



Fighting Monsters in the Abyss: The Second Administration of Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, 2006-2010

Harvey F. Kline

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Fighting Monsters in the Abyss offers a deeply insightful analysis of the efforts by the second administration of Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2006–2010) to resolve a decades-long Marxist insurgency in one of Latin America’s most important nations. Continuing work from his prior books about earlier Colombian presidents and yet written as a stand-alone study, Colombia expert Harvey F. Kline illuminates the surprising successes and setbacks in Uribe’s response to this existential threat.

In *State Building and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, 1986–1994*, Kline documented and explained the limited successes of Presidents Virgilio Barco and César Gaviria in putting down the revolutionaries while also confronting challenges from drug dealers and paramilitary groups. The following president Andrés Pastrana then boldly changed course and attempted resolution through negotiations, an effort whose failure Kline examines in *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*. In his third book, *Showing Teeth to the Dragons*, Kline shows how in his first term President Álvaro Uribe Vélez more successfully quelled the insurrection through a combination of negotiated demobilization of paramilitary groups and using US backing to mount more effective military campaigns.

Kline opens *Fighting Monsters in the Abyss* with a recap of Colombia’s complex political history, the development of Marxist rebels and paramilitary groups and their respective relationships to the narcotics trade, and the attempts of successive Colombian presidents to resolve the crisis. Kline next examines the ability of the Colombian government to reimpose rule in rebel-controlled territories as well as the challenges of administering justice. He recounts the difficulties in the enforcement of the landmark Law of Justice and Peace as well as two significant government scandals, that of the “false positives” (“falsos positivos”) in which innocent civilians were killed by the military to inflate the body counts of dead insurgents and a second scandal related to illegal wiretapping.

In tracing Uribe’s choices, strategies, successes, and failures, Kline also uses the example of Colombia to explore a dimension quite unique in the literature about state building: what happens when some members of a government resort to breaking rules or betraying their societies’ values in well-intentioned efforts to build a stronger state?

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