

Embassy Row

Sweet sixteen

Marilyn Sephcole started organizing an annual forum for female ambassadors at Howard University in 1996, after learning that 10 women headed foreign missions here.

When she wrote her book last year, there were a dozen. Now, 16 women serve as their country's top diplomat in Washington.

"The book had a big impact," said Ms. Sephcole with a laugh yesterday. "I would like to think that."

Her book, "Then There Were Twelve: The Women of Washington's Embassy Row," gave a voice to many of the female ambassadors who otherwise would have remained overshadowed by the men who still dominate a diplomatic corps of 173.

Ms. Sephcole, a professor of business and diplomacy at Howard, said the female ambassadors got here on their own merits.

"Their presence in Washington today is a measure of how far women have come and of the degree to which education has opened doors for women," she wrote.

"The women ambassadors in Washington generally have one solid common denominator — a strong educational background. Not the coattail of a husband or a father, not incredible wealth, but rather education, talent and strength of character.

"Their very presence crushes age-old myths about the limitations and frailties of women."

Ironically, the women profiled in her book come mostly from African and Latin American nations, ones not historically known for promoting women's rights.

"Africa is by far the continent that trusted women the most in handling bilateral relations with the United States," she wrote.

Ms. Sephcole became aware of the lack of female representation in foreign affairs when she was an interpreter at the United Nations in the 1980s.

"Whenever I walked into the chamber of the General Assembly, the largest body of diplomats in the world, I was always struck by the sea of male suits dominating the scene," she wrote.

"The world," she observed, was "operating at less than half its brain capacity."

"How ironic it is to exclude women from a field that requires the very qualities that even the most chauvinist of men recognize in women," she added. "Aptitude for dialogue, a sense of civility, non-aggressive attitudes, the ability to compromise and a reluctance to use force are all qualities necessary in diplomacy.

"These women are currently reshaping diplomacy," she said, "giving it their touch, adding to it a dynamic combination of grace, intelligence and a certain intuition coupled with a strength of character."

The female ambassadors today represent Angola, Belize, Bolivia, Congo, Cyprus, Ecuador, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Pakistan, Paraguay, Singapore

By Steve Salisbury
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

BOGOTA, Colombia — U.S. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell is set to make his first official visit today and tomorrow to Colombia, where he will find this country of about 40 million people embroiled in a guerrilla war now financed by illegal drugs.

The 37-year-old conflict, which has killed up to 40,000 people over the past decade, threatens to destabilize its Latin American neighbors and raises serious national security issues for the United States.

The turmoil has already claimed several American lives in Colombia and flooded the United States with tons of cocaine and heroin and tens of thousands of Colombian illegal immigrants fleeing violence and economic crisis.

Among the dilemmas confronting the Bush administration and Congress are:

- A major anti-drug campaign in which a small percentage of drugs is intercepted and new exports routes spring up as quickly as old ones are shut down.

- A growing involvement in the drug trade by Marxist guerrilla movements seeking to overthrow the existing order.

- Large paramilitary groups united under the banner of the outlawed United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) fighting the rebels with past encouragement and support from the armed forces.

Bush backs Plan Colombia

In a visit here late last month, Marc Grossman, U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs, confirmed the Bush administration's support for Plan Colombia — the anti-guerrilla program of Colombian President Andres Pastrana that was also endorsed by the Clinton administration. It aims to fight drug trafficking and to strengthen democracy by a combination of social, economic, law-enforcement, military and crop-substitution measures.

Of the \$7.5 billion budgeted for Plan Colombia — nearly half of it funded by the Bogota government — about 27 percent is allocated to the military and police, according to Mr. Pastrana's office.

Last year, Washington earmarked \$1.3 billion, largely for military helicopters, technical intelligence, and training of special anti-narcotics brigades. President Bush has proposed to broaden this aid by almost \$400 million as part of an \$880 million Andean Regional Initiative.

The anti-drug campaign has produced a stream of arrests, seizures and extraditions. However, it is often one step forward, two steps back, complain some law enforcement officials.

"It is like trying to push an elephant uphill," said Carlos Perdomo, former information chief of the Colombian national police.

Colombian police figures show that in 1995, 62,770 acres believed to be planted in coca was sprayed with herbicide by the Virginia-based DynCorp., a State Depart-

BRIEFING/ THE AMERICAS

U.S. facing Colombian dilemma

Anti-drug efforts thwarted by savvy smugglers, rebel violence



Manuel Marulanda leads the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which the U.S. State Department among the most dangerous terrorist groups.

tion funds but continue to grow drug crops. Said Jairo Martinez, a small coca farmer in southern Cauqueta province: "The problem of legal crops like corn and plantains is that it is not profitable to take them to market because there are no roads, and they weigh a lot. It is easy to carry a kilo of coca base [later refined into cocaine], and coca produces up to six harvests a year."

Coca cultivation pays

Mr. Martinez said a kilo of coca base fetches about \$900, of which he nets a few hundred dollars after expenses. Coca pickers sometimes earn double Colombia's monthly minimum wage of \$129.

While roads, bridges, and industrial palm and rubber farms envisioned in Plan Colombia take years to develop, Mr. Medina said coca farmers should be encouraged "to return to regions where the mainstream economy is."

"Coffee and clothing manufacturing are among the few labor-intensive industries that can quickly absorb the unskilled labor now employed in drugs," said businessman Miguel Posada.

Ironically, U.S. and European trade policies have contributed to a collapse in the price of coffee, Colombia's second largest legal industry after petroleum, and clothing exports have to compete against U.S. trade preferences for Central America.

"The U.S. can really help by giving us trade preferences," said Mr. Posada. Rand Beers, assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law enforcement, cites Bolivia, once a leading coca producer, as a success story for Colombia to emulate.

"When Bolivia combined enforce-



Rightist, outlawed United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia paramilitaries stand ready to fight their Marxist guerrilla enemies.

helicopter fleet is expected to reach about 170 — up from 76 in 1998.

Meanwhile, illegal revenues helped the FARC grow from fewer

