

AMERICAN MILITARY UNIVERSITY

Colombia: The American Quandary

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	v
Section	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE ISSUES	2
3. THE ACTORS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS	2
3.1. Colombia	4
3.2. The Insurgents	11
3.2.1. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	11
3.2.2. The National Liberation Army (ELN)	14
3.3. The Paramilitaries	15
3.3.1. The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)	15
4. POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION	17
4.1. Colombia	17
4.2. The Insurgents	18
5. THE MAJOR SCENARIOS	19
5.1. Scenario 1. Negotiated Peace Settlement	20
5.2. Scenario 2. Stalemate	21

5.3. Scenario 3. Disintegration	21
6. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE FUTURES	22
7. CONSEQUENCES AND TRANSFORMATIONS	26
8. FOCAL EVENTS AND THEIR INDICATORS	27
9. CONCLUSIONS	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Principal Zones of Guerrillas and Paramilitaries	12
2. Location of FARC Blocks and Fronts	14
3. Theaters of Operations and <i>Zonas</i>	15

TABLES

table	page
1. Scenario 1. Negotiated Peace Settlement	23
2. Scenario 2. Stalemate	24
3. Scenario 3. Disintegration	25



Introduction

Mention the name Colombia and most Americans will automatically think of drug cartels or narcotics traffickers. And for the United States the flow of drugs into from Colombia continues to be an extremely serious problem, serious enough for the U.S. Congress to have authorized over a billion dollars and intervention by U.S. military forces in recent years in an effort to eliminate the problem.

The Bogotá government, too, considers drug operations within its borders a serious problem. But drugs are only one of the difficulties besetting Colombia and, from that country's point of view, it is not even its largest problem. Indeed, there are as well *two* insurgencies ongoing and illegal, vigilante-like paramilitary forces scattered throughout the hinterlands of this strategically important country.

The United States is deeply involved in Colombia's fight against drugs, spending almost \$400 million in direct support of its war on drugs¹. It has at the same time, carefully avoided providing support to Colombia in its fight against insurgents.²

This study proceeds from the assumption that any nation fighting for its life will attempt to resolve that problem first. Once it has guaranteed its own survival, then it can more effectively address any other problems facing it. This means that once Colombia has either defeated or otherwise neutralized its internal insurgency, then it can pursue a counter narcotics strategy in keeping with the wishes of the United States. Hence, this study is based on the premise that continued national existence is Colombia's first order

¹ Department of State Fact Sheet, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, *Plan Colombia* (Washington, 14 March 2001) [on-line]; available from <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2001/1042.htm>.

² John P. Sweeney, *Tread Cautiously In Colombia's Civil War*, The American Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, No. 1264 (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 25 March 1999), 2.

of business. Using the Lockwood Analytical Method for Prediction (LAMP)³ the study will attempt to ascertain the likelihood that President Pastrana will be successful in defeating or neutralizing the insurgents and bringing stability to his beleaguered country.

Narcotics trafficking in Colombia has become a ubiquitous part its environment and its influence is felt in every national activity. Nonetheless, as already pointed out, Colombia's main concern is political existence. Thus the issue of eliminating narcotic production and trafficking will not be addressed except as it directly affects Colombia's principal objective: national survival.

The Issues

The issues are straightforward. Colombia's survival depends first upon the ability of its armed forces to defeat the insurgents or drive them to the conference table to negotiate a peace settlement. And the ability of the Colombian armed forces, in turn, to succeed on the battle is based upon its continued resurgence in terms of materiel, training, and—most important—morale.

The Actors and Their Perceptions

Listed below are four participants: the Colombian government, two insurgent organizations, and the paramilitaries (technically more than one, but operating more or less as a single unified group). An indifferent observer with only superficial knowledge of the circumstances in Colombia might wonder about the absence of two other well-known actors: the United States and the narcotics traffickers.

³ Jonathan S. Lockwood and Kathleen O. Lockwood, *The Lockwood Analytical Method for Prediction* (Washington: The Joint Military Intelligence College, 1994), 1-97.

First, the narcotics traffickers. While their presence is certainly a major factor in the current situation in Colombia, they in fact are passive players. That is, with one exception, they have essentially only one course of action: to continue business as usual. The exception is the case when traffickers from time-to-time engage in violence in response to government attempts to extradite traffickers or to protect elements of their operations. Otherwise, these organizations are oblivious to the destinies of any of the other actors.

Viewing the United States as an actor is a difficult question. First, the United States is an *éminence grise*, that is, it does not participate directly in the stream of events in Colombia. It does have a strong influence in how Colombia pursues its counter narcotics strategy in terms of money, materiel, and, sometimes, men. Moreover, it is extremely likely that the United States would enter directly into the conflict if the Colombian government's survival were seriously threatened. But, until that event occurs, the United States has no active part to play in any foreseeable scenarios.

A case could also be made for the inclusion of the Colombian army as an actor separate from the state. The army has sometimes acted as a *de facto* autonomous agent especially in its relations with the self-defense forces. However, it is still legally linked to the national government and with the inauguration of Plan Colombia in which it is receiving increased financial support, it is difficult to see the army as a source of independent courses of action. So, the army will not be listed as a separate actor.

Therefore, this study is based upon the active participation of only four actors: Colombia, the two insurgent organizations, and the paramilitaries.

Colombia

The history of Colombia is punctuated with intervals of conflict and calm. The second half of the twentieth century, though, has been particularly turbulent; it has even been given a name, *La Violencia*, to set it apart from the rest of Colombia's history.⁴ *La Violencia* dates from the election of Mariano Ospina Pérez, a Conservative, in 1946 and extends into the 1960s. Essentially, it began after the elections as a series of flare-ups between the elites of Colombia's two parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives.

There were violent outbreaks here and there, and for the same reasons; only this time it was Conservatives who were out to settle old scores and grievances that they had been accumulating during the years of Liberal rule and Liberals who were sometimes unprepared to accept defeat gracefully and hand over power to the victors. A more critical difference than the reversal of party labels was the fact that in 1946 the wave of violence did not, as in 1930, soon peter out. Instead, it eventually engulfed most of the country.⁵

The next four decades saw the emergence of labor as a major political element, initially limited to the coffee slopes of the Central Valley and Western Cordilleras but eventually spreading to southern Tolima. The agrarian character of the ensuing armed conflicts, given the location and temperament of the people, was a natural entrée for Communist inspired revolution. Guerrillas within the country, who had operated at relatively low levels since the fifties, formally organized themselves as the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or FARC, and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, or ELN, in addition to others, and took up the banner of the peasant worker.⁶

For various reasons, though, the altruistic objectives of the guerrillas narrowed and they began to ravage the small communities of rural Colombia. The Colombian army,

⁴ Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 345, and David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 201.

⁵ Bushnell, 201.

⁶ Safford and Palacios, 346-361.

organized for conventional warfare, was unable to protect worker communities, so self-defense units began to form to combat the insurgents. These local counterinsurgent groups in due course became loosely organized as the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, or AUC. Unfortunately, like the guerrillas they were raised to oppose, the paramilitaries, too, began to terrorize civilians they perceived as supporters of the FARC or the ELN. These acts of terrorism and atrocities earned the AUC, along with the FARC and the ELN, designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States State Department.⁷

During *La Violencia* Colombia's drug industry underwent a transformation as well. Records of cocaine derivation from the coca plant for shipment from Colombia to Europe and the United States go back as far as 1870. Several decades later, during the 1920s, drug trafficking became big business in the United States, and although drug consumption declined during the depression years, it again became popular after the Second World War. By the 1960s drugs had "become socially acceptable" in America. The Latin American drug cartels grew to meet the demand.

The powerful Colombian cartels also got their start in the drug trade in the 1960s as the middlemen who bought raw coca from farmers in the Andean region of South America, turned the coca into cocaine, and then sold the finished product. . . .⁸

It is difficult to pinpoint the origins of violence within the drug industry beyond that normally associated between rival criminal groups. But America's war on drugs, which included, along with the penalties of decertification, extradition of Colombian

⁷ U.S. Department of State, *International Information Programs: Washington File*, 10 September 2001 [online]; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/terror10.htm>.

⁸ Ron Chepesiuk, *Hard Target: The United States War Against International Drug Trafficking, 1982-1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 41-57.

narcotraffickers to the United States, introduced a new level violence from the drug community to rival that of the guerrillas and paramilitaries.

The threat of extradition led to an alarming terrorist campaign by the drug traffickers. Hundreds of witnesses, judges, and journalists were murdered. The end of the terror came only when the extradition of Colombians was prohibited in the new constitution of 1991.⁹

Moreover, changes in Colombian public opinion changed the political *laissez-faire* approach to cartel support of political leaders into the basis of one of the major scandals of the twentieth century.¹⁰ As a consequence of the presidency of Ernesto Samper (1994-1998), seen by many as an ally of the drug cartels, relations between the United States and Colombia declined, finally resulting in Colombia's decertification by President Clinton.

Annual certification is a process used by the United States as a means "to ensure that Latin American countries conform to U.S. views on how they should fight the U.S. war on drugs in their respective countries. . . . Failure to certify results in the complete termination of all U.S. assistance being received by the country (except humanitarian assistance), raises U.S. opposition to multilateral loans, and inflicts the stigma of being a known drug-trafficking nations."¹¹

In June 1998, Andres Pastrana was elected as Colombia's new president on a platform of three issues: first, to put an end to thirty years of insurgency and violence; second, to reduce the power of the countries drug cartels; and finally to reenergize the

⁹ Safford and Palacios, 340.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jurg Gerber and Eric L. Jensen, eds., *Drug War, American Style: The Internationalization of Failed Policy and Its Alternatives* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 178.

nation's depressed economy.¹² These campaign promises were not new, of course, but they came at a time when Colombians were publicly stating that they wanted peace. Pastrana's credibility was established and strengthened soon after his election by his courageous meeting with the leaders of the FARC at their jungle headquarters. His commitment to finding peace, reducing the flow of narcotics, and improving Colombia's economy has also been the basis of renewed friendship between his country and the United States.

Colombia's importance to the United States goes far beyond the war on drugs, however. Ending the violence, restoring law and order, strengthening civil society, and reducing human rights abuses, are also important to this nation, and will serve to strengthen Colombia's democracy and the region's stability.¹³

For the past forty years, more or less, Colombia has been a nation under siege, beset by active insurgent groups, illegal paramilitary forces, and international drug syndicates. And although President Pastrana came to office on the strength of his commitment to put an end to the violence, reduce the power of the cartels, and to restore the nation's economy, he has, after three years in office, yet to show any visible progress in any of these tasks. According to one study, not only has there been no advancement toward achieving these goals, things have apparently gotten worse:

The current instability in Colombia derives from the interactions and resulting synergies of an underground criminal drug economy and the growth of armed challenges to the state's authority. . . . The confluence of these factors has exacerbated even deeper problems in Colombian society, including the loss of central government authority, economic deterioration, and social disintegration, and may be creating the conditions for a "failed state."¹⁴

¹² PBS's *Online NewsHour: Andres Pastrana*, 6 October 1998. [on-line]; available from http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/july-dec98/pastrana_10-6.html.

¹³ Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on International Relations, *Regional Conflict: Colombia's Insurgency and Prospects for a Peaceful Resolution*. 105th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 August 1998.

¹⁴ Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, MR-1339-AF (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 1.

The study goes on to describe a “failed state” as one “characterized by a severe political crisis in which the institutions of the central government are so weakened that they can no longer maintain authority or political order beyond the major cities and sometimes not even there.”¹⁵

Arguments given for this dire assessment come primarily from an examination of Colombia’s political trends. Within the political field, discussion centers on the fact that Colombia has historically been a weak nation because it has not been able to maintain jurisdiction over the whole of the country and has been unable to “enforce its authority over powerful corporate or local interests.”¹⁶ The study calls these phenomena “fragmentation,” implying that they are of recent origin. Actually, these conditions have always been true due to nature of the Colombian terrain and its political heritage of elitist party politics stemming from “corporate and local interests.”

A more convincing reason for concern, though, is the loss of “legitimacy and international support after revelations of drug network financing of the successful presidential campaign of Liberal Party candidate Ernesto Samper in 1994.” As a consequence the United States decided not to renew Colombia’s certification resulting in blocking U.S. assistance except for counter narcotics operations.¹⁷ President Pastrana’s election, however, was seen as a statement by the electorate against the Samper scandal and resulted in renewal of certification.

Finally, the study points out, within four months of his election, in November 1988, President Pastrana withdrew all Colombian military forces from a 42,139 square kilometer area, the infamous *zona de despeje* (demilitarized zone) in response to

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

“demands” from the FARC as a condition for negotiations.¹⁸ It is widely known that the FARC has used this zone as a sanctuary from which it continues its insurgency and conducts terrorist activities. As a matter of fact, the *zona* was created as an incentive for the FARC to participate in peace negotiations within a safe haven inside of Colombia.

Consider this official statement concerning the demilitarized zone:

The demilitarized area was created by law to guarantee the security necessary to advance negotiations with the guerrillas. The law allows the President to create and eliminate a distention zone, as an expression of the sovereignty by the State. The law only restricts the presence of the army and the police within the area and suspends warrants for arrest; it does not narrow the authority of elected officials at either local or regional level.¹⁹

Thus, rather than causing a loss of credibility on the part of President Pastrana, who acted in good faith, it was the FARC’s abuse of the *zona* that established a loss of credibility reflecting very poorly on the guerrillas.

The arguments of the study, then, are not evidence that Colombia’s political environment has regressed and that conditions in Colombia have worsened. But they *do* show that President Pastrana has not moved any closer to his goals either.

Is there any evidence, then, that President Pastrana can bring Colombia to peace, prosperity, and security than any of his predecessors have done? The most convincing such evidence is the publication and acceptance by the United States and other nations of the world of Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia is a set of proposals designed to demonstrate “a commitment to address the related problems of armed conflict, drug trafficking,

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹ Andrés Pastrana Arango, President of the Republic of Colombia, *Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State* (Bogotá, Colombia, October 1999), 17.

human rights violations and environmental degradation.” The plan contains ten elements, summarized here:²⁰

1. An economic strategy.
2. A fiscal and financial strategy.
3. A peace strategy.
4. A national defense strategy.
5. A judicial and human rights strategy.
6. A counter-narcotics strategy.
7. An alternative development strategy.²¹
8. A social participation strategy aimed at collective awareness.
9. A human development strategy to promote efforts to guarantee adequate education and health.
10. An international-oriented strategy.²²

Without getting into the details of the plan it is sufficient to note that it constitutes a significant commitment to the restoration of stability. Moreover, the provision of \$4 billion²³ by the Colombian government reinforces the sincerity of that commitment.

Additional evidence is the substantial progress toward the initiation of peace talks between the government and the FARC during the month of January 2002. After a period of threats and counter threats between the government and the guerrillas, President Pastrana issued an ultimatum, backing it up with troop deployments and dispositions, that the FARC would be evicted from the *zona de despeje* and a major offensive would be

²⁰ Ibid., 14-16.

²¹ This strategy is possibly not self-descriptive. It is intended to assist farmers in their quests for new crops or “other profitable economic activities” to replace coca and poppy farming.

²² This one appears to be an appeal for international assistance in implementing the plan.

²³ Rabassa and Chalk, 62.

launched against the guerrillas. This time there was no question of credibility; the guerrillas agreed to meet and talk and that “the first terms for setting a cease-fire would be signed by April 7.”²⁴

The central issue of this study, as already pointed out, revolves around the state of Colombia’s armed forces. There is evidence that the military has progressed significantly from its nadir in 1997 and 1998 when it suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the guerrillas. These improvements include:

- A change in the military’s tactical operations and intelligence doctrine emphasizing mobility and rapid reaction enhanced collection and analysis of information, and modernized communications.
- Consolidation of three mobile brigades and a special forces brigade into a Rapid Deployment Force of 4,000 troops that can be quickly deployed anywhere in the country.
- Integration of air power into ground forces.
- Introduction of new equipment and better training to boost the military’s capability in signals and human intelligence capabilities.
- Finally, the government has increased its budget for military and police support. If Plan Colombia is successful in its solicitation of financial aid from the United States and others, further support of the military and police will be available.²⁵

The Insurgents

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

²⁴ Reuters, “Colombia and Its Rebels Agree to Talks, Averting Army Action,” *New York Times*, 21 January 2002.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 101-105.

The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) started during *La Violencia* as a Liberal guerrilla band during the undeclared civil war between the Liberal and the Conservative parties in Tolima. There they founded a “Communist-oriented ‘independent republic’ in Marquetalia, a remote area in southern Tolima.”²⁶ Other such republics, some sixteen or so, were created in southern Colombia where they attracted the attention of right-wing members of government. In 1964 the Colombian army carried out the “Laso Plan,” attacking the republics using a counterinsurgency doctrine copied from that employed by the United States in Viet Nam.²⁷ In 1966 the Communist guerrillas reorganized as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

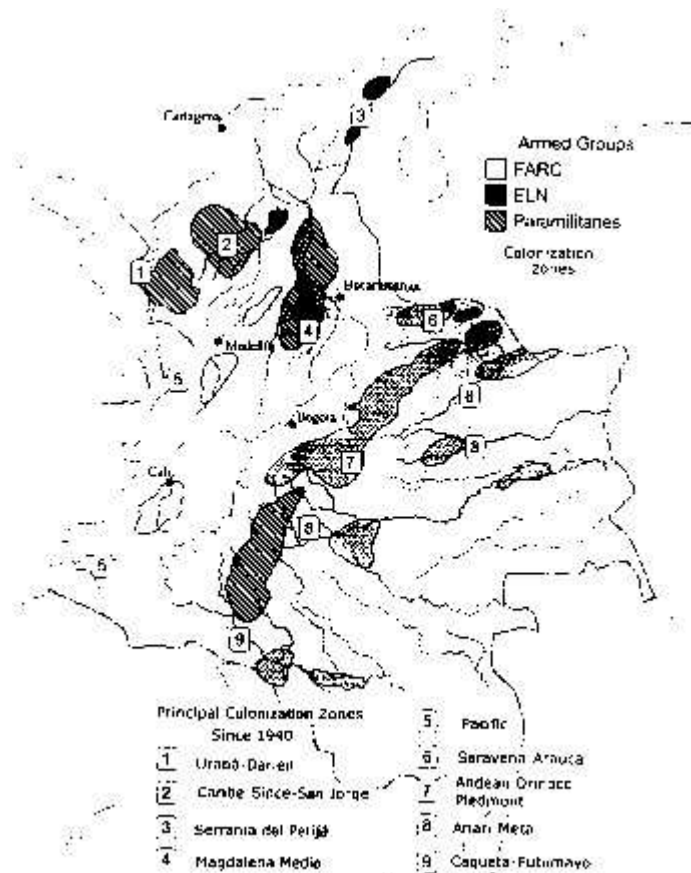


Fig. 1—Principal Zones of Guerrillas and Paramilitaries, 1990-2000
Safford and Palacios, 363.

²⁶ Ibid., 23-24.

²⁷ Safford and Palacios, 356.

From the mid-sixties through the eighties, FARC slowly gained strength and transitioned to offensive operations, engaging in ambushes of military units and raids on farms. “The main objectives were capturing military equipment, securing food and supplies, capturing hostages, and settling scores with informers.”²⁸ During this period of transition, FARC “came of age” operating in the traditional style of guerrillas.

Far from attacking the “nerve centers of the country,” as the FARC manifesto of May 1966 asserted, the FARC was more concerned with survival in the face of a determined effort by the Colombian army to eliminate it. In this formative period, the FARC began to take on the accoutrements of an army by wearing uniforms and insignia and establishing a code with severe punishments for banditry, crimes of passion, and informing.²⁹

Next came conventional military organization with a general staff and, in the Communist style, a secretariat to provide political direction. Fronts, military headquarters organizations similar to those in the Soviet Army of that era, were created and distributed into seven territorial blocs (fig. 2).³⁰

²⁸ Rabasa and Chalk, 24.

²⁹ Richard Maullin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas, and Politics in Colombia*, R-0630-ARPA (Santa Monica: RAND, 1971), 28-41, quoted in Rabasa and Chalk, 24.

³⁰ Rabasa and Chalk, 25-27.

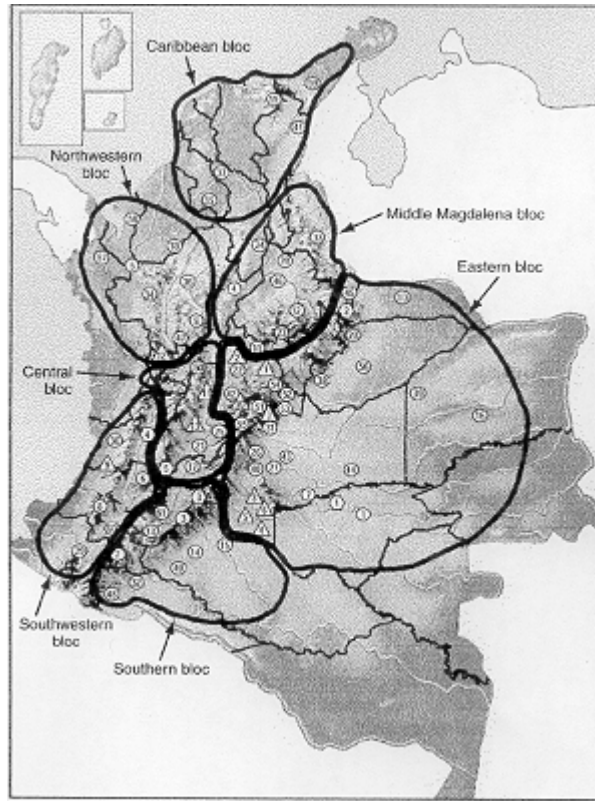


Fig. 2—Location of FARC Blocs and Fronts
Rabasa and Chalk, 28.

In spite of its expansion in size and areas of operations, FARC has some significant weaknesses. It maintains a strong link with criminal elements and has been unable to garner any sizeable support from the population at large.³¹ Even so, the Colombian government has not been able to exploit FARC's lack of popular support. Instead, popular opposition to the guerrillas at the local level has instead moved toward the paramilitaries, about which more directly. Today the FARC is structured into 70 fronts with a strength estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000.³²

The National Liberation Army (ELN)

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Ibid.

Inspired by the Cuban a group of intellectuals—groups of students and graduates of the University of Santander—founded the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN). Like the FARC, the members of ELN call themselves Communists. But, unlike the FARC, the guerrillas of the ELN are intellectuals, not agrarian workers.

The ELN uses as its model of revolution the notion of the *foco* as defined in Che Guevara’s theory of revolution. A lengthy discussion of the foco form of revolution, while interesting in its own right, is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that both scholars and most revolutionaries—communist and non-communist alike—consider the theory to be in error. Indeed, the strongest evidence of error was the failed revolution in Bolivia where Che was killed. Still, the ELN calls itself *foquista* and pursues that theory of revolution.³³



³³ Safford and Palacios, 357-358.

Fig. 3—Theaters of Operations and *Zonas*.
Rabasa and Chalk, 41.

The ELN has grown to approximately 3,000 to 5,000 guerrillas. The ELN, probably because of its intellectual origins and philosophy, does not fight the same way as does the FARC.

The ELN has generally avoided military confrontations and has pursued an “economic strategy” consisting of attacks on the power grid and the communications infrastructure, “armed propaganda,” kidnappings, and airplane hijackings; this strategy reflects the organization’s military weakness in relation to the other actors in the conflict. . . . The ELN’s short-term objective is control of its own demilitarized zone and equal status with the FARC in the peace negotiations. In May 2000, the Pastrana administration agreed in principle to establish a demilitarized zone [fig. 3] for the ELN in the southern Bolívar department.³⁴

No demilitarized zone for the ELN had, as of January 2002, been implemented.

The Paramilitaries

The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)

Colombia has never been able to provide all of its rural communities with protection against either bandits or armed political gangs. It is traditional, therefore, for many of these communities to form *autodefensas*, or self-defense groups, when the need arises. During *La Violencia* the need clearly arose with the formation of the FARC and other insurgent groups who preyed upon isolated villages for sustenance.

The origins of these self-defense groups are manifold. Many emerged spontaneously in the manner already described. Others were created as civil defense units, organized by the Colombian government in the sixties and seventies under the 1965

³⁴ Rabasa and Chalk, 45-46.

civil defense law permitting the formation of such units to support the army's counterinsurgency operations.³⁵

Even though the AUC contributes significantly to the turbulence and violence of the Colombian environment and despite its being added to the United States State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, its principal objectives are the insurgents, not the Colombian government. As a consequence, it has virtually no influence in the long-term outcome of the strife in Colombia; therefore it will not be considered a principal actor in any of the scenarios analyzed within this study.

Possible Courses of Action

Colombia

1. Negotiates (N)

Initiates or participates in negotiations or responds to such an initiation from either or both insurgent organizations. This is the third element of Plan Colombia:

A peace strategy that aims at a negotiated peace agreement with the guerrillas on the basis of territorial integrity, democracy and human rights, which should further strengthen the rule of law and the fight against drugs.³⁶

2. Continues military operations (M)

This course of action represents an abandonment of Plan Colombia and would probably mean refusing any offers by the insurgents to start peace negotiations.

3. Withdraws (W)

This course of action represents the situation in which Colombia is a failed state. Although Colombia cannot demobilize in the same sense that a guerrilla force can, its

³⁵ Ibid., 53.

³⁶ Plan Colombia, 15.

army is in a state of disarray. The government can no longer meet its responsibilities as a ruling body and the military is not able to conduct combat operations. Displacement of the Colombian government by a revolutionary coalition in the style of the Soviet Union, Communist China, or Cuba is imminent.

The Insurgents

The same courses of action apply to both the FARC and the ELN, although they might or might not operate together as allies.

1. Negotiates (N)

Initiates negotiations or responds to such an initiation by the Colombian government. Typically, following the aforementioned Guatemalan or Salvadoran models³⁷, this course of action could result from a realization that further military operations against the government are futile and the only courses open are to negotiate, surrender, or disband.

2. Continues military operations (M)

This course might occur when either or both insurgents believe that they can militarily defeat government forces. This would amount to rebuffing government offers to negotiate.

3. Demobilizes (D)

This course of action has two interpretations: first the force has been militarily defeated and is unable to continue military operations, or they have laid down their arms,

³⁷ There is wide discussion in the literature of what is called the “Central American Model,” where insurgents agreed, upon the realization they could not overcome the government’s military, to demobilize for security and participation in government. Rabasa and Chalk, 79.

disbanded their organizations, and have either gone into hiding or banditry, or have attempted to reenter society.

The Major Scenarios

In view of the foregoing discussions and analyses it should be apparent that the situation in Colombia is both complex and disordered. Hence constructing useful scenarios is a thorny business. While the number of actors, three, is not in itself excessive, the ways in which they are related and how they interact border on the intractable. Moreover, though there could be any number of meaningful scenarios, each of which could easily evolve into a different scenario. For example, one might define a scenario in which the Colombian government is able to overwhelm one or both of the insurgent groups on the battlefield. As events in, say Scenario 2, “Stalemate,” move toward that outcome, it is probable that the insurgents would propose a negotiated peace settlement (the historical precedent exists in what are called the “Guatemalan” or “Salvadoran” solutions.³⁸), thus transforming it into Scenario 1, the “Negotiated Peace Settlement” scenario.

Finally, there is the case in which the government is defeated militarily and displaced by either the FARC or a coalition revolutionary government. Precedents for this scenario abound, especially in Latin America. One might speculate that, because of its interests in keeping a friendly government in power through which it can fight the narcotics traffickers, the United States might militarily intervene to preclude such an outcome. But given its history in similar interventions, Viet Nam, for example, American involvement is by no means a certainty. There is, of course, the possibility of

³⁸ Rabasa and Chalk, 81.

intervention by a neighboring government, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, or Ecuador; recent events suggest, though, that none of these states has the wherewithal to successfully intervene. Hence, a scenario of revolutionary victory by the insurgents is included.

Accordingly, this study posits three scenarios which attempt to span the range of events in Colombia's struggle for survival: (1) survival by means of a negotiated peace settlement, (2) status quo or continued stalemate, and (3) disintegration of the Colombian government.

Scenario 1: Negotiated Peace Settlement

This scenario represents the case wherein the Colombian military has, in reality, driven the guerrillas to the peace table. In fact, as of January 2002, this appears to be what is actually happening. After a series of false starts beginning with President Pastrana's meeting with the FARC leadership after his election, the Colombian government issued an ultimatum for the FARC to either enter into negotiations or the Colombian army would begin a major offensive to drive the guerrillas from the *zona de despeje*. The guerrillas, after some hesitation, finally agreed. It should be noted that there is a long history of guerrillas beginning peace negotiations with the government only to abandon them later before any settlement could be reached.

This scenario must be considered in at least two versions. The first is that in which the government offers to negotiate, as it is now doing in the real world, and then the probabilities that either or both of the insurgent forces respond are evaluated. The second version is that in which one of the insurgents proposes to negotiate with the government and the probabilities of the government accepting is evaluated. Of interest here is the case where one insurgent offers to negotiate and, given that the government accepts, the

probability of whether the remaining insurgent would also be willing to negotiate must also be evaluated. If the FARC offered to negotiate, it is more likely that the ELN would also be willing to negotiate. If the ELN offered to negotiate, on the other hand, it is less likely that the FARC would be willing to go along since it is the stronger of the two and pretty much follows its own lead.

The case where the government has been defeated and withdraws, course of action W, has no meaning in this scenario, but these alternative futures are included in the analysis for the sake of completeness.

Scenario 2: Stalemate

This scenario, although it represents the actual state of affairs since the beginning of the insurgencies, is in reality a transient scenario. Using the Stalemate as the point of origin, it must eventually transform into one of the other two scenarios. It is possible that one or both of the insurgents might eventually tire of the contest and either sue for peace or begin to lose strength to casualties or desertions and just evaporate. But initially, for the insurgents, the greatest probabilities are that they will continue military operations, course of action M, while for the government due to its commitment to Plan Colombia will most probably seek to negotiate.

Scenario 3: Disintegration

Of the three scenarios, this is the least likely. It represents the situation in which the military has completely eroded to the point where it is no longer capable of performing its mission and amounts to the governments' withdrawal. Only course of action W is operative in this scenario, so the other two courses of action, N and M, no longer have any meaning but are included for the sake of completeness. The insurgents, most likely

led by the FARC rather than the ELN, hold the initiative; their courses of action are almost certainly to be to continue military operations until they enter victoriously into Bogotá. The outcome of this scenario is either a reduction of the Colombian nation into anarchy, Balkanization, or displacement by a revolutionary government or coalition.

Analysis of Alternative Futures

The number of alternative futures is the product of the number of courses of action for each of the actors: three for Colombia and three each for the FARC and the ELN, giving: $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$ alternative futures for each of the three scenarios.

The number of pair wise comparisons is given by:

$$\sum_{a=1}^{27} (27 - a) = 351$$

The rankings of the alternative futures for each of the scenarios are given in Tables 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

Scenario 1: Negotiated Peace Settlement

Future	Colombia	FARC	ELN	Votes
1	N	N	N	26
3	N	N	D	24
2	N	N	M	23
4	N	M	N	22
10	M	N	N	22
14	M	M	M	21
13	M	M	N	20
15	M	M	D	19
12	M	N	D	18
11	M	N	M	17
16	M	D	N	16
7	N	D	N	15
18	M	D	D	15
17	M	D	M	14
9	N	D	D	13
6	N	M	D	11
8	N	D	M	10
5	N	M	M	9
23	W	M	M	8
24	W	M	D	7
22	W	M	N	6
21	W	N	D	5
20	W	N	M	4
19	W	N	N	3
25	W	D	N	2
26	W	D	M	1
27	W	D	D	0
Total				351

Table 1.

N = Negotiates
 M = Continues Military Operations
 D = Demobilizes
 W = Withdraws

Scenario 2: Stalemate

Future	Colombia	FARC	ELN	Votes
14	M	M	M	26
13	M	M	N	25
10	M	N	N	23
11	M	N	M	23
15	M	M	D	23
12	M	N	D	21
18	M	D	D	20
16	M	D	N	19
17	M	D	M	18
5	N	M	M	17
4	N	M	N	16
6	N	M	D	15
1	N	N	N	14
2	N	N	M	13
3	N	N	D	12
7	N	D	N	11
8	N	D	M	10
9	N	D	D	9
22	W	M	N	8
24	W	M	D	7
23	W	M	M	6
19	W	N	N	5
21	W	N	D	4
20	W	N	M	3
26	W	D	M	2
25	W	D	N	1
27	W	D	D	0
Total				351

Table 2.

N = Negotiates
 M = Continues Military Operations
 D = Demobilizes
 W = Withdraws

Scenario 3: Disintegration

Future	Colombia	FARC	ELN	Votes
23	W	M	M	26
22	W	M	N	25
24	W	M	D	24
20	W	N	M	23
19	W	N	N	22
21	W	N	D	21
26	W	D	M	20
25	W	D	N	19
27	W	D	D	18
5	N	M	M	17
4	N	M	N	16
6	N	M	D	15
2	N	N	M	14
1	N	N	N	13
8	N	D	M	12
3	N	N	D	11
7	N	D	N	10
9	N	D	D	9
14	M	M	M	8
13	M	M	N	7
15	M	M	D	6
11	M	N	M	5
10	M	N	N	3
12	M	N	D	3
17	M	D	M	3
16	M	D	N	1
18	M	D	D	0
Total				351

Table 3.

N = Negotiates
M = Continues Military Operations
D = Demobilizes
W = Withdraws

Consequences and Transformations

As this is being written the Colombian government and the insurgent groups are negotiating a peace settlement, at least an agreement has been reached for more cease-fire talks.³⁹ At the same time the FARC initiated a military campaign in which casualties among guerrillas, government soldiers, and civilians ran into the dozens.⁴⁰ So, officially, scenario 1, Negotiated Peace Settlement, might appear to be the most probable scenario, but in reality, Colombia the state of affairs continues as it has for the past thirty to forty years: Stalemate.

And, within scenario 2 the most likely future is also the present, where M = continue military operations:

Future	Colombia	FARC	ELN	Votes
14	M	M	M	26

The next two most probable futures are also within the second scenario:

Future	Colombia	FARC	ELN	Votes
13	M	M	N	25
10	M	N	N	23

Here, the ELN, significantly smaller than the FARC, both in size and capability, is the first to seek to negotiate with the government. And, the third alternative future shows both insurgent groups ready to negotiate while the government continues military operations.

It would appear that a potential transformation exists in the latter two futures in that one or both guerrilla organizations are show seeking to negotiate. On the surface, then,

³⁹ Scott Wilson, "Colombia Tilts Right as Rebels Press Fight," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 31 January 2002, A20.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

things look optimistic and that now scenario 1 could become operative, until one realizes that this same sequence of events has occurred several times in the past.

Scenario 1, Negotiated Peace Settlement, is considered the second most likely scenario (scenario 3, Disintegration has almost no possibility of occurrence and will not be further considered here). The most probably alternative futures within this scenario are shown here:

Future	Colombia	FARC	ELN	Votes
1	N	N	N	26
3	N	N	D	24
2	N	N	M	23
4	N	M	N	22
10	M	N	N	22

Note future 10, which is ranked fourth in the Stalemate scenario. The other four futures indicate that if negotiations occur, the government would initiate them, and this too reflects reality. The guerrillas have often responded to government overtures, but have never requested negotiations first.

The potentials for transformations, not only from alternative future to another, but also from one scenario to another, are those in which the insurgents seek to negotiate a peace settlement. This is especially true for the FARC.

Focal Events and their Indicators

Using the LAMP definition, “a ‘focal event’ is an occurrence of sufficient magnitude that it has the potential to change the relative probability of the universe of

alternative futures.”⁴¹ Within that category, a focal event for the alternative futures under study here would be the case just mentioned, where the FARC initiated a request to negotiate a cease-fire and, eventually, a peace settlement. Indicators of this focal event would include:

- The absence of conditions.
- Cessation of all military operations and terrorist activities (such as those occurring now in Bogotá)
- Voluntary evacuation of all guerrillas from the *zona de despeje*.
- Proposed attendance at the negotiations by the commander of the FARC (Manuel Marulanda, a.k.a. "Tirofijo").

Conclusions

The election of President Pastrana in 1998 and his proposed Plan Colombia appeared to be major steps forward for Colombia in its quest for the end of civil war and its attendant violence. But as of this writing, almost three years later, the goal has not been won. The FARC and the ELN continue their insurgencies, and the AUC continues its operations against the guerrillas and those civilians it perceives as guerrilla supporters. Hope flared briefly at the beginning of 2002 with a positive response by both the FARC and the ELN, and while the proposed schedule of cease-fire talks appears to have been accepted by all sides, guerrilla violence has not subsided.

Time is short. Plan Colombia is the work of President Pastrana, but his term ends soon and according to Colombian law he may not be reelected. His successor may, or

⁴¹ Dr. Jonathan S. Lockwood, ed., *The Lockwood Analytical Method for Prediction (LAMP): Book of Readings, Volume 1*, rev. ed., (Washington: Joint Military Intelligence College, 1993; reprint, Manassas Park, VA: American Military University, n.d.), 22 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

may not, attempt to continue the effort. But if history is any indicator, until the guerrillas are confronted with an overwhelming display of force that leaves them no option but surrender or negotiate, they have no motive to cease operations. There seems to be no such force on the horizon.

For the United States the news is not good. Recognizing that Colombia has no reason to execute that element of Plan Colombia addressing vigorous pursuit of a counter narcotics strategy until its civil war can be ended, the war on drugs must continue unresolved short of direct United States intervention and engagement against the traffickers itself. And, this, clearly, is a course of action the United States is reluctant to take.

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