

ILLEGAL COLONIZATION IN THE COLOMBIAN AMAZON:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
2019

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>		
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<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 14-06-2019		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Master's Thesis		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> AUG 2018 – JUN 2010	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b>  Illegal Colonization in the Colombian Amazon: Implications on National Security			<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>		
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b>  Major Diego Guzman Molina			<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>		
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301			<b>8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER</b>		
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>			<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>		
			<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>		
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> National Security is intrinsically linked to a nation's ability to control its territory. When a nation has large unoccupied areas that are remote and difficult to control, often illegal settlements will become epidemic. The people that make up these settlements usually exploit the land for personal gain. Colonization of the Colombian Amazon (CA) by Colombian peasants has become epidemic and threatens national security. This colonization of the CA has been continuously occurring since the 19th century and has happened as a consequence of the government's lack of control. In the CA, a variety of illegally settled areas have been subject to the Colombian commission of crimes for illegal mining, crops, deforestation, and most significantly the expansion of insurgent movements and their illegal economies. Hence, this thesis aims to support the argument that illegal colonization in the CA represents a threat to Colombian national security.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Illegal Colonization, Insurgency, FARC, Counterinsurgency, illegal crops, Colombian Amazon.					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b>	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b>	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b>			<b>19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b>
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	81	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

ILLEGAL COLONIZATION IN THE COLOMBIAN AMAZON: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY by Major Diego Guzmán Molina, 81 pages.

National Security is intrinsically linked to a nation's ability to control its territory. When a nation has large unoccupied areas that are remote and difficult to control, often illegal settlements will become epidemic. The people that make up these settlements usually exploit the land for personal gain. Colonization of the Colombian Amazon (CA) by Colombian peasants has become epidemic and threatens national security. This colonization of the CA has been continuously occurring since the 19th century and has happened as a consequence of the government's lack of control. In the CA, a variety of illegally settled areas have been subject to the Colombian commission of crimes for illegal mining, crops, deforestation, and most significantly the expansion of insurgent movements and their illegal economies. Hence, this thesis aims to support the argument that illegal colonization in the CA represents a threat to Colombian national security.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Fermín Oviedo and the community of Puerto Cachicamo, who inspired the realization of this thesis.

Sincerely thanks to my thesis committee. I want to recognize the work and effort they put into revising and improving my thesis, specifically, Lieutenant Colonel James Ballard, as the chairman, who oriented me on the right road map to achieve the purpose of my thesis; Doctor Prisco Hernandez who was fundamental in lead me to the right methodology to use; and Mr. Albert Stahl.

Finally, many thanks to my lovely wife Carolina, and my gorgeous children, Juan Diego and Sofía. They allowed me to work on my MMAS by sacrificing the time we must spend together.

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## ACRONYMS

CA	Colombian Amazon
CN	Counter Narcotics
CoG	Center of Gravity
COIN	Counterinsurgency
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
GAO	Organized Armed Group (by its acronym in Spanish)
M-19	19th of April Movement (Insurgency)
UN	United Nations



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

War is God's way of teaching geography.

—George Carlin, quoted in Geoffrey Demarest  
“Shaping the Regional Security Environment in Latin America”

With the end of Cold War and the resulting waning of East-West tensions, a new type of international and regional security, which is non-military in character, is becoming an increasing global concern. “The conventional military dimensions of peace and security aspects persist, although at a much lower level of importance than before. However, this lowering of tension has been more than compensated by increasing unconventional security threats from new factors like population growth and the associated impacts such as depletion and degradation of natural resources and environmental deterioration.”<sup>1</sup>

In Colombia, several national security threats are attributed to social, geographical, and political phenomena involving the state's vacant lands. These security threats are meant to be managed using processes that harmonize the relations between the state, society, government, and territory. One of these processes is known as Territorial Planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Juha I. Uitto, ed., *Management of Latin American River Basins: Amazon, Plata, and Sao Fransisco* (Tokio, Japan: The United Nations University, 1999).

The European Charter for Planning (ECP) defined territorial planning as the spatial expression of the economic, social, cultural and ecological policies in a state.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the concept of territorial planning involves the search for the correct, balanced, and harmonious interaction of the territory's components. Among these components, the form that the system of human settlements acquires is key, given its complementary and indissoluble character in the formation of the territory.<sup>3</sup> In Colombia, territorial planning should be the product of the active participation of different social actors related to regional dynamics. The government is the principal actor and must participate and develop the territorial planning process.<sup>4</sup> An aspect that challenges the government's ability to execute territorial planning in Colombia is the phenomenon of illegal colonization.

Illegal colonization in the CA has taken a different form in comparison to the rest of the country's regions. It has been characterized by poverty belts with precarious public services, in very degraded social and physical environments.<sup>5</sup> In the Amazonian territory, initial action was not taken by the Colombian government on these settlements due to the

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<sup>2</sup> Barcelona General Assembly of ECTP-CEU, *The Charter of European Planning*, accessed 24 November 2018, <http://www.ectp-ceu.eu/index.php/en/publications-8/the-charter-of-european-planning-213>.

<sup>3</sup> Patricio Gross, "Ordenamiento Territorial: El Manejo De Los Espacios Rurales," *EURE (Santiago)* 24, no. 73 (December 1998): 116–18, accessed 2 September 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0250-71611998007300006>.

<sup>4</sup> Colombia Republic Congress, Pub. L. No. 388, *Ley 388 Territorial Development Law*, (1997).

<sup>5</sup> Darío Fajardo, *La Amazonía Colombiana en la Nueva Fase Agrícola* (Bogotá: Colombia Amazónica, 2009).

complex nature of Colombian geography, which prevented the Colombian authorities from regulating occupation of the Amazon. Many of these unplanned settlements are now villages with a social, economic and political organization, as well as a cultural identity rooted in the colonized territory. Unfortunately, these populations have not been able to integrate into the country's development model due to their illegal nature. This situation has been exploited by criminal groups principally insurgent groups and drug trafficking cartels who have offered settlers illegal economic alternatives such as, planting illicit crops to compensate for the lack of legal economic options the state does not provide. For example, it is widely documented the number of areas occupied by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in their expansion in the south of the country. There, the illegally colonized areas consolidated by the FARC became 'sanctuaries' of this organization with ideological, social and political support. These illegal colonized areas have become commonplace during the 60 years armed conflict. The objective of this thesis is to support the argument that the illegal colonization phenomenon in the CA represents a threat to national security.



Figure 1. 'La Tigra' Village located in *Serranía de la Macarena* National Park, Colombian Amazon

*Source:* Kikyo, "Los Fantasmas del río Guayabero," *Notimundo Blogspot*, 6 May 2012, accessed 12 January 2019, <https://notimundo2.blogspot.com/2012/05/guaviare-y-meta-zonas-abandonadas-por.html>.

#### Generalities with the Term "Colonization" in Latin America

The *Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language* defines the term colonize as "the act of fixing in the land the dwelling of its cultivators,"<sup>6</sup> and the *Oxford Dictionary* defines colonization as "the action of appropriating a place or domain for one's use."<sup>7</sup> In Latin America, the colonization processes can be planned and promoted by the State to populate lands that are considered uninhabited and in response to increasing pressure of peasants for access to land. An example of this process is the

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<sup>6</sup> Diccionario de la lengua española, "ASALE, RAE," accessed 18 November 2018, <http://dle.rae.es/>.

<sup>7</sup> Oxford Dictionary, "Colonization," accessed 18 November 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/colonization>.

colonization of the Brazilian Amazon from the 1970s to the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Other times, colonization fronts are opened by granting concessions to logging companies, agriculture, and the construction of roads and infrastructure that facilitate the arrival of settlers.<sup>9</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, colonization in Colombia refers to the arrival of peasant who are often people from adjacent regions that are poor and/or displaced from urban areas. Commonly, territories that have an indigenous presence are considered uncolonized due to the low indigenous population density.<sup>10</sup> However, the occupation of land by indigenous tribes does not correspond to the phenomenon of colonization in the CA.

As shown in table 1, the category ‘Invaders –Squatters’ is directly related to the term illegal colonization. In this category the State does not recognize the “legal” nature of land tenure of the person who occupies it. In this instance, the State’s policies aim to recover the occupied territory by expelling its inhabitants or relocating them. If illegal colonization expands rapidly beyond any plausible official intervention, the government creates a consensus with the colonizer communities following the model of the category ‘Peasant Communities’ within Category 3, table 1 to regulate the occupation of the vacant lands and avoid further unplanned expansion of the agricultural frontier.

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<sup>8</sup> Chris Van Dam, “Forest Companies and Rural Communities in the North of the Amazon. Chair of Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development” (Universidad Nacional de Salta, Argentina, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



Table 1. Forms of Land Tenure in Latin America

Types of property	Characteristics
<i>1. Public</i>	
Intangible areas: streets, coastal waters, ports, national security areas, etc.	Cannot be sold, leased, donated, mortgaged, etc.
Protected Areas	Sometimes overlapping with other forms of tenure or mining, logging and oil concessions
Wastelands or Badlands	Sometimes reserved for colonization programs
Urban land / Infrastructure	Involves the provision of public services and the use of public spaces that are deemed essential for the ability of people to live in urban areas.
<i>2. Private</i>	
Latifundia	Lands with significant unproductive areas or extensive grazing
Agricultural companies	Intensive use of technology and capital, salaried relationships, linked to agro-industries, external markets and multinational companies
Small producers capitalized	Produce basically for the domestic market of the country (monocultures, coffee, tobacco, fruit, horticulture)
· Subsistence peasants	Although generally, their condition is one of poverty, land tenure is legally recognized by the state.
<i>3. Associative / Communal</i>	
· Peasant communities	Traditional forms of property, combining forms of communal and family usufruct. The land usually cannot be sold, parceled, mortgaged
· Indigenous territories	With different degrees of legal recognition in terms of access and use rights (indigenous culture heritage)
<i>4. Without land</i>	
Small tenants, sharecroppers	The land is lent or leased
Invaders, squatters	On public or private lands, generally in <b>areas of colonization</b>
large investors who lease all the factors of production to work the land ("sowing pools")	Great geographic mobilization capacity based on investment opportunities / existing natural capital

*Source:* Chris Van Dam, "Forest Companies and Rural Communities in the North of the Amazon. Chair of Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development" (Universidad Nacional de Salta, Argentina, 1999).

Nevertheless, in Colombia, the classification of 'peasant community' does not eliminate the illegal nature of the possession of the land. Only until the national land planning authorities grant private property titles to settlers, the land can be considered legally colonized. The most significant barrier to granting private property titles in the

CA is that many of the illegal settlements are in national forest reserve and national parks areas. Figure 2 shows the tense relations between illegally colonized communities, and the ministries for agriculture and the environment.

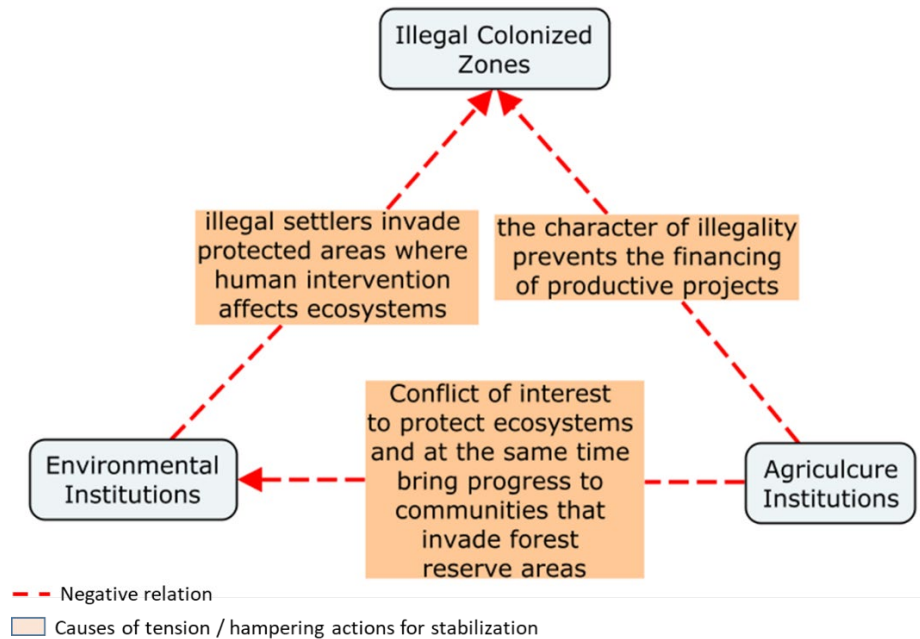


Figure 2. Relations between Illegal Colonizer Communities, Agricultural and Environmental Institutions in Colombia

Source: Created by author.

The relations in figure 2 show that development in illegally colonized settlements imply agrarian programs, social and economic policies that could affect the Amazon ecosystem. For example, if the state grants ownership titles to people who are settled in a national park, the land would be valued and would attract more peasants from other regions, who would seek to open paddocks in the middle of the jungle to create individual properties for their benefit. Another example is the construction of a paved road in the

middle of a national park. It would lead to enhancing the land value of the protected forest areas significantly, and it would prepare the ground to other phenomena such as land grabbing and more illegal settlements besides the existing ones. Therefore, the nature of illegal occupation prevents the state from investing resources in these areas thereby preventing development and progress.

On the other hand, there is the human aspect of those who inhabit the territory. By law, the State has to guarantee the welfare and progress to the entire nation. Therefore, if drastic measures are taken such as the forced eviction of lands that have been illegally colonized during many years, it would create a great conflict between the population and the government since the state would not recognize the human aspect of the illegal settlers being victims of the situation of ongoing violence and poverty that has plagued the country. Figure 3 shows the geographical characteristics between an illegally colonized area and a legal colonized area. It also illustrates the different policies enforced by Colombia and Brazil.



Figure 3. Colonization Features in the Amazon

*Source:* Google Earth, “Colombian Amazon,” accessed 6 February 2019; Google Earth, “Brazilian Amazon,” accessed 6 February 2019, <https://earth.google.com/web/@2.32526195,-73.34525855,205.68204219a,496.17168915d,35y,0h,45t,0r/data=ChYaFAoML2cvMWhodzFmdmR3GAIgASgCKAI>.

### The Colombian Amazon Region

The Amazon is the most extensive region of Colombia, covering 35 percent of the territory (403,348 km<sup>2</sup>). At the same time, it is the least populated by a wide margin, since it had a population density of only 2.6 inhabitants per square kilometer in 2012. In contrast, the rest of Colombia had a density of 162.2 inhabitants per square kilometer for the same year.<sup>11</sup> The Colombian Amazon Region is made up of the departments of Vaupés, Guaviare, Caquetá, Guainía, Meta (south), Putumayo, and Amazonas.

With its low soil fertility, particularly over the so-called stable ground surface the CA has turned out to be particularly difficult for the implementation of planned

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<sup>11</sup> Meisel R. Adolfo, Bonilla M. Leonardo and Sánchez J. Andrés, “Geografía económica de la Amazonía Colombiana” (Documentos de trabajo sobre Economía Regional, núm. Banco de la República Colombia, octubre de 2013).

agricultural colonization. Nevertheless, the agricultural frontier is advancing due to land grabbing practices.<sup>12</sup> According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), “it has been driven by forces and conflicts in the interior of the country, with its adverse effects on the ecosystem and the degradation of the natural and cultural heritage, the expansion of the areas by human intervention, the processes of deforestation and pasturing, and the intensification of extractive activities such as mining, and illegal crops. These phenomena occur with different intensities and social characteristics in the different Amazonas sub-regions.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Illegal Colonization

<sup>13</sup> Caribe, Comisión Económica para América Latina, *Amazonia posible y sostenible* (CEPAL, Patrimonio Natural, 2013), accessed 16 March 2019, <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/1506-amazonia-posible-sostenible>.



Figure 4. Colombian Natural Regions

Source: Wikipedia, “Natural Regions of Colombia,” accessed 13 October 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural\\_regions\\_of\\_Colombia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_regions_of_Colombia).

### Conflict in the Colombian Amazon Region

The weakness of the State is probably the argument most used when explaining the expansion of the insurgency, and illegal crops in the agricultural frontier located on the Andes foothills.<sup>14</sup> According to the U.S. Military doctrine, “insurgency is the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control

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<sup>14</sup> Adolfo, Leonardo, and Andrés, “Geografía económica de la Amazonía Colombiana.”

of a region. An insurgency is a form of intrastate conflict, and counterinsurgency (COIN) is used to counter it.”<sup>15</sup>

The illegality that results from the Colombian government weaknesses has also been pointed out as being responsible for environmental deterioration. According to Alfredo Rangel, a renowned politician and economist, “Colombia has been a country with much more territory than State” and “this precariousness of the State institutions facing the size of the territory has made possible, phenomena such as spontaneous unregulated colonization, and the establishment of armed insurgent groups in large areas of the country.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Eric Hobsbawm states, “the history of Colombia can be interpreted based on the recurrence of two facts: permanent colonization and incessant violence.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, the conditions of poverty in the colonized zones and the geographical conditions of the CA have made it favorable for FARC and warfare against the Colombian state.

The enormous propagation of coca crops in the south of the country is a major contributing factor to instability in the region. According to the UN, 42 percent of the

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Adolfo, Leonardo, and Andrés, “Geografía económica de la Amazonía Colombiana,” 92.

<sup>17</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Historia del siglo XX, 1914-1991* (Grupo Planeta (GBS), 2000), 245.

country's coca crops were produced in the Amazon region by 2013.<sup>18</sup> The close relationship in Colombia between insurgency warfare and drug trafficking is clear.

In 2016 a peace agreement was signed between the FARC and the Colombian government as part of the solution to an armed conflict in which this armed organization has attempted to overthrow the Colombian government by insurgency war. The post-conflict scenario allows us to visualize two possibilities for the future of the Amazon. The first, is that Organized Armed Groups or GAOs (for its acronym in Spanish) take control of the zones historically controlled by the FARC and take over drug trafficking in the colonized areas. The second presents a crucial opportunity for the State to consolidate the military and diplomatic victories achieved under the peace agreement to take control of the vulnerable communities prone to be manipulated by the remnant armed groups and their illegal economies. It is essential to take advantage of this moment to bring progress to the colonized communities. From the perspective of the Colombian Military Forces, it is crucial to neutralize the persistent armed threats and to bring the action of the State with all its institutions to the colonized areas where, for decades it has been absent in remote lands due to the dynamics of the armed conflict.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations, "Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey June 2013," accessed 3 April 2019, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crop-monitoring/index.html?year=2013>.

<sup>19</sup> In Colombia, there are systems of persistent threats which have emerged from the peace dialogues between the government and the FARC. These armed persistent threats (called Residual Armed Groups or Organized Armed Groups 'GAOs') are made up of members of the FARC that did not take part in peace accords. They have military power and control the same strategic zones for the production of illicit drugs as FARC. The geographical-organizational distribution is similar to that which the FARC has employed since its expansion in Colombia's National Territory





Figure 5. United Nations ICMP Colombia – Coca Survey for 2002

Source: United Nations, “Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey June 2013,” accessed 3 April 2019, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crop-monitoring/index.html?year=2013>.

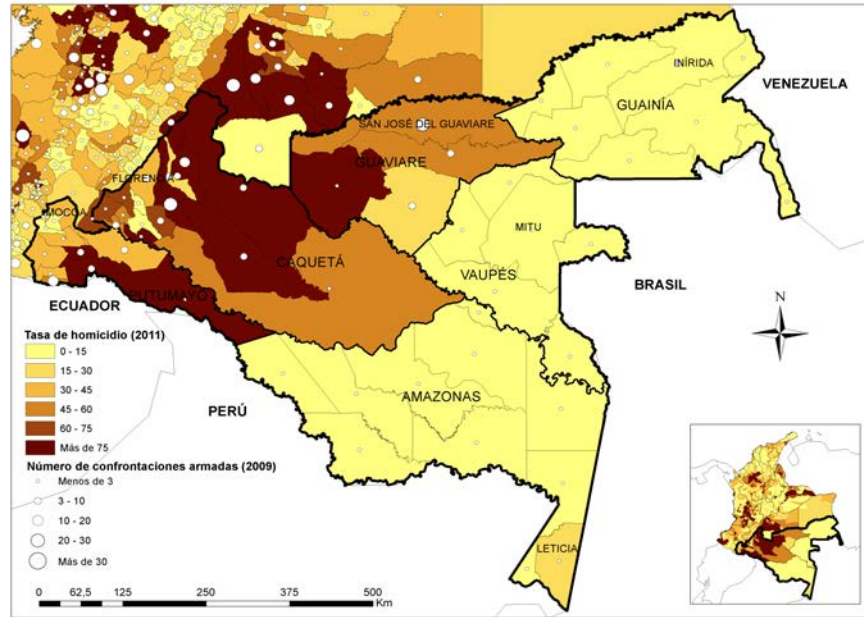


Figure 6. Homicide Rate (2011) and Number of Armed Confrontations (2009) in the Colombian Amazon

*Source:* Meisel R. Adolfo, Bonilla M. Leonardo and Sánchez J. Andrés, “Geografía económica de la Amazonía Colombiana” (Documentos de trabajo sobre Economía Regional, núm. Banco de la República Colombia, octubre de 2013), 93.

### Expansion of the Agricultural Frontier Due to Illegal Colonization: A Social-Ecological Threat

The environmental cost for the country due to colonization in the Colombian Amazon is incalculable.<sup>20</sup> The government has recognized the social and ecological problems of the Amazon in recent decades. Therefore, it has tried to align policies that bring progress to the illegally established communities in the Amazon, and in parallel, seek the protection of the Amazonian ecosystem. The illegal condition of the settlements

<sup>20</sup> El tiempo, “Reforma Agraria, 35 Años Perdidos - Archivo Digital de Noticias de Colombia y el Mundo desde 1.990,” accessed 23 November 2018, <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-539519>.

in forest reserve areas protected by the laws of the State represents a tremendous constraint to formalize aid to these communities since the government is committed to the protection of the natural wealth that the Amazon represents.

The Colombian government has been highly committed to the protection of the Amazon Basin. Commitments regarding the environment are part of the president's strategic goals. Recent governments have set an ambitious goal of zero net deforestation by 2020. To achieve this goal, Colombia significantly increased the formalization of forest reserve areas. A core project is the Amazon Vision Program, a progressive low-deforestation project that aims to promote sustainable development in the region in a post-conflict scenario.<sup>21</sup> As expected, usually these types of environmental programs for the protection of the Amazon do not include the grant of legal titles to illegal settlers.

Currently, a significant challenge in Colombia is the increased pressure on forests in the wake of the Colombian peace agreement with the FARC and the still limited government control in the Amazon region. For example, in the Department of Caquetá in the northern Amazonas, the Colombian magazine *Semana* states, "Caquetá is the department where deforestation has grown the most in the last two years. When the FARC recently left the territory, mafias and other settlers arrived and began extensive illegal cattle ranching, which, unlike coca cultivation, requires much more space to carry

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<sup>21</sup> KfW Bank aus Verantwortung, "REDD Early Movers (REM) Programme," accessed 16 March 2019, <https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/International-financing/KfW-Development-Bank/Topics/Climate/REDD/>.

out livestock activities.”<sup>22</sup> The deforestation that ranching livestock represents could be more devastating for the amazon ecosystem since it requires more extensive areas than illegal crops.

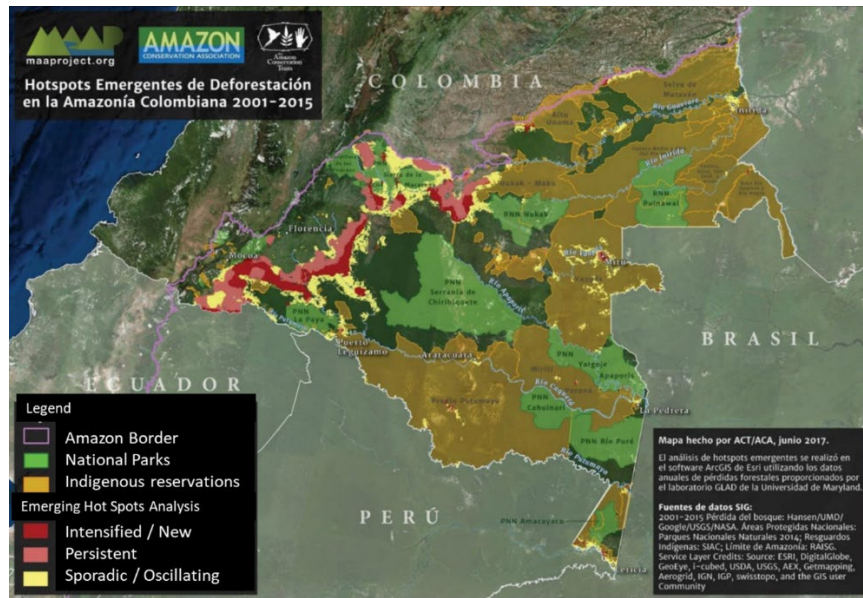


Figure 7. Intensity of Deforestation and Protected Areas in the Colombian Amazon (2001 to 2015)

Source: B. Hettler, A. Thieme, and M. Finer, “Deforestation Patterns in Colombian Amazon.” MAAP Columbia, 2017, accessed 18 November 2018, <http://maaproject.org/patrones-de-deforestacion-en-la-amazonia-colombiana/>.

<sup>22</sup> Semana, “Deforestación en Caquetá: los bosques que arrasaron en el posconflicto,” accessed 21 November 2018, <http://especiales.semana.com/deforestacion/caqueta.html>.

## Considerations of Military Strategy in the Colombian Amazon Region

National security refers to the protection of a nation state, including its citizens, economy, and institutions.<sup>23</sup> According to Colombian law, “it is the obligation of the State to design the necessary measures to offer its members guarantees for the attainment and maintenance of peaceful coexistence on acceptable levels and citizen security to ensure the independence, sovereignty, autonomy, territorial integrity and validity of a fair order at the national and international levels.”<sup>24</sup>

As part of its constitutional mission, the Colombian Military Forces have been committed to restoring order and maintaining peace in the CA for many years. In this region, the Colombian Military in support of the National Police conducts principally counter narcotics (CN) and COIN operations in the Amazonian territory to assert the rule of law and disrupt illegal activities such as drug trafficking. One of the most important aspect in the operational environment is the relationship between society and criminality.

The illegal settlers in the CA have based their livelihoods on illicit activities such as the cultivation of the coca plant for many years. Thus, the strategy of CN operations by military means like manual eradication of coca, have generated tension between illegal colonizers, the Army, and the National Police. The tension is primarily due to the Armed

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<sup>23</sup> Colombia Congress, Pub. L. No. 684, 25, *Organization and Operation of Colombian National Security and Defense* (2001).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Forces attempt to enforce the National law and stop illicit activities like coca production and trafficking.<sup>25</sup>

In that sense, habitually protests by illegal settlers are carried out against the action of the armed forces. The coca producers use to sabotage military procedures of eradication of the coca crops arguing that the government does not offer them decent living conditions. This situation does not only occur in Colombia but also in other adjacent countries in the region, all seeking disrupt the problem of illicit crops by military means.



Figure 8. Peasants Protesting against Manual Eradication of Illicit Crops both in Colombia and Peru

*Sources:* Generacionpaz.co, “La Silla Vacía,” 5 October 2017, accessed 3 March 2019, <http://generacionpaz.co/content/masacre-en-tumaco-aqu-no-hab-disidencias-polic-y-ej-rcito-nos-dispararon-campesinos>; Radio Pampa Yurac, “Este martes agricultores colalerosse movilizarán y acordarán huelga indefinida,” March 2015, accessed 10 January 2019, <http://www.radiopampayuracfm.com/2015/03/este-martes-agricultores-cocaleros-se.html>.

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<sup>25</sup> According to the Colombian doctrine, the drug trafficking chain system consists on the cultivation (illegal crops), production, transportation (both chemical inputs for production and terminated drugs), marketing, money laundering product of illegal drugs, and consumption.

## Conclusion Chapter 1

Taking into account the geostrategic importance of the Colombian Amazon and the direct link between this sub-region, illegal colonization, and the episodes of instability in Colombia, this study intends to determine from the Military Sciences and Arts perspective, if the socio-geographical phenomenon known as illegal colonization of lands in the CA represents a threat to National Security.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The laws of war—this is a problem that anyone directing a war must study and solve. The laws of revolutionary war—this is a problem that anyone directing a revolutionary war must study and solve. The laws of China’s revolutionary war—this is a problem that anyone directing a revolutionary war in China must study and solve.

— Mao Tse-tung,  
*Strategic Problems of China’s Revolutionary War*

#### Introduction

At first glance, the term illegal colonization, in essence, would not be an issue related to the Military Sciences and Arts. Instead, it seems to be a geography, sociology or political science matters. For this reason, it has been challenging for the author to make an approximation to the subject to link it with the Master of Military Art and Science’ areas of study. There is no military doctrine in the world that deals with the specific topic of illegal colonization in Colombia, its causes, its dynamics, or its solutions.

However, the author considers the context in which the phenomenon develops, its causes, and characteristics are directly related to the history of the armed conflict in Colombia. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze it from the perspective of the Military Sciences and Arts since this knowledge branch generally deals with the human dimensions of war and military operations. Besides, Military Art is typically subject to qualitative rather than quantitative investigation. Although it does not exclude the use of quantitative methods when appropriate; it can include such areas as psychology,



leadership, individual and collective behavior, culture, ethics, and problem-solving; and finally, history provides the context and depth for the study of military solutions.

### Relationship between Illegal Colonization and Insurgent War

The author found that similar episodes of what is known as illegal colonization have been related to the expansion of insurgent movements since the Chinese Civil War (1927 to 1949). Galula, who was a French military officer and scholar influential in developing the theory and practice of counterinsurgency warfare, describes one episode of the Chinese Civil War as follows: “In order to escape annihilation, the Communists began their Long March from Kiangsi to a remote area north of Shensi. In 1937, after the Long March, the supporters had again dropped to 40,000. On VJ Day (victory over Japan day), the Party had grown to 1,200,000 supporters, controlled an area of 350,000 square miles with a population of 95 million, and had a regular army of 900,000 men and a militia force of 2,400,000. I was not vulnerable anymore.”<sup>26</sup>

This episode of the Chinese People’s War has several common components to the term illegal colonization. The first, which is a displacement of people for a social reason (avoid annihilation). The second, people are moving to a remote area. It means that there was no presence of the ruling regime of the time, and the geographical conditions were favorable to establish settlements in hiding. The third is a prolonged settlement with established political-social systems, without government control, and which extends over time. These factors caused people to take over this territory and consider it their own.

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<sup>26</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security, 1964), 22.

The relationship between the phenomenon and the insurgent war in Colombia in the 20th century links this phenomenon with the study of the Military Sciences. The increment of colonization in the Amazon's forest reserve areas as a strategy of the communist guerrillas is widely documented. We must not go beyond the very texts of the communists to prove this reality. In his book, Alape, a militant writer of the communist current who supported the cause of the FARC, remembers the words of Manuel Marulanda Vélez, founder of the FARC as follows: "After the first guerrilla conference, it was determined (by FARC) that the armed body (guerrilla units) in three departments would demobilize and convert into groups of self-defense made up of peasants from the regions and with ex-combatants who decided and wanted to work in peace, colonizing the jungle."<sup>27</sup>

#### Geographic Factors, Colonization, and Military Sciences

According to Galula, the machines for the control of the population (absence of anarchy) of a state are the political structure, the administrative bureaucracy, the police, the military forces, and the geographical conditions.<sup>28</sup> But also, Galula describes the geographical characteristics conducive to the emergence of insurgencies. The author found that these characteristics are consistent with the geography of Colombian territory such as the shape of the country (star), and borders surrounded by jungle.

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<sup>27</sup> Arturo Alape, *Las Vidas de Pedro Antonio Marín Manuel Marulanda Vélez Tirofijo* (Bogotá: Barnes and Noble Press, 1996), 27. The first guerrilla conference (1965) is considered the official founding act of the FARC as an insurgent movement. Arturo Alape (1938-2006) Alias Jacobo Prías.

<sup>28</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice*.

As mentioned before, in the case of the People's War in China (1927 to 1949) and the insurgent war in Colombia against the FARC (1965 to 2016), geographic factors have played a fundamental role in the roots of the conflict. For this reason, the author investigated if this fact allows an objective judgment in the analysis of illegal colonization phenomenon as crucial on the FARC insurgent struggle. On that purpose, the author consulted David Galula, since his work describes the conditions to succeed, and the conditions for defeat in counterinsurgency war, including geographic aspects whereas Garry M. Leech, an independent journalist and writer, describes the geographic aspect of the destabilized environment in Colombia as follows: "geographic isolation (of people) bred a distrust of central government that persists in rural Colombia. To this day, the government in Bogotá has never effectively controlled all of the national territories."<sup>29</sup>

### History Review

The concept of illegal colonization as a simple act of land grabbing (by peasants) and not as a strategy of geographical expansion of insurgencies cannot be ignored. It would be inferred that the phenomenon occurs from the moment in which displaced people began to occupy the Amazon jungles independently and without the control of the State, it means, its origins date before the 20th century. For this reason, authors such as Wolfgang Brucher and Molano were consulted. These authors tell the story of the colonization of the CA from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the subversive

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<sup>29</sup> Garry M. Leech, *Killing Peace: Colombia's Conflict and the Failure of US Intervention* (New York: Information Network of the Americas, 2002), 7.

war in Colombia in the 1960s to see whether the expansion of the phenomenon as isolated events of land occupation without apparent strategic importance contributed to create an environment of instability after the 1960s.

Subsequently, authors such as Alfredo Molano and Ramírez describe an episode of the settlement of people in the jungles Colombia known as ‘Armed Colonization’. The author has attempted to determine if this definition falls within the category of ‘Illegal Colonization (made by civilians)’ and what were its effects on the stability of the region.

Finally, Molano tells the story of the colonization of the Amazon driven by the rise of coca crops in the jungles of the Amazon (from the decade of 1970). The aim is to ascertain whether coca growing for the purpose of planting illicit crops is related to the phenomenon of illegal colonization, and what are the effects on the stability of the Nation.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### History Review

The author will make a historical review of the events on the zones most affected by the phenomenon of colonization in the Colombian Amazon to understand better the extent of the phenomena as we can see in the Amazon north-west departments of Caquetá, Putumayo, and Guaviare, in which colonization has had the highest rates.

This study will allow the author to understand the social, economic and security phenomena in a colonized area where different circumstances have existed, such as the weak presence of the State, the precarious economic conditions on the colonized areas, the marginality of the populations and the inhospitable terrain. The aim is to study whether the guerrilla groups, and the drug trafficking actors, are related to illegal colonization phenomena.

#### Case Study Analysis

To have a better idea of the social and military situation in the illegal colonized areas, the author will analyze a case study in a hamlet located in the department of Guaviare. The case study analyses the situation of illegal colonization in the Puerto Cachicamo community. This village has been the scene of the insurgent war for many years. Currently, there are still situations such as the growing of illicit crops, the disaffection of the civilian population against the State Military Forces, and illegality in the occupation of the land.

The data collected in this case study is based on the military operations experience by the author in that area during 2017 as a commander in the Colombian National Army. In his experience, the author perceived that in Puerto Cachicamo the social problems of the last century in rural Colombia remain. The principal characteristic of the community is the character of illegality in land tenure.

Based on this case and using Military Art, the author will focus the analysis of the operational environment using the civilian population as Center of Gravity (CoG) to determine if the conditions of the illegal colonizers have direct effects on the security problems that affect the Nation.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### HISTORY REVIEW

Little by little, however, and as the war became more intense and widespread, his image was fading away in a universe of unreality

— Gabriel García Márquez,  
*One Hundred Years of Solitude*

#### Introduction

This chapter conducts data collection and analysis following the methodology detailed in chapter 3 to determine what the implications of illegal colonization on Colombian national security are. For that purpose, it is necessary to analyze the dynamics of the phenomenon from different perspectives. In the first section, the history of the phenomenon is explained, therefore presenting a historical review of the events that caused the migration of peasants who began to occupy the Amazonian territory.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the process of land occupation in the Amazon has had a differentiated development which must be understood. For this reason, we must resort to a historical review of the main events that framed colonization, which allows us to support whether the process of colonization of the CA had difficulties in the systematic and methodical incorporation of public policies towards the peasant masses that were moving to establish settlements in the Colombian jungles.

## Section I

### Spontaneous Colonization of the Amazon: A Low-Intensity Threat to the Nation

#### Background of Illegal Colonization in Colombia

The Colombian Amazon was unknown until the war of independence of Colombia in 1819. Only some sporadic incursions had been made by some Spanish conquerors and the passing performance of some missionaries. It was the missionaries who founded small villages, connected by paths in the Amazon region. At the beginning of the 20th century, missions of the Capuchin friars began in Putumayo and Caquetá. There, they built roads and subsequently founded towns where they concentrated the indigenous groups and attracted the first settlers from the interior of the country. In these ways, they were the ones who set the bases for colonization in what are today the capitals of the departments of Putumayo and Caquetá.

According to Brücher, a renowned researcher of the 20th century, both the native inhabitants of the high mountains and the Spaniards before the 1960s decade, dodged the forests beyond the Andes mountain range. The low Amazon plains were a mysterious space, which due to its climate and the prevailing endemic diseases were avoided because it was considered inhabitable. Moreover, according to some edaphological investigations towards the late 1950s, the jungle was considered as an economically worthless territory from the agricultural perspective. These convictions undoubtedly contributed to ignoring the importance of the early planning for the occupation of the jungle areas before the



1950s. Brücher states that by the end of the 1950s, “the Colombian government described these national territories as jungle regions, underdeveloped and hostile to humankind.”<sup>30</sup>

### The Problem of Land Distribution: Cause of Violence in Colombia

There is an extensive literature that describes how the social conflict in Colombia is linked to the problem of the distribution and administration of state lands among its inhabitants. Pearce tells how the antecedents of the war of a thousand days (1899-1902) were conflicts related to the possession of land between landlords (latifundia) and settlers that the State did not resolve early. This social non-conformity environment added to the spread of generalized violence in the country as a result of the murder of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a charismatic political leader who aspired the presidency of Colombia and one of the most charismatic political leaders who supported the causes of the most disadvantaged social population. Gaitán was assassinated during his second presidential campaign in 1948, setting off the Bogotazo and leading to a violent period of political unrest in Colombian history known as ‘La Violencia’ (approx. 1948 to 1958).<sup>31</sup>

Gaitán’s assassination paved the way for the peasant class to begin occupying the Colombian jungles without recognizing the laws of the State. In her work, Pearce, an investigator concerned with human rights and related social, political and economic

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<sup>30</sup> Wolfgang Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia* (Bogotá: Agustín Codazzi, 1974), accessed 14 May 2019, <https://www.oceandocs.org/handle/1834/3281>.

<sup>31</sup> “El Bogotazo” refers to the massive riots that followed the assassination in Bogotá, of Liberal leader and presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on 9 April 1948 during the government of President Mariano Ospina Pérez (President of Colombia 1946 to 1950). The 10-hour riot left much of downtown Bogotá destroyed.

issues in South America, narrates the tensions between the great landowners and the poor peasant class in this way: “there was an immense reserve of public lands in the new republic, an estimated 75 percent of the country’s land area in 1850. During the 19th century, a great deal of this was given out to a handful of private owners. Two concessionaries, for instance, were granted 150,000 hectares between them; 73 percent of the two million hectares given out during the 19th century were granted in concessions of more than 1,000 hectares.”<sup>32</sup>

This system failed to reconcile the peasant classes and favored large landowners who possessed the titles of the land. Pearce continues: “Labor was a major problem if landowners were to exploit their estates commercially. The mass of the population still lived in the highland areas, and if the peasants gained access to the ample land in the low-lying warmer areas, they would no longer have any incentive to work on the large estates. Population movements were, in fact, beginning to take place from the densely-populated highlands to the slopes and intermountain valleys. But governments resisted giving land titles to their peasants. Instead, they offered large expanses of land to European immigrants, most of whom failed to respond. Those peasants who tried to settle the public lands were expelled in a variety of ways. Landowners could pay the legal costs of acquiring title to the lands, but just as often they usurped it and occupied them illegally, finding a friendly judge to confirm their ownership. Once the landowner had claimed the land rights, and accompanied by the police, he would tell the colonel who had settled

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<sup>32</sup> Jenny Pearce, *Colombia Inside the Labyrinth* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1990).

there that he must leave or sign a contract to rent it. The rent was most often taken in the form of labor.”<sup>33</sup>

Finally, Pearce asserts that “at first, colonizers did little to protest against their situation and continued to be the *status quo* for many years. After 1875, however, laws were passed which gave them some protection. This law was ignored by landowners and violent conflicts frequently broke out when the peasants invoked them in their defense. The landowners destroyed crops, brought down bridges to prevent peasants taking produce to market, formed vigilante groups to intimidate and terrorize, and imprisoned peasant leaders on false charges. The bloody struggle over Colombia’s agricultural frontier was just beginning.”<sup>34</sup>

#### The One Thousand Days War (1899 to 1902)

The One Thousand Days War was the longest and most destructive of Colombia’s civil wars. The devastation was exacerbated by the emergence of numerous liberal guerrilla armies in various parts of the country. On the other hand, the conservatives, with their control of the institutions, responded by the employment of the National Military Forces. The Civil War in Colombia between 1899 and 1903 left as a consequence the separation of Panama from the Colombian territory. Also, the Colombian state neglected the situation of its borders in the Amazonian territory in the south of the country.

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<sup>33</sup> Pearce, *Colombia Inside the Labyrinth*.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

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Figure 9. Indigenous People Enslaved by the Peruvian Company 'Casa Arana', then 'Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company' for the Massive Exploitation of the Rubber Tree in the 20th Century

*Source:* BBC, "Cien años después, la Amazonía recuerda uno de sus episodios más trágicos," October 2012, accessed 14 May 2019, [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/10/121012\\_colombia\\_genocidio\\_casa\\_arana\\_caucho\\_amazonia\\_aw](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/10/121012_colombia_genocidio_casa_arana_caucho_amazonia_aw).

#### Colombia–Peru War (1932 to 1933)

As mentioned previously, after the One Thousand Days War, Colombia had neglected its inhospitable borders. Casa Arana,<sup>35</sup> a Peruvian Company, took advantage of the situation. The Multinational Rubber Company Casa Arana extracted rubber from the jungle to meet the world demand for this product during WWI. The exploitation of the

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<sup>35</sup> The Arana house was denounced by a British newspaper for the torture and murder of thousands of Colombian indigenous people, who served as slaves for the extraction of rubber in the Amazon jungle. After 1907, Casa Arana became in the 'Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company', with participation of British capitals and with headquarters in London. After the scandal in 1907, the company continued extracting rubber using the indigenous tribes to this purpose. The Colombian government was neglected until 1932, when it was decelerated the war with Peru for the recovering of the Amazon territory.

jungle on the southern border of Colombia was a multimillion-dollar business that favored Peru for many years.

According to the Colombian magazine *Semana*, “at the beginning, the situation was ignored by the Colombian government, until 1909, when the name of the department of Putumayo appeared in the newspaper ‘Trust’ of London. The region, systematically forgotten in Colombia, made headlines on the other side of the Atlantic because of the atrocities suffered by the indigenous people.”<sup>36</sup> It was from that moment that the Colombian government focused on recovering its sovereignty over the Amazonian territory invaded by the Peruvians. Nevertheless, the expansionist tendencies of Peru continued until 1932. The situation caused the conflict of Leticia and the dispute over the Amazonian trapeze.<sup>37</sup> The conflict was resolved in favor of Colombia.

Although it seems paradoxical, it was precisely this conflict that marked the initiation of a massive agrarian unplanned colonization in the southern Andean foothills. The reason is that “the Colombian government built two roads rapidly through from the Andes towards the navigable rivers in Putumayo and Caquetá to facilitate the mobility of troops. One of these roads leads from Pasto to Puerto Umbría, and the other comes from Altamira via Florencia to the Orteguzza river, a water tributary of the Caquetá river.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Semana*, “La reconciliación de un etnocidio,” 14 September 2015, accessed 15 May 2019, <https://www.semana.com/educacion/articulo/etnocidio-casa-arana/442158-3>.

<sup>37</sup> The Amazon Trapezium or Trapezium of Leticia is a geographic corridor located in the extreme south of the Department of Amazonas, which is the southernmost part of the country, and allows it to have banks on the Amazon River. It extends as a peninsula between Brazil and Peru.

<sup>38</sup> Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia*.

As shown in figure 10, two arteries of terrestrial communication were created after the war against Peru. They were neither the result of planned colonization nor were they created for it.

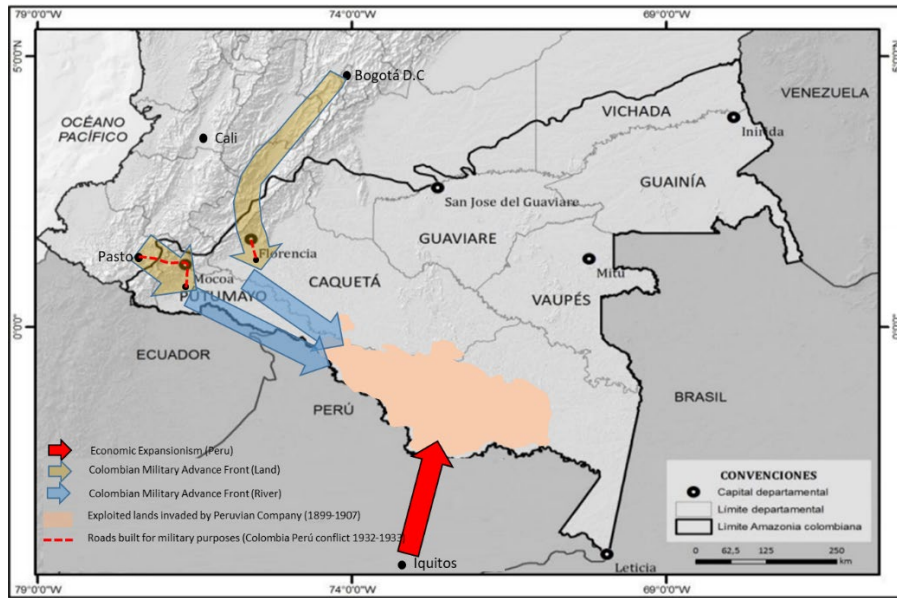


Figure 10. Colombia-Peru War (1932 to 1933). Military Avenues of Approach

Source: Created by author. Adaptation of Leonardo Bonilla, *Construction of an Amazon Territory in the 20th Century* (Bogotá: SINCHI Institute, 2000), 77.

### Government Response to Spontaneous Illegal Colonization

Faced with the rise of migratory movements and land occupation in rural areas of the country, the national government issued Law 200 of 1936 that sought to reconcile the peasant classes with the Colombian state. This law, called “the revolution on the March,” recognized the vacant land as property of the settlers and granted land titling on it “as long as the occupied lands contribute economically to society.” According to Pearce, “with support from bankers and industrialists, Liberal and Conservative landowners set

up a violent opposition movement, to organize against Law 200. It included attacks on peasants who demanded the right to land. Between 1944 and 1946 many of the labor and agricultural policies of the first López Pumarejo government were reversed. Law 100 of 1944 protected landowners from the claims of sharecroppers and opened the way for the landowner's violent revenge on peasant organizers in parts of Tolima and Cundinamarca States. It was in these areas that Communist-led peasant self-defense groups came to predominate during *La Violencia*.”<sup>39</sup>

#### 'La Violencia' (1948 to 1953) and its Effects on Colonization

By 1948 Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was a political leader representing the poorest peasant masses and, therefore, had publicly denounced the land distribution injustices of which the peasants were victims. This political leader was against the country's traditional political classes and was considered the next president of Colombia. On April 9, 1948, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was murdered. This event represented a 'trigger' to unleash the violent events that took place in Colombia in the following five years. The reasons for the violence were those same injustices that the settlers had been subjected to for decades.

After 1953 the demographic pressure in the cities caused by peasants displaced from the war, the accelerated proletarianization of the masses, and the government's difficulties in controlling the occupation of the territory were the causes of the great increase in the immigration of settlers to the Amazon.<sup>40</sup> Under the pressure of this

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<sup>39</sup> Pearce, *Colombia Inside the Labyrinth*, 43.

<sup>40</sup> In Marxism, proletarianization is the social process whereby people move from being either an employer, unemployed or self-employed, to being employed as wage

situation, the State created colonization and parceling institutes during the period 1948-1953, but none of them carried out practical works that would alleviate the situation of this colonizing population.<sup>41</sup> According to Brücher, the attempts of the institutions to bring parallel progress to the colonization of the Amazon would fail in the future.<sup>42</sup>

### Massive Illegal Colonization in the Colombian Amazon: Consequence of *La Violencia*

As mentioned earlier, after the violent political period from 1948 to 1953, one of the strategic courses of action to overcome the economic crisis was the colonization in the east, an area of approximately 60,000 km<sup>2</sup> in the Andean-Amazonian Piedmont between the Ariari river and the border with Ecuador, see figure 11. As shown previously, the departments of Guaviare, Putumayo, and Caquetá seem geographically located for a country's expanding purposes as limits of colonization zones like in any other country that seeks to expand its agricultural frontier. However, there were factors that the government had not foreseen, such as the use of the roads built in the war against Peru by civilians towards the jungle savannas; the massive access of people to the jungle territories using the rivers; and generally the massive migration of victims of violence

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labor by an employer. Proletarianization is often seen as the most important form of downward social mobility.

<sup>41</sup> Elsa María Fernández-Andrade, *El narcotráfico y la descomposición política y social: el caso de Colombia* (San Rafael, Mexico: Plaza y Valdes, 2002), 45.

<sup>42</sup> Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia*. Until that moment, the body in charge of taking projects to colonized places was the Colombian Agrarian Fund (Caja Agraria Colombiana in Spanish). After *La Violencia*, the Colombian Institute of Agricultural Reform (INCORA) was created. This organism assumed the responsibility of regulating the expansion of the agricultural frontier and controlling the occupation of lands by illegal settlers.



from the interior of the country towards the jungle of the Amazon in search of new opportunities. These factors accelerated the migration to the Amazon jungles by spontaneous illegal colonizers in a disorganized way and without adequate planning from the Colombian government.

As explained above, the number of settlers that crossed the mountain range increased steadily with the opening of the two roads built for military purposes during the war against Peru. But far greater numbers of migrants settled in the decade of 1960. From the beginnings of *La Violencia* motivated for possession of land issues principally, until 1964 around 100,000 displaced peasants migrated to the regions of Putumayo and Caquetá. The strong growth of this immigration flow was possible thanks to the existing roads as mentioned previously. However, the true cause of migration was motivated by the social, economic and political situation of the interior of the country.<sup>43</sup>

#### Penetration Lines and the Colonization of the Amazon

The most striking feature in the expansion of colonization over the forest is the division of the phenomenon simultaneously into three separate zones. In this, the access roads to the region or penetration routes played a fundamental role. These roads are the three main roads that cross the mountain range towards the Amazonian and Orinoco plains. The first from Pasto to Puerto Asís; from Neiva via Altamira to Florence and Rio Orteguaza the second; and the third from Bogotá via Villavicencio to the Ariari river. On all these three road arteries depended (and still depends) the entire economic life of these

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<sup>43</sup> Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia*.

three colonized regions. While the Bogotá-Villavicencio highway was relatively wide and 80 percent asphalt paved, the other two were narrow and in poor condition. Figure 11 shows the penetration routes to the Amazon region.

However, authors such as Brücher and Molano affirm that the roads, although important, were in no way an indispensable condition for the illegal colonization of the Amazon. While in Putumayo there is linear colonization through the road, in the departments of Caquetá and Guaviare large spaces were conquered by illegal settlers, using the main river tributaries such as the Guayabero and Ariari. Therefore, the assertion that roads are the precursors of colonization, is not true in the most inhospitable departments like Guaviare. It is important to understand the penetration routes of colonization to understand that the action of the state was null in those populated spaces that were geographically isolated from the rest of the country.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia*.

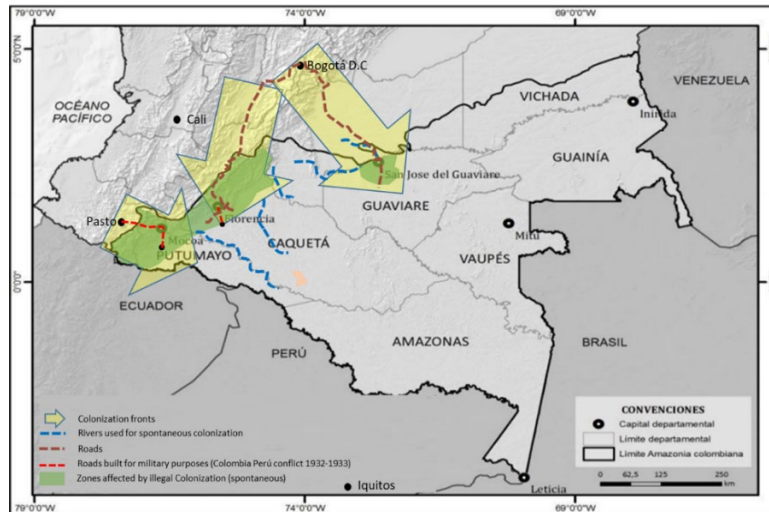


Figure 11. Lines of Penetration toward Amazon Lands used by Illegal Colonizers

Source: Created by author based on Wolfgang Brücher. *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia* (Bogotá: Agustín Codazzi, 1974), accessed 9 March 2019, <https://www.oceandocs.org/handle/1834/3281>.

### Social Perspective: Living Conditions of the Spontaneous Colonizers in the Amazon

As is to be expected, the degree of education and health of the population in the illegally colonized sectors was markedly low and below the country's average. These settlements were affected by high levels of malnutrition, infectious and endemic diseases. The infant mortality rate was 30 percent to 50 percent; the number of hospitals, health posts and medical attention was completely insufficient in quantity and quality.<sup>45</sup>

For the great majority of the illegal settlers who crossed the mountain range without resources, the main problem consisted of physically surviving the initial time

<sup>45</sup> Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia*.

during which there still could not be harvests. In the agricultural stage of colonization, rice and corn were grown almost exclusively for the market to the interior of the country and were the only marketable products. After the 1970s cattle ranching developed as an important branch of the agrarian economy in the Amazon. However, for the settler without capital, the acquisition of livestock was a problem due to the lack of financing and land titles.<sup>46</sup>

#### Difficulties in the Legal Tenure and Use of Land

The method of clearing the forest and the economy that developed on this new land of colonization also determined the form of possession. According to Colombian law, a settler occupying a vacant lot could only acquire title to it once he had cultivated 2/3 of the occupied area. On average, one settler managed to clean an area of about 3 hectares of forest annually, so it took many years to clear an economically profitable area. It led him to a vicious circle: as he did not yet have the property title, he did not get official credit, and without the credit, he barely managed to get out of the primitive level of self-sufficiency subsistence and obtain the public property deed.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the government's inflexible policies of colonization slowed the development of the rural economy and the lowered standard of living in the Amazon agricultural frontier considerably. The bulk of the settlers had no property title, and their cultivated plots were very small.

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<sup>46</sup> Alfredo Molano, *Selva Adentro: Una historia oral de la colonización del Guaviare* (Bogotá, Colombia: Ancora Editores, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia*.

## Analysis Section I

To facilitate the study of the illegal colonization phenomenon, the author is based on the classification of land tenure explained in table 1. According to the historical review of section I, the following are the types of no-land tenancy shown in chapter 1.

1. Spontaneous Illegal Colonization: According to Rangel, this type of illegal colonization is represented by people that migrated to the Amazon region taking advantage of the construction of roads in the departments of Putumayo, Caquetá, and Guaviare, also using rivers to appropriate the uncultivated lands of the Amazon.<sup>48</sup>
2. Without land - large investors (e.g., Casa Arana): This category is not a subject of study of this thesis.
3. Latifundia Illegal Colonization: This term is created by the author to explain the conditions in which the peasants who occupied the lands of the landowners (latifundia) were developed. These types of colonizers were victims of the dispute over the recognition of property titles. However, there were no latifundia in the Amazonian lands, since these were uninhabited forest areas. Therefore, latifundia colonization is not a subject of study of the present thesis.

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<sup>48</sup> To facilitate the study of the phenomena the author classified Illegal Colonization by types.

## Section II

### Armed and Narco Colonization: High Intensity Threat to National Security

#### Armed Colonization in the Colombian Amazon Jungle

Molano and Ramirez T. used the term “Armed Colonization” to describe the combination between armed groups (e.g., armed self-defense peasants, insurgent groups) and peasant citizens in search of colonizing the nation’s vacant lands. On the one hand, Ramirez T. describes the phenomenon as “a historical concept used to interpret, from a certain type of forced displacement of civilians, the genesis and development of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).”<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Molano narrates in his work how the peasants who were victims of the violence generated by the policies of land distribution in Colombia undertook organized marches towards the remote southern areas. These were mass movements of peasants who used arms to defend themselves against the oppression of the state and the landlords who owned latifundia.

As a result of this migratory movement, communities of settlers were founded in the department of Guaviare.<sup>50</sup> The concept of peasants organized into armed auto defenses had a close relationship with the foundation of the FARC in the following years. As explained in chapter 2, the concept of armed peasant marches was not new in the world. In China, it was a key episode for the creation of the insurgency that defeated the Chinese government in 1949. However, some authors like Molano defend the theory that

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<sup>49</sup> William T. Ramírez, “Colonización armada, poder local y territorialización privada,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 72, no. 2 (December 2001): 81.

<sup>50</sup> Molano, *Selva Adentro*.

it was not a conspiracy addressed by world communism to organize the peasant masses endowing them with weapons and establishing them in territories far from the state control. However, other authors such as Ramírez argue that the armed colonization was strategically premeditated and that this phenomenon was the one that made possible the consolidation of the armed guerrillas that gave rise to the creation of the insurgent group FARC. Therefore, the armed colonization preceded by agricultural colonization with an ineffective intervention by the Colombian State allowed the insurgent groups to find the physical conditions in the land that are required to carry out a successful insurgent war from the Amazon basin.

Several of the geographical conditions are found in scholarly works such as *The Art of the Anti-Revolutionary War* written by John McCuen. According to McCuen “the revolutionaries almost invariably find it easy to establish themselves in the ‘countryside’, in isolated, difficult terrain where the governing authorities are weakest, know least what is going on, and show the least interest . . . at the same time, they silently take control of isolated villages where they form guerrilla bases.”<sup>51</sup> This theory is studied more thoroughly by analyzing the history of the creation of the FARC as an insurgent group.

#### Armed Colonization: The Genesis of FARC

As explained above, the violence unleashed in Colombia between 1948 and 1953 brought with its bloodshed in the country in reaction to how policies were administered by the central government, especially in terms of land ownership. As a result of this

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<sup>51</sup> John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005).

upheaval at the national level, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla conducted a coup d'etat against the current government of the time arguing that it was necessary to re-establish order at the national level. In his mandate, General Rojas Pinilla negotiated the peace with the guerrilla groups that emerged from the model of land distribution.

The conservative guerrillas fought to defend the latifundia model and the liberal guerrillas defended the rights of the illegal landowners whose political leader was Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. However, not all the guerrillas surrendered before the amnesty offered by General Rojas Pinilla.<sup>52</sup> During and following “La Violencia”, the Communist Party of Colombia, founded in 1930, developed organic links to several liberal guerrilla and irregular rural forces, most of whom nominally depended on the official Colombian Liberal Party and eventually demobilized by the end of that period. Those groups with more direct relations with the PCC tended to not demobilize, keeping their weapons and organizational structures mostly intact.<sup>53</sup>

In the fourth year of General Rojas Pinilla's mandate, a bipartisan agreement was reached between the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties, known as the National Front. The agreement consisted of rotating the power between the liberal and conservative parties every four years.<sup>54</sup> After a polemic election, General Rojas Pinilla was defeated politically in mid-1957. This event led to the creation of the M-19 (19th of April Movement), an insurgent group who claimed electoral fraud to overthrow General

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<sup>52</sup> Eduardo L. Pizarro, *Las FARC de la autodefensa a la combinación de todas las formas de lucha*, 2nd ed. (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> Pearce, *Colombia Inside the Labyrinth*.

<sup>54</sup> The National Front lasted from 1958 to 1974.



Rojas Pinilla from power. The subsequent events regarding M-19 are not subject of this thesis.

Now, the traditional parties whose failures in the land administration system gave rise to violence in Colombia returned to power.<sup>55</sup> It generated even more tension among the communities of peasants who did not own land and who were now armed for self-defense purposes. According to Pearce and Pizarro L, the armed peasants migrated from the latifundia to the uninhabited mountains and colonized lands in mountainous geographical areas where the state had no control. According to Molano, the armed settlers considered the colonized lands an “agrarian movement,”<sup>56</sup> other authors affirm that these groups had the political support of the Colombian Communist Party. Manuel Marulanda Vélez, the future founder of the FARC, was one of the leaders of these armed movements.<sup>57</sup> The armed settlers organized themselves into clandestine communities in the areas of Cundinamarca, Tolima, and Caldas.<sup>58</sup>

The situation was denounced in the Congress of Colombia, and the Colombian government was forced to act. The course of action taken was the use of the military apparatus of the State to recover the areas invaded by the armed colonists of the so-called

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<sup>55</sup> Pearce, *Colombia Inside the labyrinth*.

<sup>56</sup> Alfredo Molano, “Asalto a Marquetalia,” *El Espectador*, 14 June 2014, accessed 15 May 2019, <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/asalto-marquetalia-articulo-498380>.

<sup>57</sup> Pearce, *Colombia Inside the Labyrinth*; Pizarro, *Las FARC de la autodefensa a la combinación de todas las formas de lucha*. Molano, “Asalto a Marquetalia.”

<sup>58</sup> Pizarro, *Las FARC de la autodefensa a la combinación de todas las formas de lucha*, 30.

'Independent Republics' and defeat their leaders and armed activists. The actions took place within the framework of the government of the conservative president Guillermo Leon Valencia, who tried to contain the intentions of the communist party to expand its ideological-political system in the country.

The military operations to locate and defeat communities of armed settlers, were carried out in the main areas colonized by the influence of communism, such as Marquetalia (Tolima) and Riochiquito (Caldas). Although the Military Forces were superior in number and equipment, guerrilla leaders and armed peasants fled the area and began a new migratory movement south-east towards the jungles and Andean foothills. As a result, in 1964 the armed colonists attacked by the state, organized and created the FARC as an insurgent group. The FARC was so-called the armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party, whose objective was the seizure of political power and to overthrow of the National Government.

Once the FARC was created and had expanded to the areas of Caquetá, Guaviare, and south of Meta these areas became sanctuaries of the insurgency, since the insurgency benefited from the dense jungles and the complex geography that provided protection. Thus began the history of armed colonization in the CA.

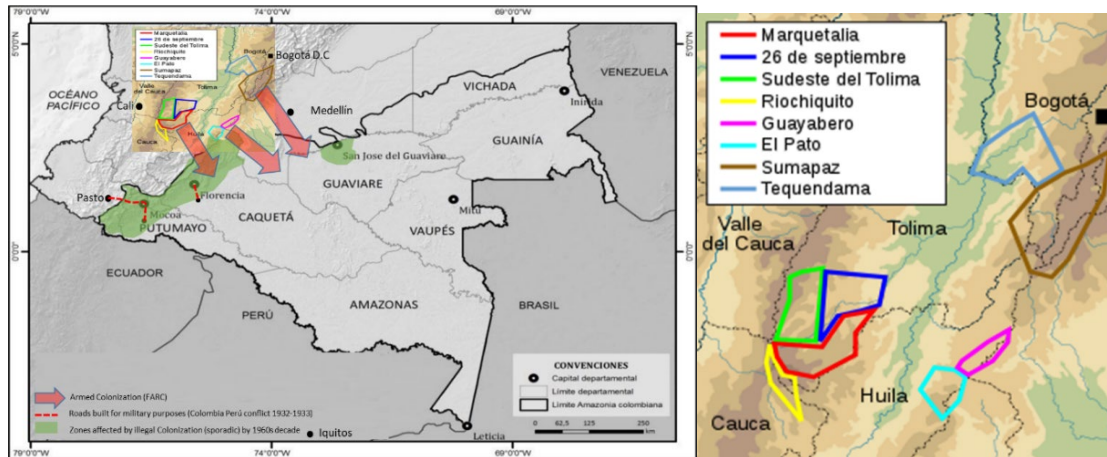


Figure 12. Armed Colonization after 1965 and ‘Independent Republics’

Sources: Created by author. Adaptation of Leonardo Bonilla, *Construction of an Amazon Territory in the 20th Century* (Bogotá, SINCHI Institute, 2000), 77 (right); Jean Lartéguy, *les guérilleros* (Raoul Solar, 1967), 198 (left).

### Armed Colonization in the Colombian Amazon

It is important to clarify that the FARC considers itself an agrarian movement which from the beginning used the illegal use of arms to overthrow the government. This specific characteristic makes us deduce that it is not only a group of former guerrillas who had declared war on the Colombian State, but also a civilian sector of society that founded entire communities in isolated places of the Amazon, under the rules of a co-government, FARC, and its communist ideology.

Similarly, the study of the social phenomenon of illegal colonization becomes more complex if one takes into account that there was a combination of armed settlers and sporadic illegal settlers. According to Molano, “the existing colonizers (sporadic) saw themselves invaded by the armed colonizers and had to adapt to the norms of the new co-government imposed by the FARC guerrillas. This episode was materialized in

violence through repression by FARC in the already existing spontaneous-colonized zones.<sup>59</sup>

### Narco-Colonization

The term narco-colonization explains the movements of people towards the CA to sow illicit crops (especially coca). Molano describes the relationship between illegal settlers and drug trafficking expansion in the Amazon as follows: “The economic dynamics of colonized spaces in the Amazon were diverted towards the mass production of cocaine.”<sup>60</sup> According to Molano, beginning in the 1980s, another massive migration to the CA took place. This time, it was to colonize lands with a purely lucrative purpose. Many of these settlers abandoned the Amazon lands once they obtained some capital since this is the ultimate goal of narco-colonization.

However, the phenomenon becomes more complex if we combine narco-colonization, armed colonization, and spontaneous colonization. For example, in the south of the Department of Meta, the combination of spontaneous colonization and the sowing of coca crops made it more difficult for the State authorities to prosecute the settlers who have benefited from the sowing of illicit crops. According to Gootenberg, a historian who specializes in the history of the Andean drug trade, “beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, the coca-cocaine boom had dramatic consequences on the Ariari frontier, notably on the distribution and uses of the land. As Granada (Meta) developed into the largest municipal seat in Ariari, the surrounding rural land increased in

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<sup>59</sup> Molano, *Selva Adentro*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

value and became a means of money laundering.”<sup>61</sup> Gootenberg adds: “From 1960 to 1984, the region went from being an open agricultural frontier with a system of land tenure more equitable than the rest of rural Colombia to having the most unequal land distribution in the country.”<sup>62</sup>

However, the best description of the combination between the illegal colonization classes in the Amazon is made by Cook, an analyst who works in the field of Counterterrorism: “The illicit agricultural economy fostered a *mestizo* and *colono* coca culture. For the past four decades, coca smallholders have been actively engaged in building municipalities, in party politics, and have routinely engaged with the national state to demand better services and integration as working citizens. Illegal Colonists in the Amazon have done all this, despite their low status in many sociological senses.”<sup>63</sup>

#### Relation between Armed Colonization and Narco-Colonization

When the coca boom began in the 1980s, the FARC already had significant social and military influence in the departments of Caquetá, Putumayo, and Guaviare. The adoption of coca crops as an economic link between FARC and civilian settlers is expressed in the words of Jacobo Arenas, an ideological leader and founder of the FARC insurgency, “We tell coca growers: partners (comrades), we are not going to prohibit you

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Gootenberg and Liliana Dávalos, *The Origins of Cocaine: Colonization and Failed Development in the Amazon Andes* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Cook, “The Financial Arm of The FARC: A Threat Finance Perspective,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 1 (2011): 19–36, accessed 19 May 2019, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.1.2>.

from growing coca, because that is something that has become widespread, and besides, we are not the government to prohibit it. You may cultivate it, but make sure you buy cattle, set you farm order, clean up your houses, and educate your children, because coca may end anytime. And people are sympathetic to that orientation, and not just sympathetic, they have to accept it.”<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the official FARC’s decision to support narcotics production took place in 1982 at their Seventh Conference. This allowed the FARC insurgency to expand geographically and to strengthen their military capacities with support of drug trafficking.<sup>65</sup> Table 2 shows the main events related to the expansion of FARC and drug trafficking in Caquetá.

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<sup>64</sup> Semana, “Jacobo Arenas Habla Sobre Lehder,” 6 April 1987, accessed 29 April 2019, <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/jacobo-arenas-habla-sobre-lehder/8742-3>.

<sup>65</sup> Cook, “The Financial Arm of The FARC.”

Table 2. Events Related to Colonization of the Amazon in the Caquetá and Relation with FARC, Drug Trafficking and the Colombian Government in the 20th Century

Year	Event
1977	Start of small-scale coca cultivation in Caquetá by illegal settlers.
1978-1979	Creation of militias network [mentioned in the original text as self-defense groups] by the FARC to control illicit crops in colonized lands.
1985	First crop substitution proposal included in the development plan for the Caguán region (between the FARC, the Colombian Government, and the communities).
1986-1991	Major concession by FARC to economic and military activities rather than ideological and political spheres.
1991-1992	Total territorial control by FARC on the cultivation, processing, transportation of cocaine in the region (the FARC as a cartel).
1995-1996	Coca peasants' protests against the government's measures to engage drug trafficking in the Amazon Region.
1998-1999	Total control of the drug trafficking chain by FARC, which controls and regulates the prices of coca base paste (PBC) to the Amazon colonists.
1999	Competition for the drug market between the FARC and paramilitary groups in Caquetá colonized territory.
	The Colombian Government conceded 42,000 square kilometers to the FARC through a demilitarized zone, including San Vicente del Caguán in the Department of Caquetá as a condition of FARC to carry out the peace dialogues with the Colombian Government.

*Source:* Created by author based on Juan G. Ferro, “Las FARC y su relación con la Economía de la Coca,” Mamacoca.org, February 2002, accessed 12 November 2018, [http://www.mamacoca.org/feb2002/art\\_ferro\\_Farc\\_y\\_coca\\_Caguan\\_es.html#fn1](http://www.mamacoca.org/feb2002/art_ferro_Farc_y_coca_Caguan_es.html#fn1).

#### Analysis Chapter 4

As it has been argued, throughout the history of the 20th century in Colombia, illegal colonization of the Amazonian territory was a social phenomenon that evolved outside of the control of the Colombian state. This phenomenon has been the cause and consequence of violence in Colombia, since it is directly related to factors of instability such as insurgencies and the expansion of illicit crops planting.

Table 3 shows the types of illegal Colonization in Colombia according to the historical review. As can be seen, armed and narco-colonization in the CA have had direct repercussions on national security of Colombia.

Table 3. Types of Illegal Colonization in the Amazon with Definition

Type	Definition	Effect present in the Amazon	Implications in Violence episodes
Latifundia	This term was created by the author to explain the conditions in which the peasants who occupied the lands belonged to latifundia under the concept of sharecropping. Latifundia illegal Colonizers were victims for the dispute with landowners over the recognition of property titles.	No	Yes
Spontaneous	People who migrated to the Amazon region taking advantage of the avenues of approach to appropriate of the uncultivated lands of the Amazon.	Yes	No
Armed-Colonization	It involves armed peasant self-defense groups and insurgent groups that migrate in groups toward the Amazon Basin. They were supported by the communism who support their social and political causes.	Yes	Yes
Narco-Colonization	It arises from the 'boom' of coca in the 1980s. According to the UN, narco-colonization is the category that has most affected the landscape of the Amazon and has had the most influence in the departments located on the border. agricultural. <sup>66</sup>	Yes	Yes

*Source:* Created by author.

In the historical review it is observed that the types of illegal colonization can be given in a combined way as shown in figure 13.

<sup>66</sup> United Nations, "Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey June 2013," accessed 3 April 2019, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crop-monitoring/index.html?year=2013>.



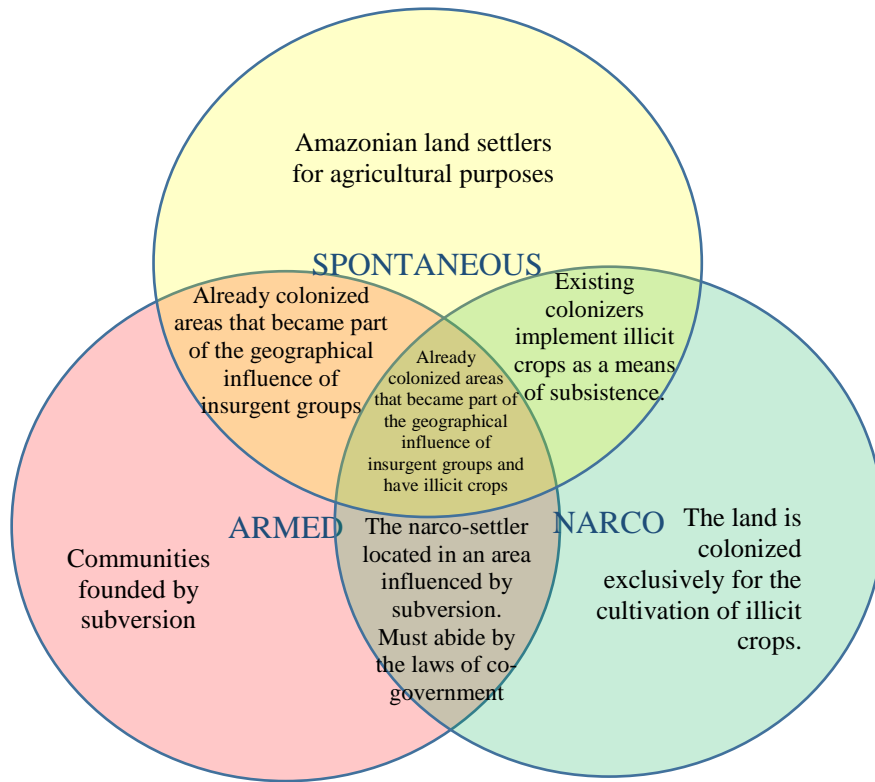


Figure 13. Types of Illegal Colonization in the Amazon with Examples

Source: Created by author.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS CASE STUDY

#### Introduction

This chapter is based on the observations collected by the author in Puerto Cachicamo hamlet, located on the agricultural frontier of the Amazon, and on the border between the departments of Meta and Guaviare. This area demonstrates all the characteristics and the combination of all the types of illegal colonization in the Amazon explained in chapter 4.

The information was compiled in 2017, a year after the Colombian government signed the Peace agreements with the FARC. The author was assigned as commander of a tactical unit in the National Army. His mission was to conduct stability and CN operations in 2017 with the purpose of attacking drug trafficking and neutralizing organized armed groups operating in the Amazon region.

## Results



Figure 14. Puerto Cachicamo Hamlet, Guaviare

*Source:* Marandúa, “Puerto Cachicamo Guaviare Poblado,” 3 May 2018, accessed 5 May 2019, <https://marandua.com.co/autoridades-realizaron-consejo-seguridad-tras-ataque-la-armada-nacional-puerto-cachicamo-guaviare/puerto-cachicamo-guaviare-poblado/>; Google Maps, “Guaviare,” accessed 5 May 2019, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Guaviare,+Colombia/@1.790927,-72.9476884,8z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x8e10db65105949d7:0x6435922b4d8854c7!8m2!3d2.043924!4d-72.331113>.



Figure 15. Eradication of Coca Crops in Puerto Cachicamo

*Source:* Photos taken by author, 2017.



Figure 16. Finding of Artisanal Laboratory for the Processing of the Coca Leaf in Vicinity of Puerto Cachicamo

*Source:* Photos taken by author, 2017.



Figure 17. Social Protest against the Presence of Military Units of the National Army in Vicinity of the Hamlet, Puerto Cachicamo, November 2018

*Source:* Semana Rural, “El video que muestra la tensa relación entre el Ejército y los campesinos del Guaviare,” 14 December 2018, accessed 14 April 2019, <https://semanarural.com/web/articulo/video-confrontacion-entre-campesinos-y-ejercito-en-el-guaviare/736>.



Figure 18. Portrait of Alias Alfonso Cano in Puerto Cachicamo Hamlet

*Source:* Photos taken by author, 2017. Note: Guillermo León Sáenz Vargas (1948-2011), Alias Alfonso Cano, was the commander of FARC. He succeeded founder Manuel Marulanda (alias Sureshot, in Spanish: Tirofijo) in March 2008 and commanded the Marxist rebel group until being killed in action by the Colombian Army.



Figure 19. War Material Found in the Vicinity of Puerto Cachicamo, Marzo 2017

*Source:* Photos taken by author, 2017.

As shown in the images, the Puerto Cachicamo community presents the characteristics and consequences of an illegal colonizer community such as underdevelopment and practice of illegal economies. Consequently, the tension between the civilian population and the Government is mainly due to the presence of the military apparatus of the State and the absence of the other government institutions.

This tense relationship is due to the history of the FARC in the area and it acting as co-government which managed infrastructure, justice and other gaps that the national government could not provide because of the illegal nature of the occupation of lands, largely of which are part of the Amazon forest reserves. By 2017, the village of Puerto Cachicamo was still considered by the government an illegally colonized place. This fact makes it difficult to grant land titles to its inhabitants, and it was considered a place where security was not guarantee which prevented infrastructure development and progress. The protests against the National Government and complaints by citizens can be seen in the video attached to the thesis.<sup>67</sup>

#### Application of Military Arts: Operational Design to Analyze the Operational Environment (OE) in Puerto Cachicamo

Figure 20 is based on the conversations the author had with the civilian population about the complaints they have as illegal settlers. Based on this, the following diagram was made. It shows the tense relationship with the government based on the complaints that the peasants have against the Colombian Government.

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<sup>67</sup> Attached is the video, Youtube, “Protest of Civilians to military unit of the National Army in Puerto Cachicamo, 2018,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_19c2V38xEM&t=285s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_19c2V38xEM&t=285s) Social Media.

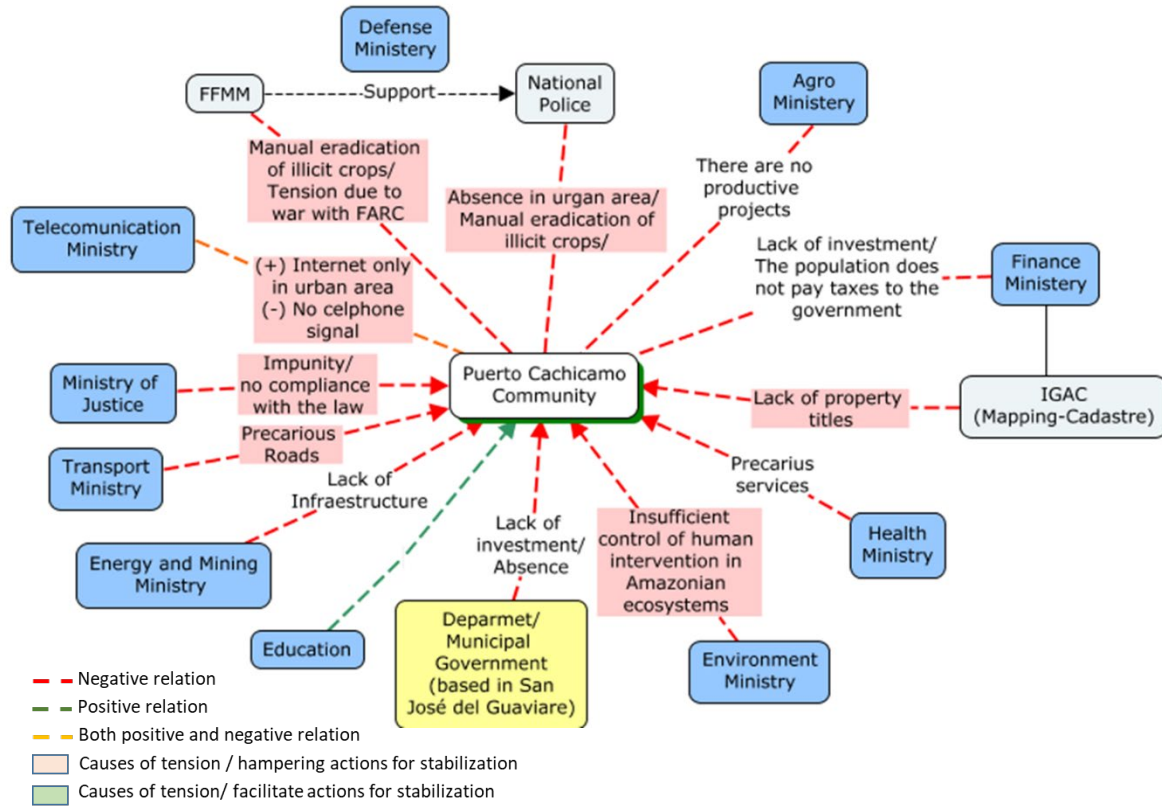


Figure 20. Relationship between Puerto Cachicamo Community and the Government Institutions (Compilation of People Grievances)

Source: Created by author.

The following is a representation of the Operational Environment within Puerto Cachicamo, Guaviare. It shows the main actors of the conflict and depicts the civilian population as the Center of Gravity CoG. As can be seen in figure 21, the tensions between the civilian population and state agencies are contrasted by the illegal economies and the influence that the insurgency had on the population for many years.

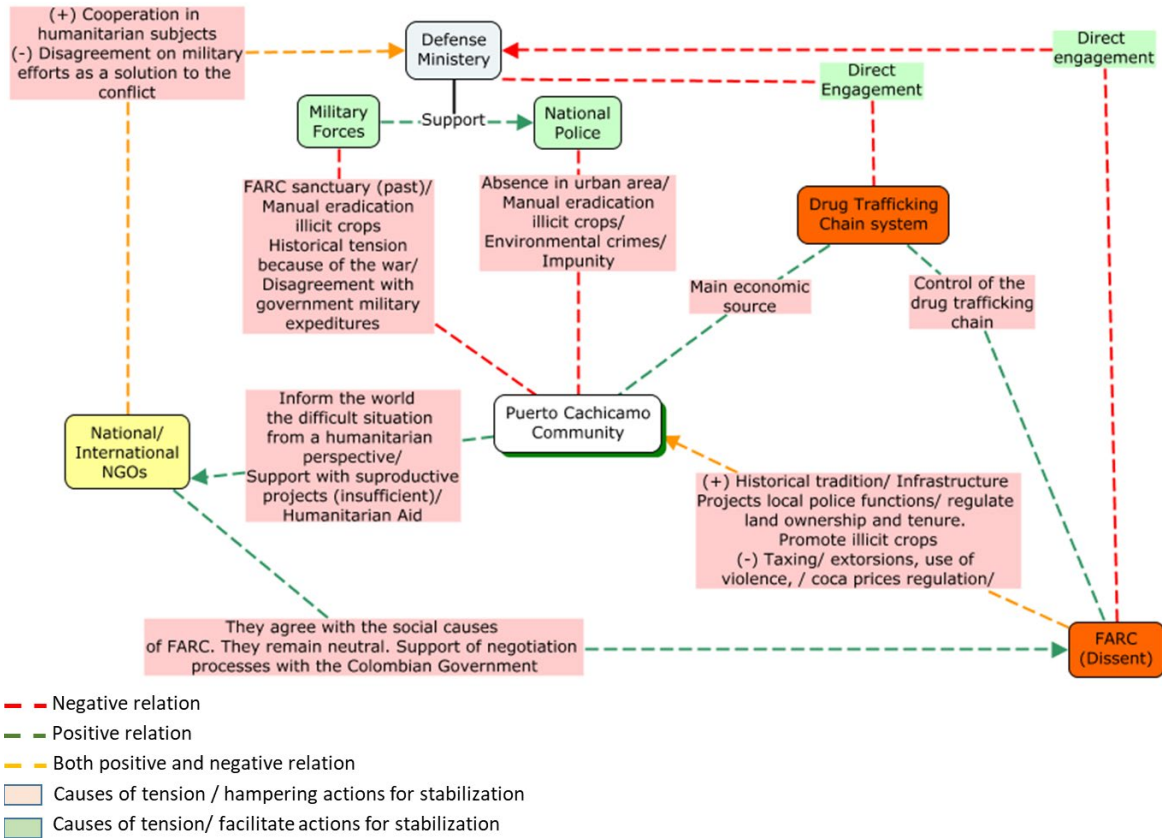


Figure 21. Current State of Relations between Puerto Cachicamo Community and the Actors of the Armed Conflict

Source: Created by author.

The following is a diagram of a proposed end state to facilitate the work of stabilization of the Puerto Cachicamo village by the National Government.



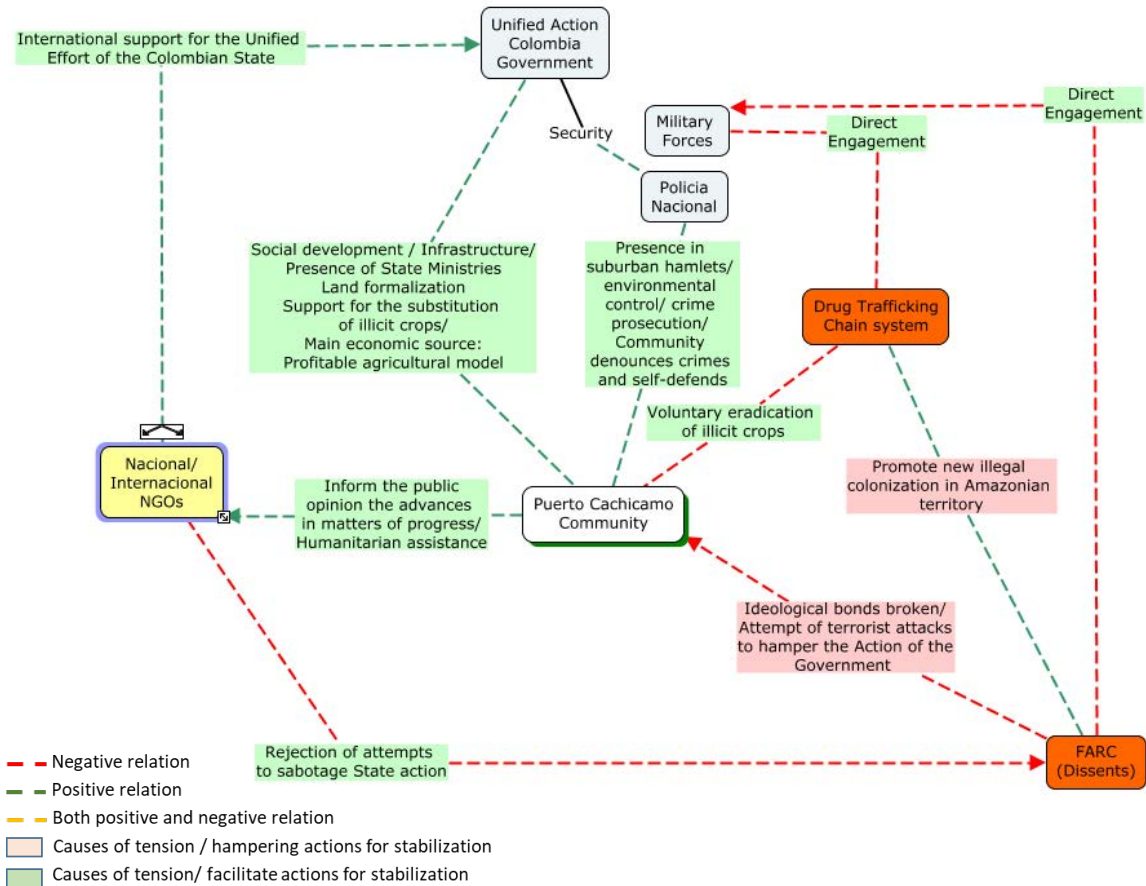


Figure 22. Proposed End State Operational Environment: Relations between Puerto Cachicamo Community and the Actors of the Armed Conflict

Source: Created by author.

As can be seen in the diagram, the desired final state, shows that a negative relationship only occurs when community, the insurgency and the illegal economies are connected. If these actions happen, the government would use the military means to directly attack directly the armed guerrillas and the producers of illicit drugs. As is shown, the peasants would voluntarily eradicate their illicit crops as long as the government offers viable productive alternatives. This would cause tension between the peasants, drug cartels and armed guerrillas, since illicit crops are the principal row

material for large-scale production of cocaine. Therefore, the cartels and armed guerrillas will have no alternative but to seek new niches of illicit crops.

For this purpose, the heads of the drug trafficking system (cartels or GAOs) will promote illegal colonization beyond the agricultural frontier, where the State cannot control the illegal occupation of forest reserve areas. For this reason, it is important to highlight that the State's effort to consolidate the areas where the farmers are engaged in the production of illicit crops is useless if there is no effective control to avoid emergence of illegal colonization in the uncultivated lands of the nation since these are jungle lands that still offer all the advantages to initiate processes of land grabbing, which is the basic condition to start illegal colonization phenomena.

In the same way, when breaking the ideological links between society and insurgency, it is essential to guarantee the security of the inhabitants with the military and police force of the State. The difference is that this time the population will be willing to collaborate actively in the security tasks of the Government because the proposed system is bringing progress and civilians will want to defend it.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis shows how some social factors of land injustice changed the concept of the “traditional” peace and security problems in Colombia. The problem of illegal occupation of land by peasants was ignored by the Colombian government for many years. Consequently, it brought with it more than fifty years of violence due to problems related to land tenure. However, history shows that, if this phenomenon continues to be ignored, or receives inadequate attention, it will have as a consequence the persistence of problems derived from the occupation of the uncultivated lands of the State and the emergence of insurgencies as well as massive production of illicit crops.

Therefore, it is important to understand the problem and its effects. Thus, the Colombian government has to focus its efforts on preventing new cases of colonized spaces in the jungles of the Amazon. The effort must be directed to avoid new cases of illegal colonization. On the other hand, the second strategic front would be focused on bringing progress and seeking solutions for the communities of existing illegal settlers. However, it has been proved that bringing progress to illegally colonized areas increases the value of the lands, which would stimulate illegal colonization in the Amazonian territory.

In this sense, the institutions in charge of the territorial ordering process play a fundamental role, since these are in charge of issuing laws, accelerating the granting of land titles, mapping and monitoring processes to exercise effective control and regulate the occupation of agricultural frontiers in the CA. In this context, the main effort in matters of security must be carried out by the National Police, since this body has a constitutional

duty to maintain internal order in the National territory. To this end, the police have the legal backing to prevent villagers from committing crimes such as deforestation and land grabbing.

In support of this effort, the National Army has the responsibility to support the work of the National Police. As noted in chapter 5, the initial phase of the strategy to include illegal settlers within the State's productive apparatus will cause tension between the civilian population and the criminal groups that operate in the area. That is where the Army must intervene with the military capacity required to defend the population. Similarly, the use of the Military Forces can support infrastructure projects to bring progress to the communities of settlers within the framework of Military Operations in Support of Civil Authorities.

## GLOSSARY

Counterinsurgency. Combination of measures undertaken by a government, sometimes with United States Government (USG) and multinational partner support, to defeat an insurgency.<sup>68</sup>

Informal settlements. Areas where groups of housing units have been constructed on land that the occupants have no legal claim to, or occupy illegally. Unplanned settlements and areas where housing is not in compliance with current planning and building.<sup>69</sup>

Insurgency. The organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.<sup>70</sup>

Latifundia. A great landed estate with primitive agriculture and labor often in a state of partial servitude.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 25 April 2018), x.

<sup>69</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Informal Settlements,” accessed 14 October 2018, <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1351>.

<sup>70</sup> JCS, JP 3-24, x.

<sup>71</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “Latifundia,” accessed 10 September 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/latifundium>.

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