little real battlefield impact. American military planners, on the other hand, opposed using small-country forces in active combat. In December 1942 the U.S. War Department concluded that the “complications” connected with using Latin American troops “seriously outweighed” the potential benefits.⁹⁴ The Latin American republics generally lacked military institutions capable of making an effective battlefield contribution. Therefore, U.S. officers, it was argued, should not be bothered with the combination of diverse multinational units as a mere political gesture. In this light, the U.S. War Department turned back Colombians when they approached U.S. officials about fighting abroad. In February 1944 an American intelligence officer in Bogotá reported that Colombian Army officers were “anxious” for “an active part” in the military campaign against the Axis powers.⁹⁵ In April 1944 Bogotá informally proposed that Colombian airmen join U.S. forces overseas. Considering U.S. military mission reports, American military planners assumed they would have to train and equip the entire Colombian squadron. The combat value of the unit would not justify the investment. U.S. officers politely asked their Colombian counterparts not to pursue the matter; the López administration dropped the idea in mid-1944.⁹⁶ Variants of the exchange occurred in other Latin American capitals. In most cases, U.S. officials succeeded in preventing Latin Americans from even offering military contributions. Only Brazil and Mexico sent forces abroad during World War II.

The Brazilian and Mexican governments had good reasons to join the coalition of fighting countries. Both believed that combat operations would improve their

military establishments. Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas and Mexican leader Manuel Ávila Camacho thought overseas fighting would give their respective countries a greater role in the postwar world. Domestic political forces and a desire for a greater share of U.S. military and economic assistance further motivated decision makers. The Roosevelt administration held that Brazil and Mexico, the largest and most capable U.S. allies in Latin America, could make a real military contribution. Since the active participation of the two leading Latin American republics would also serve a larger political purpose, Washington agreed to train and equip units from both countries. In July 1944 the 25,000-man *Fôrça Expedicionária Brasileira* (FEB) arrived in Italy. Integrated into the 5th U.S. Army, the Brazilian division encountered some immediate supply and morale problems. Fortunately, it managed to overcome most issues before it engaged the Germans. The FEB pursued the German Army up the Po Valley and captured Monte Castello. It later seized Castelnuovo, Montese, Marano, and Vignola. On several occasions, the Germans hammered the expeditionary force, inflicting heavy losses on the Brazilians, but overall the FEB accumulated a good combat record in Italy. Brazil suffered 3,500 combat casualties by the time the European war ended in May 1945.⁹⁷ The 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron joined the 5th U.S. Air Force in the Philippines on 1 May 1945. Operating P-47s from Clarke Field outside Manila, the Mexican flyers undertook close air support and air-ground operations over Luzon and Formosa. Seven Mexican pilots died during the war, two in combat action. Although the 5th U.S. Air Force commander maintained that the Mexican accident rate was too high, the squadron's combat performance, like that of the FEB, was fully acceptable.⁹⁸ In an inter-American military context, Brazil and Mexico made extraordinary contributions to the Allied effort. In both countries, it bred high expectations for postwar cooperation with the United States.

Colombian servicemen did not distinguish themselves by fighting abroad, but they did attend U.S. service schools during World War II. The exchanges increased Colombian military preparedness, familiarized Colombians with U.S. tactics and doctrine, forged new personal relationships, and promoted pro-American sentiment among Colombian servicemen. Colombians attended armor, artillery, and infantry courses in the United States.⁹⁹ Colombian military surgeons and lawyers studied at American institutions, including apprenticeships alongside U.S. colleagues. More than ten Colombian students matriculated with each class at the U.S. service academies. In 1939 the Colombian minister of war sent several Colombian Army quartermaster officers to the Canal Zone. They received "theoretical instruction," as well as first-hand exposure to "the actual operation of a commissary; the receiving, storage, and the warehousing of property; property accounting; cooks and baker school; company storeroom and mess; and motor transportation and shops."¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the Santos government petitioned Washington to accept Colombian pilots to U.S. Army flight schools. After a physical examination and



Colombian military pilots Lieutenant Gustavo Artunduaga, Lieutenant Bernardo Escobedo, Major Luis Pinto, and Captain Hector Materon prepare for a training flight at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas, 1942. Colombian servicemen gained access to U.S. service schools during World War II. (Source: Department of the Navy, NARA)

language test, Colombian flyers proceeded to the United States where they spent three months in a basic flight-training course, six months learning their tactical specialty, and three months at Air Corps Tactical School. By 1943, more than thirty pilots traveled to the United States for flight training each year. Still others attended the Central and South American Air School, later called the Inter-American Air Forces Academy, which opened in Panama in 1943. Colombian Navy officers completed classes in ship maintenance, supply, leadership, and antisubmarine warfare at U.S. naval schools. “Courses were fast and demanding,” remembered Second Lieutenant Álvaro Valencia Tovar, who trained at the U.S. Armor School in Kentucky.¹⁰¹ Professionally, Colombians learned more about the art of war. They also became close friends with U.S. servicemen, some of whom they would encounter again in Korea. The specialized courses, moreover, provided Colombians with the skills they needed to deploy their new U.S. military equipment.¹⁰²

In 1938 President Santos claimed to have little interest in acquiring American arms. In fact, he explicitly asked Americans to refrain from pushing U.S. weap-

ons on the Colombian armed forces. By 1940, Santos had reversed his position. Unable to purchase arms from European manufacturers, Colombia needed a new source for military supplies. In order to take full advantage of the U.S. training missions, Colombian authorities wanted American equipment. The U.S. advisers, they discovered, knew little about weapons manufactured in foreign countries. For its part, Washington wanted Latin American militaries to purchase and use American gear. In the event U.S. and Latin American forces undertook combined operations, standardized equipment simplified inter-American supply processes. In 1940 Washington decided that it would distribute equipment to Latin America in ways consistent with its hemispheric strategic priorities. The Roosevelt administration grouped the Latin American republics into four categories. Washington decided to provide Mexico and Brazil with arms to maintain domestic stability and repel a major Axis assault. After the United States satisfied Brazilian and Mexican requirements, U.S. authorities resolved to send equipment to Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Hostile forces in those countries posed a direct threat to the Panama Canal. Yet American forces could not easily defend the countries of northern South America because of their distance from the United States. The third tier included the Central American and Caribbean republics. The Roosevelt administration calculated that U.S. forces could easily protect countries within the zone of greatest American influence. Washington, therefore, sought only to provide enough military materiel for each government to maintain domestic order. The remaining republics of South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay) composed the final group. Given the finite quantity of U.S. equipment, American planners decided that these countries, a great distance from the United States, would receive arms only after the needs of the other republics had been fulfilled. The entire scheme mirrored the geography of the inter-American neighborhood.¹⁰³

The Lend-Lease program, which Roosevelt signed into law on 11 March 1941, provided the means through which to distribute U.S. equipment. The measure made defense materiel available to countries deemed essential to U.S. security. On 6 May 1941, the Roosevelt administration declared Colombia and several of its neighbors vital to the defense of the Western Hemisphere, making them eligible for assistance; Colombia's domestic political situation delayed the signing of the Lend-Lease agreement until 17 March 1942. Once initialed, the contract allocated \$16.2 million in U.S. military aid to Colombia. Bogotá agreed to pay roughly 44 percent of the total cost. Between 1942 and 1945, however, Colombia received only \$8.3 million in Lend-Lease arms, half of the available American equipment. The Colombian Congress neglected to pass the funding bill to receive the full package of U.S. assistance. Liberal-Conservative fighting also held up legislation necessary to properly deploy some of the American materiel. Despite these problems, Colombia acquired airplanes, light tanks, trucks, motorcycles, artillery, antitank guns, and rifles (M-1



U.S. Army Lend-Lease motor vehicles outside Bogotá, 1943. Colombia did not take full advantage of the Lend-Lease program. Still, it acquired modern U.S. military equipment, for the first time, during World War II. (Source: U.S. Army Signal Corps, NARA)

and M-31 carbines) during World War II.¹⁰⁴ The republic also received U.S. military uniforms. Colombian soldiers gradually replaced their prewar Prussian-style headgear with American helmets, a visual representation of the army's new orientation toward the United States. Most of the equipment, including helmets, arrived after Colombia's 1943 recognition of belligerency with the Axis, when Colombia began to play a more active role in Caribbean defense, but after the real threat to the region passed.¹⁰⁵ As the war drew to a close, Colombia also received some U.S. supplies under the Surplus War Property Disposal Act, although most of those items were nonlethal.¹⁰⁶ Compared to Britain and the Soviet Union, Colombia received a negligible amount of Lend-Lease materiel. Together, the Latin American republics received less than 3 percent of the wartime equipment distributed by the United States, with Brazil (Washington's closest ally) taking 75 percent of the region's total allocation.¹⁰⁷ Still, Lend-Lease assistance introduced Colombians to modern U.S. military equipment, which they would rely upon in the years ahead.

Regrettably, the Lend-Lease program created unintended tensions among the Latin American republics. From the beginning, some U.S. and Latin American officials feared that American military assistance would spark a hemispheric arms race. Many Colombians, for example, believed that the Peruvian government received Lend-Lease materiel disproportionate to its defense needs. Since Colombia and Peru had clashed between 1932 and 1934, leaders in both countries suspiciously watched their competitors. Bogotá expressed misgivings when Lima-bound U.S. aircraft, some laden with supplies, refueled at Colombian airfields. Other interregional rivals experienced variations of this problem. Indeed, on 15 February 1943 the

U.S. military attaché to Colombia noted strong “evidence of distrust and jealousies between Latin American nationals, particularly on the subject of Lend Lease.”¹⁰⁸ As for Colombia and Peru, U.S. officials allowed Lima less military aid than Bogotá. The public record, which included Lend-Lease allotments, did not allay Colombian concerns. To convince Colombians that the United States did not favor Peru, U.S. Caribbean Defense Command representative Colonel Serafin M. Montesinos took a copy of the U.S. Lend-Lease ledger to Bogotá in mid-1944. It demonstrated that the United States intended to send more equipment to Colombia than Peru.¹⁰⁹ Yet in the end, because Colombia did not accept everything the United States offered, the American military delivered slightly more materiel to Peru.

As with the declaration of belligerency in 1943, Colombian internal affairs inevitably influenced bilateral military cooperation. Colombia’s domestic political situation prevented the country from taking full advantage of the Lend-Lease program. As for the frequent leadership turnovers, a U.S. military mission chief complained in August 1943 that regular cabinet shakeups spawned confusion over Colombian-American objectives.¹¹⁰ In fact, four different men headed the Colombian Ministry of War in one twelve-month period. Political controversies distracted Colombian ministers from their regular duties, creating obstacles to the efficient administration of the bilateral relationship. Indeed, in October 1943 American ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane, who had replaced Braden in April 1942, reported that Colombian internal “bickering” disrupted the smooth functioning of the alliance.¹¹¹ It also forced officials to abort some potentially useful ventures. In December 1943, for example, U.S. and Colombian officials agreed to hold a bilateral military exercise in the Caribbean, one that would have included air, land, and sea forces.¹¹² But in July 1944, after months of preparation, Colombian planners asked U.S. officers to postpone the maneuver. Bogotá intended to wait until its internal political situation calmed. The two countries did not reschedule the exercise.¹¹³ In these ways, domestic affairs influenced Colombian-American military relations. Throughout, political discord raised U.S. concerns about Colombian internal security.

Internal Security

Colombian and U.S. officials worked together to promote Colombian domestic stability during World War II. Conventional defense matters, rather than internal security, dominated the Colombian-American affiliation between 1939 and 1945. The two governments were nevertheless determined to protect Colombia from internal enemies. Prior to the war, American interest in Latin American internal security centered on protecting U.S. citizens, businesses, and friendly governments. During World War II the focus of internal security efforts shifted. Inter-American agents

undertook hemispheric counterespionage operations to control Axis saboteurs, smugglers, and sympathizers. Evidence of Axis subversion in Colombia (and elsewhere) excited Americans. The *New York Times* expressed American fears when it reported in August 1940 “that a well-knit, secret Nazi military organization, disciplined and ready for action” thrived in Colombia. That such an organization “could exist in such a bulwark of democracy as Colombia under normal circumstance would appear ridiculous,” the writer continued, but the situation during the early 1940s was anything but “normal.”¹¹⁴ Generally, Bogotá found the problems less troubling than Washington. “All of Colombia is a potential airfield” that might threaten the United States, President Santos laughed when Roosevelt publicly posited that the Germans had built secret landings in Colombia.¹¹⁵ Regardless, both the Santos and López administrations cooperated with American authorities. After the war, U.S. investigators learned that Tokyo and Berlin did not have a coordinated espionage program in Colombia. Adolph Hitler, for instance, showed very little interest in Latin America. During World War II, however, inter-American officials uncovered sufficient evidence to conclude that the threat was real and immediate.

Wartime counterespionage cooperation involved a vast array of activities, all designed to strengthen the Colombian government’s control over the country. Bilateral collaboration protected Colombian institutions and installations against Axis saboteurs. Counterespionage agents seized Nazi propaganda and fortified Colombia’s coastal garrisons to “retard the action of enemy aliens and sympathizers.”¹¹⁶ Officials forced German pilots out of Colombia; they attacked a widespread platinum smuggling network. Authorities even dismantled a clandestine radio operation known to have tracked the movements of Colombian warships.¹¹⁷ This state-building exercise in Colombia involved elected officials, diplomats, military officers, and law enforcement agents. At the highest levels, the U.S. and Colombian presidents, their cabinets, and diplomatic representatives defined the terms and conditions governing counterespionage operations. The Colombian Army, National Police, department authorities, and municipal police all worked to combat internal subversion, albeit with varying degrees of proficiency. The U.S. military attachés, Office of Naval Intelligence, and Military Intelligence Division gathered information on clandestine activities. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, in Colombia at the request of the Colombian government, also played their part, especially Quanten H. Plunkett, who served as an adviser to Colombia’s National Police director.¹¹⁸ American embassy and consulate employees both collected and communicated intelligence to the appropriate Colombian authorities. The enormous task of correlating and analyzing information gathered by American agents fell to William Braden, the ambassador’s son, as well as the wives of several U.S. officials who were all (at one time or another) reported to have spent ten or more hours per day at the task.¹¹⁹

Several realities of life in Colombia frustrated U.S. and Colombian officials. First, Colombian detectives maintained an ineffective domestic intelligence net-

work. Indeed, the United States provided an estimated 85 percent of the information in Colombian counterespionage files. The deficiency directly led Colombia to request FBI assistance, which the U.S. government promptly provided.¹²⁰ Second, the National Police and local authorities were often at odds with one other. In other cases, Colombians did not trust the national government or its agents; the killing by National Police of dozens of sports fans following a bullfight riot along the Caribbean coast illustrated this distrust. The incident led local citizens to demand (in vain) the withdrawal of the “interior police” from the region. In such an atmosphere, many Colombians refused to cooperate with federal investigators. Corruption simultaneously impaired the proper functioning of many Colombian operations. American embassy consul Nelson R. Park noted that, even after a successful 1940 raid that netted thirty-four illegal firearms, it was “practically impossible to rely on the cooperation of local government because of their ignorance and their being easily corruptible.”¹²¹ In another case, Nazi agents in Barranquilla had been informed of a National Police raid before the agents conducting the operation even left Bogotá.¹²²

The experiences of Washington’s most active “Nazi-hunter,” Medellín vice consul Vernon Lee Fluharty, embodied the ground-level problems and possibilities of cooperation. Fluharty worked in the Department of Antioquia, the state with the most pro-Nazi activity. The department shared a border with the Chocó mining region (the origins of platinum smuggling) and included a peninsula on the Gulf of Urabá, adjacent to Panama. Fluharty, equipped with a sidearm for his own protection, entered a dangerous underworld of smoky roadhouses and Nazi intrigue. Medellín detective force commander Guillermo Upegui, a pro-German official who repeatedly informed suspects before government raids, frustrated Fluharty’s early efforts.¹²³ Later, in November 1941 the Santos administration forced Upegui to resign. The new Colombian commander, Mauricio Arango, forged an efficient alliance with Fluharty. In fact, after Arango came to office, Medellín consulate officials met with city detectives on a daily basis to coordinate and plan intelligence activities. The Fluharty-Arango team seized Axis literature, confiscated arms, shut down clandestine radio networks, and trailed foreign nationals.¹²⁴ Ambassador Braden repeatedly praised Fluharty’s “intelligent and valuable work”; as with other ventures, the counselor’s counterespionage success depended on the cooperation of Colombian officials.¹²⁵

A major wartime concern involved a potential air strike on the Panama Canal launched from Colombian territory. The larger Colombian-American wartime alliance made a Colombian military offensive against the passageway unthinkable. Instead, authorities feared that Axis sympathizers might launch a surprise attack, perhaps simply by mounting munitions on a commercial airplane. Although such an attack “might seem incredible,” an American journalist concluded, “so too did the notion that Germany would overrun” Western Europe.¹²⁶ In this context, the

United States and Colombia soon focused their attention on the Colombian-German Society for Air Transportation (SCADTA), a Colombian airline founded (with German capital) in 1919 by Austrian Peter von Bauer. During the 1920s SCADTA turned a handsome profit and soon controlled a majority of Colombia's air traffic. In 1931 Pan American Airways purchased a controlling interest in SCADTA to prevent the Colombian carrier from competing with its international routes. Pan American president Juan Terry Trippe, however, kept his stake in SCADTA quiet, and by the late 1930s few U.S. officials, and even fewer Colombians, knew that the U.S. firm held a controlling interest in the Colombian airline.¹²⁷ As the war grew closer, the U.S. government became increasingly uncomfortable with SCADTA because it employed German aviators, several of whom maintained ties to the German Air Force. As U.S. anxieties became known in Colombia, President Santos calmly dismissed their "exaggerated fears."¹²⁸ Washington, however, took the threat very seriously. Delighted when it "rediscovered" that Pan American owned SCADTA, the Roosevelt administration tried to pressure the company to remove SCADTA's German employees. Much to the chagrin of administration officials, Trippe refused to cooperate, believing the idea bad business, and Pan American Airways maintained the services of the German flyers.¹²⁹

Bad for business or not, the Roosevelt administration wanted the Germans out of Colombia. On 4 September 1939, three days after the outbreak of the European war, Ambassador Braden told Santos that Pan American effectively owned SCADTA, news that changed the president's position. By cooperating with the United States against SCADTA, Santos realized he could return the airline to Colombian control. In September 1939 Santos ordered that Colombian copilots fly on all international flights and pressured SCADTA administrators to fire a few German flyers. Soon thereafter, two suspicious German pilots took one-way vacations to Japan. On 31 December 1939 the Santos administration ordered Colombian Army guards to be stationed at all airports and Colombian copilots on all domestic flights.¹³⁰ Later that year, the Santos administration, encouraged by Washington, started planning its takeover of SCADTA by invoking 1938 legislation that required 51 percent Colombian ownership of all Colombian airlines. Ironically, the law had been designed to defend SCADTA and Von Bauer, then a Colombian citizen. Even so, in 1940 Santos oversaw the merger of SCADTA and the Colombian Air Service, a smaller Colombian airline, into a national carrier called Avianca. Avianca fired its remaining eighty-four German employees after France fell in June 1940. The outcome pleased Bogotá and Washington. Colombia put the airline under its control; the United States rid the country of German aviators. Only Pan American lost in the deal.¹³¹

With the exception of Pan American Airways, American businesses in Colombia thoroughly cooperated with the United States in security matters. When the

Conservative daily *El Siglo* ran a series of pro-German articles, the State Department convinced American advertisers to threaten the editors. If the newspaper continued its pro-German expressions, U.S. firms would take their business elsewhere. At the same time, the Santos administration warned *El Siglo* to moderate its editorial practices. The Colombian government threatened to withhold publishing supplies if the paper failed to comply. *El Siglo*, thereafter, supported the Allied cause. The Sherwin-Williams Paint Company, based in Cleveland, Ohio, agreed to fire its pro-Nazi representative in Colombia. Managers at the International Business Machines (IBM) headquarters in Colombia disposed of two openly Nazi employees, Frederick Frank Sendel and Klaus Jacoby. The company fired Sendel, who returned to Europe, and transferred Jacoby to the United States, where the FBI placed him under surveillance. In other instances, Washington used a proclaimed list of dangerous individuals and firms to blacklist Axis nationals or pro-Axis businesses. Inclusion on the blacklist had the effect of cutting off scarce wartime resources and driving away commercial associates for fear of U.S. retribution.¹³²

With U.S. assistance, the Colombian government also tracked foreign nationals. In July 1940 the Santos administration compiled a comprehensive census of foreigners residing in Colombia. Bogotá established guidelines for the entry and movement of foreigners the following year.¹³³ Because of strict Colombian immigration laws, only five thousand Germans, and fewer Japanese, lived in Colombia. Immediately following Pearl Harbor, Bogotá broke relations with the Axis and expelled all German, Italian, and Japanese diplomats, including German minister to Colombia, Wolfgang Dittler, who had coordinated Nazi activities in Colombia.¹³⁴ The Santos administration action disrupted the Nazi network in Colombia. Because Colombian laws proved impotent against pro-Nazi Colombian and Latin American nationals, a weakened network survived.¹³⁵ As World War II developed, the United States pressed Colombian authorities to follow the model of other Latin American nations and deport more foreign nationals. Peru, for example, sent thousands of foreigners to the United States, where U.S. officials confined most for the duration of the war. Bogotá, in contrast, took relatively few steps to rid the republic of “dangerous” individuals.¹³⁶ Colombian officials became somewhat more responsive after their November 1943 declaration of belligerency. The country’s new status, Bogotá feared, would excite saboteurs and sympathizers. The Colombian government therefore extradited some Axis nationals to the United States. The Roosevelt administration thought Colombia should have been more aggressive.

In addition, the two governments undertook an extensive survey of Colombian territory to improve internal security and state control. A joint U.S.-Colombian aerial photography program (which consisted of a U.S. cameraman aboard a Colombian-piloted plane) provided information on suspected espionage facilities and areas critical to hemispheric defense. The Colombian-American mapping

project also helped the Colombian government accurately chart its national territory for the first time. In 1939 U.S. Department of State geographer Wilson Popehoe and Colombian military officers Captain Hernando Herrera and Lieutenant Eduardo Falon undertook an ambitious survey of Colombia's Pacific coast.¹³⁷ French Intelligence Service reports of a Nazi steamer landing arms and personnel on Colombia's Pacific coast inspired the mission to "obtain information regarding the foreigners living in the area" and "investigate the report that airplane motors and fuselage had been landed by German ships."¹³⁸ Aboard the Colombian gunboat *ARC Carabobo*, the team steamed from Buenaventura to the Panamanian border. En route, the men made an extensive account of the coast, concluding the allegations unfounded. The group determined that the suspicious movements likely "arose from smuggling activities," another persistent wartime concern in both Bogotá and Washington.¹³⁹

Colombian and U.S. authorities confronted the illicit platinum trade during World War II. Manufacturers used the precious metal—an essential ingredient in modern warfare—to make airplane, tank, and high-speed naval patrol boat ignition contacts. Germany resorted to platinum smuggling to keep its war machine moving. Colombia constituted one of the world's major suppliers of the metal. The Chocó, a dense jungle region in the northeast corner of Colombia, had been the source of illegal platinum since the colonial era. The precious metal found its way onto the black market through one of two channels. Small producers, who panned on isolated rivers, sold the metal to illegal agents at prices above market value. Also, corrupt officials at larger mining companies, such as the Chocó Pacific Company, covertly diverted platinum to contrabandists for a compelling profit. Once platinum appeared on the black market, commodity smugglers took it to Germany via one of several elaborate routes. The most common path to Berlin went from the Chocó, through Ecuador or Peru, down the Pacific coast to Chile, and then to Buenos Aires. From Argentina, German agents smuggled platinum to Europe aboard "neutral" Spanish ships. Traffickers transported platinum from Spain overland to Germany. For the Allies, combating the traffic proved difficult because even a small amount of the metal, such as the amount that might be concealed in one's pocket, had tremendous military value.¹⁴⁰

In October 1943 the U.S. government estimated that 40 percent of Colombia's monthly production of platinum reached Germany, although the figure was likely inflated.¹⁴¹ Theodore C. Barth, a German-born former Banco Aleman Antioqueño representative in Colombia, orchestrated platinum smuggling in South America. An intelligent, crafty, and violent man, Barth, along with his underlings, managed to acquire platinum until the end of the war, despite significant Colombian government efforts to apprehend him. Farid Cajale, a close associate of Barth's, who used no fewer than six aliases and traveled on a French passport, also escaped prosecution. The two men often used "mules," typically female companions, to move the

metal out of Colombia. Two other prominent smugglers, Carlos Valero and Miquez A. Correa, were not so fortunate: the former was arrested in Argentina and the latter in Medellín.¹⁴² Colombian-American cooperation against the smugglers expanded after 1942 as the magnitude of the problem became apparent to officials.¹⁴³ Since the opening of the conflict, Bogotá permitted only the Banco de la República and its agents to purchase platinum. In September 1943 the Colombian government restricted the number of bank purchasing agents and declared any platinum not in the possession of those agents contraband. The next month, the López administration placed all exits from the Chocó under surveillance and significantly increased National Police presence in the area. Then, in 1944 the Colombian Army began to patrol the region, especially important roads and waterways. One U.S. serviceman in Bogotá praised Colombian military involvement because Colombian Army personnel were “less crooked” than civilian officials.¹⁴⁴

Washington contemplated preventive purchasing on the Colombian and Argentine black markets but decided that such a move would only encourage smuggling. In December 1943 the U.S. Caribbean Defense Command chief asked Colombians to do more to combat smuggling. Lieutenant General Brett hinted that Colombia's acquisition of Lend-Lease aid depended on the republic's “attitude” against smuggling. He then accelerated the delivery of military equipment to inspire Colombian action.¹⁴⁵ By late 1944 Colombia and the United States had reduced, but not eliminated, platinum smuggling. The Allied military campaign in Western Europe cut overland routes to Germany; Colombian and American authorities exerted greater control over the source of illicit platinum. Overall, the transnational assault on smuggling, and other internal security operations, encouraged Colombian stability, even if the real domestic threat never really matched prevailing concerns. The entire undertaking formed the basis for U.S. involvement in Colombian internal security and state-building affairs during the cold war.¹⁴⁶

Economic and Political Disorder

Beyond conventional and internal security, the Colombian-American wartime alliance required economic collaboration. World War II disrupted the global economy, created new demands for Latin American exports, and limited the availability of capital goods. U.S. and Latin American officials believed this economic disorder threatened the stability of the Americas. Concentrated economic cooperation therefore satisfied basic economic requirements and furthered inter-American defense objectives. The collapse of overseas markets forced the Latin American republics to find new commercial outlets, principally in the United States. Less dependent on European trade than most Latin American countries, Colombia sent roughly 25 percent of its exports to Europe during the mid-1930s.

By 1940 Colombia's trans-Atlantic exports dropped to 10 percent of the national total. At the same time, the American demand for raw materials exploded as U.S. factories produced military equipment for U.S. and Allied forces. In order to meet wartime production schedules, the United States needed to harvest the world's resources. This unusual economic situation affected different countries in different ways; the war's economic impact often varied among sectors within a given country. In Colombia the volume of total exports actually grew by nearly 7 percent between 1940 and 1945. Yet shipping shortages and scarce secondary goods meant that the capital countries such as Colombia accumulated had few useful outlets. Between 1941 and 1942 the total value of Colombian imports dropped by 50 percent. Colombia's foreign exchange reserves increased 540 percent during the war. This situation, common in Latin America, produced rampant inflation. Bogotá adopted currency and price controls, described by one U.S. economist as "the most complete and balanced" in Latin America; Colombia even divested itself of some money through aggressive debt payments.¹⁴⁷ The wartime economic turbulence nonetheless persisted.¹⁴⁸

The Colombian and U.S. governments addressed these problems through a variety of measures that lessened wartime hardships and created conditions theoretically conducive for postwar modernization. Indirectly, economic cooperation fostered Colombian security by promoting internal communication, strengthening the central government, expediting the movement of Colombian forces throughout the country, and easing U.S. and Colombian access to strategic materials. It also addressed conditions that might encourage social unrest and internal discord. At the beginning of the war, Colombia first needed to restore its international credit in order to receive U.S. economic assistance. The country had defaulted on its foreign debt, held by private investors, in 1933. In 1940 the U.S. Department of Commerce brokered an agreement between Bogotá and the Foreign Bondholder's Protective Council, which represented lenders, thereby making Colombia eligible for American assistance.¹⁴⁹ Soon thereafter, the Roosevelt administration sent a \$10 million Export-Import Bank loan to Bogotá for public works and currency stabilization programs.¹⁵⁰ In 1941 Colombia took \$12 million to develop transportation networks, and in 1943 the Export-Import Bank sent another \$15 million to Colombia for agricultural projects.¹⁵¹ Colombia accepted \$3.4 million to construct a hydroelectric plant in 1945. In conjunction with these credits, Washington dispatched a cadre of U.S. economic advisers to Colombia. Recognizing Colombia's great need for "more and better transportation," U.S. Bureau of Public Roads engineers collaborated with Colombian highway managers to upgrade and expand Colombia's road network.¹⁵² Other American advisers helped Colombians dredge waterways and build (or improve) railroads. The scarcity of construction equipment slowed work at many sites, but did not negate the usefulness of these Colombian-American development projects. At the same time, Americans cooperated with Colombian

officials on medical and sanitation programs. Bogotá and Washington expanded the country's telephone network; Colombian farmers collaborated with U.S. agricultural experts to plan and implement irrigation and warehousing programs. Private Americans also invested in Colombia during World War II. In general, the conflict limited business opportunities in Europe and Asia. Latin America offered capitalists attractive, relatively safe, options. With strong democratic values, fair business laws, good courts, abundant natural resources, and an "energetic and aggressive" population, *Wall Street Journal* analysts considered Colombia an excellent investment.¹⁵³ By mid-1945 the U.S. private sector had funneled just over \$223 million into the South American republic.¹⁵⁴

Concurrent with these activities, Colombia sent raw materials to the United States. In order to guarantee U.S. access to essential commodities, Washington signed contracts for strategic materials with many Latin American republics. Bolivia shipped huge quantities of tin to the United States, while Mexico and Venezuela accelerated their deliveries of crude oil. American industries relied on Colombian platinum, accounting for the great interest of U.S. authorities in platinum smuggling. In February 1942 the Santos government signed an agreement with the U.S. Metal Reserve Company, which stockpiled strategic materials, to sell to the U.S. government all its platinum, minus that needed by Colombia or purchased by U.S. banks.¹⁵⁵ Bogotá also worked with the U.S. Rubber Reserve Company. In June 1942 the Santos administration agreed to ship to the United States all Colombian rubber, again minus the sum required for domestic consumption.¹⁵⁶ Wartime demand led to a modest increase in Colombian oil production, although the shortage of drilling equipment, geographic inaccessibility of Colombia's best reserves, and legal barriers limited Colombian oil industry gains.¹⁵⁷

World War II affected various sectors of the Colombian economy in different ways. Despite dramatic fluctuations between 1939 and 1940, Colombian coffee fared well during the war.¹⁵⁸ The country's principal product accounted for approximately 54 percent of all Colombian exports. A labor-intensive crop that employed thousands of Colombians, coffee was socially and economically vital to country's well-being. With the coming of the European war, the value of Colombian coffee exports fell from 88 million pesos in 1938 to 74 million pesos in 1940. That year, Bogotá signed the Third Pan American Coffee Congress Accord, an international pact that stabilized coffee prices and established U.S. import quotas.¹⁵⁹ As the war progressed and the U.S. defense establishment percolators brewed around the clock, demand for Colombian coffee skyrocketed. By 1942 the total value of Colombian coffee exports hit nearly 145 million pesos; prices remained high through the end of the war.¹⁶⁰ Colombian ranchers also profited from the global conflict, shipping substantial quantities of beef to American forces in the Canal Zone. Colombia's textile industry, on the other hand, disappeared almost overnight. The Pacific war cut off Colombian mercantilists from their East Asian

silk suppliers. With no way to acquire a sufficient stock of raw materials, many factories folded. International affairs, domestic politics, and nature also conspired to devastate the Colombian banana industry. Sigatoka, a banana plant disease, infested Colombia's banana growing region in the late 1930s. The United Fruit Company, the major producer of Colombian bananas, had the tools and expertise to combat sigatoka. But the costly 1928 labor strike, memories of hostile Colombian politicians, and shipping shortages discouraged further American investment. At the same time, overseas military developments hurt Colombian banana producers. Before the war, the United Fruit Company sold the entire Colombian harvest to European purchasers. After 1939 the demand for bananas in that market evaporated. American investors therefore divested themselves of their Colombian holdings between 1939 and 1944, resulting in the collapse of the entire industry in Colombia, with devastating effects on some local economies.

During World War II, Colombia and the other Latin American republics aspired to become industrialized countries, to shed their status as producers of raw materials. Between 1939 and 1945 Latin American governments accumulated unprecedented amounts of foreign capital. Yet the scarcity of heavy equipment, building supplies, and industrial machinery left Latin Americans with few ways to discharge the funds. To acquire even a modest volume of secondary goods, President Santos established a Colombian commercial office in Washington. At home, the new Superintendent of Imports helped distribute scarce materials.¹⁶¹ Some new Colombian industries emerged, and Latin Americans started trading finished products among themselves at a respectable level. Yet since the republics could not buy the equipment necessary to industrialize, they could not achieve their long-term economic objectives. Rightly, the situation frustrated Latin Americans. They had the financial resources to launch major industrial efforts but lacked essential capital goods. Recognizing the region's long-term economic goals, the Roosevelt administration asked Latin Americans to be patient, to wait until after the war. The American promise set the scene for a major conflict in U.S.–Latin American relations after 1945.

While the Latin American republics shared an expectation of postwar modernization, Colombia alone inched toward the major internal crisis known as *la Violencia*. In February 1944, after several months in New York City with his ailing wife, Alfonso López returned to Colombia, optimistic that his political fortunes would improve.¹⁶² López resumed his duties as Colombia's chief executive and set out to administer the republic. The Conservative Party immediately intensified its campaign against the president. One *El Siglo* writer pledged to “hold the [López] regime, which has directed robbery, assassination and embezzlement . . . up to the disgrace of history.”¹⁶³ Conservative officials committed themselves to fight what they believed to be Liberal Party tyranny, corruption, and immorality.¹⁶⁴ That same month, Alberto Lleras, then minister of justice, charged Laureano Gómez with

slander. When Gómez refused to testify in court, Lleras imprisoned the Conservative Party leader.¹⁶⁵ In response to Gómez's imprisonment, riots broke out in several Colombian cities, the most destructive of which occurred in Bogotá and Cali. The disturbances continued until López ordered the police to release Gómez. Soon thereafter, Colombian Army reservist José Rojas and a local priest led a revolt in Purificación.¹⁶⁶ The Colombian armed forces subdued the rebellion; they also defeated a Conservative uprising in Jericó in April 1944.¹⁶⁷ López threatened to resign but remained in office. The president's closest advisers concluded that the country's political crisis was "the most critical the country had ever faced." While that diagnosis was overstated, Colombia indeed found itself in a difficult situation.¹⁶⁸

President López pinned the country's problems on industrialists, Conservatives, and Catholic Church officials. He even suggested, with doubtful sincerity, that a vast Nazi conspiracy worked to foment domestic instability.¹⁶⁹ But a gang of disgruntled Colombian Army officers came closest to toppling the president. President López went to Pasto, near the Ecuadorian border, to observe the Colombian Army's annual field exercise on 9 July 1944.¹⁷⁰ Around 5:00 A.M. the following morning, a group of junior army officers, led by Lieutenant Colonel Diógenes Gil Mojica, pulled the president from his hotel bed and placed him under arrest. They then carried López to a hacienda outside town.¹⁷¹ With strong Conservative feeling, the officers believed López and Colombian liberalism culturally and socially dangerous. They also loathed the president's preference for the National Police over the army. In any case, back in the capital, president-designate Echandía took control of the government and declared a state of siege. Meanwhile, in Pasto loyal Colombian Army officer Colonel Gonzalo Fajardo disguised himself as a conspirator and (with forged documents) convinced the hacienda guards to release López. Free again, the president returned to Pasto and confronted Lieutenant Colonel Gil. The renegade officer immediately surrendered to the Colombian commander-in-chief. The capable efforts of key cabinet officials helped foil the coup, compartmentalizing the crisis, as did the overall loyalty of the Colombian armed forces. The failed revolt nevertheless convinced many Colombians that the country was moving toward a crisis of immense proportions.¹⁷²

López resumed his presidential duties on 12 July 1944. The investigation that followed the events in Pasto indicted forty Colombian Army officers in the stillborn coup. The relationship between the Conservative Party, especially Laureano Gómez, and the conspiracy remained unclear. Liberal officials believed that Gómez had collaborated with the officers. After the Pasto affair Gómez sought political asylum in the Brazilian embassy. In late July the Conservative Party chief fled to Quito, Ecuador, where he remained until December.¹⁷³ Liberals never effectively connected Gómez to the coup, nor did Conservatives offer a convincing defense of their leader. On 31 July, Congress granted López special authority to reorganize the Colombian Army and purge undemocratic elements.¹⁷⁴ The move gave the

president more control over the Colombian military, but did not save López from an early resignation. Alfonso López handed the Colombian presidency over to Alberto Lleras in 1945.¹⁷⁵ A relative calm then fell across the country as Liberals and Conservatives geared up for the critical 1946 presidential election, a contest that would unleash *la Violencia* on Colombia with important domestic and international consequences.

. . .

Colombia and the United States partnered to defend the Western Hemisphere during World War II. Elected officials brought the republics together after decades of mistrust; diplomats collaborated at inter-American meetings; military servicemen came together to plan, study, and train; authorities managed internal security and economic problems. Colombian military forces might have fought overseas, but U.S. policymakers discouraged small-nation contributions to the fighting coalition. Constantly interacting with events in Europe and Asia, the Colombian-American wartime partnership embodied inter-American cooperation. Ideologically, shared democratic values made the Colombia and the United States logical allies in the war against totalitarianism. As for material interests, the United States secured a strategically vital region, obtained emergency access to important facilities, improved an ally's military capabilities, and gathered important raw materials. Colombia relied on the U.S. forces to defeat the Axis powers. It also received U.S. military and economic assistance. Colombia's domestic situation affected most aspects of the wartime partnership, including its declaration of belligerency, Lend-Lease assistance, and counterespionage operations. By extension, Colombians exercised tremendous control over bilateral relations. Indeed, important provisions, such as the military mission contracts, empowered Colombians. On the edge of the zone of greatest U.S. influence, Colombia and the United States established important diplomatic, military, and economic links during World War II. Those interlocking ties formed the basis of broader bilateral cooperation during the 1950s, but only after the two countries passed through the tumultuous postwar era.