

THE COLOMBIAN AWAKENING:  
PRESIDENT ALVARO URIBE'S INTEGRATED ACTION APPROACH TO  
COUNTERINSURGENCY

BY

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES  
FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES  
AIR UNIVERSITY  
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

JUNE 2010

## APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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## DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my advisors:

Dr. Hal Winton and Dr. James Kiras:

Doc Winton thank you for your guidance, wisdom, and most all, your tremendous patience.

Dr. Kiras thank you for your contributions and insight. I learned a great deal from each of you. Thank you.

To my beautiful and loving wife: I love you and thank you for enduring this whole ordeal with me. As usual, I could not have done it without your unwavering support.

To my kiddos: I love you all!

## ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effectiveness of Colombia's Integrated Action approach to counterinsurgency against the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia Ejercito del Pueblo (FARC-EP), primarily from the Colombian perspective. It specifically seeks to answer the following question: "How effectively did the government of Colombia integrate the various elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—to attain its political objectives of establishing a stable government that provided both internal and external security?" The American-supported initiative known as Plan Colombia was conceived in 1998-1999 to stabilize Colombia's internal and external security situations with a combined anti-drug and counterinsurgency strategy.

Prior to 11 September 2001, American involvement in Colombia was largely limited to counter-drug and emergency humanitarian operations. Afterwards, American military involvement and funding expanded to include operations against guerilla organizations within Colombia. Soon after taking office in 2002, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe developed the Democratic Security and Defense Policy to reinstate the rule of law in Colombia and protect its population. This study used evaluation criteria derived from classic counterinsurgency theories, current doctrine, and guiding principles of stability operations to determine Colombia's effectiveness.

This study concludes that Uribe's integrated national security strategies brought about vast improvements from 2002-2008, particularly in the areas of security and economic growth. These improvements demonstrated signs of true progress toward a stable society capable of achieving a lasting peace. Colombia's transition to a more efficient civil-justice system, the consolidation of the state's authority throughout the country, and the social reform programs all have shown signs of success, but are vulnerable as well. Continued long-term efforts are required to combat the root cause of Colombia's instability: the guerrillas, the illegal drug trade, and paramilitary groups. This study concluded that while these threats have diminished significantly from 2002-2008, the potential to reverse these results is still a reality.

From 2002 to 2008, Colombia made impressive strides in severely degrading an insurgency against the leftist guerrillas, disrupting the illegal drug trade within its borders, and demobilizing paramilitary and insurgent groups. Virtually nothing is heard today, however, about Colombia's successes in counterinsurgency, counter-drug, and stability operations. The Colombian approach to their "forgotten war" and the progress made in recent years can provide relevant lessons for other counterinsurgency operations.

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## Introduction

*Colombians! My last wish is for the happiness of the fatherland. If my death contributes to the end of partisanship and the consolidation of the Union, I shall [be] lowered in peace into my grave.*

*--Simon Bolivar*

The South American country of Colombia, like the legendary phoenix, is rising slowly from the ashes of a bloodstained history marred with insurgencies, political instability, and economic turmoil. The United States has had a long and well-established relationship with Colombia, most recently evident in Plan Colombia's counter-drug and counterinsurgency operations. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan drastically changed U.S. foreign policies and reignited an interest in counterinsurgency warfare theory and doctrine. Yet virtually nothing is heard today about the "forgotten insurgency" and the recent successes experienced in Colombian counterinsurgency operations—all accomplished without a large American military presence. This thesis examines the extent to which the Colombian approach of integrating various elements of national power to combat this "forgotten insurgency" can provide lessons will be applicable to other counterinsurgency operations.

Colombia arose from the ashes of the politically unstable and short-lived South American republic known as La Gran Colombia (The Great Colombia), led by Simon Bolivar. Simon Bolivar was a Venezuelan general and national hero who led the military forces that liberated much of South America from Spanish rule during the early nineteenth century. The dissolution of La Gran Colombia in 1830 led to the creation of three new countries: Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. Simon Bolivar, known as El Liberador (The Liberator), served as the president of La Gran Colombia from 1821 until its dissolution in 1830. In the years following the separation, the new Republic of Colombia, much like its predecessor, became overwhelmed with political volatility between the rival Conservative and Liberal political parties as each vied for power over the next century. Colombia's violent past served as a harbinger of Colombia's equally

violent present, which has been defined by constant class warfare struggles, insurgent anti-government aggression, and internal political conflicts.

The twentieth century began with a civil war between the Conservative and Liberal political parties. The Conservative Party, composed of large landowners who favored a strong central government, finally gained power in 1880. Prior to 1880, the opposing Liberal Party, composed of the smaller coffee plantation owners who favored a decentralized government, had dominated the political landscape for over thirty years.<sup>1</sup> Economic instability, high inflation, and a disillusioned population led to the Liberal Party's attempt to remove the ruling Conservatives from power by force. This political struggle produced an armed conflict known as the Thousand Day War from 1899-1902. The Liberal Party utilized unconventional warfare and irregular guerilla tactics against the conventional forces of the Conservative Party, reminiscent of the tactics that insurgents use in Colombia today.<sup>2</sup> The Thousand Day War left the country in ruins with 100,000 killed. In 1903, the weakened Colombian government was unable to suppress an American-sponsored separatist movement that led to the separation of Panama from Colombia and eventually the construction of the Panama Canal.<sup>3</sup>

Colombia's legacy of frequent violence, economic turmoil, and internal political tensions ultimately led to another civil war known as La Violencia (The Violence). This conflict began with the 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, leader of the Liberal Party and a presidential candidate. Gaitan's assassination exacerbated Colombia's already deteriorating political situation and sparked one of the bloodiest civil wars in the history of the New World, which claimed the lives of approximately 300,000 people.<sup>4</sup> Violence spread into the rural areas where the Conservatives created armed militias to suppress the insurgents. The insurgents responded to the oppression by arming themselves and adopting the communist ideology that became the basis for many of the current insurgent groups of today.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Troy Sacquety, "Colombia's Troubled Past," *Veritas* Vol. 2, no. 4, (2006): 9.

<sup>2</sup> David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), 149-50.

<sup>3</sup> John E. Fagg, *Latin America: A General History* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 890.

<sup>4</sup> "State Department Country Profile: Colombia", <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/c/111571.htm>, accessed 26 Dec 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Geoff Simmons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 40.

In 1957, an alliance between the Conservative and Liberal political parties established a power-sharing group, known as the National Front, which eventually ended La Violencia.<sup>6</sup> When the violent conflicts ended and the newly formed government encouraged renewed economic growth, the monopoly of power held by the two parties intensified the disenfranchisement of the rural Liberal and communist forces. These groups established local regimes with armed guerrilla groups in the remote areas of Colombia beyond the control of the central government. The Colombian countryside provided an ideal breeding ground for the expansion of the ideologies attempting to emulate the successful revolution in Castro's Cuba. The most significant of these groups was the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia Ejercito del Pueblo (FARC-EP), created in 1964 as a "self-defense" force against the central government.<sup>7</sup> During the same period, government-sponsored rightist paramilitary groups evolved as a "counter-guerrilla" force to compensate for the lack of military and police forces in the rural areas to protect the civilian populations.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, Colombia's government accepted the violent conflicts with leftist guerrilla and rival paramilitary groups in the remote parts of Colombia as part of everyday life. This attitude soon changed in the 1980s as the insurgent groups, primarily the FARC-EP, adopted kidnapping, and drug-smuggling tactics in an effort to obtain financial autonomy.<sup>9</sup> This insidious relationship with the illicit drug trade finally gave the FARC-EP a means to obtain the military, political, and economic growth throughout rural Colombia it required to achieve the objective of toppling the central government by

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/c/111571.htm> accessed 26 Dec 2009

<sup>7</sup> "40 Years of the FARC (2004) "[http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441\\_farc/index.shtml](http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441_farc/index.shtml), accessed 6 January 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Sacquety, "Colombia's Troubled Past," 10.

<sup>9</sup> "40 Years of the FARC (2004) "[http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441\\_farc/index.shtml](http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441_farc/index.shtml), accessed 6 January 2010.

the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> The Colombian government also changed policy in the 1990s and attempted to negotiate peace settlements with the insurgents to establish the rule of law, but to no avail. During this period, the insurgent power base and influence expanded, while the central government's control of the country slowly eroded.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, violent internal conflict, illegal drug trade, and political instability continued to plague Colombia. Several Colombian presidential administrations attempted, and failed, to achieve a negotiated peace with the FARC-EP. In an effort to eradicate the illegal drug flow from South America, primarily cocaine from Colombia, the American and Colombian governments developed a joint policy called Plan Colombia in 1998. The purpose of the original Plan Colombia was to stabilize Colombia's security and revitalize a struggling economy with an anti-drug strategy.<sup>11</sup>

The plan called for the United States to provide financial support for Colombia's counternarcotics efforts, while limiting American involvement in counterinsurgency operations against the FARC-EP and other paramilitary groups.<sup>12</sup> However, Colombia's disparate counter-drug operations and counterinsurgency activities soon led to a worsening security situation. The Colombian government did not control most of the drug-infested territories, nor did it understand the growing political and military strength of the FARC-EP. Thus, the twentieth century ended the same way it began, with Colombia on the verge of collapse in the midst of a civil war.

The 11 September 2001 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States significantly changed American policies toward Colombia and its goals for Plan Colombia. Prior to the attacks, American involvement in Colombia was largely limited to counter-drug and emergency humanitarian operations. Afterward, American military assistance and funding expanded to include operations against guerilla, terrorist, and

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<sup>10</sup> 40 Years of the FARC (2004) [http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441\\_farc/index.shtml](http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441_farc/index.shtml), accessed 6 January 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Colombian Embassy, *El Plan Colombia*. [http://www.colombiaemb.org/repository/Doc\\_Plan\\_Col/Plan%20Colombia%20texto.pdf](http://www.colombiaemb.org/repository/Doc_Plan_Col/Plan%20Colombia%20texto.pdf), accessed 6 January 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Colombian Embassy, *Financiancion Plan Colombia*. [http://www.colombiaemb.org/repository/Doc\\_Plan\\_Col/Plan%20Colombia%20financiaci\\_n%20a%20sept%202000](http://www.colombiaemb.org/repository/Doc_Plan_Col/Plan%20Colombia%20financiaci_n%20a%20sept%202000), accessed 6 January 2010.

paramilitary organizations within Colombia.<sup>13</sup> President Alvaro Uribe's election in 2002 also brought about a significant change in the Colombian government's strategic vision concerning security, economic prosperity, and counterinsurgency. Soon after taking office, President Uribe, as an extension of Plan Colombia developed the Democratic Security and Defense Policy, which was designed to reinstate the rule of law in Colombia and protect the country's population by reasserting the central government's authority.<sup>14</sup>

This study will evaluate the effectiveness of Colombia's counterinsurgency campaign against the FARC-EP from President Uribe's 2002 election until 2008. This evaluation is primarily from the Colombian perspective. It specifically seeks to answer the following question: "How effectively did the government of Colombia integrate the various elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—to attain its political objectives of establishing a stable government that provided both internal and external security?"

The evidence will come from primary and secondary sources collected from historical documents, military journals, and relevant literature from the United States and Colombia. In order to understand the concepts of counterinsurgency and effectively evaluate them, a framework with a foundation constructed from current theories and doctrine will provide the study a frame of reference. Institutional documentation obtained from the Colombian Defense Ministry, the Colombian governmental organizations, and the Colombian press will be used to analyze counterinsurgency operations from the Colombian perspective.

The first chapter describes counterinsurgency frameworks from current literature and military doctrine. David Galula's seminal work, *Counterinsurgency: Theory and Practice*, presents the laws and principles of counterinsurgency warfare. John Nagl's work, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, studies the ability of organizations to adapt to demands of counterinsurgency warfare. Finally, the United States Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, presents principles and guidelines for conducting counterinsurgency operations. This study will evaluate Plan Colombia's integrated national approach to counterinsurgency

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<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Finlayson, "U.S. Forces: The Major Command Structure," *Veritas* Vol. 2, no. 4 (2006): 66.

<sup>14</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, *Politica de Defensa y Seguridad Democratica*, Bogota, 2003.

and stability operations from 1998-2008. The *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* will be used as the evaluative criteria to assess Plan Colombia's results as measures of progress. The evaluation criteria will also determine if the Colombian government's integrated action plans established the necessary conditions to achieve the following political objectives: (1) a safe and secure environment, (2) rule of law, (3) stable governance, (4) sustainable economy, and (5) social well-being.

The second chapter presents a brief history of Colombian insurgencies from their early origins through the implementation of Plan Colombia in 1998. The chapter begins with a brief review of major Colombian internal conflicts in the twentieth century from the violent clashes of La Violencia to the current state of insurgency. This historical context provides perspective of Colombia's violent past, its influence upon the evolution of narco-trafficking criminal activities, and contemporary insurgent movements.

The third chapter examines the details of the American-supported Plan Colombia and describes the implementation of the plan's various components. It specifically examines how effectively President Uribe's administration orchestrated the instruments of national power in a counterinsurgency campaign.

The fourth chapter studies how the Colombians defined a successful counterinsurgency and stability operations. It utilizes the evaluative criteria to assess the Colombian government's ability to achieve the necessary conditions to achieve its end states and political objectives. This chapter also assesses Plan Colombia and the applicability of its methods to future counterinsurgency operations. The final chapter draws conclusions and makes recommendations concerning the Colombian's ability to conduct successful a counterinsurgency campaign merging offensive, defensive, and stability operations while incorporating the instruments of power in a quest to achieve a lasting peace.

The study now begins with an analysis of the current counterinsurgency literature from contemporary authors and extant U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine.

# Chapter 1

## Counterinsurgency Theorists and Doctrine

*Essential though it is, the military action is secondary to the political one, its primary purpose being to afford the political power[s] enough freedom to work safely with the population.*

*--David Galula*

David Galula posits key laws and principles of counterinsurgency warfare based on his experiences from 1945 to 1958 as a French military officer. John Nagl, a former U.S. Army officer, argues that dynamic leadership enables organizations to adapt successfully in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. The U.S. Army Field Manual *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, provides current military doctrine for designing and implementing successful COIN operations. *The Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction* provides a strategic framework for building a sustainable peace and the necessary conditions that should be established in order to achieve them.<sup>1</sup> The literature's concepts will provide lenses from which to view the decades-long COIN struggle in modern day Colombia. The guiding principles for the building of a sustainable peace will provide criteria from which the Colombian government's integrated national approach toward COIN and stability operations will be evaluated.

Colombia's American ally defines an "insurgency" as an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government using subversion and armed conflict.<sup>2</sup> These lengthy politico-military campaigns use irregular military forces and political institutions that aim control the population in order to weaken the legitimacy of the established government, while simultaneously increasing insurgent influence.

David Galula was an insightful French officer who participated in North African campaigns, the liberation of France, and the occupation of Germany during World War II. After the war, while assigned as an assistant military attaché in China and later as a

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<sup>1</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press), 2009, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001as amended through 2009), 266. JP1-02 DOD terms and definitions do not take into account the inherent political nature of an insurgency.

military observer in Greece, he witnessed first-hand the communist guerrilla tactics during the Chinese Communist Revolution and the Greek Civil War. Galula used his experiences in China and Greece to develop principles that provides a “compass” for the counterinsurgent.<sup>3</sup> During his subsequent posting as a company commander in Algeria from 1956 to 1958, he set out to prove his theory of counterinsurgency warfare derived from his previous observations and experiences.<sup>4</sup> His counterinsurgency tactics and techniques assisted in the eradication and pacification of the nationalist insurgency within his assigned area.

### **Galula’s Fundamentals for a Successful Insurgency**

David Galula’s most notable work *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* provides an anatomical construct for counterinsurgency operations by discussing the origins of a successful insurgency, then deriving a successful strategy to defeat it. Galula establishes four fundamentals required for the execution of a successful insurgency. First, the insurgents must have a cause to attract the population’s loyalty and establish a connection with the local population base. Second, they require an unstable host government with significant military and political vulnerabilities. Third, the insurgents should ideally have access to a semi-hostile geographic environment within the country. The fourth crucial fundamental for a successful insurgency is the external support. According to Galula, the first two fundamentals are absolute requirements for the insurgency to take hold and flourish. The geographic environment of the country is a factor that is unalterable and can provide advantages for either the insurgent or the counterinsurgent, making it more of an enabler for the insurgent than an absolute requirement. External support is not necessary to begin an insurgency but can become a requirement as the insurgency progresses from a guerrilla to mobile warfare.<sup>5</sup> According to Galula, successful insurgencies require a cause, a vulnerable host government, and although not required, may exploit the country’s geographic factors and external support.

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<sup>3</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 1964, 2006.), xiii.

<sup>4</sup> David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (1963; reprint, Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2006), 247.

<sup>5</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 26.



Galula argues that an attractive and meaningful cause gives the insurgent a formidable, though intangible, asset that can be transformed into a strong base of popular support.<sup>6</sup> He also argues that these causes frequently come from a political problem or “an unresolved contradiction” within the society.<sup>7</sup> Ideological causes tailored to garner popular support are among the motivating factors leading to insurgent violence. Insurgents often recruit the disenfranchised, frustrated, and embittered masses that are dissatisfied with the government’s policies. They do so with promises of physical and economic security to maintain strong support among the population. Without the cause, there is no popular support. Without popular support, the insurgency will not survive. Therefore, an ideological cause both molds an insurgent movement’s organization and guides its operations. After an attractive ideological cause upon which an insurgency can thrive is established, the insurgents must exploit the government’s vulnerabilities.

The effectiveness of the central government is dependent on both its military and its political strength. A stable government must have legitimate political systems capable of establishing the rule of law and sustaining economic growth. The government’s military and police forces must be able to provide the population with a safe and secure environment. The combined costs of upholding law and order as well as population security strains the government’s resources and limits its actions, frequently creating vulnerabilities. Other governmental vulnerabilities include political corruption, insufficient military training, and poor economic progress. Insurgents exploit these vulnerabilities by conducting attacks on targets that represent the central government. Insurgent attacks on governmental representatives, poorly trained military and police forces, and key infrastructure all contribute to delegitimizing the central government. According to Galula, there are four governmental instruments of population control: the political structure, the administrative bureaucracy, the police, and the armed forces.<sup>8</sup> These instruments administer the government and provide security. Leadership is also a contributing factor in the determination whether a government is vulnerable to an insurgency. Strong political leadership achieves unity of effort by synchronizing the

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<sup>6</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 17.

instruments of national power toward defeating an insurgency. However, weak leaders have difficulty achieving the unity required to combat insurgents.

Galula's third fundamental of a successful insurgency revolves around the nature of the country's own geographic environment. The country's environment can influence both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent. Galula argues that insurgencies are most favored by a semi-hostile large, land-locked, star-shaped country, "with jungle-covered mountains along the borders and scattered swamps in the plains, in a temperate zone with a large and dispersed population and a primitive economy."<sup>9</sup> This environment in a large country with a dispersed rural population and border areas make maintaining the rule of law difficult for the central government.

The final factor favoring a successful insurgency is a border adjacent to other states that provide the insurgents with sanctuary as well as external moral, political, technical, financial, and military support.<sup>10</sup> The availability of external resources from neighboring states assists the success of any insurgency. Moral support derived from a sympathetic neighbor can provide benefits to the insurgent by swaying internal and external public opinion toward the insurgent's cause. Conversely, diplomatic pressure imposed on the counterinsurgent's government by a neighboring country can provide the insurgent the support helpful to achieving its political objectives and goals. The insurgent's financial support, technical advice, and military weapons and equipment can come from adjacent states or from states outside the theater of operations that seek to assist the insurgency.

### **Galula's Counterinsurgency Theory**

David Galula's counterinsurgency strategy argues that conventional warfare has inherent limits and emphasizes the importance of obtaining the support of the population by exploiting the insurgent's weaknesses and limiting intangible advantages such as sympathy toward the insurgent's cause. Galula developed four laws for counterinsurgency: (1) the population is as necessary for the counterinsurgent as it is for the insurgent, (2) support is gained through an active minority, (3) support from the population is conditional, and (4) intensity of efforts and vastness of means are

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<sup>9</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 26.

essential.<sup>11</sup> Harkening back to Carl von Clausewitz, Galula stresses the primacy of politics over military action.<sup>12</sup> Galula emphasizes that political power is paramount and that military action is second to political activity.<sup>13</sup>

Galula develops a comprehensive strategy for effectively managing insurgencies but warns that it is by no means a panacea and that it is not always possible to defeat an insurgency.<sup>14</sup> The strategy's construct focuses on the population and maintains political primacy over military action. Based on the above fundamentals, Galula outlines an eight-step strategy designed as a counterinsurgent "compass" to build (or rebuild) the political machine from the population upward.<sup>15</sup> The first step is to apply the appropriate level of combat forces to expel or destroy the insurgent forces. Well-delineated escalation of force procedures minimize collateral damage and civilian casualties. The second step is to deploy combat troops within the population centers to oppose returning insurgents and provide local security for the population. Examples in today's environment are the American military force's utilization of Combat Outposts (COPs) in Iraq and Afghanistan. The third step is to establish contact with and controlling the population to isolate it the insurgents. The fourth step is to purge the insurgent political organization. The fifth step is to establish (or reestablish) a local provisional authority. The sixth step is to test the newly trained leaders and assess their performance. The seventh step is to organize the new leaders into a national party. The final step is to win over or inhibit the actions of the remaining insurgents. Utilizing all these steps, Galula argues that it is extremely helpful to have a strong national leader who can establish unity of effort by integrating the military and civilian activities required to conduct counterinsurgent activities.<sup>16</sup>

### **John Nagl**

John Nagl is a retired U.S. Army officer, scholar, and influential authority on counterinsurgency operations. As a serving officer, he led a tank platoon during

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<sup>11</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 52-55.

<sup>12</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 63-64.

Operation Desert Storm, served as an operations officer during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and later commanded a tank battalion. In his work *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, Nagl compares and analyzes the British counterinsurgency experience in Malaya from 1948-1957 with the American experience in Vietnam from 1950-1972. Nagl argues that warfare places profound demands on military institutions; adaptation is required to meet those demands; the ability to adapt is constrained by institutional culture; an insightful and inspirational political and military leadership is a key catalyst in shaping the military institutional culture and thus fostering adaptation to the demands of counterinsurgency. The two situations he assessed were similar but had opposite results. His analysis determined what factors led to each organization's ability to learn and adapt to the insurgency it faced. Nagl contends that the British Army was a learning organization that developed a successful counterinsurgency strategy from 1952-1957.<sup>17</sup>

The British developed an irregular war perspective, based on its history of close cooperation with civil authorities and centuries of policing the colonial empire.<sup>18</sup> However, from 1948-1951 the performance of the British Army brought forth mixed results. During this period, it became apparent that the British Army had to overcome its resistance to the organizational changes required to fight a successful counterinsurgency.<sup>19</sup> The arrival of General Sir Gerald Templer in 1952 changed everything. Templer, a strong and dynamic leader instituted changes rapidly, if not impatiently, and coordinated both intelligence, and the military and civilian actions that harnessed nationalism and won the "hearts and minds" of the population.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Nagl concluded that the leader's ability to achieve unity of effort in which a comprehensive strategy incorporating all the instruments of national power was the catalytic ingredient of a successful counterinsurgency campaign.

The American army's experience in Vietnam was dramatically different. In stark contrast to the British, the American army initially viewed its task as the defeat of an

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<sup>17</sup> John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 104.

<sup>18</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 81.

<sup>20</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 91.

enemy on the field of battle.<sup>21</sup> Nagl's posits that the American army was unable from 1950-1972 to fully develop successful counterinsurgency doctrine in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> Blind resistance by the higher levels of command to alter conventional warfare stifled reform and change needed to institutionalize the reforms needed to fight a successful counterinsurgency campaign. The U.S. Army and the other military services continued to innovate and instituted organizational changes at lower levels.<sup>23</sup> The Marine Corps instituted Combined Action Platoons (CAP) that lived with the population and focused on pacification by dividing missions between platoon-sized patrols and civil-military operations.<sup>24</sup> In spite of the encouraging results of the Marine Corps CAP concept, General William Westmoreland, the commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), disagreed with the Marines' concept and did not widen it to include Army units.<sup>25</sup>

Nagl's analysis of Vietnam was only partially correct. In 1968, under the new MACV commander General Creighton Abrams, the Americans eventually discarded General Westmoreland's strategy of attrition and began to pursue an integrated counterinsurgency strategy. Former U.S. Army officer Lewis Sorley argues in his book *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* that by late 1970 or early 1971 the United States had in fact won the Vietnam War.<sup>26</sup> At this point, the Viet Cong insurgency was defeated with most of the South Vietnamese population secured and controlled by the South Vietnamese Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) armed forces. General Abrams' new strategy of securing the population and supporting the South Vietnamese government created an environment that was self-sufficient and capable of fighting the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) with limited American military support. Sorley also argues that American popular, political, and financial support to continue the conflict declined significantly, leading to the

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<sup>21</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 176-177.

<sup>23</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 157.

<sup>24</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 157.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: the Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Orlando, Florida: Hartcourt Books, 1999), 217.

elimination of U.S. military support to the ARVN as well as hasty troop withdrawals, making the ultimate collapse of the South Vietnamese regime in 1975 inevitable.<sup>27</sup>

At least from 1968-1972, the American army, under the leadership of General Abrams, showed adaptability as a learning organization as it shifted focus toward counterinsurgency operations. Abrams' experience during this brief time refutes Nagl's argument of the U.S. Army's inability to adapt as an organization throughout the Vietnam War. Abrams, an insightful leader, was able to institutionalize effective changes to strategy that translated to success on the battlefield. These changes, however, occurred too late to prevent the fall of South Vietnam.

The contrast between the British and American experiences provides useful insight into the importance of adaptable, learning organizations to counter flexible insurgent forces. Successful counterinsurgency campaigns require organizations that learn, share, adapt, and disseminate information quickly. These organizations require dynamic leaders capable of instituting change. Such leaders also create unity of effort by synchronizing complex civilian and military actions in pursuit of political objectives and goals.

#### **U.S. Army Field Manual, FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency***

General David Petraeus is the U.S. Army general currently in command of the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and responsible for U.S. military operations in the Middle East, Egypt, and Central Asia. He is a skilled warrior-scholar and influential counterinsurgency expert. Petraeus commanded the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division during the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003 and conducted successful counterinsurgency operations in Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul. He later commanded the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq responsible for the creation and training of the Iraqi Security Forces. He returned to the U.S. to take command of the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center, the institution responsible for the creation and implementation of Army doctrine, and prioritized the study of counterinsurgency operations highly within the Army's professional education systems. It was during this time that General Petraeus and his Marine counterpart and fellow counterinsurgency

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<sup>27</sup> Sorley, *A Better War*, 373.

expert, Marine General James Mattis, spearheaded the development of the *U.S. Army's Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency*. This manual filled a 20-year gap in U.S. Army and Marine counterinsurgency doctrine that incorporated many of the principles and historical lessons learned from Galula, Nagl, and other counterinsurgency experts to provide guidance for current and future operations.

One such construct for designing and conducting successful counterinsurgency operations is the use of what the military refers to as logical lines of operations or LLO's. Military commanders use LLO's to visualize, describe, and direct operations that support other instruments of power in a counterinsurgency campaign.<sup>28</sup> Campaign plans that incorporate the LLO concept from tactical to the grand-strategic levels can provide mutual support to each other's actions. These lines of operations, much like the insurgents themselves, are highly flexible and adaptable to each individual leader's needs at any level of war and all forms of warfare or civil-military operations. Sample lines of operations that routinely used in the design of a counterinsurgency campaign include the following: (1) Conduct Information Operations, (2) Conduct Combat Operations/Civil Security Operations, (3) Train and Employ Host-Nation Security Forces, (4) Establish or Restore Essential Services, (5) Support Development of Better Governance, and (6) Support Economic Development.<sup>29</sup> These lines are not limited by scope or by number. The intent is to give the leader attempting to achieve political objectives, from the head of state responsible for synchronizing the instruments of power to the lowest tactical commander, a concept with which to visualize, implement, and assess the counterinsurgency campaign. Such assessments are intended to provide feedback to the learning organization that allows it to adapt where needed.

Well-designed campaign plans continually assess the current situation and the progress of operations with assessment tools known as measures of effectiveness to determine if progress is achieved along and across the various lines of operations. Measures of effectiveness assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment tied to measuring the attainment of the over-arching political-military

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<sup>28</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army), December 2006. 5-3.

<sup>29</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 3-24*, 5-3, 5-1.

objective, achievement of an intermediate objective or creation of an effect.<sup>30</sup> The results obtained provide information that allows adjustments into the campaign plan. Measurements and statistical indicators have limits when measuring social environments.<sup>31</sup> For example, the number of water treatment plants built by a state does not necessarily guarantee that the population has fresh water. Measuring the effectiveness of government and military actions toward a political goal is difficult, but intelligently used as a means of effectiveness, it can indicate progress or lack thereof in a counterinsurgency effort.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

This study will use the works of Galula, Nagl, U.S. Army FM 3-24, and applicable principles of stabilization operations to assess the merits of Colombia's integrated counterinsurgency campaign. To measure the effectiveness of Colombia's efforts, the following criteria will be used to evaluate Plan Colombia's progress: (1) safe and secure environment, (2) rule of law, (3) stable governance, (4) sustainable economy, (5) social well-being. The first criterion is from the stability operations end state and the security line of operation drawn from FM 3-24 that supports it.<sup>32</sup> This LLO supports the government's legitimacy and establishment of a safe and secure environment by: the cessation of large-scale violence, territorial and physical security, and a monopoly of violence from police and armed forces. The second criterion, also derived from stability operations principles, is the rule of law principle.<sup>33</sup> This criterion measures the ability of the population to have access to a self-sustaining justice system that provides law and order enforcement and proper accountability under the law. The third criterion, also derived from FM 3-24 and stability operations principles, is the governance line of operation.<sup>34</sup> Support to the development of better governance relates to the central government's ability to gather and distribute resources while providing direction and control for the society. The fourth criterion, drawn from FM 3-24, is the economy line of

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<sup>30</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 3-24*, 5-26.

<sup>31</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 3-24*, 5-27.

<sup>32</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 3-24*, 5-5; United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*, 6-38.

<sup>33</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*, 7-64.

<sup>34</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 3-24*, 5-16; United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*, 8-98.



operation.<sup>35</sup> Support to the economic development and the attainment of a stable economy of the nation is critical for its stability and includes maintaining a viable economy, the control over an illicit economy, employment generation, economic growth, and the sustainability of a market economy. The final criterion is the stability operations principle of social well-being. Social well being is the ability of the population to be free from the want of basic needs and to coexist peacefully.<sup>36</sup> Conditions that are required to achieve this include, access to and the delivery of basic needs, the return and reintegration of internally displaced person (IDPs), and demobilization of former armed insurgents. The evaluation of these criteria will provide measures of progress from which to assess the results of Colombia's integrated action and counterinsurgency strategies.

### **Colombia's Current Strategy**

Colombia's Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security (PCDS) is a national campaign plan prepared by the Colombian Ministry of Defense. This plan is part of a four-year National Development Plan 2006-2010 supported by Plan Colombia. The first of Colombia's strategic national objectives is to consolidate territorial control and strengthen the rule of law across the entire national territory. Second, is to protect the public and retain the strategic initiative against all threats to security. Third, is to raise significantly the cost of trafficking drugs in Colombia. Fourth, is to keep Colombia's public security forces modern and effective, with a high level of legitimacy based on public confidence and support. The final goal is to maintain the downward trend in all crime rates in the country's urban centers.<sup>37</sup>

### **Summary**

This chapter has analyzed the current counterinsurgency and stability operations literature from authors David Galula and John Nagl, U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine, and the United States Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. Galula's key laws and principles provide a "compass" for the counterinsurgent. John

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<sup>35</sup> Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 3-24*, 5-17. United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*; 9-133.

<sup>36</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*; 10-162.

<sup>37</sup> Ministeria de Defensa, *Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática –Bogota*, 2007. This document describes objectives for the President Uribe's Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security.

Nagl argues that adaptive learning is essential to effective counterinsurgency efforts and that service culture and leadership are the key ingredients in bringing about such learning. Finally, the U.S. Army FM 3-24 provided military doctrine, principles, and guidelines for the implementation of successful counterinsurgency operations. Concepts derived from the literature's concepts provide a comparative framework from which to compare the Colombian government's counterinsurgency operations.

## Chapter 2

### **The Unholy Trinity of Violent Political Instability: Guerrillas, Drugs, and the Paramilitaries**

*The National Strategy Against Violence acknowledges that one of the most important factors contributing to the violence in Colombia is the illegal bearing of arms, and in it, the government will take steps to rid the country of illegally held arms.*

*-- Cesar Gaviria*

*In reality, paramilitary groups are responsible for twice as many homicides in Colombia than the guerrillas.*

*-- Belisario Bentancour*

*I am a decent man who exports flowers.*

*-- Pablo Escobar*

Colombia is a land of paradoxes. It is rich in natural resources but has one of the highest poverty rates in Latin America, despite recent years of exponential economic growth. It is also a land where one successful counterinsurgency campaign, Plan Lazo (Lasso Plan) conducted in the 1960s, subsequently gave rise to Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the longest-lasting insurgent group in the western hemisphere. Since the early days of the republic, political violence has been considered a normal part of everyday life. Colombia's violent conflict stems from the often-volatile interactions between the weak central government and an unholy trinity of instability: leftist guerrilla insurgencies, the illegal drug trade, and paramilitary vigilantism. This chapter provides historical context concerning the three factors that are at the root of Colombia's modern conflict from 1948 to 2002. Understanding Colombia's legacy of violence is required to develop an integrated counterinsurgency and stability strategy capable of effectively attaining a lasting peace.

### **Legacy of Violent Conflicts**

The bloody internal conflicts between the Colombian Liberal and Conservative parties are largely responsible for the country's long legacy of violence and political instability. The endemic political volatility and violence prompted two civil wars that

claimed over 400,000 lives in the twentieth century. Conflict and rivalry characterized both ruling parties since the republic's inception and have dominated Colombian politics ever since. The predecessors of the Conservative Party were the followers of Simon Bolivar, the first Colombian president, who favored a strong centralized government. The followers of Bolivar's vice president, Francisco de Paula Santander, were the ancestors of the Liberal Party who favored a decentralized government. As different as the rival party's ideologies were, both were oligarchic constructs that served the national government, which focused on resourcing its major cities and population areas at the expense of the rural poor population.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the political clashes between the rival parties led to the first of the violent civil conflicts, the Thousand Day War. The conflict ended in 1902, but widespread violence continued throughout Colombia's rural countryside. The central government's inability to control economic decline, maintain its legitimacy in rural areas, and govern the urban population centers allowed the political oligarchy to remain relatively unscathed from violence and adopt an "out of sight, out of mind" approach toward the poor.<sup>2</sup> Social, political, and economic tensions continued to increase slowly from 1902-1947. In 1947, violence broke out during worker strikes and demonstrations that led to 14,000 deaths.<sup>3</sup> The tensions between the two feuding parties reached the breaking point the next year and sparked Colombia's second civil war of the twentieth century, La Violencia, which claimed the lives of approximately 300,000 Colombians.

### **El Bogotazo and La Violencia (1948-1952)**

On 9 April 1948 Liberal leader and Colombian presidential candidate, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, was assassinated in Bogota, while the capital city hosted the Ninth Inter-American Conference. Gaitan was a former mayor of Bogota and an immensely popular candidate who wanted to change the Liberal Party from its oligarchic base to include the middle class and the working class rural farm workers or campesinos. The Liberals, believing that the assassination was a Conservative Party plot, retaliated by beating, killing, and then hanging the assassin in public. Bloodshed and violence ensued

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<sup>1</sup> Bert Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001), 39

<sup>2</sup> Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War*, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Geoff Simmons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 40.

throughout Bogota with the destruction of government buildings, private homes, businesses, stores, and vehicles. This turned into in one of the bloodiest mass riots in Latin American history, which became known as El Bogotazo.<sup>4</sup> The violence of the urban population engulfed the city, killing an estimated 1,500 people over the course of two days before to the city's security forces suppressed the rebellion.<sup>5</sup>

After El Bogotazo, the atrocities of the La Violencia quickly spread from Bogota to the rural Colombian countryside. In the town of Puerto Tejada, Liberal rebels decapitated Conservatives and then played soccer with the severed heads.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, the Conservative President Mariano Ospina Perez (1946-1950) attempted to form a bipartisan agreement in which both parties would share power. However, he ultimately failed, declared a state of siege, and forcibly closed the Congress when the Liberal Party abstained from the 1949 presidential elections in an effort to delegitimize the government.<sup>7</sup> Ospina exacerbated political tensions and civil unrest by aggressively terminating Liberal governors and deploying the rural police forces to intimidate and harass Liberals.<sup>8</sup>

In 1950, Laureano Gomez (1950-1953), the unopposed Conservative presidential candidate, assumed the Colombian presidency; and La Violencia continued throughout the countryside. Gomez labeled the Liberal Party as communists and became obsessed with eliminating the Liberal opposition. From 1951-1955 Gomez continued his crusade against communism outside Colombia and secured an enduring relationship with the United States by sending Colombian Army troops to fight in the Korean War.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Colombia has the distinction of being the only Latin American country that fought in the Korean War.

Within Colombia, another war against communism raged. Liberal resistance groups began to organize themselves into bands of guerrilla groups to fight the

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<sup>4</sup>Frank Samford and Mark Palacios: *Colombia Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 348.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as Prologue? A History of Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, March 2002), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War*, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Samford and Palacios, *Colombia Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, 348.

<sup>8</sup>Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Briscoe, "Barbula and Old Baldy March 1953: Colombia's Heaviest Combat in Korea," *Veritas* Vol. 2, no. 4 (2006): 15.

Conservative paramilitary counter-guerrillas organized by departmental police or the army.<sup>10</sup> La Violencia was one of the bloodiest civil wars in the history of the western hemisphere. It was characterized by political instability, partisan rivalry, and utter brutality. During the conflict, many armed groups, both Conservative and Liberal, routinely occupied territories and brutally controlled populations through heinous acts. The victims were often shot at point-blank range, slashed with machetes, decapitated, quartered, or burned.<sup>11</sup> Colombia continued in a state of siege and slowly descended into chaos under the ultraconservative leadership of a president intent on removing the Liberal Party from political power and purging its unofficial resistance guerrilla forces.

### **La Violencia Continues (1953-1957)**

As the carnage of La Violencia continued to ravage the country, popular support for the Gomez regime weakened dramatically. In 1953, the chief of the armed forces, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, led a bloodless coup d'état, supported by both the Conservative and Liberal parties, with hopes of ending the violence. In an immediate attempt to suppress the bloodletting of La Violencia, Rojas offered amnesty to armed groups who laid down their arms. He initially enjoyed widespread support as thousands of paramilitaries and guerrillas demobilized throughout the country bringing a short-lived respite to Colombia through peace, justice, and liberty.<sup>12</sup> However, La Violencia did not end; paramilitary and guerrilla violence soon resumed. After the amnesty and demobilization in 1953, leftist guerrilla leaders returned to their homes only to find persecution and death from rightist paramilitary death squads. Rojas's military units often supported and maintained close ties with some paramilitary bands to purge the countryside of the remnant guerrilla leaders.<sup>13</sup> The leftist guerrillas based in the rural areas retaliated with violence, rearmed, and reconstituted their quasi-military capabilities.

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<sup>10</sup> Samford and Palacios, *Colombia Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, 349.

<sup>11</sup> Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 137.

<sup>12</sup> Gonzalo Sanchez, *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics: The Case of "La Violencia" in Colombia* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001), 19

<sup>13</sup> Lt. Darryl Maas, *Insurgency, Amnesty, and Dictatorship: General Rojas Pinilla's Attempts to End Colombia's Violence, 1953-1957* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 2002), 39.

By 1957, Rojas had assumed a dictatorial role. His regime impeded progress toward the reinstatement of a constitutional democracy. Rojas maintained power and influence by instituting scorched-earth policies to eradicate political competitors and the rural insurgency. His regime grew increasingly corrupt and ruthlessly utilized the armed forces to suppress any opposition.<sup>14</sup> Rojas was ultimately unable to restore a legitimate democratic government that the population trusted. He failed to improve the widespread poverty, recover from an overwhelming economic crisis, and put an end to the resurgent bloodbath that continued to devastate rural Colombia. Rojas's inability to provide security to the rural population intensified the lack of confidence in and disdain for the national government. Ironically, the heavy-handed policies designed to quell the insurgent violence actually led to a resurgence of violence and legitimized the guerrilla movement.<sup>15</sup> Massive protests, strikes, riots, and the defection of high-ranking military officers created significant instability and chaos within Rojas's regime. The anarchic situation led to an alliance between Conservatives and Liberals that removed Rojas from power, exiling him to Spain. A five-man military junta supported by the bipartisan alliance established a temporary military authority that coordinated a peaceful transition to a civilian government.

### **The National Front Period (1957-1974)**

Created in 1957, the National Front established a power-sharing coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberals. The National Front reigned during a 16-year period in which the presidency and appointed government officials would alternate every four years between the Liberal and Conservative parties. It also attempted to restore order and pacify the rural areas. In 1958, the Liberal candidate, the widely respected Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958-1962), became the first President of the National Front. The creation of this alternating government restored stability, provided economic growth, and eventually ended La Violencia. The partisan fighting between the Liberals and the Conservatives had officially ended, but the explicit political exclusion of

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<sup>14</sup>Rempe, *The Past as Prologue?*, 3.

<sup>15</sup>Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War*, 101.

all other political parties created new dynamic that led to a renewed armed struggle by the excluded groups against the central government.<sup>16</sup>

After taking office, President Camargo requested the assistance of the United States for advice on the how to deal with the insurgent violence of the Colombian countryside. In late 1959, the U.S. responded by sending an interagency survey team of six made up of highly qualified individuals to Colombia to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Colombia's internal violence. The team leader was CIA officer Hans V. Tofte, a veteran of World War II and the Korean War. He was a former British commando and later a U.S. Army authority in European and Middle Eastern guerrilla warfare. The other team members were Colonel Berkeley Lewis, a retired U.S. Army Ordnance Officer and former military attaché in Argentina; Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Koontz, who had a formerly served with the U.S. Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) in Bogota; Major Charles T.R. Bohannon who had served with and fought alongside Philippine guerrillas during WWII and participated in anti-guerrilla campaigns against the Huks; Colonel Napoleon Valeriano of the Philippine Army, believed to be the most successful Philippine officer in anti-guerrilla warfare; and Bruce Walker, a former Marine lieutenant with tours in Honduras and Ecuador.<sup>17</sup>

The Joint Survey Team remained in Colombia for over two months and met with military commanders, political, and guerrilla leaders.<sup>18</sup> The team concluded that the rural violence had killed an estimated 250,000 people and displaced approximately 1.5 million *campesinos* from the rural farms.<sup>19</sup> The report also found that the Colombian security forces lacked the ability to plan and coordinate operations and no mechanisms to gather and assess information. It also found deficiencies in the logistical infrastructure needed to execute a counterinsurgency campaign effectively.<sup>20</sup> These deficiencies inhibited the Colombian Army and National Police from preventing the violence perpetuated by the guerrilla bandits and the paramilitary gangs. The survey also found that most of the

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<sup>16</sup> Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 325.

<sup>17</sup> Team for Colombia, Sept. 29, 1959, Declassified memorandum from CIA Chief of Western Hemisphere Division, Joseph Caldwell (J.C.) King to Mr. John C. Hill, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/surveyteam29sep1959.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Rempe, *The Past as Prologue?*, 5

<sup>19</sup> Rempe, *The Past as Prologue?*, 5

<sup>20</sup> Assessment preliminary Report, Colombia Survey Team, Colonel Lansdale, February 23, 1960, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/lansdale23feb1960.htm>



violence was criminal activity by guerrilla groups that could be eliminated within one year using specialized Lancero (Colombian Lancer) units. Colombian Lancero units, similar to U.S. Army Rangers, conduct direct action and special reconnaissance missions for the Colombian Army. These Lanceros units, along with U.S. intelligence and advisory support, could augment the Colombian Army teams and execute counter-guerrilla operations.<sup>21</sup>

In 1962, another survey team led by the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, BG William P. Yarborough, concluded that the Colombian Army needed U.S. Special Forces advisors to support the Colombian Army units in basic counterinsurgency operational planning, civic action, close air support, and intelligence operations.<sup>22</sup> The Americans decided on an indirect approach to the Colombian Civil War by resisting the temptation to deploy Special Forces teams directly into combat. By focusing on providing economic and military aid and logistical and intelligence support, the U.S. all but guaranteed Colombian solutions to Colombian problems.<sup>23</sup> Mobile Training teams (MTTs) consisting of field grade officers, provided by the Latin American Special Action Force stationed in the Panama Canal zone, were dispatched to advise the Colombians. Until the first U.S. MTT advisory teams arrived in 1962, the Colombians conducted sporadic and unfocused counter-guerrilla operations. The advisory teams helped the Colombians to synchronize military civil action with counterinsurgency operations.<sup>24</sup>

The lack of significant government presence and the resulting absence of law and order in the Colombian countryside enabled the bandit guerrillas and paramilitary gangs to act with impunity. The population lost confidence in the ability of the Colombian security forces to protect them and take action against guerrilla forces. After a decade of civil war characterized by extreme violence, corruption, and mistrust, the public's opinion of the government's institutions was extremely low. Leftist guerrilla leaders such as Jacobo Arenas and Pedro Antonio Marin, also known as Manuel Maulanda Velez

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<sup>21</sup> Assessment preliminary Report, Colombia Survey Team, Colonel Lansdale, February 23, 1960, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/lansdale23feb1960.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Visit to Colombia, South America, by a Team from Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, February 26, 1962, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/surveyteam26feb1962.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Rempe, *The Past as Prologue?*, 14-15.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Briscoe, "Plan Lazo: Evaluation and Execution," *Veritas* Vol. 2, no. 4 (2006): 43.

or Tirofijo (Sureshot), exploited the government's neglect and established farming commune enclaves, what became later known as independent republics, sponsored by the Colombian Communist Party.<sup>25</sup> The success of the combined operations allowed the Colombian government to develop Plan Lazo, an integrated internal defense campaign designed to ensure Colombia's stability and sovereignty and eliminating communist guerrillas and their independent republics.

### **Plan Lazo (1962-1964)**

Fidel Castro's successful guerrilla revolt and overthrow of Cuban President Fulencio Batista in 1959 sparked the embers of revolt throughout Latin America. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev soon announced that the Soviet Union would encourage and support wars of national liberation all over the world. This dynamic intensified the Cold War anti-communist rhetoric and suspicion within the United States. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy proposed the Alliance for Progress plan that encouraged economic cooperation between the U.S. and Latin America. This plan was meant to eliminate or significantly reduce communist threats to American interests by increasing internal security throughout Latin America.

By August 1962, American and Colombian collaborative efforts to develop a solution to the country's internal security problems led to the development of Colombia's Internal Defense Plan or Plan Lazo.<sup>26</sup> The newly elected Conservative President Guillermo Leon Valencia intended Plan Lazo to be a counterinsurgency campaign with specific civic action programs and military operations designed to eradicate guerrilla groups and eliminate the communist-influenced independent republics. By 1964, nine such enclaves existed in the Colombian countryside, administered by communist-influenced leftist insurgents conducting criminal activities, and relatively free from the central government's influence.

The marked successes of Plan Lazo's counterinsurgency operations and civic action programs allowed the Colombian government to project security, economic

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Dudley, *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Planning and Objectives document for Colombia, US Assistance, circa 1965, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/g21965tabe.htm>

progress, and political reforms into the remote areas neglected by previous administrations. Another important part of Plan Lazo was the utilization of paramilitary groups, organized civilian self-defense units that were armed, equipped, and trained by the Colombian Army in an attempt to bolster local support. The paramilitaries augmented the Colombian Army, and established intelligence networks that monitored, and gathered information on the rebels.<sup>27</sup> These measures enabled the government to alleviate and attempt to resolve some of the root causes of the rural violence. The Colombians selected Marquetalia as the first independent republic target because of its size and the criminal activities of the communist insurgents.<sup>28</sup> This enclave located in a remote 800-square-kilometer area, approximately 2,000 meters above sea level in the Colombian Andean region, was also the stronghold of Tirofijo, the future leader of the FARC.

### **La Violencia Ends...The FARC Begins**

On 18 May 1964, Operation Marquetalia began as approximately 3,500 Colombian security forces attacked and eventually destroyed the Marquetalia guerrilla group. However, the rebel leader Tirofijo escaped to a neighboring independent republic, Rio Chiquito, where he formed a coalition with other insurgent groups. Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) was born around Tirofijo's movement with the financial, political, and ideological backing of the Colombian Communist Party.<sup>29</sup> By 1966, Colombia's coordinated use of civic action at the local and national levels combined with Plan Lazo's successful counterinsurgency operations officially ended La Violencia. The bipartisan conflicts marred by atrocities that had plagued Colombia for decades ended with the elimination of the independent republics and produced peace in the rural countryside. However, this relatively stable peace was short lived. In the end, the national government proved once again unable to maintain a military presence that could provide security, sustain legitimate local governance, and uphold the rule of law. Ironically, Colombia's efforts to end La Violencia by wiping out

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<sup>27</sup> Jasmin Hristov, *Blood and Capital: The Paramilitarization of Colombia*, (Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, 2009), 61.

<sup>28</sup> Progress report on the Colombian Internal Defense Plan (IDP), July 1, 1964, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/comiskey4july1964.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Rempe, *The Past as Prologue?*, 29.

last of the guerrillas ultimately exacerbated the rural violence and allowed the FARC to expand from a small band of disparate communist guerrillas to a powerful insurgent organization. Plan Lazo's success provided only a short-term solution that focused on the symptoms of Colombia's violence not the root cause.

### **FARC-EP**

In 2003, the FARC was the oldest, largest, best-armed, best-trained, and best-financed insurgent guerrilla group in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>30</sup> The FARC's 77-year-old leader, Tirofijo, was the world's oldest guerrillero (guerrilla fighter) until his death of a heart attack in 2008. After his escape from Marquetalia, Tirofijo fled to the rural mountain jungles of southeastern Colombia. In 1966, other surviving Marxist guerrilla organizations conducted a massive consolidation of several rural self-defense forces to form the FARC, the armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party. Tirofijo first assumed the position of chief of staff and ultimately supreme commander of the FARC. For the next twenty years, the FARC exploited the central government's weak rural presence and Colombia's remote mountain and jungle geography to survive, reconstitute, and expand.<sup>31</sup> The FARC continued to grow and expand its influence and power by creating combat units or fronts, while not yet considered by the Colombian government to be a significant threat.

In 2001, the FARC was organized into seven geographically oriented blocs of approximately 2,000-6,000 guerrilleros. Each bloc consisted of 4-15 fronts of 200-300 insurgents per front. Each front controlled its territorial areas of operation with combat, support, and infrastructure elements. Multiple columns composed of companies, the major combat units of the FARC, constituted the fronts. The companies, consisted of approximately 50-55 guerrilleros, could divide into smaller platoons and teams dependent on mission requirements.<sup>32</sup> Historically, the FARC has engaged the Colombian military forces in small-scale ambushes and raids to capture weapons, equipment, and supplies.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold: The Peace Process of Colombian President Andres Pastrana* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama, 2007), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs, Insurgency, and Its implications for Regional Stability* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 24.

<sup>32</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 24.

Initially, the FARC relied on kidnapping and extortion as primary sources of income; however, the addition of the highly lucrative illegal drug trade further augmented the FARC's existing funding mechanisms. In 1978, the insurgent group officially sanctioned and formalized the practice of kidnapping political leaders, large landowners, and business executives to finance the creation of future fronts.<sup>34</sup>

The 1970s were years of rapid growth and expansion for the FARC. The enormous influx of income and resources from the illegal drug and extortion activities allowed the FARC to train and equip its guerrilleros in a way that equaled, and eventually surpassed, the Colombian armed forces. Since 1966, the 350-member FARC grew significantly to an estimated 1,000 in 11 fronts in 1982, approximately 3,600 in 32 fronts in 1986, 7,000 in 60 fronts in 1995, and 15,000-20,000 in over 70 fronts in 2000.<sup>35</sup> The ultimate objective of the FARC was to create an army of about 60,000 guerrilleros capable of full-scale offensive operations to defeat the Colombian Armed Forces, occupy Bogota, and take control of the government.<sup>36</sup>

In May 1982 at the Seventh Guerrilla Conference, the FARC officially adopted an eight-year plan required a shift from a defensive to an offensive strategy. This plan called for a new way of fighting by building an army to conduct large-scale attacks on the Colombian armed forces and surround the major cities to broaden FARC's control throughout the country.<sup>37</sup> Also during the conference, the FARC added EP for Ejercito del Pueblo (People's Army) to indicate that the new strategy was representative of the people attempting to garner more public support. Over the years, the FARC-EP's brutal intimidation tactics, assassinations, kidnappings, and criminal associations with the illegal drug trade had prevented any widespread popular support among mainstream Colombians.

In August 1982, Colombian President Belsilario Betancour (1982-1986), using the recently enacted Law 35, offered amnesty to groups involved in the armed conflict

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<sup>34</sup> Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Alfredo Rangel, *Colombia: Guerra en el Fin del Siglo* (Bogota, Colombia: Tercer Mundo Universidad de Los Andes 1998) 12.; Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> 2004 BBC interview with Alfredo Rangel titled "40 years of The FARC"  
[http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441\\_farc/index.shtml](http://www.BBC.co.UK/Spanish/specials/1441_farc/index.shtml).

<sup>37</sup> Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*, 53.

that opposed the government.<sup>38</sup> Betancour's decree required the former insurgents to demobilize and reintegrate into society. In the first three months, only 400 guerrilleros accepted the amnesty offer.<sup>39</sup> President Betancour's proposals assumed that relative deprivation was a root cause of the insurgent violence. He believed that citizens turned to the insurgents if they felt that the government deprived them from justice, wealth, and political participation. But his assumption proved to be ill-founded. As the negotiations for a truce continued, the FARC formed a political party called the Union Patriótica (Partiatic Union) to broaden its influence and political appeal to the urban Colombians. For the next several years, instead of demobilizing and reintegrating into society, the FARC continued expanding its criminal activities to fund the further development of its military forces and prepare itself for war.<sup>40</sup> The FARC's refusal to disarm forced the Colombian military forces to pursue a more aggressive approach toward the guerrillas.

On 9 December 1990, the Colombian military forces launched an attack on the FARC headquarters in Casa Verde, Operation Centauro (Operation Centaur), was designed to decapitate the FARC by targeting its key front leaders and Tirofijo. The operation failed to achieve its objectives. The Colombian military forces did not capture the insurgent leaders. The population perceived the operation as a strategic failure by the Colombian government.<sup>41</sup> In 1993, during the Eighth Guerrilla Conference, the FARC officially changed its strategy from the traditional guerrilla tactics to mobile warfare conducted with a guerrilla army capable of maneuvering in large columns that could attack and defeat the Colombian military forces.<sup>42</sup> This evolution of the FARC's strategy, funded by the illegal drug trade and criminal activities, led to the creation of the seven blocs or regional commands with large subordinate fronts equipped with artillery and crew-served weapons to carry out large-scale attacks. The Colombian army had not adapted to the FARC's new strategy and remained postured as a counter-guerrilla force.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> "Operacion De Alto Riesgo," *La Semana*, 7 January 1991. <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/operacion-alto-riesgo/27629.aspx>.

<sup>42</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 43

<sup>43</sup> General Carlos Alberto Ospina "Insights From Colombia's Prolonged War," *Joint Forces Quarterly* Vol. 3, no. 42 (2006): 59

By 1996, the FARC's change in strategy became evident when its guerrilla fronts began to engage and defeat the Colombian security forces in large-scale attacks. The Colombian security forces were completely unprepared to counter the FARC's mobile warfare strategy. The national police was a 100,000-person force that focused primarily on law and order operations and the national army was 145,000 strong but only 20,000 were dedicated to counterinsurgency operations.<sup>44</sup> From 1996-1998 the Colombian military forces suffered serious defeats at the hands of the FARC, these losses continued to demoralize the public opinion.

The most significant defeat of the Colombian armed forces occurred in March 1998. At El Billar, in southern Caqueta, the FARC devastated an elite counter-guerrilla unit, killing or capturing 107 soldiers an estimated 69 percent of the unit.<sup>45</sup> El Billar seemed to reinforce the earlier failures of the Colombian armed forces during Operation Centauro, shattering the image of a strong military capable of protecting its populace from insurgents. The Colombian society suffered significantly from the constant violence and instability caused by the guerrilla groups, the paramilitaries, and the criminal *narco*-traffickers (drug traffickers). By 1999, the Colombian government reached its nadir politically, economically, and militarily, while the FARC, and reached its zenith. The military defeats by the FARC, the violent vigilantism of paramilitary forces, and the ongoing illegal drug trade undermined the government's authority at all levels.

### **The Other Guerrillas: ELN and M-19 (1970-1990)**

In 1962, Colombian rebel Fabio Vasquez Castano and a group of Colombian students traveled to Cuba, received military training, brought back inspiration from the Cuban revolution, and decided to establish a Che Guevara-inspired foco strategy for Colombia.<sup>46</sup> El Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (National Liberation Army) officially formed on 4 July 1964. It drew its main influences from a combination of Marxism and the Roman Catholic Church. Its original members consisted primarily of university

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ospina, "Insights from Colombia's Prolonged War," 60.

<sup>46</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 11.

students. One of the ELN's most influential members, the revolutionary priest Camilo Torres, disillusioned by the harsh brutality of La Violencia, wanted to revolutionize Colombian society. He believed in the liberation of the campesinos (rural people) from what he saw as unjust political, economic, and social conditions created by the National Front and struggled for the poor as a revolutionary guerrilla in the ELN until his death in 1966.<sup>47</sup> Like the famous revolutionary guerrillero Che Guevara, Camilo Torres gained even more notoriety in death than he had in life. He quickly became the most famous guerrilla priest in Latin America and a symbol of revolution.

The ELN barely escaped annihilation on two separate occasions during the 1970s, and during the 1980s developed a new strategy using extortion and kidnapping tactics for survival. The ELN controlled oil-rich areas of land containing Colombia's oil pipelines. It often extorted money from foreign oil companies and conducted kidnappings for high ransoms. These became lucrative ways of rearming and expanding. In 1999, the ELN hijacked a Colombian airline with 43 passengers on board in a bid to increase its legitimacy and importance during stalled peace negotiations with the Colombian government.<sup>48</sup> In 2001, the ELN exacerbated the country's already decimated economy by attacking the strategic Cano-Limon-Covenas oil pipeline 170 times costing Colombian government over \$500 million in lost revenues for the year.<sup>49</sup> According to General Carlos Alberto Ospina, former commander of the Colombian army, the ELN's power and influence diminished significantly over the years due to waning political support and substantial military losses.<sup>50</sup> However, the ELN's survival instinct remained intact. The ELN's most recent adaptation for survival was an alliance made with its rival the FARC in April 2001.<sup>51</sup> The ELN recently attempted negotiations with the Colombian government, but no settlements have been reached.

The now-defunct group M-19 traced its origins to the presidential election of 19 April 1970, in which the former dictator General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla lost the election

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<sup>47</sup> Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War*, 115.

<sup>48</sup> Bibiana Mercado Y Jorge Gonzalez, "Una Muestra De Fuerza Del ELN," *El Tiempo*, 13 April 1999. . <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-912531>.

<sup>49</sup> Government Accountability Office, *Efforts to Secure Colombia's Caño Limón-Coveñas Oil Pipeline Have Reduced Attacks, but Challenges Remain* (Washington DC: GAO, September 2005), i.

<sup>50</sup> Ospina, "Insights From Colombia's Prolonged War," 58.

<sup>51</sup> Arturo Peñaloza Pinzon, "ELN Confirma Alianza Con FARC," *El Tiempo*, 10 April 2001. <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-557862>.



due to purportedly fraudulent practices and scandal. After the election, disgruntled members of the Rojas party combined with former and expelled members of the Colombian Communist Party and the FARC. They all shared a belief in a crusade for a “second independence” but were more likely to conduct dramatic political-military feats than actually build a movement.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to the FARC rivals, M-19’s flashy urban guerrilleros operated openly in the cities while the FARC counterparts limited themselves to the countryside. The group’s first appearance came in 1974 when its members stole one of Simon Bolivar’s swords, vowing to return it only when Bolivar’s ideals had been realized.<sup>53</sup> The most infamous of their schemes came in 1985, when 35 insurgents stormed the Palace of Justice in Bogota. The insurgent group took an estimated 300 lawyers, judges, and supreme court justices hostage. The next day, the Colombian army regained control, but only after the palace was engulfed in flames and over 100 hostages died.<sup>54</sup> The massacre at the Palace of Justice was M-19’s final act as an insurgent group. By the end of 1990, it had demobilized and transformed into the Democratic Alliance Party.

### **Pablo Escobar’s Reign Of Terror**

During the 1980s and the 1990s, Colombia attained international infamy as a major narcotic trafficking center and number-one producer and supplier of cocaine in the world.<sup>55</sup> However, Colombia's association with drugs, primarily coca, dates back centuries. The coca plant, from which cocaine is derived, plays a vital role in the indigenous cultures of the Andean people in the northwestern portions of South America. In these areas of Colombia, cultivation, trade, and consumption of the coca, has been socially and culturally accepted for centuries. The increased demand for cocaine, fueled by the insatiable demands of consumers like the United States, led to the formation of wealthy and powerful criminal organizations that profited significantly from the emergent illegal drug trade. The criminal activities associated with the drug trade quickly became

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<sup>52</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), 246.

<sup>54</sup> Troy Sacquety, “Colombia’s Troubled Past,” *Veritas* Vol. 2, no. 4, (2006): 51.

<sup>55</sup> Dennis M. Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz, editors, *Colombia: A Country Study*, (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress 1988). <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/>.

a second major contributor, after the violent guerrilla movements, to the political instability that threatened the legitimate authority of the Colombian government.

The most notorious of the criminal *narco*-trafficking organizations in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s was the Medellin Cartel, led by the ruthless drug lord Pablo Escobar. The Medellin Cartel, based out of Colombia's second-largest city, maintained a highly profitable monopoly by supplying the majority of the cocaine destined for the U.S. from South and Central America, and the Caribbean. Escobar's efforts to revolutionize the illegal drug trade in Colombia led to a centralized and streamlined cocaine industry, in which he controlled the growers, the processors, and the distributors.<sup>56</sup> Escobar garnered popular support and undermined the legitimacy of the government by maintaining a pristine public image as a generous philanthropist and a wealthy entrepreneur. The poor population of Medellin embraced him as a local hero and Robin Hood-type, as he built soccer fields, schools, churches, and housing developments that provided jobs to thousands of residents.<sup>57</sup> Escobar's million-dollar monetary donations to large social development campaigns for the city's poor further alienated the populace from the central government. Pablo's influence increased further as he became involved in the local politics. In 1982, Pablo Escobar was elected as a substitute congressional representative for Jairo Ortega. In the Colombian political system the substitute delegate has full privileges of the office and attends the congressional sessions if the primary delegate is unavailable.<sup>58</sup> Escobar's strategy of winning the support of the population and obtaining political power worked.

However, his public persona was the antithesis of his private one. Pablo routinely bribed Colombian politicians, government officials, and judges. Those individuals not loyal to him were subject to his unique strategy of coercion known as "plata o plomo" (silver or lead).<sup>59</sup> His victims had a simple choice, accept Pablo's money as a bribe, or receive Pablo's lead in the form of a bullet. Pablo's methods proved initially effective in corrupting most of the government, but he was unable to induce the Colombian

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<sup>56</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt For The World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 24-25.

<sup>57</sup> "Un Robin Hood Paisa," *La Semana*, 16 Mayo 1983. <http://www.semana.com/noticias-gente/robin-hood-paisa/62018.aspx>.

<sup>58</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 30-31.

<sup>59</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 24.

government officials to cut ties with the American's counter-drug and extradition efforts. Escobar's extreme methods soon changed his image from that of a local hero to that of a terrorist and political outcast.

Escobar's reign of terror and vengeance escalated as he terrorized Colombian political figures in retaliation for their support of American extradition of Colombian narco-traffickers. He realized that the Colombian government, with U.S. aid, sought to destroy his cartel and counterattacked with a wave of terror attacks. Escobar routinely employed hired assassins to do his bidding. One of his most famous victims was the Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara. Lara supported the extradition of narco-traffickers and exposed many aspects of Pablo's past. This ruined Escobar's political career.<sup>60</sup> On 18 April 1989, an assassin killed the Liberal Party presidential candidate, Luis Carlos Galan, during a campaign speech.<sup>61</sup> On 27 November of the same year, in an attempt to kill Galan's successor, Cesar Gaviria, Escobar's henchmen planted a bomb that exploded on Colombian airliner Avianca Flight 203, killing 107 passengers.<sup>62</sup> Fortunately for Gaviria, he was never aboard the plane and went on to eventually become the president of Colombia from 1990-1994. By this time, Pablo Escobar was no longer merely a ruthless Colombian drug lord. He was now an international terrorist and a clear and present danger to U.S. national security.

Escobar's reign of terror ended when he negotiated his own surrender to the Colombian authorities in 1991. Just prior to his surrender, the Colombian Constitutional Assembly changed the constitution and formally outlawed extradition.<sup>63</sup> Pablo stayed sequestered in a luxury prison, a mansion in his hometown, where he could comfortably reestablish his drug activities. The national police forces were unable to come within twenty kilometers of the property, which was guarded by the local police that he effectively controlled.<sup>64</sup> On 22 July 1992, Escobar escaped the "prison" after the Colombian government decided to move him to a maximum-security facility. A country-

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<sup>60</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 39-41.

<sup>61</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 59.

<sup>62</sup> Bowden *Killing Pablo*, 59; "Objetivo GAVIRIA," *La Semana*, 8 May 1995. <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/objetivo-gaviria/44026.aspx>.

<sup>63</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 98.

<sup>64</sup> Bowden *Killing Pablo*, 97.

wide manhunt began with the creation of a combined U.S.-Colombian Medellin Task Force.

The manhunt grew and included the vigilante paramilitary organization led by the Fidel Castano known as Los Pepes (Perseguidos Por Pablo Escobar or People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar). Los Pepes committed itself to the demise of Escobar by bombing, assassinating, and kidnapping members of Pablo's organization and his family.<sup>65</sup> On 2 December 1993, the Colombian National Police located Pablo in a middle-class neighborhood and attempted to take him into custody. Escobar retaliated and died of gunshot wounds in a shootout as he attempted to escape from the rooftop.<sup>66</sup> However, the death of Pablo Escobar and the dismantling of the Medellin and the Cali drug cartels did not solve Colombia's drug problem. In fact, the groups that replaced the big drug cartels were more difficult for the Colombian security forces to combat. These highly decentralized organizations made up of fragmented networks maintained their insidious relationships with the paramilitaries and insurgents.<sup>67</sup>

### **Paramilitary Organizations (AUC)**

Paramilitary or armed civilian self-defense militias have a long-standing tradition in Colombia as result of a little or no security presence in the rural areas. For decades, local self-defense groups filled the void of the government's inability to provide security and protection to the campesino populations. These armed groups became commonplace throughout the Colombian countryside. During the early 1960s, Colombia's Plan Lazo, designed to eliminate the communist-influenced guerrilla insurgent groups, incorporated paramilitary or armed civil self-defense militias as supplementary forces to the Colombian counterinsurgency operations. The paramilitary forces protected the local

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<sup>65</sup> Undated, Ca. April 1993 *Information Paper on "Los Pepes"* U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Secret, 4 pp. Source: DIA declassification decision under FOIA

This DIA information paper prepared for the FBI provides general background information on *Los Pepes*, including its origins, composition, and activities. The report finds that "Fidel Castano Gil," identified as "chief of operations" for the *Pepes*, could pose new and different challenges in a post-Escobar era," noting that "Castano's drug trafficking activities provide him the financing necessary to further an anti-left agenda." DIA concludes that the Colombian government's willingness to take on Castaño "may depend more on how his paramilitary agenda complements Bogota's counterinsurgent activities rather than on his drug trafficking activities."; <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB243/19930400-dia.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 247-249.

<sup>67</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 12-14.

communities against the guerrilla insurgents by augmenting the Colombian security forces and collecting intelligence on the insurgents.<sup>68</sup>

In 1965, the Colombian government issued Decree 2298, which eventually became Law 48 in 1968, providing the legal framework for the organization and arming of the rural paramilitary forces trained and equipped by the Colombian military forces to support counterinsurgency operations.<sup>69</sup> The government's use of paramilitary forces offered several advantages. First, the paramilitaries immediately filled the vacuum of security that the government was unable to provide with its own forces. Second, the paramilitaries were an excellent source of intelligence for the counterinsurgent forces. Third, the indirect nature of the relationship between the government and the paramilitary force offered the government a degree of plausible deniability to paramilitary actions. Fourth, the paramilitary forces were not encumbered by the strict rules of warfare that bind conventional forces. Despite their many advantages, the paramilitaries were destabilizing because their associations with criminal activities, insurgents, atrocities, and the drug trade undermined the government's legitimacy. Thus, their continued existence remains a cause of political instability and violence.

During the presidency of Virgilio Barco (1986-1990), the rural self-defense paramilitary groups underwent a radical paradigm shift. The drug lords soon hired paramilitary forces as the preferred security apparatus for personal protection and the protection of their coca crops. Two other major changes occurred: (1) deaths attributed to paramilitary violence surpassed those attributed to guerrilla activities; (2) the Colombian armed forces no longer officially supported the paramilitary forces.<sup>70</sup> In 1989, President Barco declared paramilitary organizations illegal. Nevertheless, the decree did not disarm the groups thus the paramilitary violence continued as the groups continued their insidious alliances with drug cartels and other illegal entities and also continued counterinsurgent operations against guerrilla groups like such as the FARC and ELN. The banning of paramilitary militias had virtually no effect on the reduction of violence, kidnappings, and extortions. There still existed a vast security void throughout much of the country. Barco's government was unable to project its military power to

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<sup>68</sup> Hristov, *Blood and Capital*, 61.

<sup>69</sup> Hristov, *Blood and Capital*, 62.

<sup>70</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 13.

protect the people caught in the middle of the unholy trinity of violence among the self-defense groups, drug cartels, and the insurgent guerrillas.

In 1995, President Cesar Gaviria, recognizing the lack of security in most parts of the country, issued Decree 356, which again legalized paramilitary forces for special services of surveillance and public security.<sup>71</sup> This decree stipulated that anyone with Ministry of Defense approval could provide for his own security armed with military weapons. The governor of the department of Antioquia and future Colombian President Alvaro Uribe used this decree to create the Community Associations of Rural Vigilance (CONVIVIR), which focused on intelligence reporting for security forces and self-defense. In addition to intelligence gathering for the military, some units within CONVIVIR were involved in the killings of suspected guerrilla sympathizers.<sup>72</sup> In 1999, the units making up CONVIVIR were officially disbanded.

In 1997, Carlos Castano, brother of Los Pepes founder Fidel Castano, formed the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) to provide regional security and protection from communist insurgents. The AUC was the main right-wing paramilitary group in Colombia until it disbanded in 2006.<sup>73</sup> The AUC attempted to fill the void of the Colombian police and military forces unable to provide security to the rural population from the FARC's extortion and kidnapping activities. The AUC further increased its power and influence through an alliance of convenience with illegal drug-trafficking organizations which also needed a security force to counter guerrilla responses when the drug lords refused to pay the guerrilla's "drug taxes."<sup>74</sup> The atrocities committed by the AUC, while condemned by the international community, were largely overlooked by the population because the primary targets for AUC were the guerrilla insurgents or civilians suspected of supporting the guerrillas. During the 1990s, the FARC's new strategy of aggressively attacking Colombian forces in small towns and military bases threatened the legitimacy of the government. This change in strategy led to an accelerated expansion of paramilitary forces to fill the security void. From 1991 to 1999, paramilitary membership increased significantly from approximately 850 to an

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<sup>71</sup> Hristov, *Blood and Capital*, 69.

<sup>72</sup> Hristov, *Blood and Capital*, 70.

<sup>73</sup> Troy Sacquety, "Colombia's Troubled Past," 53.

<sup>74</sup> Ospina, "Insights from Colombia's Prolonged War," 59.

estimated 5,900 members.<sup>75</sup> Prior to Colombia's recently improved security situation, the AUC, was the most successful anti-guerrilla group in the country.<sup>76</sup>

Under Plan Colombia, the government of Colombia increased its security and government presence throughout the country significantly and offered the AUC a negotiated demobilization agreement. President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) also provided incentive programs, reduced prison sentences, and offered government stipends. As a result, the former AUC paramilitaries would successfully reintegrate into society.<sup>77</sup> On 18 April 2006, after several months of demobilization and negotiations, the Colombian government announced that its largest paramilitary group, the AUC, had officially disbanded. Over the course of several months, an estimated 30,000 paramilitaries demobilized and turned in over 17,000 weapons to the Colombian security forces.<sup>78</sup> The paramilitary phenomenon in Colombia was a direct result of weak state practices, a highly decentralized government, and the long-standing requirement for a proper security apparatus. These conditions threatened the legitimacy of the government. Ironically, the paramilitary self-defense groups arose as a part of a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that intended to eradicate guerrillas by providing a temporary security solution allowing the government to bolster its own security forces while strengthening the government's legitimacy and authority.

### Summary

The assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in 1948 marked a new era of conflict in Colombia known as La Violencia (1948-1966) claiming the lives of over 200,000 Colombians. During La Violencia, leftist guerrilla groups and paramilitary self-defense forces consisting of rival political groups clashed violently, and with impunity throughout the Colombian countryside. Decades of neglect from the national government and the state's lack of presence in Colombia's rurareas exacerbated the violence and fomented an

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<sup>75</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 32.

<sup>77</sup> Hristov, *Blood and Capital*, 148.

<sup>78</sup> "Colombia Says Paramilitary AUC is no more," Agency France-Presse, *Reliefweb*, 18 April 2006, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB/NSF/db900SID/SKAR-6NYBS?/OpenDocument>.

insurgency. During the 1960s, Marxist-Leninist-inspired guerilla bands created small enclaves in the isolated countryside and supported by the Colombian Communist Party.

In 1964, Plan Lazo, Colombia's first national strategy designed to restore law and order and stability to the state, rid the country of the communist enclaves and officially ended La Violencia. In 1966, remnant groups of disparate guerrillas consolidated and formed the FARC. Other armed guerrilla groups emerged such as the ELN and M-19 in response to the oligarchic National Front government. From 1970 to 2000, the FARC, financed by the illicit drug trade, grew from a small band of 350 to an estimated 20,000 guerrillas and expanded to the economically and politically strategic areas of the country. The FARC, the ELN, and M-19 during the 1980s and 1990s carried out attacks against government and infrastructure targets in an attempt to destabilize the country. By the 1990s, the FARC had transitioned from conducting small guerrilla attacks to larger scale mobile warfare with the capability to defeat the Colombian security forces. By 1998, the Colombian state was on the verge of collapse politically, militarily, and economically, and the FARC was on the rise.

As a direct result of the Colombian government's neglect in providing ample security to its citizens and its weak state authority paramilitary self-defense groups emerged during La Violencia and then again to counter the powerful illegal drug cartels in the 1990s. In 1997, the AUC consolidated many different paramilitary groups in order to confront the leftist guerrilla groups. The AUC financed themselves with resources obtained from illegal drug-trafficking and were responsible for various violations of human rights. By 1998, the AUC continued to conduct attacks on civilians, guerrillas, and anyone deemed as guerrilla sympathizers and continued to play a major role in the downward spiral of the Colombian state.

The illegal drug trade continued to thrive and expanded after the death of the infamous drug lord Pablo Escobar. During the 1990s, Escobar's drug cartel empire was replaced by fragmented and decentralized organizations that were difficult for the Colombian security forces to confront and defeat. These organizations also maintained close ties to the guerrilla groups as well as the paramilitary forces. In 1997, Colombia surpassed Peru and Bolivia and became the largest cultivator of coca leaf hectares. By



1998, the nexus among the drug-traffickers, the guerrilla groups, and the paramilitaries and the resulting conflict continued to wreck havoc on a country on the brink of decline.

## Chapter 3

### The Crisis Strategy: *Plan Colombia*

*There are reasons to be optimistic about the future of Colombia, especially if we receive a positive response from the world community, as we work to create widespread prosperity combined with justice. This will make it possible for Colombians to pave the way for lasting peace.*

*--President Andres Pastrana*

*We are committed to maintaining the line between counterinsurgency and counter-drugs, because we are not in the counterinsurgency business.*

*--U.S. Official (circa 1998)*

*From the very first day, the main goal of President Alvaro Uribe's government has been to make Colombia safer, free from threats to its citizens' security, where legitimate government authority can promote the economic and social development of all Colombians.*

*-- Juan Manuel Santos*

*In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups. We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions, defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory, and provide basic security to the Colombian people.*

*-- President George W. Bush*

During the 1990s, Colombia was a country under siege and in rapid decline. Colombia's downward spiral toward regional and economic instability intensified after decades of violence, weak governance, a flourishing illicit drug trade, and guerrilla warfare. The Colombian armed forces, unprepared for the strengthening FARC-EP, proved incapable of maintaining a monopoly over the use of force, and were no longer able to carry out basic security and domestic order functions. As a result, they lost large areas of the countryside to the guerrilla forces. The security vacuum enabled paramilitary self-defense forces, guerrilla insurgents, and drug cartels to conduct indiscriminate acts of violence and terrorist attacks throughout Colombia. With large portions of territory controlled by the leftist guerrillas and other areas utilized to cultivate illegal drugs, the

population and the international community began to lose its confidence in Colombia's ability to govern. This chapter examines Colombia's response to its internal crisis and its plans for peace and stability beginning with the negotiations with the FARC-EP and culminating with the execution of the American-supported Plan Colombia from 1999-2008.

### **Colombia's Decade of Descent, Crisis, and Instability (1990-2000)**

Colombia's endemic violence and instability were symptoms of a fragile government confronted with the convergence of the illegal drug trade, armed self-defense groups, and the continuing leftist guerrilla insurgency led by the FARC-EP and ELN groups. The decline into the abyss of instability and disorder increased as Colombia's security situation continued to deteriorate. The internal conflicts among the Colombian security forces, powerful drug cartels, vigilante paramilitaries, and guerrilla insurgent forces were primarily responsible for the violence that ravaged Colombia in the 1990s. These conflicts created several destabilizing factors: increased crime rates, large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the expansion of coca leaf cultivation, a devastated economy, and a marginalized military further eroded the government's already declining authority.

In 1991, Colombia became one of the most dangerous countries in the world as the average homicide rates peaked at 80 killings per 100,000 residents.<sup>1</sup> During most of the 1990s, the country's crime rate increased to unprecedented levels. From 1991 to 2002, the average national homicide rate was approximately 73 per 100,000 or approximately 32,000 homicides. An estimated 3,700 kidnappings occurred in 2000, the highest rate of kidnappings in Colombia's history.<sup>2</sup> Medellin, Colombia's second-largest city and Pablo Escobar's former seat of power, achieved a homicide rate in 1991 of 381

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<sup>1</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, Republica de Colombia, "Logros de la Politica de Consilacion de la Seguridad Democratica," Bogotá, September 2009; Source: [www.antisecuestro.gov.co](http://www.antisecuestro.gov.co) and [www.derechoshumanos.gov.co](http://www.derechoshumanos.gov.co) 1992-1995 data from Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forensensicas.

<sup>2</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, Republica de Colombia, "Logros de la Politica de Consilacion de la Seguridad Democratica," Bogotá, September 2009; Source: [www.antisecuestro.gov.co](http://www.antisecuestro.gov.co) and [www.derechoshumanos.gov.co](http://www.derechoshumanos.gov.co) 1992-1995 data from Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forensensicas.

per 100,000, averaging more than 16 homicides per day.<sup>3</sup> Medellín was, during the height of Pablo Escobar's reign of terror, the murder capital of the world. The security situation declined significantly within Colombia's 1,119 municipios (similar to U.S. counties) as the guerrilla forces and paramilitary groups exploited the void caused by lack of local government presence. The FARC controlled large areas of strategic coca-cultivating land in the rural southern regions and replaced the local government apparatus by providing security and collecting taxes from the growers and campesino farmers. An estimated 649 municipios maintained an active guerrilla presence and at least 280 municipios had no police presence at all.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Colombian Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement or CODHES) the violent conflicts among the Colombian army, the self-defense paramilitary forces, and guerrilla insurgent groups led to an estimated 4.4 million IDPs with approximately 2.2 million IDPs from 1999 to 2005.<sup>5</sup> The self-defense paramilitary forces and the narco-traffickers routinely competed for the FARC-controlled coca cultivation areas in southern Colombia. The guerrilla and paramilitary groups often attacked the rural campesino population who "supported the other side" through acts of terror, and massacres against the civilian often forcing thousands from their villages and farms.<sup>6</sup> Forced displacement through terror was a common tactic utilized by both the guerrillas and the paramilitary groups to force the population to abandon lucrative crop fields for coca cultivation, and remove them from strategic military or economic zones.<sup>7</sup>

Colombia's rapid descent into chaos also resulted from its transition to the world's largest cultivator of coca leaf and the strained relationship with the U.S. during the Ernest Samper presidency (1994-1998). The illegal drug trade and domestic coca

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, "Medellín Goes From Murder Capital To Model City," *Newsweek*, 19 November 2007. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/69552>.

<sup>4</sup> Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs, Insurgency, and Its implications for Regional Stability* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 50.

<sup>5</sup> Consultoria Para Los Derechos Humanos y El Desplazamiento (Codhes) Número de Personas Desplazadas por Departamento de Llegada por trimestres desde 1999 a 2005 - Cifra Codhes 15 febrero de 2006 Fuente: Monitoreo población desplazada - Sisdhes *Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento*

<sup>6</sup> "100 Familias Desplazadas Cultivarán Café En El Dorado (Meta)," *El Tiempo*, 23 January 2008. <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-3930454>.

<sup>7</sup> Jasmin Hristov, *Blood and Capital: The Paramilitarization of Colombia*, (Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, 2009), 161.

cultivation became lucrative resources for the drug cartels, the self-defense paramilitary militias, and the guerrilla insurgents. Successful illegal drug eradication efforts in Bolivia and Peru during the 1990s decreased the coca cultivation rates in the two countries significantly. Coca cultivation within the Colombian borders increased however, as it proved less risky and more profitable for the Colombian narco-traffickers. As a result, domestic coca cultivation eventually soared, from over 50,000 hectares in 1995 to over 163,000 hectares in 2000.<sup>8</sup>

Ernesto Samper's scandal-ridden presidency, tarnished by allegations of Cali drug cartel campaign contributions, contributed to the further deterioration of Colombia. His presidency faced several challenges including a tense relationship with one of Colombia's oldest and most faithful allies, the United States. The Clinton Administration felt that Semper's government was not cooperating with American counter-narcotics efforts and decertified the country as an official partner in the War on Drugs. The decertification proved catastrophic for Samper's government by ending all foreign aid from the U.S. and creating sanctions that further crippled the nation's economy.<sup>9</sup> Samper's tenure as president from 1994-1998 was also characterized by several other destabilizing factors: the expansive growth of paramilitary groups, the lack of progress in the peace initiatives with the insurgent guerrillas, and the noticeable change in the FARC-EP's military strategy.<sup>10</sup> Colombia was quickly approaching the status of a failed state.

In the late 1990s, Colombia's financial system experienced a debilitating blow as several banks and other financial institutions failed.<sup>11</sup> The national economy crumbled under the strain of financial decline and the political instability caused by the ubiquitous internal conflicts. Throughout the decade, both the inflation rate and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth fluctuated dramatically. In 1994, the inflation rate peaked at 45 percent and five years later Colombia experienced a decline of -4 percent GDP because

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<sup>8</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, Republica de Colombia, "Logros de la Politica de Consilacion de la Seguridad Democratica," Bogotá , September 2009.

<sup>9</sup> "El Costo de La Bofetada," *La Semana* , 1 April 1996. <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/costo-bofetada/31140.aspx>.

<sup>10</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 45.

<sup>11</sup> Jose E. Gomez-Gonzalez, *Bank Failure: Evidence from the Colombian Financial crisis* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press and US Department of the Treasury, 2007), 1.

of the economic and financial crisis.<sup>12</sup> The economic downward spiral proved disastrous to the central government's authority and legitimacy as Colombia's economy plummeted into a severe recession increasing unemployment rate and the already high poverty levels.

During the mid-1990s, the FARC-EP shifted its military strategy to operate in large-scale offensive attacks against government targets involving multiple fronts using mortars and improvised cylinder bombs.<sup>13</sup> The FARC had evolved into an army capable of imposing its will on the government and population by occupying and controlling territory. Exploiting the Colombian army's vulnerabilities, the FARC mounted several successful attacks against them from 1996 to 1998. The emboldened FARC guerrillas, in conjunction with the ELN, launched 42 offensives in 14 of the 32 Colombian departments (equivalent to U.S. states) during the 1998 national elections killing approximately 140 soldiers, police, and civilians.<sup>14</sup> In retaliation for guerrilla attacks, the paramilitary forces, with purported links to the Colombian military, continued to conduct extrajudicial executions and massacres of suspected guerrilla supporters adding the vicious cycle of violence.

In 1998, the Colombian army and police forces suffered devastating and humiliating defeats from the FARC in El Billar, Miraflores, and Mitu. The Colombian army's defeat at El Billar in March was significant because the FARC defeated an elite counterinsurgency unit with approximately 800 guerrillas. In August 1998 just prior to the inauguration of the newly elected Colombian president, Andres Pastrana (1998-2002), the FARC launched a 1,200-man attack against the 120-man Colombian army garrison in Miraflores. Miraflores, a remote coca-producing jungle enclave located approximately 275 miles southeast of Bogota became a battle zone as the guerrillas overwhelmed the Colombian forces, destroyed the military base, and in the aftermath the FARC killed 30, captured 100, and wounded 50 people.<sup>15</sup> In November 1998, approximately 1,000 FARC

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<sup>12</sup> The World Bank Group Database, Quick Query selected from World Development Indicators <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/DDPQQ/member.do?method=getMembers&userid=1&queryId=135>.

<sup>13</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Ramsey III, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque: The Colombian Security Force Experience, 1998-2000, Occasional Paper 34* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 31; Diana Jean Schemo, "Colombian Rebels Broaden Offensive With Attacks on Symbols of U.S. War Against Coca," *New York Times*, August 19, 1998. <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/colombia/colombia8-19-98.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 44.

guerrillas launched an attack and occupied the small city of Mitu, the departmental capital of Vaupes located nearly 400 miles southeast of Bogota near the Brazilian border. The FARC guerrillas occupied the city for three days killing 10 civilians, 80 soldiers and police officers, and capturing 40 people.<sup>16</sup> These attacks painfully illustrated to Pastrana's new administration its military's vulnerabilities as well as the military power of the FARC-EP. Colombians strived for and insisted on peace; they felt trapped between the horrific violent conflicts among the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the state.<sup>17</sup> Colombians concerned about the FARC's military capabilities, urged the government to reinstate a peace strategy. The Colombians were not the only ones concerned about the military capabilities of the Colombian armed forces. In 1999, the U.S. "Drug Czar" Gen. Barry McCaffrey testified to a Senate Committee that the Colombian armed forces were incapable of conducting counter-narcotic operations because of the FARC.<sup>18</sup> Pastrana vowed to fight for justice, bring peace and stability to his country, and immediately initiated new negotiations for peace with the FARC-EP in 1998.

### **President Pastrana the Peacemaker (1999-2002)**

In June 1998, President Andres Pastrana inherited a country in turmoil that seemed destined for failure. Pastrana's government faced a waning economy, increased countrywide attacks by guerrilla forces, rampant drug production, and the expansion of vigilante paramilitary self-defense groups. He concluded that negotiations with the insurgents were the only way to solve Colombia's demise. Pastrana campaigned and won on a platform of restoring peace and stability while aggressively pursuing anti-drug efforts and a negotiated peace settlement to the three-decade long insurgency. In July 1998, he provided a faint glimmer of hope to the Colombian people by following through with his campaign promises and met with the FARC commander, Tirofijo, in the

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<sup>16</sup> Bert Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001), 25.

<sup>17</sup> Diana Jean Schemo, "Colombian Rebels Broaden Offensive With Attacks on Symbols of U.S. War Against Coca," *New York Times*, August 19, 1998.  
<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/colombia/colombia8-19-98.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Isacson, *Getting Deeper: The United States' Growing Involvement In Colombia's Conflict* (Washington, DC: International Policy Report, Center of International Policy, 2000), 4.

mountain countryside to initiate the guerrilla peace process.<sup>19</sup> Pastrana's new administration, determined to obtain peace and stability at any cost, proved eager to take extreme risks, make significant sacrifices, and endure harsh political criticism to resolve the forty-year civil war.

One of his most controversial and highly criticized initiatives was the formation of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), known as la zona de despeje (the clear zone) in the FARC's historic stronghold in southern Colombia. His intent was to create a FARC-controlled neutral zone, with no government security presence that allowed government and FARC representatives to engage in peace talks. On 7 November 1998, one week after the Mitu attack, Pastrana withdrew all police and army units from the area and officially ceded to the FARC an area of approximately 16,000 square miles, consisting of five municipios in the southern departments of Meta and Canqueta with an estimated population of 90,000.<sup>20</sup>

The DMZ was only to last 90 days as an incentive to honor a cease-fire agreement and as a temporary concession to the guerrillas for their involvement in the bilateral peace negotiations. Pastrana, desperate for an end to the unrelenting insurgency, would ultimately extend the life of the DMZ 11 times over the course of 38 months.<sup>21</sup> The historic meeting between Pastrana and Tirofijo was set to take place on 7 January 1999 in the rural southern town of San Vicente del Caguan. On that day, President Pastrana, with an audience of hundreds of reporters and television media journalists, was going to introduce initiatives and compromises designed to instill trust and increase security.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, Tirofijo never appeared, claiming that a paramilitary death threat had prevented his appearance. Pastrana's high stakes gamble clearly had not paid off, and it seemed that his ambitious plans to establish a negotiated peace process was doomed from the beginning.

Ironically, in his quest for peace Pastrana's zona de despeje concept only led to further instability and violence. The surrendering of territory to guerrilla insurgents who refused to disarm with the hopes of achieving a peaceful resolution was not popular with

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<sup>19</sup> Adam Isacson, *The Colombian Dilemma: After A Century Of Fighting, Can A Fragile Peace Process Succeed?*, (Washington DC: International Policy Report, Center of International Policy, 2000), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ramsey, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Ramsey, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War*, 29.



Pastrana's political and military critics. The DMZ concept, dubbed by some FARC-landia, represented the Pastrana administration's desperation to appease the FARC, symbolized the government's apparent lack of authority, and highlighted the military's inability to conduct successful counterinsurgency operations. While the government upheld its part of the agreement honoring the cease-fire and withdrawing its troops from the area, the FARC had different plans. For Tirofijo and the other FARC leaders, FARC-landia represented a sanctuary from which to build its military and economic power to prepare for future war. The FARC immediately established control of the uncontested territory. The insurgents maintained security for the population, provided the rule of law, built roads and bridges to facilitate troop transport for future operations, continued kidnapping for extortion, stockpiled and smuggled weapons, continued to expand illegal drug production, and signed international economic agreements.<sup>23</sup>

Over the next three years, subsequent peace talks idled as the FARC refused to disarm, continued to conduct guerrilla attacks, and frequently "froze" negotiations. The Pastrana administration finally halted all negotiations and ordered the military to reassert control over the DMZ in early 2002, after the guerrilla group conducted a series of attacks killing hundreds of civilians with improvised cylinder bombs, destroyed critical civilian infrastructure, and hijacked a commercial aircraft kidnapping a senator.<sup>24</sup> Pastrana's infamous DMZ debacle represented a low point for his government's legitimacy and authority. His futile attempts at achieving a negotiated settlement with the FARC were further disrupted by the guerrilla's position of strength and by the massacres of suspected guerrilla sympathizers, committed by vigilante self-defense paramilitary groups with suspected links to the Colombian military.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Pastrana's four-year attempt at peace was not a complete failure. While the FARC obtained a sanctuary from which to increase its military and economic strength, the Colombian government also gained some strategic and operational advantages largely due to Pastrana's own

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Dudley, *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2006), 172-173.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Emblin, "Colombia se rebelo!," *El Tiempo*, 29 December 2002. <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1372660>; Juan Forero, "Colombian Rebels Hijack a Plane and Kidnap a Senator," *New York Times*, 21 February 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/21/international/americas/21COLO.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Nina M. Serafino, *Colombia: Conditions and U.S. Policy Options* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 12, 2001), 1.

proposal, the U.S.-supported Plan Colombia. During the four-year peace process, the government was also able to build its military forces, while the FARC lost its domestic prestige with the population due to its aggressive terrorist activities. The population felt that the FARC had been given everything and had not taken the negotiations seriously.<sup>26</sup>

### **Plan Colombia (1999)**

In 1998, Pastrana began to mend the strategic relationship between the U.S. and Colombia damaged by the drug-money-tainted Ernesto Samper administration. His new administration pledged to end Colombia's forty-year civil war, eliminate illicit drug activities, and encourage economic and social development. In 1999, Pastrana traveled to Washington D.C. and unveiled his six-year comprehensive solution to Colombia's crisis entitled "Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State." Plan Colombia's purpose was to regain and sustain the government's stability and legitimacy by negotiating peace with the major guerrilla insurgent groups, stopping the flow of illegal drugs, and encouraging economic, military, and social reforms with the assistance of the international community.<sup>27</sup> Pastrana's Plan Colombia contained ten essential components:

1. Economic revitalization that encouraged employment creation and supported tax revenues as well as international trade agreements designed to counterbalance the illegal narco-trafficking shadow economy.
2. Fiscal and financial reform proposals designed to boost economic activity and recover Colombia's former prestige in international financial markets.
3. A negotiated peace that proposed a negotiated peace settlement with the major guerrilla groups (primarily the FARC and ELN).
4. A national defense strategy designed to restructure and modernize Colombia's security forces enabling them to enforce the rule of law and provide security throughout the country.

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<sup>26</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 125.

<sup>27</sup> *Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State*. President of the Republic of Colombia. Bogotá, October 1999. Peace Agreements Digital Collection U.S. Institute of Peace. [http://www.usip.org/library/pa/colombia/adddoc/plan\\_colombia\\_101999.html](http://www.usip.org/library/pa/colombia/adddoc/plan_colombia_101999.html).

5. Judicial reform and human rights strategy intended to reaffirm the rule of law to guarantee equal and impartial justice to all Colombian citizens.
6. A multi-national counter-narcotics effort to impede the production, distribution, sale, consumption, asset laundering, precursor chemicals, and arms dealing activities within each country involved. Within Colombia itself, stopping the influx of drug-money to the guerrilla and the self-defense armed paramilitary groups.
7. An agricultural and economic reform program designed to provide legal agricultural alternatives to coca farmers and laborers.
8. An anti-corruption effort that develops accountability at the local and community levels of government.
9. Broad social reform including health and education programs as well as programs designed to decrease the poverty levels within Colombia.
10. An international effort to secure the international community's support of Colombia's peace initiatives and counter-narcotic efforts.

Colombia, which provided an estimated 90 percent of the cocaine and 47 percent of the heroin consumed in the U.S., was in the midst of rapid decline. The architects of Plan Colombia determined that the primary cause of the country's downward spiral was the illegal drug trade. The plan proposed that aggressive counter-drug operations would address the root causes of Colombia's violence by undermining the legitimacy, resources, and capabilities of the narco-traffickers, the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries. These actions would strengthen Colombia's democratic institutions with economic and social development and ensure stability and the central government's authority. Simultaneously, the guerrillas weakened by the neutralization of the drug economy, would hopefully conform to a comprehensive settlement and restore the state's stability. In 1998, Pastrana initiated the peace process with the FARC and agreed, as a sign of his sincerity to negotiate, to surrender approximately 4 percent of Colombia's sovereign territory to the guerrilla group. The six-year project designed to revive Colombia's stability and restore peace had an enormous total cost of \$7.5 billion. Pastrana's administration vowed to provide \$4 billion and sought \$3.5 billion from the United States and the international community.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 62.

## **U.S. Support for Plan Colombia**

Pastrana's election quickly repaired the strained relationship between Washington and Bogota. The urgency of Colombia's crisis and potential for instability drove the Clinton Administration to support Pastrana's government and its proposals. As early as December 1998, the U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen and his Colombian counterpart, Defense Minister Rodrigo Lloreda, collaborated on the following U.S.-supported military initiatives:

1. **Counternarcotics Battalions.** Three 950-man battalions, under the guidance of the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), created, trained, and equipped from within the Colombian Army designed to conduct counternarcotics and fumigation operations. The first of these anti-drug battalions was stationed in Tres Esquinas, a coca-producing region in southern Colombia.
2. **Riverine Program.** Support to a program designed to develop the Colombian Navy's control of river traffic.
3. **Colombian Air Force Assistance.** The U.S. provided upgrades and pilot training on A-37 Dragonfly aircraft and funded runway and air base improvements. This program provided the Colombian Air Force with "lift" capability and the ability to interdict drug-smuggling aircraft.
4. **Intelligence.** The U.S. helped establish a Joint Intelligence Center (JIC) collocated with a counternarcotics battalion at Tres Esquinas where U.S. personnel shared intelligence with the Colombian military and police. Prior to 1999, the U.S. was unable to share vital intelligence concerning guerrilla activities if it was unrelated to counternarcotics.
5. **Military Reform.** USSOUTHCOM assisted in the transition of the Colombian Army from its defensive mindset, the improved collaboration with the national police, the improvement of counternarcotics capabilities.
6. **Arms sales.** U.S. provided military arms and equipment to assist in the modernization of the Colombian security forces.
7. **Police assistance.** U.S. continued its financial support to the national police.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Isacson, *Getting Deeper: the United States' Growing Involvement in Colombia's Conflict*, 2-6.

In July 2000, the U.S. Congress allocated \$860 million in funding to Colombia as part of Plan Colombia's counternarcotics efforts.<sup>30</sup> Approximately 77 percent of these funds equipped the three counternarcotics battalions with 16 UH-60 Black Hawk and 30 UH-1H Huey helicopters and equipped the national police with two Black Hawk and 12 Huey helicopters.<sup>31</sup> The remaining 23 percent of the funds included provisions for economic and social aid. The package included \$65 million for crop substitution and alternative economic development, \$10 million for coca farmers displaced by fumigation operations, and \$51 million to improve human rights protections and aid to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international governmental organizations (IGOs).<sup>32</sup>

The anti-drug operations centered on a "Push Into Southern Colombian Coca-Growing Areas," where the new counternarcotics battalions cleared and secured the areas from armed groups and conducted aggressive aerial fumigation operations in the FARC-controlled zones producing the majority of the coca leaf crops. The operations would then extend to the southeastern and central portions of Colombia and ultimately the whole country.<sup>33</sup>

Despite these comprehensive efforts by the end of 2002, it was clear that President Pastrana's struggle to keep Colombia from continuing its downward spiral into a state of crisis no closer to ending the violence than the previous administration was. Colombia had become significantly more dangerous as evidenced by dramatic increases in homicides, kidnappings, massacres, and terrorist attacks.<sup>34</sup> In 1999, Colombia experienced a meltdown of its financial institutions, and the following year inflation skyrocketed to an unprecedented 26 percent. Paramilitary membership continued to escalate and leftist guerrilla insurgents occupied sovereign territory. With both groups funded by illegal drug production, Colombia became the undisputed primary source of cocaine for the United States. Pastrana's failed attempts to negotiate a peace settlement with guerrilla groups with no set timetables, no disarmament agreements, and no

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<sup>30</sup> Serafino, *Colombia: Conditions and U.S. Policy Options*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 65.

<sup>34</sup> Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold*, 182.

reintegration plans led to failure and virtually guaranteed a more violent and unstable future. Nevertheless, for all these failures between 1998 and 2002, the Pastrana government did provide a legacy of hope and framework for peace within Plan Colombia for the long term. Plan Colombia, however, was not without its own faults.

### **Plan Colombia's Flaws**

From the American perspective, the tragic flaw in the U.S. support to Plan Colombia was the Clinton Administration's narrow focus on the drug problem and its reluctance to acknowledge the interconnected unholy trinity among the guerrilla insurgents, the illegal drug trade, and the paramilitaries as the root cause of Colombia's violence and instability. The Clinton Administration's skewed view originated from the fear of U.S. involvement in long-term COIN operations in Latin America. During the 1990s, the increasing strength of the guerrillas rightfully concerned President Clinton's administration, but human rights concerns also influenced the shortsighted policy to focus solely on counternarcotics instead of supporting COIN efforts.<sup>35</sup> The self-imposed restrictions on U.S. policy with respect to Plan Colombia proved counterproductive and ultimately impeded progress toward peace and stability.

The U.S. Congress maintained strict oversight over the utilization of the equipment and funds allocated to the Colombian counternarcotics units and purposefully restricted the scope of its military operations. Unlike the modified intelligence-sharing agreements, the large counternarcotics units were unable to use any of their assets (i.e. helicopters) to aid in COIN operations against the guerrilla insurgents. The U.S. aid only applied to counternarcotics operations; COIN operations were limited to the regular Colombian Army units.

From the Colombian perspective, this flaw manifested itself in the narrow manner with which Pastrana's government approached the root of Colombia's violence. Despite Plan Colombia's initiatives, Pastrana's administration lacked a comprehensive plan integrating all the instruments of power to simultaneously defeat the insurgency, destroy

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<sup>35</sup> Adam Isacson, "Evaluating Plan Colombia," *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, Summer/Fall 2005. 140.

the illegal drug trade, and disband the paramilitaries. Pastrana treated Colombia's unholy trinity as three separate entities. The state focused primarily on relinquishing territory in negotiations with duplicitous guerrillas and the eradication of the illicit drug crops that funded them. The struggling Colombian military was primarily responsible for COIN operations against powerful guerrilla groups and often engaged in operations with the paramilitaries against the guerrilla insurgents. The central government's lack of strategic involvement in COIN operations translated to the military acting unilaterally and incomplete military plans with severely limited civil action programs.<sup>36</sup> During this time, Colombian army and security forces were able to clear guerrilla infested areas, but with no overarching government strategy linking the Colombian army's military actions to political objectives, were often unable to build or hold.

During the Pastrana years, the military leadership had adamantly opposed the concept of FARC-landia because it painfully symbolized the state's lack of confidence in the military. Ironically, the lack of ceasefire agreements between the government and the FARC that led to aggressive COIN operations and helped the Colombian military regain its strategic military initiative.<sup>37</sup> The military leadership of Generals Carlos Ospina, Jorge Mora, and Fernando Tapias worked to adapt, develop, and execute effective population-centered COIN strategies, but unfortunately, plans often were constrained due to lack of central government participation making the consolidation of military gains difficult.<sup>38</sup> Pastrana's lack of leadership, his inability to adapt to a failed situation, and his inattention to unity of effort between the political and military leaders led to incongruent military and diplomatic campaigns that focused on the symptoms of Colombia's crisis but not on the root cause.

### **Uribe's Policy for Defense and Democratic Security (2002-2006)**

In May 2002, a third-party candidate, Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010), was elected president obtaining 53 percent of the total popular vote. He became the first presidential

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Marks, "Colombia: COIN the Right Way," *Military Review*, (March-April 2007), 42.

<sup>37</sup> General Carlos Alberto Ospina "Insights From Colombia's Prolonged War," *Joint Forces Quarterly* Vol. 3, no. 42 (2006): 60.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Marks, "Colombia: COIN the Right Way," *Military Review*, (March-April 2007), 44-45.

candidate to win in the first round in a Colombian election.<sup>39</sup> Uribe, like his predecessors Pastrana and Samper, inherited a nation in turmoil that struggled economically, militarily, and socially. His popularity stemmed from his “firm hand, big heart” campaign advocating the primacy of the population’s security to achieve peace and stability.<sup>40</sup> In order to accomplish this, he swore to improve and expand the security forces to combat the guerrillas and the paramilitary forces. He criticized Pastrana’s failed negotiations with the FARC and the ELN guerrilla insurgents for further destabilizing the country and leading to record levels of violence, kidnappings, and other criminal activity. Uribe worked quickly to expand on Pastrana’s original Plan Colombia, with U.S. support and financing, to bolster the country’s security, countering the illegal drug trade, while alleviating the nation’s social and economic woes.

American support to Plan Colombia changed drastically because of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and marked a major adjustment in U.S. Policy toward assistance to Colombia. In 2001, the U.S. State Department declared Colombia’s three major insurgent groups, the ELN, the FARC, and the paramilitary AUC to be terrorist organizations.<sup>41</sup> In 2002, the U.S. Congress granted “new authorities” to Plan Colombia that included \$25 million dollars in Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) funds. The supplemental bill also removed the restrictions imposed on military assistance and financing for counternarcotics operations and expanded the scope to include operations against terrorist groups.<sup>42</sup>

As part of the original Plan Colombia, Congress had mandated a restriction of 400 personnel, equally divided between U.S. military and civilian contractors, as a method of limiting the number of forces within the country. By 2005, the National Defense Authorization Act increased the limit to 800 personnel excluding the permanent party stationed at the U.S. Embassy and Military Group-Colombia.<sup>43</sup> Under the newly

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<sup>39</sup> “Arrollador Triunfo De Uribe,” *El Tiempo*, 27 May 2002.  
<http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1315988>.

<sup>40</sup> Nina M. Serafino, *Colombia: The Uribe Administration and Congressional Concerns* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, June 14, 2002), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Center For Defense Information, United States Department of State’s List of Known Terrorist Organizations, <http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/terrorist-groups.cfm>.

<sup>42</sup> Ramsey, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque*, 79-80.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Finlayson, “U.S. Forces: The Major Command Structure”. *Veritas* Vol. 2, no. 4, (2006): 66.



expanded authority of Plan Colombia, USSOUTHCOM focused its personnel to provide the Colombian armed forces assistance in the following areas:

1. Training and equipping elite units in COIN and counter-narcotic operations.
2. Assisting with the establishment of joint operations units.
3. Providing U.S. military Planning Assistance Training Teams who work with Colombian military commanders and their staffs to improve their operational planning abilities.
4. Providing support, including helicopters, intelligence platforms, rations, fuel, and munitions, to Colombian military units engaged in operations against high-ranking illegally armed group leadership.
5. Training trainers for critical specialties such as aviation unit maintenance and counterterrorism.
6. Training and assistance in the development and sustainment of a human rights policy and program within the Colombian armed forces.
7. Assistance with the establishment of social and civic support programs in communities previously controlled by illegally armed groups.<sup>44</sup>

President Uribe, with the expanded U.S. support to Plan Colombia, was able to create an integrated political-military strategic framework from which to attain security, stability, democratic governance, and a sustainable peace. In June 2003, he published Colombia's new national security strategy, the Policy for Defense and Democratic Security, as a course of action "to establish and reinstate the rule of law in Colombia and protect the population."<sup>45</sup> Uribe's Democratic Security Policy established five strategic objectives:

1. Consolidating control of national territory. Uribe levied a one-time war tax on the wealthiest citizens to fund the initial increases of the Colombian armed forces. The significant increase of the military and security forces projected a legitimate government presence in every municipio and denied sanctuary to terrorists and perpetrators of violence. Once a basic level of security had been established, the

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<sup>44</sup> USSOUTHCOM: Support to Colombia. <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/factFiles.php?id=35>.

<sup>45</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2003.

government would provide the needed social programs i.e., health care, economic development, etc., to the population.

2. Public security. An increase in the government's security leading to a significant decrease in violent activities, i.e. homicides, kidnappings, extortion, and IDPs.
3. The destruction of the illegal drug trade. The policy's aerial interdiction and illegal crop eradication initiatives were to weaken the drug economy through counter-drug operations to eliminate the financing of terrorist groups responsible for corruption and crime.
4. Maintain a military deterrent. Colombia's increased military capability aimed to secure the borders and maintained a long-term guarantee of democratic sustainability
5. Transparent resource management. Transparency would legitimize and provide credibility to government reform, i.e. the Ministry of Defense, the Colombian Army, and the National Police forces.<sup>46</sup>

The implementation of Uribe's national course of action began with the rapid expansion of the Colombian security forces. Uribe based his new strategy on enhancing the lack of the population's personal security previously caused by the central government's absence throughout the country. He understood that an offensive strategy to attack the root cause of Colombian instability and violence required a population-centric and resource-intensive solution. Uribe's strategy supported the modernization and specialization of the military and police units under the Ministry of Defense. The new security forces structure would allow the government's army and national police forces to reclaim territory from insurgents and narco-traffickers while protecting the rural and urban populations.

Uribe imposed a one-time tax on the nation's wealthiest individuals to fund the extensive military expansion and raised an estimated \$700 million.<sup>47</sup> The revenues from the taxes resourced the Ministry of Defense's (MOD) new Plan de Choque (Shock Plan). This initiative was a multi-year phased development plan that called for additional specialized army and national police units: mobile brigades, counter guerrilla battalions, mountain warfare battalions, jungle warfare battalions, infrastructure protection units,

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<sup>46</sup>Ministerio de Defensa, "Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2003, 32-33.

<sup>47</sup>Marks, "Colombia: COIN the Right Way," 47.

anti-terrorism units, anti-kidnapping (GAULA), rural police forces, and the creation of several 40-man campesino platoons consisting of local forces.<sup>48</sup> The Colombian army trained and equipped the campesino platoons and fielded them in more than 600 locations to provide local security.<sup>49</sup> Other specialized units continued to provide protection to the rural and urban populations, conducted COIN and drug eradication operations, and protected the state's vital infrastructure.

The improved collaboration of the Colombian army and national police within the MOD led to increased joint and interagency operations. Uribe's strategic framework mandated the establishment of joint operational commands and the replacement of the traditional army divisional territorial commands.<sup>50</sup> The joint commands, in which a military single commander ensured the unity of command for operations among the separate services, were essential to integrate military assets with other government agencies to execute successful counterinsurgency and stability operations. This concept however, was difficult for the Colombians to grasp and required drastic changes to their institutional culture. Fortunately, Generals Fernando Tapias, Carlos Ospina, and Jorge Mora supported the joint concepts and worked to transform Colombia's military institutions to meet the new demands.<sup>51</sup> Uribe's administration provided Colombia with an integrated national strategy that incorporated disparate government agencies, the Colombian armed forces, and the national police to ensure stability and security.

The initial results from Uribe's Democratic Security Policy indicated that his comprehensive counterinsurgency and counter-drug campaign plan showed significant progress within a year after implementation. In its first year, the Colombian security forces killed or captured 5,453 insurgents from the FARC and ELN guerrilla groups and the AUC paramilitaries. During the same time, 1,412 guerrilla and paramilitary insurgents demobilized; and the number of homicides and kidnappings significantly decreased from the previous year.<sup>52</sup> Between August 2002 and June 2003, in close collaboration with the U.S., the Uribe government sprayed 147,837 hectares of illegal crops

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<sup>48</sup> Ramsey, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque*, 100.

<sup>49</sup> Marks, "Colombia: COIN the Right Way," 48.

<sup>50</sup> Marks, "Colombia: COIN the Right Way," 48.

<sup>51</sup> Marks, "Colombia: COIN the Right Way," 48.

<sup>52</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, Republica de Colombia, "Logros de la Politica de Consilacion de la Seguridad Democratica," Bogotá, September 2009.

bringing the total number of existing coca leaf hectares down to approximately 100,000 from an estimated 145,000 in 2001.<sup>53</sup>

### **Plan Patriota (2003-2006)**

In 2003, the Colombian security forces initiated a joint COIN campaign called Plan Patriota (Patriot Plan) to remove insurgent guerrillas and reestablish government control in FARC strongholds located in the, Cundinamarca Bogota, Caqueta, and the Antioquia departments. Plan Patriota's initial operations successfully purged the guerrilla presence from the Cundinamarca department and eliminated several key FARC leaders, which dealt the FARC a significant blow.<sup>54</sup> Plan Choque's security force expansion provided the government with the flexibility and capability to execute Plan Patriota's classic clear-hold-build counterinsurgency operations. The operations began with the military forces eliminating guerrilla units from traditional FARC strongholds and securing the guerrilla-occupied municipios. After the Colombian armed forces secured the areas, the units systematically moved to the next guerrilla-infested area. The national police and Carbinero units, as well as campesino platoons, reoccupied the municipios secured by the military forces to establish local law and order and built fortified police stations to prevent guerrilla counterattacks. After the establishment of local law and order, the primary government agencies provided public services and consolidated government control over the area.<sup>55</sup>

In 2002, 158 of Colombia's 1,099 municipios lacked a legitimate government presence and police stations to protect the local population. This statistic changed drastically by 2004, when all 1,099 municipios had active police stations capable of projecting government presence.<sup>56</sup> The commander of the Colombian armed forces, General Freddy Padilla de Leon, indicated that Plan Patriota's successful COIN and counternarcotics operations were also responsible for the following: the 35 percent reduction in infrastructure attacks, the eradication of over 223,000 hectares of coca, the capture of 135 tons of cocaine, and contributed greatly to Colombia's 7 percent economic

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<sup>53</sup> International Crisis Group, "Colombia: President Uribe's Democratic Security Policy," 10.

<sup>54</sup> Ramsey, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque*, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Robert W. Jones, Jr., "Plan Colombia and Plan Patriota: The Evolution of Colombia's National Strategy." *Veritas* Vol. 2, no. 4, (2006): 63.

<sup>56</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2007, 15.

growth in 2006.<sup>57</sup> Plan Patriota proved highly successful as it systematically targeted and eliminated several of the FARC's key leaders. However, efforts to incorporate non-military institutions to "hold and build" proved extremely difficult, particularly in Colombia's southern regions.<sup>58</sup> The Colombian military institutions and government agencies required further integration to achieve unity of effort and sustain progress.

### **The Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security (2006-2010)**

In May 2006, Uribe was reelected for a second term, after an amendment to the constitution reversing the ban on consecutive terms for Colombian presidents, which had become law in 2004. Uribe achieved another significant victory receiving an unprecedented 62 percent of the popular vote.<sup>59</sup> His popularity was due in large part to the considerable results of his first term. Colombian citizens enjoyed strong improvements in security, a rapidly growing economy, and a higher quality of life. Colombia no longer was on the verge of becoming a failed state. From 2002 to 2006, the number of homicides and kidnappings for extortion decreased by 40 percent and 83 percent respectively.<sup>60</sup> While the results indicate that stability was within Colombia's grasp, one must understand the truly fragile state of its recovery. Colombia's root cause of instability, the unholy trinity of guerrillas, illegal drugs, and paramilitaries, continued to exist in 2006. The FARC, victims of a successful COIN campaign were no longer capable of conducting large-scale attacks, but it continued to conduct guerrilla warfare. In 2006, the 30,000-strong AUC paramilitaries demobilized, but other criminal bands quickly replaced them. The drug traffickers also adapted to the successful counternarcotics operations and exchanged the large plantations of illegal crops for small areas of land with legal crops growing alongside the illicit ones.<sup>61</sup> This new strategic environment required a new civil-military strategy from the Colombian government that focused on the consolidation of governance for Uribe's 2006-2010 term.

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<sup>57</sup> "Balance contra la subversión es positivo: Comandante de las FFMM" (2006), transcript of a Ministry of Defense interview with the Commander of the Colombian Armed Forces, General Freddy Padilla de Leon. <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/index.php?page=181&id=4909>.

<sup>58</sup> Ramsey, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque*, 130.

<sup>59</sup> "Uribe, Segundo Tiempo," *La Semana*, 27 May 2006. <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/uribe-segundo-tiempo/94929.aspx>.

<sup>60</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2007, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2007, 11.

The Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security, similar to Uribe's previous Policy for National Security, contained five strategic objectives: consolidate territorial control and strengthen the rule of law across the entire national territory; protect the public and retain the strategic initiative against all threats to citizen security; drastically increase the cost of trafficking drugs in Colombia; maintain modern and effective security forces; and continue the downward trend in all crime rates.<sup>62</sup> Uribe's new national strategy reinforced the military successes of Plan Patriota by implementing 28 plans, initiatives, and programs designed to strengthen and consolidate the government's influence on security, stability, and social reforms.

To further the progress made by Plan Patriota, Uribe's consolidation strategy aligned the government's security, social, and counter-drug efforts and focused specifically on Colombia's unholy trinity. The plan categorized different municipalities according to their security situations into three zones: red, yellow, and green. The red zones were areas with an active insurgent presence. The government focused intense military efforts to eliminate the insurgent threats and to obtain territorial control of the zone. The yellow zones were still controlled by the Colombian security forces that provided security and maintained order within the zone and in the process of recovery. In these zones, the government focused on stabilization efforts to maintain order in preparation for the establishment of government institutions. The green zones were stable areas with functional police forces capable of providing security without military augmentation. The government focused on the building of state authority through the establishment of institutions and public services.<sup>63</sup>

In conjunction with USSOUTHCOM, the Colombian MOD developed a comprehensive civil-military concept, which led to the creation of the Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI). The CCAI was a national-level body that combined nation-building, counter-drug, and COIN operations between security forces and civilian government agencies, which ensured unity of effort within the secured areas categorized as green zones.<sup>64</sup> Uribe's new strategic plan prioritized the establishment of

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<sup>62</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2007, 29-42.

<sup>63</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2007, 31.

<sup>64</sup> Adam Isacson and Abigail Poe, *After Plan Colombia: Evaluating "Integrated Action," The Next Phase of U.S. Assistance* (Washington DC: International Policy Report, Center of International Policy, 2009), 5.

CCAI in traditionally FARC-controlled municipalities. In 2007, the Uribe administration developed the Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena (PCIM). The PCIM was a high-priority initiative that implemented the CCAI concept in a region of six municipalities in the Meta department known as the Macarena. The Macarena had been a FARC stronghold for over 40 years and produced more coca than any other region in the world. The PCIM established a fusion center in the Vista Hermosa municipality where both military and civilian agencies coordinate actions through an integrated operational team.<sup>65</sup> After 40 years, the majority of the Macarena region no longer lacked a security apparatus or government presence. The PCIM model proved sufficiently successful to be implemented throughout Colombia. By 2007, 58 of Colombia's 1,099 municipalities had CCAIs to enable Uribe's consolidation plan.<sup>66</sup>

In 2008, Colombia made significant progress in its 40-year conflict with a series of successful, through controversial, military operations. Launched on 1 March 2008, Plan Fenix (Phoenix) was a military operation that involved the raid of a FARC sanctuary located just within Ecuador's borders. Colombian security forces killed Raul Reyes, the FARC's spokesman and second-in-command.<sup>67</sup> Purported evidence from Reyes' laptop computer that implicated Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Ecuador's President Rafael Correa in supporting FARC activities sparked diplomatic tensions among Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. On 2 July 2008, the Colombian military forces launched Operation Jaque (Check), a bold and controversial hostage-rescue operation. The successful operation led to the release of the FARC's most important political hostages. The Colombians duped the FARC into releasing former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, three American contractors, and 11 hostages from the Colombian security forces after several years of captivity. The loss of these high-profile hostages crippled the FARC's ability to exert any political or international pressure for future negotiations with the Colombian government or the international community.<sup>68</sup> On 25 May 2008, Colombian Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos announced the death of

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<sup>65</sup> John E. Herbst, "Supporting Colombia" Ambassador Herbst and Senior USAID and DOD officials Visit Bogota." *Civilian Response* Vol. June-July 2008, no. 5. (2008): 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática," Bogotá, 2007, 34.

<sup>67</sup> "Raúl Reyes, 'canciller' y miembro del Secretariado de las Farc, fue muerto en combate en Ecuador," *La Semana*. 1 March 2008. <http://www.semana.com/noticias-on-line/raul-reyes-canciller-miembro-del-secretariado-farc-muerto-combate-ecuador/109821.aspx>.

<sup>68</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, "The FARC at Their Worst Moment in History," Bogotá, 2008, 5.

the FARC's supreme leader, Tirofijo, from a heart attack in March 2008. The FARC immediately confirmed the news through a media video release.<sup>69</sup> The deaths of the FARC's top two leaders, the decimation of the FARC large-scale military forces, and the loss of the high-value hostages severely weakened the FARC from 2007-2008.

### **Assessment of the FARC in 2008**

The FARC's ability to seize control and political power over the Colombian government in 2008 was seriously degraded from what it had been in 1998, when the guerrillas were at the height of their political and military power. From the implementation of President Uribe's Policy for Defense and Democratic Security as part of the overall U.S.-supported Plan Colombia, Colombia's government has risen from the ashes of instability and inflicted sufficiently severe damage to the FARC that approximately 11,000 guerrillas demobilized from 2002 to 2008.<sup>70</sup> The ELN demobilized in smaller numbers, and the AUC disbanded and demobilized an estimated 30,000 paramilitaries in 2006.

The FARC in 2008 was incapable of conducting the large-scale attacks reminiscent of the humiliating 1998 defeats of the Colombian security forces. By 2008, the FARC was unable to garner the support of the population due to their terrorist actions involving improvised bombs killing hundreds of civilians and their penchant for kidnapping. The FARC also suffered militarily. The loss of their commander Tirofijo as well as the defection, capture, or death of several key front and mid-level commanders severely degraded the FARC's capabilities to engage in combat and to exercise command of its forces. In 2008, the FARC was on the brink of unraveling as the Colombian government continued to build its momentum toward stability and peace.

### **Summary**

Colombia's unholy trinity of guerrillas, narco-traffickers, and paramilitaries, haunted successive presidential administrations. For decades, the country's traditionally

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<sup>69</sup> Maria Isabel Rueda. "Tirofijo está muerto" *La Semana*. 25 May 2008. Las FARC confirman la muerte de Manuel Marulanda. FARC video confirming death of Tirofijo.

<http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/14563/telesur-confirma-muerte-de-marulanda/>.

<sup>70</sup> Ministerio de Defensa, Republica de Colombia, "Logros de la Politica de Consilacion de la Seguridad Democratica," Bogotá, March 2010.



weak central government marginalized its authority and legitimacy as it proved incapable of maintaining the monopoly over the means of violence, establishing the rule of law outside of its urban centers, sustaining a stable economy, and providing for the social well-being of its citizens. The events of the eight years from 2000-2008, however, symbolize vast improvements in all these areas. At the turn of the millennium, Colombia was on the verge of a collapse due to political instability, endemic violence, and economic ruin. It was also trapped in the nexus among guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the illegal drug trade. The next chapter will evaluate key factors within Plan Colombia's integrated COIN and counternarcotics operations to determine if the necessary conditions were met to achieve Colombia's political objectives from 2002-2008.

## Chapter 4

### The Grades Are In

*After long years of suffering from the relentless violence perpetrated by illegal groups, Colombia is now generating confidence. Confidence so that young people can live and go to school in our country, confidence for investors and workers, confidence to engage in enterprise, confidence to overcome poverty and inequality, and confidence in Colombia as full of possibilities rather than limitations.*

*--Alvaro Uribe*

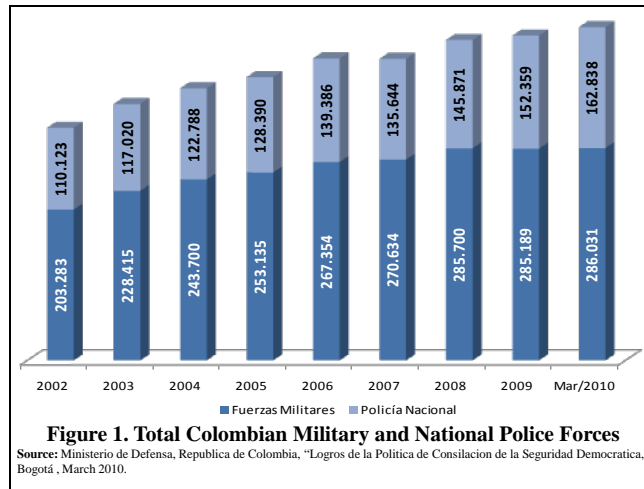
An evaluation of President Uribe's Integrated Action approach to COIN and counternarcotics operations from 2002 to 2008, by applying the strategic framework for Stabilization and Reconstruction operations, indicates indisputable signs of measureable progress concerning Colombia's stability, but also illuminates areas of concern. The strategic framework provided a lens from which to examine key stability factors used to measure Colombia's progress in achieving the following objectives: a safe and secure environment, legitimate rule of law, stable governance, sustainable economy, and social well-being.

#### Safe and Secure Environment

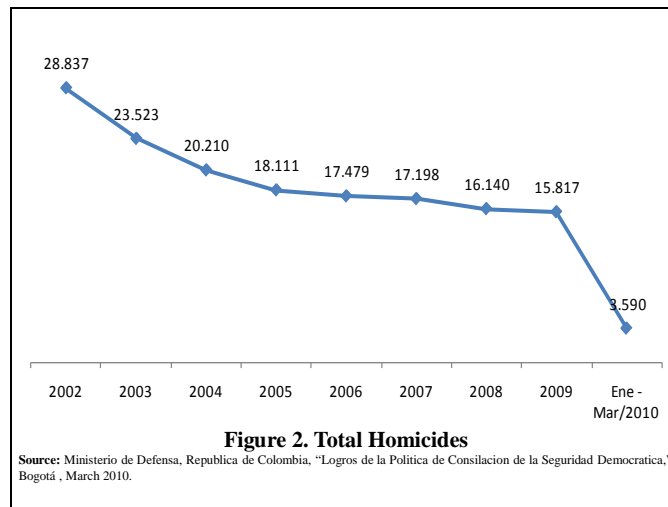
A safe and secure environment is one in which the population is able to conduct their daily lives without fear of large-scale violence.<sup>1</sup> Colombia's most important achievements occurred in the areas related to obtaining a secure environment. Significant progress in the areas of economic growth, social reform, governance, and rule of law flowed from the improved security environment. Uribe's Plan de Choque expanded, modernized, and specialized the Colombian security forces to reclaim territory from insurgents, obtain freedom of movement throughout the country, and maintain a legitimate monopoly over the means of violence. Figure 1 shows the 27 percent increase in total Colombian security forces from 2002 to 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*, 6-38.



Trends in violence and crime also indicate significant progress in Colombia's stability. Colombia was known for a time as the murder and kidnapping capital of the world. Vast improvements in the homicide and kidnapping rates show further signs of progress in the area of security. Figure 2 shows the total homicides decreased from 28,837 in 2002 to 16,140 in 2008, an estimated decrease of 44 percent.



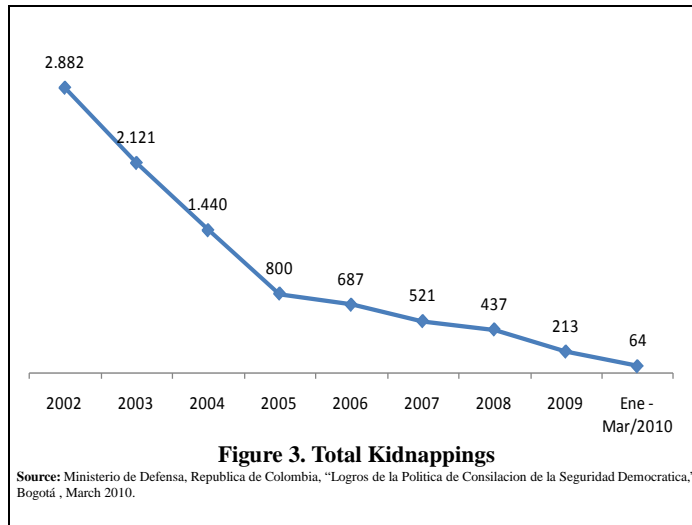
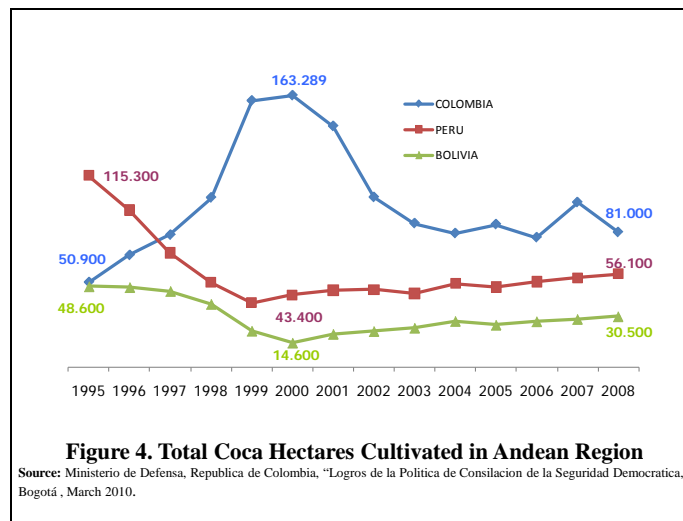


Figure 3 shows the number of kidnappings decreased from 2,882 in 2002 to 437 in 2008, an estimated decrease of 85 percent. Counter-drug eradication efforts facilitated by increased freedom of movement throughout the territory correlates to major improvements in Colombia's security environment. Figure 4 shows coca leaf cultivation decreased from 163,289 hectares in 2000 to 81,000 hectares in 2008, an estimated decrease of approximately 50 percent.



Colombia's security environment improved significantly since the implementation of Uribe's national strategies in 2002. The FARC has a significantly reduced presence, and the paramilitary violence decreased substantially due to the demobilization of the AUC in 2006. However, security concerns remain as the Colombian government continues to consolidate its presence throughout the country. New paramilitary bands such as the Aguilas Negras (Black Eagles) are primarily rogue narco-trafficking organizations that work to increase recruitment targeting impoverished young men and women to join their ranks offering them money, vehicles, and weapons.<sup>2</sup>

### **Rule of Law**

The establishment of the rule of law is a key component of any country's stability. The rule of law provides the population with equal access to laws and a legitimate justice system capable of enforcing security, human right protections, and accountability to the law.<sup>3</sup> Legal institutions such as a ministry of justice, law enforcement agencies, and police forces must be sustained with adequate security to encourage the government's legitimacy. One of Uribe's major accomplishments between 2002 and 2008 was the transition from the inquisitorial civil-law system to the common-law accusatorial system similar to the system in the United States and England. The inquisitorial civil system authorizes the judge to direct and control the proceedings, marginalizing the roles of the prosecutor and the jury. This form of civil law, common throughout Latin America, is a remnant from colonial Spanish rule.

Colombia's judicial system was routinely inefficient, and criminal cases often were not resolved for years. Uribe's strategy, in conjunction with the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), instituted drastic judicial reform. The results were noteworthy, criminal cases were resolved in 75 percent less time, the backlog of criminal cases was drastically reduced, and over 60 percent of cases with formal charges resulted in

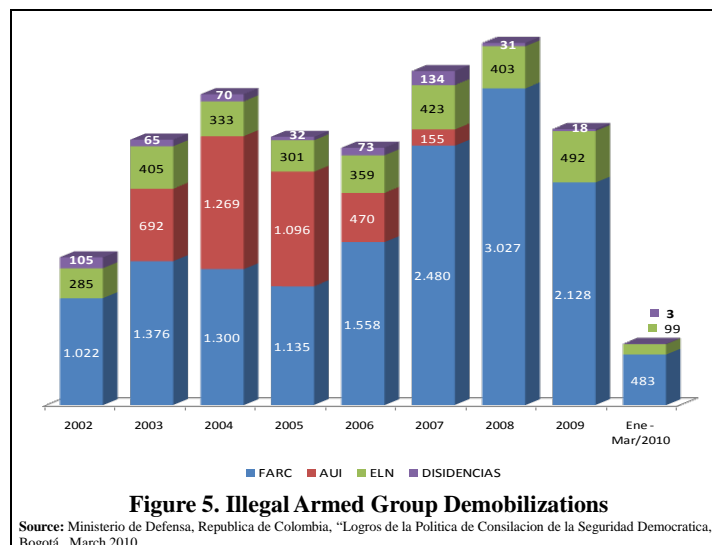
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<sup>2</sup> Adam Isacson and Abigail Poe, *After Plan Colombia: Evaluating "Integrated Action," The Next Phase of U.S. Assistance* (Washington DC: International Policy Report, Center of International Policy, 2009), 22.

<sup>3</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*, 7-64.

convictions instead of only 3 percent under the previous system.<sup>4</sup> In order to provide the population with access to the justice, Uribe’s government established 49 justice houses to promote efficient and peaceful resolutions to legal issues in the rural areas.<sup>5</sup> The judicial reformation proved successful, demonstrating an expeditious and efficient civil law system accessible to the population--thus reinforcing confidence in the new judicial system and restoring legitimacy to the government’s institutions.

Another of Uribe’s initiatives was the Justice and Peace Law (JPL) passed in 2005. This law was designed as a legal apparatus with which the government engaged with the paramilitaries in order to expedite the demobilization process. The JPL was essential to the reintegration process of former paramilitaries. President Uribe also provided incentive programs, reduced prison sentences, and offered government stipends to former guerrilla and paramilitary members as further motivation to demobilize and successfully reintegrate. The most significant demobilization effort that influenced the overall improvement of security was the disbanding of the AUC. In 2006, an estimated 30,000 paramilitaries disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated back into society.<sup>6</sup> The FARC and ELN guerrillas continue to demobilize. Figure 5 shows that the 11,898 FARC and 2,509 ELN insurgents between 2002 and 2008.



<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Marcella, *Democratic Governance and the Rule of Law: Lesson from Colombia*, (Carlisle, PA.: Strategic Studies Institute, December 2009), 28-29.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Marcella, *Democratic Governance and the Rule of Law*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> "Colombia Says Paramilitary AUC is no more," Agency France-Presse, *Reliefweb*, 18 April 2006, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB/NSF/db900SID/SKAR-6NYBS?OpenDocument>.

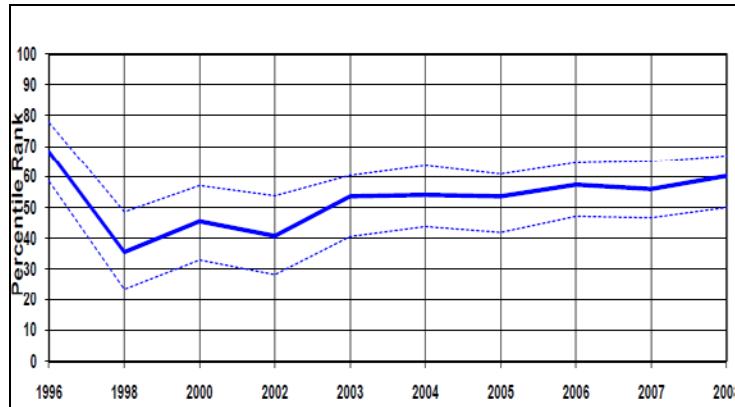
Uribe's strategies enabled the state to expand and improve the rule of law by providing the population with equal access to laws and instituting a trusted justice system that inspired confidence. The transition to an accusatory system, the increased accessibility for the rural population to the administration of justice, and the implementation of the JPL are clear signs of the state's strengthening legitimacy and key indicators of progress. However, the government must continue to expand the accessibility of justice to all the citizens and properly reintegrate former insurgents by holding them accountable for their actions.

### **Stable Governance**

Historically, the democratic government in Colombia was weak and unable to maintain a presence in the ungoverned rural areas. This often caused security and local government vacuums filled by guerrillas, narco-traffickers, and paramilitaries. However, the Colombian government's recent successes in the areas of security and the rule of law strengthen its ability to provide the population with access to the collective benefits and services of the state.<sup>7</sup> Uribe's strategy to project the state government into the local areas beginning with security forces followed by government agencies proved successful in linking the local government institutions to the national ones. This enabled all of 1,099 the municipios to take part in the local and national elections. By 2008, all of Colombia's municipios had a sustained government and security presence, and 58 of the municipios in the former FARC-controlled regions had CCAIs to help incorporate governmental programs. The accomplishments of the PCIM in the Macarena region served as a model for other regions within the country. The World Bank utilizes international governance indicators to measure a country's performance in certain categories. According to the World Bank's indicators, from 2002 to 2008, Uribe's government increased its effectiveness from 40 to 60 percent demonstrating steady progress over time as shown in figure 6.

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<sup>7</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles For Stabilization and Reconstruction*, 8-98.



**Figure 6. Governance Indicators: Colombian Government Effectiveness**

Source: World Bank, "Governance Matters 2009: Worldwide Governance Indicators," Washington D.C. 2009.

The Colombian government's ability to exert legitimate and effective authority at the national and local levels vastly improved from 2002 to 2008. The implementation of the CCAI and the PCIM models increased the effectiveness of the government and enabled the consolidation of legitimate state authority in formerly ungoverned territories. The Colombian government must continue to prioritize the linkage between the local government and the national-level institutions in order to strengthen its legitimacy and relevance. The sustained expansion and consolidation of the state and its authority is required in order to ensure long-term stability throughout the country.

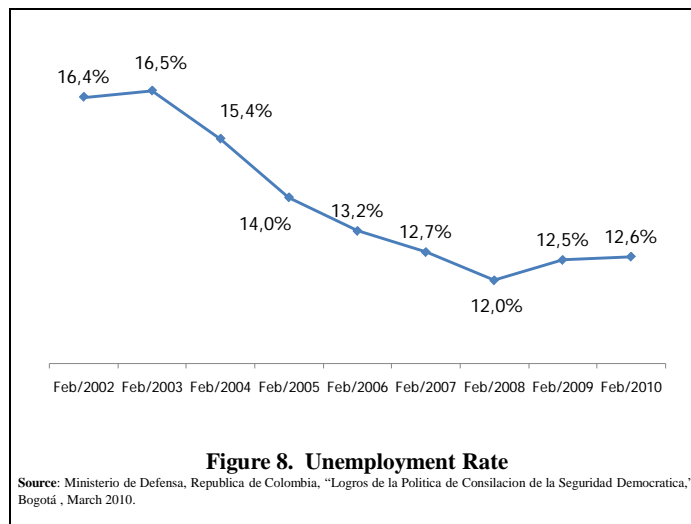
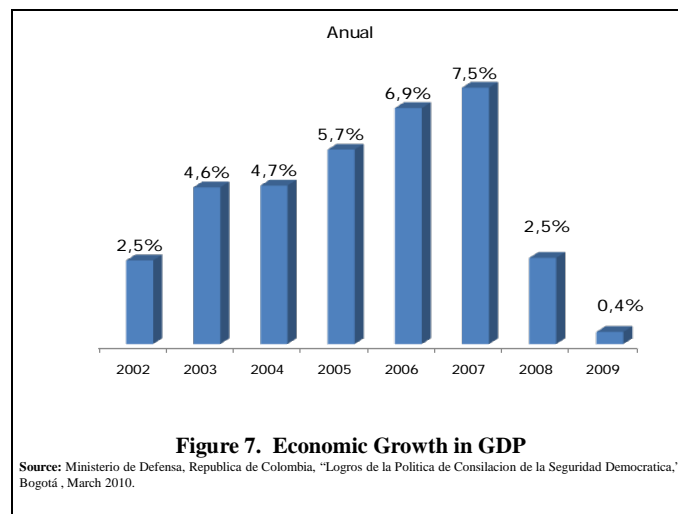
### **Sustainable Economy**

In 1999, Colombia suffered a devastating economic crisis as financial institutions failed and led to a debilitating 4 percent decline in GDP in 1999. This decline was exacerbated by the ongoing conflict among the guerrillas, Colombian security forces, drug traffickers, and paramilitaries. The Uribe administration's strategies increased security throughout the state and continued to strengthen the Colombian economy. His strategies further enhanced the stimulation through a combination of fiscal reforms and a strengthening of its financial systems. Currently, Merrill Lynch ranks Colombia number four on their list of countries least likely to undergo a financial crisis.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Office of the President of The Republic, "Colombia: Moving Ahead and Progressing," Bogota, July 2009. 5.



In stark contrast to its abysmal economic and financial situation in 1999, Colombia successfully regained the confidence of foreign investors and continued to show significant progress in a remarkable macroeconomic recovery. In 2007, the GDP grew by 7.9 percent, the highest growth rate in 29 years.<sup>9</sup> This is a sign of not only a sustainable economy, but also of Colombia's overall success as stable nation no longer in decline. Figure 7 shows the annual economic growth of Colombia's GDP, which maintained a steady growth from 2002 to 2007. Figure 8 shows a major decline in the nation's unemployment rate from 16.4 to 12 percent from 2002 to 2008.



<sup>9</sup> Office of the President of The Republic, "Colombia: Moving Ahead and Progressing," Bogota, July 2009. 5.

In 1999, Colombia's economy and financial institutions were in a crisis. The unmistakable improvement in Colombia's security environment enabled a strong economic recovery characterized by a significant rate of growth in GDP from a 4 percent decline in 1999 to a phenomenal 7.9 percent growth in 2007. A sustainable economy that grows also has the ability to provide employment. Uribe's initiatives lowered the unemployment rate significantly between 2002 and 2008. Although these economic and financial improvements proved to be clear measures of substantial progress toward stability, the unemployment and poverty levels remain high. This is primarily due to the amount of IDPs displaced by decades of internal conflict.

### **Social Well-Being**

Colombia has made remarkable strides improving its overall security environment against insurgents and drug-traffickers, recovering its economic and financial institutions, and expanding its government presence throughout the territory. Uribe's integrated strategies also included several programs designed to enhance the social well-being of Colombia's impoverished populations historically excluded from government social services. Since 1985, an estimated 4.4 million Colombians have been displaced due to the persistent armed conflict.<sup>10</sup> As shown in Figure 9, the number of displaced persons per year was reduced by 30 percent, from 442,380 in 2002 to 306,313 in 2008.

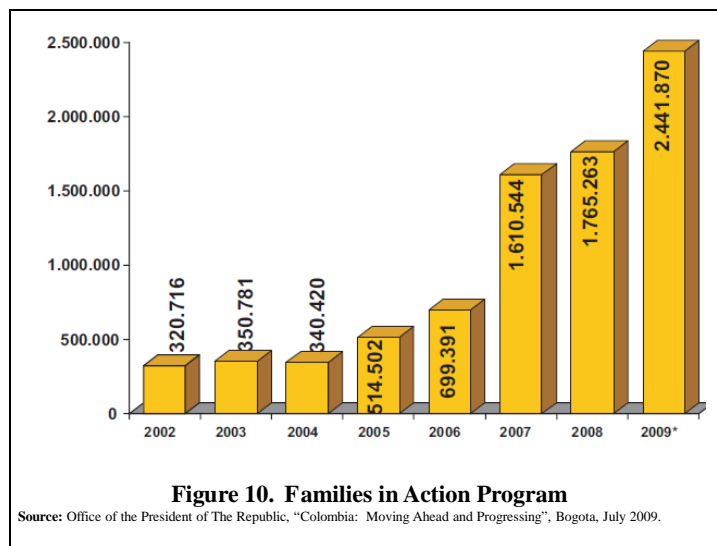
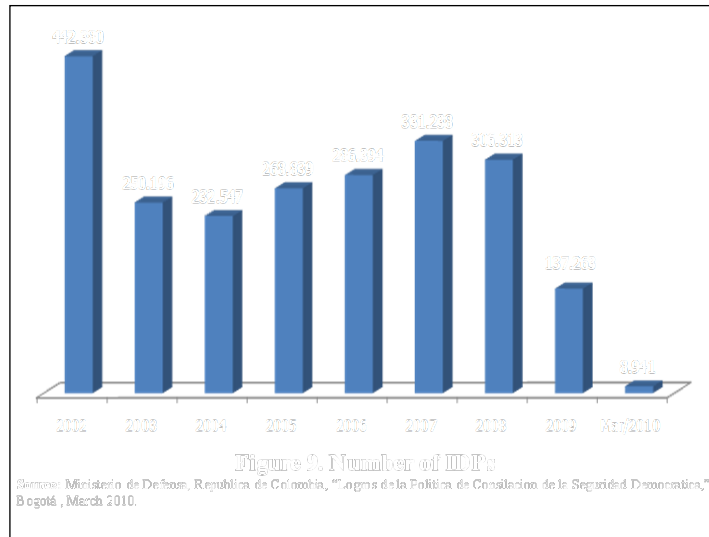
President Uribe's strategy includes the Families in Action Program, a national initiative that provides nutrition subsidies to children under the age of seven to ensure that nutrition and health care needs are provided during the child's critical stages of growth. This program sponsors education subsidies for ages seven to eighteen to low income children or children displaced by violence.<sup>11</sup> The results of this flagship program and others indicate steady progress in Colombia's social programs, especially concerning IDPs. The Families In Action Program assists IDPs in 32 departments and 1,065

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<sup>10</sup> Consultoria Para Los Derechos Humanos y El Desplazamiento (Codhes) Número de Personas Desplazadas por Departamento de Llegada por trimestres desde 1999 a 2005 - Cifra Codhes 15 febrero de 2006 Fuente: Monitoreo población desplazada - Sisdhes *Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento*.

<sup>11</sup> Office of the President of The Republic, "Colombia: Moving Ahead and Progressing", Bogota, July 2009. 9.

municipios in Colombia.<sup>12</sup> Figure 10 shows the increase in families enrolled in the program from only 320,716 in 2002 to 1,765,263 in 2008.



Colombia’s decades-long violent conflict among the state, guerrillas, narco-traffickers, and the paramilitary vigilantes created a humanitarian crisis that wreaked havoc on the civilian population. Even with the gradual decline of IDPs since the implementation of Uribe’s initiatives in 2002, Colombia continues to have a staggering number of IDPs requiring focused attention from the state. The ability of the state to consistently provide social services and meet the needs of its citizens, especially the

<sup>12</sup> Office of the President of The Republic, “Colombia: Moving Ahead and Progressing”, Bogota, July 2009. 10.

impoverished ones, demonstrates a considerable degree of progress and stability. As the security environment improved and the state's authority expanded from 2002 to 2008, the Uribe government proactively instituted several initiatives and programs specifically designed for IDPs and the poor population, which had been historically neglected by the government.

### **Uribe's Leadership**

There is no denying that Colombian President Alvaro Uribe is an astute leader. He was capable of incorporating effective and often seemingly radical changes to ossified military and civilian institutions that during previous administrations were unwilling or unable to adapt to the growing insurgency. An assessment of Uribe's leadership from 2002 to 2008 would be similar to Nagl's assessment of General Sir Gerald Templer. Uribe inherited a nation in complete disarray on the brink of becoming a failed state. His national security strategies and his Integrated Action approach to COIN and counter-drug operations ensured that unity of effort between military and civil institutions remained paramount in all operations.

Colombia's conflict placed overwhelming demands on its military and civilian institutions. Uribe, with the assistance of Generals Fernando Tapias, Carlos Ospina, Jorge Mora, and Freddy Padilla, managed to adapt Colombia's military culture to the president's broad approach to COIN and counter-drug operations. President Uribe forced a change within the military and civilian institutional culture of the MOD at the expense of several senior military and ministerial leaders who were unwilling to adapt to meet the new demands of Colombia's environment. Uribe proved to be a model of dynamic and skillful leadership as he created and executed a strategic shift in his nation's destiny. One wonders what will become of Colombia in 2010 as he ends his presidential term. Will his successor be able to build upon the successes of the past decade? Will his successor finally end the relentless violence familiar to many generations of Colombians?

### **Summary**

Colombia's vast improvements from 2002 to 2008, demonstrate indisputable signs of progress toward stability. Colombia's most notable achievements and indicators

of progress are the improved security environment; the efficient administration of justice; the consolidation of state governance; the expanding economy; and successful social reform programs. The Colombian armed forces underwent a massive transformation, increased its numbers significantly, and executed successful COIN and counter-drug campaigns that severely disrupted the illegal crop production, and degraded the FARC and ELN guerrilla groups. These military operations, along with the expansion of the state's authority, and the demobilization of insurgent groups, significantly reduced homicide and kidnapping rates. The freedom of movement provided by the increased security created a permissive environment from which the economy as well as political and social programs were able to thrive. Colombia's continued success relies on a sustained effort to build and further its achievements. The FARC, the ELN, and narco-trafficking are still the root cause of Colombia's conflicts and have the potential to turn back the impressive accomplishments of the past several years. These interrelated threats require a simultaneous strategy to achieve stability and peace. Uribe's comprehensive approach to marginalizing the unholy trinity of violence provides valuable lessons on conducting integrated military-civilian COIN and counter-drug operations to achieve stability and progression toward a lasting peace.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

*Democratic Security, now practiced for over six years, has strengthened the practice of freedoms that had been lost to Colombians with the advance of terrorism. Reality has demonstrated that security is indispensable to guaranteeing democratic participation by citizens.*

*--Alvaro Uribe*

In 1999, Colombia's decline into oblivion seemed inevitable as the unholy trinity of leftist guerrillas, narco-traffickers, and paramilitary vigilantes ruled large swaths of rural territory. Thus, Colombia's unprecedented rise from the ashes of instability, violence, and economic turmoil over a ten-year period represents impressive progress. During the Uribe administration, the Colombian government restructured and strengthened the security forces, reoccupied formerly guerrilla-occupied regions, and consolidated its state authority to increase its presence throughout the country.

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the U.S.-supported Plan Colombia in conjunction with President Uribe's integrated action strategies against the guerrilla insurgent groups, the narco-traffickers, and the paramilitary bands from 2002 to 2008. This evaluation has been primarily from the Colombian perspective. It specifically addressed the following question: "How effectively did the government of Colombia integrate the various elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—to attain its political objectives of establishing a stable government that provided both internal and external security?"

Colombia's greatest achievements over the past decade have been the substantial progress made in establishing a safe and secure environment for its citizens and increasing the legitimacy of the central government's authority throughout the territory. President Uribe's initial focus on protecting the population and securing the environment led to other impressive achievements in the economic, governance, and social areas.

### **Notable Achievements and Areas for Concern (2002-2008)**

By 1999, the Colombian government had reached its lowest point politically, economically, and militarily. The humiliating defeats of the Colombian armed forces at the hands of the FARC, the violent vigilantism of the paramilitary forces, and the ongoing drug trade continued to delegitimize and undermine the central government's authority. By increasing, restructuring, and strengthening the Colombian armed forces through the implementation of Plan Colombia and the Democratic Security Policy, the government was able to regain territory and consolidate government authority and presence to all of Colombia's 1,099 municipios. The reassertion of government authority and security caused a drastic decline in crime rates. Colombia is no longer considered the murder and kidnapping capital of the world

Historically, the Colombian government's influence rarely expanded beyond the urban areas. Government presence in the guerrilla-controlled rural areas was non-existent. The recently increased security and the expansion of government presence into the former guerrilla-controlled areas enabled linkage between the local and national level government institutions that never before existed. The CCAIs are crucial to the successful coordination of civil-military operations and the incorporation of government programs at the local level. The integrated action efforts as part of the PCIM in the Macarena region serves a model for civil-military efforts in support of COIN, counter-drug, and stability and reconstruction operations.

In 1999, Colombia was in an economic crisis and suffering a near complete meltdown of its financial institutions. In 2007, Colombia's GDP growth rate was at 7.9 percent. The combination of security and stability equates to consumer confidence and economic growth. This legitimate economic growth also degraded the illicit drug economy.

This study clearly shows that the Colombian government effectively integrated all the instruments of national power and provided unity of effort toward achieving its political goals of security and stability. But, for all the successful indicators of progress in Colombia, difficult challenges remain. The paramilitary and guerrilla demobilizations must be monitored for proper application of justice to former paramilitaries and guerrillas. The fact that the global demand for illegal drugs remains high can be directly

attributed to crime and violence in Colombia. While Colombia's economic growth is on the rise, the unemployment and poverty levels are also high. The FARC and other smaller guerrilla insurgents remain active, although on a much smaller scale. These challenges can be corrected through long-term efforts supported by an integrated national strategy that continues to blend together COIN, counter-drug, and stability operations.

### **Summary**

Colombia's impressive recovery from the brink of disaster serves as a good model for future COIN, counter-drug, and nation-building campaigns. The success of the Colombian strategy lies in the fact that Colombia, with support from the U.S., took control of its own destiny. Colombia's results from the past decade, while faced with many difficult challenges ahead, speak for themselves. In 2002, President Uribe's election was a result of the population's overwhelming security concerns. A recent poll for the upcoming Colombian Presidential elections listed the top three concerns for Colombian citizens as being unemployment, poverty, and the quality of health care. The armed conflict and drug-trafficking rank number six and number ten respectively.<sup>1</sup> Colombia's root causes of conflict, the unholy trinity of guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the narco-traffickers, remain. The trinity's influence on the Colombian society has significantly diminished due to the improved security environment. The safe and secure environment provided Colombian citizens the freedom of movement and confidence to expand the economy and to accomplish political and social reforms. As long as the government maintains its current strategic vision, Colombia will continue on its path toward stability and peace,

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<sup>1</sup> Informe de Resultados, Encuesta Presidencial 2010. Colombian Presidential Brief 2010 from *El Tiempo*. Slide 61.



APPENDIX A



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