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MODERN WARFARE FROM THE COLOMBIAN PERSPECTIVE

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by

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Modern Warfare from the Colombian Perspective

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Thesis: The characteristics of the Colombian armed conflict correspond to those of the current theories of modern warfare.

Discussion: The character of war has had a great change after the Second World War, and even more after the end of the Cold War. The former symmetry between two big armies fighting against each other is no longer the primary issue in the theater of operations. A proliferation of non-state actors has emerged as a main threat to the nation-state. In modern warfare, the conventional armies are engaging unconventional enemies, in irregular or non conventional wars.

In this post-Cold War era there has been a considerable military activity in the world and plenty of debate over how to do it. One of the most interesting aspects of the debate is over the type of warfare that the state forces are waging. The case looks at various aspects that are relevant for the study of warfare in the present time. The thesis observes the similarity between the Colombian armed conflict and the war in other parts of the world in the current era.

Conclusion: The Colombian armed conflict is a depiction of the modern warfare that the world is facing in nowadays.

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## PREFACE

I am interested in warfare. I am also interested in the Colombian armed conflict. This paper is an attempt to analyze the latter from the theoretical perspective of modern warfare.

The world's big events change the behavior of humankind. The Cold War episode affected the dynamics of several countries. Due to informational new era, warfare evolves homogenously in different parts of the world. Several enemies of democratic states share common interests, in come cases they utilize similar strategies both political and military. It is important that we (democratic states and US allies) analyze different conflicts around the world so we can give a better fight against the enemies of democracy.

The theories of modern warfare brought by contemporary academics bring interesting points about the dynamics of the conflicts all over the world. This paper is an attempt to evaluate whether or not the Colombian conflict corresponds with these theories.

## ***MODERN WARFARE FROM THE COLOMBIAN PERSPECTIVE***

### **Introduction**

Colombia has been waging an internal armed conflict for more than fifty years that had developed enormously during that time. The conflict had been manifested in different forms, at the beginning there was political violence, then insurgency, guerrillas, militias, paramilitaries groups, drug smugglers, and now it had turned into pure narcoterrorism.

The master of military studies provides the proper academic environment to analyze the military strategy and in this specific case the link between the modern warfare and the Colombian armed conflict. This paper brings some thoughts about the prevalence of the new global phenomenon of modern warfare in the midst of the conflict waged in Colombia and provides more elements in order to better understand it and its future consequences.

Following the educational material at Command and Staff College in military subjects, to understand the armed conflict in Colombia, it is appropriate to analyze the present situation of the Colombian armed conflict from the military point of view. For the United States and the Colombian military forces, as well as other military forces in the world that face the challenge of this modern type of war it is imperative to understand the characteristics of the actual warfare and capitalize the methods and apparatus employed by the enemy.

The purpose of this paper is to explain how the Colombian armed conflict has been developing, how the actual situation stays alive and hence contribute to a better understanding of the war that has been striking Colombia for more than 50 years. Some of the theories of modern warfare will be analyzed as well as the

applicability of various concepts exposed among these theories in the Colombian armed conflict.

The issues that compose the conflict are present in the rural areas as well as the cities; massacres, kidnapping, extortion, drug smuggling and the “miracle fishing” (a variety of kidnapping employed by the terrorist groups consisting in randomly stopping cars in any selected route and take as hostages wealthy people for a potential good negotiation, political or economical) are part of the climate of terror, violence and death among the country set by the terrorists groups in the recent years.

The insurgency in Colombia emerged in the 1940s as a response to the political oppression of the time. Peasants, forgotten by the government, got together forming guerrillas groups giving voice to popular sectors unprotected by the government. The initial purpose was only to send a message to the government in order to be heard and get solutions to their problems but it turned other way.

Violent acts, massacres, bombing with different types of explosive devices, indiscriminate killing, the use of land mines, kidnaps, drugs production, and trafficking are, among others, the tools employed by the terrorist groups to wage the war in Colombia. These tools are similar to those employed by the terrorist groups in other parts of the world; some authors had called this trend the terrorism globalization.

The terrorism, an occurrence which does not have an official definition by the United Nations (UN), is one of the tactics of modern warfare described by some theorists as **Asymmetric Warfare**, **New Wars** or, **Fourth Generation Warfare**.



These theories of modern warfare will be discussed in section three as well as their relevance to the Colombian conflict.

## **Section 1**

### **Background**

#### **1. Origin of the Conflict**

Colombia is under the strongest terrorism threat in history. There are two elements combined together with this hazard: guerrillas and narcotraffic. The current government had employed several strategies in order to stop or control the conflict; nonetheless in the present time, the menace is still alive, however, under the leadership of the actual president, Alvaro Uribe, some progress has been made.

Through the time the various government administrations have all addressed the problem from different perspectives. Some had put more energy into the military fight while others had tried to handle the issue in a different way, even accepting some of the conditions and requirements imposed by the terrorist groups in order to start the dialogues. It seemed like the former is the one that had gave better results so far.

Colombia is a beautiful country with nice-looking landscape such as the *Chicamocha Riverine Canyon* in Santander, the highlands of Cundinamarca and Boyaca, the *Tayrona Park* in Santa Marta and the vast valleys of the eastern region. One can enjoy the stunning geographic features and the large diversity of flora and fauna present all over the country, especially in the Amazonic area. Colombia has two big oceans that form very nice beaches in the Caribbean and

Atlantic coasts, these beaches are well known as a heaven for thousands of tourists from the entire world.

Not only rich in natural resources like oil, coal, steel, rubber and many others, in most part of the country Colombia posses a very fertile land where almost everything sowed by the peasants grows. Paradoxically this described paradise has always been under some type of violence or war since the colonization period; the independence war in 1819, the one thousand days of civil war in 1899, the war against Peru, and for over fifty years, the current armed conflict, which began as political violence and had turned into a combination of terrorism and narcotics smuggling in what has been called narcotraffic, with its main actor the FARC (Acronym for *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or Revolutionaries Armed Forces of Colombia) terrorist group.

To better understand the Colombian armed conflict, and the development of the illegal armed groups, it is necessary to go back in the 1920s when the first peasants' organizations started to gather and share the unrest upon the government.

The colonial period left the Colombian territory divided in two main sectors, the Andean region, and "other parts" of the country. The first one is the center of the country or *heartland*, in which the main cities where funded by the Spaniards due to its geographical features. The political leadership and the high social classes reside in the center of the country. The other parts of the country compile all the regions outside the Andean region forming the rural areas. Following the independence, the hope of finding new destinies and better opportunities for jobs

and wealth started a migration of thousands of people from the center to the other parts of the country, a colonization of these rural areas lasted until the 1940s.

As the political power was focused mainly in the central part of the country this new colonization brought some disorder for the settlers and the peasants of the rural sector. The state did not control this colonization and thus there was an imminent absence of the state in these regions. This nonappearance of the state resulted in expense of the peasants. There were no strong commerce laws, no guarantees existed for the peasants that worked the land, not appropriate roads to take off the products, and the land was not divided equally.

There was grievance among the citizens that did not find solutions to their basic problems. The government was not paying enough attention to the other parts of the country. In the absence of effective government presence a political vacuum creates dissatisfaction among the people and opportunity for counter-government forces. This phenomenon certainly happened in this country. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the lack of government in the country side resulted in both criminal violence and vigilantism.

But these organized groups of peasants remained calm in the 20s and 30s, they were only sending a voice to the government about their concerns and grievance, the government did poor in order to solve those matters. The state leadership failed to properly integrate the four elements of national power, informational, economical, political, and military.

All these aspects in addition of the trigger factor in 1948 of the assassination of the political leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, very popular among the peasants and the populace formed the beginning of the armed conflict, which from the late 40s

several governments had tried to stop or control but until nowadays no one had found the appropriate solution to the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The terrorist organizations

Several different illegal groups had appeared in the theater over the years of conflict, FARC remains as the main terrorist organization in the present days and the worst enemy of the state. Bellow, this group will be portrayed as well as two other groups still significant in the conflict.

### *FARC-EP*

The FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Ejercito del Pueblo) *Revolutionaries Armed Forces of Colombia, Army of the People* (is the name they use), has approximately 8000 militants, composed of men, women and children. One can say that FARC started as a fusion between the Communist Political Party (PC), founded in 1930, and the guerrillas of the 50s. The FARC has developed in different stages; the peasants movements of the 20s, the self defense groups of the *Violence* period (1946 to 1965), the introduction of guerrillas organizations in the 1950s, the leftist political input of the PC in the 80s, and its present stage narcoterrorism.

### ELN

The name of the terrorist group ELN corresponds to the acronym for *Ejercito de Liberacion Popular* (Liberation Army of the People). This group started as a guerrilla revolutionary group instead of a self defense group. In 1964, under the inspiration of the Cuban theories an activist group from the PC sowed the seed of guerrillas in the rural area of Santander.

The organization tried to get influence in the cities of the east part of the country and did not succeed due to the military's losses. In the second half of the 70s ELN made an attempt to gain strength by establishing in the areas located along the bonanza of the oil and bananas; in the states of North Santander and Uraba. Today the group is addressed by the government mainly by dialogues; ELN is willing to give an end to its military facet.

AUI

The AUI stands for *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (Self Defense Groups United for Colombia). Also called paramilitaries, the organization has its origin in 1965 as a strategy of the Cold War against insurgencies. In the 80s a different type of paramilitary started as an extension of private armies of the illegal industries of narcotics and emeralds. By the end of the 80s the government authorized the creation of self defense groups for private sectors as a local response to the guerrillas.

In the 90s the AUI started to perform illegal activities as well as terrorist acts against the population and they turned pursued by the government authorities. This group is now demobilized and managed by the government throughout dialogues.

## **Section 2**

### **The Evolution of the Conflict to the Present Situation**

The origin of the Colombian armed conflict has internal and external causes. The internal roots are found in the grievance of the peasants in the 1940s that gave birth to the insurgency. The still active terrorist groups, however, started as

guerrillas groups, during the period called the National Front, a political agreement between the two political parties. The purpose of the National Front was to swap the power for sixteen years between the conservators and the liberals. This political system evidently excluded political parties other than conservators and liberals. Taking in consideration this exclusion, one could say that there was a justification for the existence of certain political grievance. The national Front ended in 1974 but formally concluded with the new constitution of 1991.

From the external perspective, guerrillas groups began in Colombia during the Cold War period, as a consequence of the socialist influence of the Soviet Union. Another external phenomenon with strong internal consequences is the drug smuggling. This phenomenon consolidated in Colombia in the 1970s.

Both internal and external factors shaped the conflict. The former grievances that gave beginning to the guerrillas disappeared. The only political goal of the active terrorist groups is to conquest the political power while they take care of the narcotics enterprise.

The insurgencies before 1980 were small and not very relevant to the national security. At this point in history the guerrillas were not able to gain popular support. They started to fund their activities through illegal actions such as drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion.

Among all the insurgencies the FARC developed as the bigger and more capable terrorist group. They developed a strategy to take the political power based on Mao Tse Tung theories. Due to the drug industry, FARC's strength developed greatly in the 90s. In the second half of the 90s the group transitioned from guerrilla war to mobile war; the Colombian military forces remained in a

counter-guerrilla posture. This gave some advantage to the terrorists. The military forces received several defeats in combat actions performed by the enemy primarily against isolated units. The mobile war consists in operating in large units performing conventional type attacks against small and isolated military units but without the intention to defend terrain.

From 1998 to 2002, Andres Pastrana assumed the presidency after he based his campaign recognizing that the conflict was political and promising to set a table for peace negotiations with FARC. He attempted similar discussions with ELN to end the violence. As a FARC's condition, he even ceded a demilitarized zone (DMZ) to FARC in which the negotiations would take place free of conflict.

The intention of the FARC, nevertheless, was not to make any kind of negotiation. On the contrary the group used the DMZ for other very different purposes such as training combatants, exchanging drugs for weapons, building unconventional weapons and gaining time to reinforce their military structure. During this period of negotiations, FARC launched five major offensives out of the DMZ, some even employing homemade but formidable armor. Also FARC executed several kidnappings all over the country.

After three years of failing negotiations, Pastrana ended the DMZ and focused on the military effort. Pastrana made some significant international effort to obtain important aid of the United States in military support. The military's goal during the Pastrana's administration was to regain the strategic initiative. It did so by attacking enemy strategy, operations, and tactics.

In 2002 the Colombian people, tired of the conflict, elected Alvaro Uribe, a strong character person determine to defeat FARC at any cost. He launched his

administration under the strategic plan called democratic security, based on the intention of guarantee the individual rights of the Colombian people centering the effort in the military forces. An additional funding was injected to the military budget. New and specialized units were created. There was a considerable increase in manpower for the military forces, and the Congress approved laws that gave more warranties to the soldiers.

The objective of Uribe's administration (2002 to present) is to assure military control of all the territory. The military incorporated the employment of Joint Task Forces all around the country. This gave a better effectiveness to the operations. The consequence of the military boost during Uribe's office is that FARC no longer operates in large units; several leaders had been killed and captured. FARC's north front is pretty much defeated. Some FARC units had begun to surrender. The tactics employed by FARC are limited to isolated terrorist acts, kidnappings and guerrillas actions, focusing in minefields and the use of improvised explosive devices.

The present situation is very complicated. The military forces maintain the strategic initiative, controlling the majority of the territory. The terrorists hide in the dense jungle along the borders of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Peru only crossing the border they can find safe havens. FARC holds more than six hundred hostages among soldiers, policemen, politicians, and civilians including three Americans. Several of them have been in captivity for more than six years.

From the political stand point, the terrorist organization is focusing its strategy in the captives to press the government for a humanitarian exchange of



hostages for terrorists that remain in prison. FARC imposed as a condition of the hostage's release a second DMZ. President Uribe remains in a strong posture.

While President Uribe is resolved to never grant a DMZ, FARC tries to influence the national and international community to achieve its goal. In fact there are international governments willing to intervene in favor of the humanitarian exchange. The influence of the conflict is spread all over the world, especially in Latin America and mainly manned by leftist governments such as Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia under the pressure and leadership of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

In January 2008, after Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez approached to the terrorist group, FARC released two civilians. Chavez intervened again in February and four more civilians were sent free. He declares that he has the back up of seven more countries to support the humanitarian release, and only the Colombian government remains reluctant to this purpose. Chavez addresses the international community to stop call FARC a terrorist organization, instead he says is a belligerent group.

The president of France, Nicolas Zarcosi, is also concern with the issue of the hostages, especially because among the captives remains a Colombian politician, Ingrid Betancourt which has a French citizenship. He stresses that the humanitarian exchange must be carried out, and that he will put his effort on it.

The other two groups ELN and AUC have been addressed mainly trough negotiations. The majority of the AUC warriors have been demobilized, while the leaders turned into justice waiting a reincorporation into society following the approval of a government's law called *perdon y olvido* (forgiveness and oblivion).<sup>2</sup>

### Section 3

#### The Modern Warfare and the Colombian Armed Conflict

Strategists call modern warfare by different names; *asymmetric war*, *fourth generation warfare*, or *new wars*. This paper refers to these three definitions and presents an analysis from the Colombian conflict perspective.

The character of war has had a great change after the Second World War, and even more after the end of the Cold War, the former symmetry between two big armies fighting against each other is no longer the primary issue in the theater of operations. The outcome of the Cold War left the world with the United States as the only conventional and economic superpower with the inevitable resentment that this causes. A proliferation of non-state actors has emerged as a main threat to the nation-state. In modern warfare, the conventional armies are engaging unconventional enemies, in irregular or non conventional wars.

*Asymmetrical warfare* is often used to describe a situation where an adversary can take advantage of its strengths or an opponent's weaknesses. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff have defined asymmetrical warfare as attempts to circumvent or undermine an opponent's strengths while exploiting his weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the opponent's usual mode of operations.<sup>3</sup>

In his book *asymmetrical warfare*, Roger W. Barnett lists some characteristics comprised in asymmetrical warfare. Innocent people are a selected target of the enemy. The enemy performs deliberate wide-scale attack on civilians. Adversaries choose combination of terrorism, hostage taking, biological, chemical and radiological warfare. As operational techniques, they prefer indiscriminate targeting; human wave or suicide attacks, emplacing anti-aircraft batteries on

religious shrines, schools, or hospitals, using human shields. Other tactics employed in their form of information include perfidy, false representation, or certain attacks against national infrastructure or computer networks, or marching soldiers through minefields in order to clear the mines and deliberate environmental destruction.

The theory of *new wars* is brought by Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss emphasizing that the term “new” does not necessarily indicate that an actual armed conflict has begun only recently but rather than the normal dynamics have changed.<sup>4</sup> The authors compare “old wars” or conventional wars, with “new wars,” in six aspects; locus, agents, economics, targets and victims, technologies and media coverage of humanitarian issues in war. The new wars are waged in areas of fragmented political authority and the state border is meaningless; the role of nonstate actors is greater. In regards to economies, the illegal activities, aid and plunder are crucial. The targets and victims are not only combatants but civilians. Also new technologies emerge and make a revolution in military affairs. The media coverage also is a big influence for the new wars. In today’s wars the information flows instantly and affects the public opinion in a big manner.

The fourth generation warfare, expressed by William Sturgiss Lind in the article he co-authored for the *Marine Corps Gazette* in 1989, “*The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation*” marks the most radical change since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.<sup>5</sup> William Sturgiss Lind developed a frame of four generations of modern warfare taking as a point of departure for modern war the treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

The first generation of war goes from 1648 until 1860. In the first generation of war the importance was the order on the battlefield, columns and lines were the primary focus in tactics. The emerging technology in military matters of the nineteenth century brought the end of first generation warfare; the order in the battlefield became ineffective.

The second generation of war was developed by the French in War World One; the development of better weaponry and especially, machine-guns, brought the importance of the mass firepower artillery to the battlefield. The culture of order of the first generation, in terms of procedures, was preserved and the obedience was more important than initiative.

The third generation of war is also called maneuver warfare, and focuses on speed of movement, the initiative in the battlefield and the center of gravity and critical vulnerabilities, not only the mass firepower to destroy the enemy.

With this framework of the generations of war, comes into sight the fourth generation which stresses that the state loses its monopoly on war, hence in conflicts everywhere in the world, state forces are fighting nonstate armed groups. The border between politics and war, combatants and civilians, peace and conflict, battlefield or safe zones do not exist or are very confused.

"The fundamental percept is that superior political will, when properly employed, can defeat greater economic and military power. Because it is organized to ensure political rather than military success, this type of warfare is difficult to defeat."<sup>6</sup>The main objective in fourth generation warfare is not the opponent's military forces, it is the opponent's determination to give the battle; the focus is to diminish the political will.

So in order to achieve its political strategies, the armed groups employ different tactics such as terrorism, guerrillas' tactics, confusion, secrecy, information operations or any type of action that can shrink the legitimacy of the state.

In the Colombian armed conflict almost all these aspects of modern warfare are present. The FARC terrorist group employs the use of terrorism as its primary tactic. The FARC has been trying to undermine the political will of the Colombian state utilizing different means; they try to influence the public opinion and create confusion among the international community.

The conflict in Colombia as expressed in the introduction is in nowadays merely a narcotraffic business, a business the FARC does not want to give away. In Colombia exists a wide political diversity, the means to reach the power via democracy are open to any type of political party no matter its inclination; as a matter of fact Colombia has had many different leftist political parties, several politicians from communist parties had reached important seats in the political arena. Former illegal armed groups had signed up the peace with the government, M-19 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*)<sup>7</sup>, signed the peace agreement with the state in 1990, only nine months later some of its former leaders became important politicians.

So it is not a matter of political will from the side of the government, it is simply that the FARC wants to keep going with the conflict and the main reason is because it represents a lucrative business. The Colombian territory in the jungle and fields, described in section one as "other parts", is so vast and in some way isolated, that represents a sort of freedom of action for the FARC. They can carry

out its crimes, extortion, hide hostages, take care of the drugs and weapons smuggling, like the new wars theory stresses as illegal activities in one of its highlighted features, economics.

The conflict represents mainly a business to the FARC, even though; they seem to show a political facet in order to create deception among the public opinion. One of the political ideas professed by the FARC is the Marxist-Leninist theories, the socioeconomic change through organized revolutionary actions.

Nowadays, nobody can stop it, the struggle of social classes in Colombia, against the oligarchy sustained politically and military by the US government has been tied with identical struggles of those oppressed people from Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, etc. against a unified plan (political and military) to take over the Andean-Amazonic region; the people of the Great Homeland had answered also coordinating and unifying the struggles against their own transnational oligarchies and throwing away the odd and evil santanderean nationalism of "little homeland", because at the end they had understood that the cause of the working Colombian people, to reach the peace with social justice, is their own cause.<sup>8</sup>

According to the theories analyzed in this section, all the characteristics of the Colombian armed conflict fit in the modern warfare. A state military fighting against nonstate forces. Its main actor, the FARC terrorist group executes just about every tactic employed by other nonstate armed groups in other parts of the world. The FARC maintains a Maoist concept of guerrilla warfare; "When guerrillas engage a stronger enemy, they withdraw when he advances; harass him when he stops; strikes him when he is weary; pursue him when he withdraws."<sup>9</sup>

In Colombia innocent people frequently die just because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time, due improvised explosive devices set up by the enemy indistinctly, the FARC retains under captivity more than 600 hostages as merchandise for a possible exchange, either economically or politically.

As one can see, these three theories of modern warfare, and the Colombian armed conflict coincide in several aspects relevant for the case of study. In the current era, state militaries are fighting nonstate forces, the use of terrorism as a tactic, the focus on political will, the employment of guerrilla's tactics in the battlefield, the blurry borderlines between combatants and civilians, and the importance of information operations.

The consequence of waging war the way the enemy of modern warfare wages it, executing different strategies and tactics described in this section is that innocent civilians end up being the crucial victims, targets, and raw material of the enemy. Hence the primary focus of any state engaged in modern warfare must be the population, improvement of humanitarian conditions, and reinforcement of state's legitimacy rather than the employment of military power itself.

#### **Section 4**

##### **How to Fight the Enemy of the Twenty First Century**

Given the challenges of the modern war presented above, the implementation of new doctrines as a way of performing operations among the armies waging the enemy enhances the capabilities of the military forces' tactics in maneuver warfare. The enemy in modern warfare enhances his strength from the people; whether they use them for recruiting, influencing the public opinion, or utilizing them as their primary target.

The threats for combat forces in the current era have changed. The enemy is no longer a big army fighting regular warfare. The enemy employs unconventional tactics to oppose a large military superiority, including guerrillas

tactics and terrorism. In order to succeed in this type of environment it is imperative for the forces involved in modern warfare to incorporate permanently new methods of waging war. The applicability of likely operations to defeat today's enemy will be analyzed as well as some considerations for success will be presented.

## 1. Distributed Operations

The enemy's ability to disperse in small units employing guerilla tactics against conventional forces compels the regular armies to seek changes in doctrine. One of the alternatives to counter this opponents' advantage is to incorporate the use of distributed operations.

*"Distributed Operations* describes an operating approach that will create an advantage over an adversary through the deliberate use of separation and coordinated, interdependent, tactical actions enabled by increased access to functional support, as well by enhanced combat capabilities at the small-unit level."<sup>10</sup>

In order to maintain the initiative over the enemy, the forces must be adapted and shaped accordingly to the mission; in this specific case to be successful in this type of task. Performing distributed operations brings a great deal of complexity to command and control in the theater of operations. It is required to improve the communication's system with adequate technological aspects for this purpose.

The responsibility for small unit leaders is larger and thus, the education and training for the young Marines or Soldiers requires more attention, the main actor on the ground is the platoon commander or even the squad commander. A high-



quality education with a special emphasis in moral aspects is decisive for future leaders to better interact with the local people on the theater of operations is a key factor for success in distributed operations.

Distributed operations are not part of the regular doctrine applied by most conventional forces; it is crucial to build a consolidated guidance principle while adopting a solid doctrine and disseminate it among the schools and training units.

## 2. Special Operations

“Special Operations Forces are small units that work alone or in combination with one another in both direct and indirect military operations, often using tactics of unconventional warfare.”<sup>11</sup> The use of unconventional tactics is essential in modern warfare. The enemy employs different types of unconventional tactics and the only way to gain advantage against him is to do the same. A conventional army can not focus only in conventional tactics.

The particular responsibilities performed by Special Forces such as surveillance of targets, reconnaissance of objectives and battlefield intelligence are decisive in the war against guerrillas.

Special Forces' personnel must be selected from the best qualified soldiers. Special Operations are people, traditionally known as big soldiers with muscles, capable of performing risky missions. In modern warfare, minds are more important than muscles. The ability to interact with the population and obtain intelligence from the local people is crucial in order to gain tactical and strategic advantage.

### 3. Air and Space Operations

To defeat the enemy air and space operations bring important capabilities to the battlefield.

Space Operations perform many functions which can aid countering insurrections. AFDD 2-2 notes the most relevant ones as command and control (C2), intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), navigation and timing; weather services, and support of counterair, counterland, countersea and special operations.<sup>12</sup>

For a superpower country like United States the use of air and space operations in a full scale (the ultimate aircrafts, satellites, special sensors, etc.) gives a potent strength in the battlefield, especially in the urban terrain. The enemy could be tracked, the lines of communications employed could be controlled, the source of supplies can be interfered and so forth.

For countries like Colombia, with limited economic and military resources, the employment of air and space operations is incomplete but still helpful. In the Colombian geographical context where the main battles are fought, the use of helicopters as a mean of movement of troops decreases the ability of the enemy to achieve ambushes. The helicopters are also vital in the combat zone to provide support to the ground troops, carrying supplies, or providing close air support.

The commander on the theater of operations at the high level needs to be responsible of the implementation of the specific operation or combination of some of the operations described above, according to the particular circumstances of the area of operations. "Commanders will decide when and where to use distribution and aggregation based on the tactical situation, the terrain, and the nature of the enemy they are facing".<sup>13</sup> In countries like Colombia, the enemy tactics and terrain dictates the use of distributed operations. In the northern part of Colombia, which is

mainly open mountain, the enemy fights in small groups employing basic guerrilla's tactics; the use of small forces which can strike and disperse, the support of local village, changing in civilian clothes to hide fighting forces give the enemy some advantages that can only be defied by performing developing this type of operations. On the contrary in the south part of the country with the prevalence of the jungle as a terrain feature, the enemy's *modus operandi* is different; the use of large units of more than five hundred combatants, employing conventional tactics, is common. Hence, in a case like this, it is impossible to execute distributed operations with small units, because the enemy could easily exploit these vulnerabilities and take advantage of the number proportion.

In order to enhance warfighting capabilities, the military forces facing today's enemy, need to take in consideration some important aspects while performing operations; flexibility to adjust to the specific tactical requirements for each precise environment in order to achieve a blunt success of these operations, appropriate training and education for small unit leaders and adequate technological assets to enhance the command and control capabilities. It is essential to make a good analysis determining what types of operation perform in a given area of operations.

The most important aspect for any military force involved in modern warfare fighting today's enemy is to bare in mind that the main factor of success remains in the population, therefore the performance in the battlefield must be focused in the people. Protecting the populace and gaining the confidence of the locals are vital facts of any military campaign.

The legitimacy of the institutions requires to be supported by their adequate behavior. The communities need to be convinced that the forces of the state are

the ones fighting to protect the lives and rights of the innocent people. While executing every operation, national officials must consider that any single action shapes the influence of the people. Along with the legitimacy of the institutions, the media plays a relevant role, therefore information operations, with special emphasis in civil and military operations and civil affairs need to be solid to assure a proper public opinion.

## **Conclusion**

After more than fifty years of violence, the Colombian armed conflict has evolved in very different manners. The malformation of several factors like peasants' grievance, political violence, insurgencies, guerrillas, narcotics smuggling and terrorism configured the actual state of affairs. FARC remains as the main narcoterrorist organization.

The characteristics of the armed conflict in Colombia embody complex aspects of the modern warfare theories Fourth Generation Warfare, Asymmetric Warfare and New Wars. A non-state enemy, FARC, represents the main threat for the state and for the Colombian national security. The Colombian enemy is fighting the state forces employing the same recourses of enemies in other current wars like Iraq and Afghanistan; terrorism, hostage taking, deliberate wide attack on civilians and targeting non-combatants.

While engaging modern warfare's enemy, Special Forces operations, air and space operations and distributed operations are effective type of operations that contribute to a military defeat of the enemy. The political leadership of the states needs to understand however that the best response to counter the enemy

in modern warfare goes far beyond from a sole military action. The economical, informational and political elements of national power comprise an equivalent importance as the military power.

It is very likely that the success of modern conflicts can be defined among the population, therefore, fighting today's enemy state leaders and military forces must maintain the legitimacy of the institutions and endeavor campaigns that fully integrate the four elements of national power.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Colombian political leader, assassinated in April 1948.
- <sup>2</sup> Perdon y Olvido is the name of the law.
- <sup>3</sup> Roger W. Barnett. Asymmetrical Warfare, Washington D.C. 2003, 15.
- <sup>4</sup> Peter J. Hoffman, Thomas G. Weiss. Sword and Slave, Laham, MD, 2006, 57.
- <sup>5</sup> William S. Lind. The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation, Marine Corps Gazette, 1989, 24.
- <sup>6</sup> Thomas X. Hammes. Insurgency: Modern Warfare Involved into a Fourth Generation, 1.
- <sup>7</sup> M-19 Movimiento revolucionario 19 de abril. Former insurgency group.
- <sup>8</sup> Alberto Pinzón Sánchez. En Causa Propia. <http://www.anncol.nu>
- <sup>9</sup> Mao Tse Tung. On Guerrilla Warfare, Baltimore, Md, 1992, 46.
- <sup>10</sup> M.W. Hagee General USMC Commandant of the Marine Corps. A concept for Distributed Operations. 25 April 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> Fred J. Pushies. Special Operations, St. Paul, 2003, 11
- <sup>12</sup> James A. Oldenburg Fighting The War Above Iraq Employing Space Operations To Defeat An Insurgency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala, 2003, 7.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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