JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION IN URIBE’S COLOMBIA:
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE

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By

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Abstract

Colombia faces the historic prospect to resolve the longest standing civil conflict in the world. This chance comes as the result of massive gains against the FARC, the ELN, and Colombia’s out of control paramilitary forces. These gains however give Colombia a chance, not a guarantee, of lasting peace. After surrendering a Switzerland-sized piece of Colombia to the FARC, Colombians elected Álvaro Uribe on a platform of “Democratic Security.” Uribe placed the focus on security first by expanding forces by a third, to 270,000, including a core of 80,000 professional soldiers, with mobile brigades and Special Forces.¹ The army is backed by a large helicopter fleet, tactical bombers and approx $4 billion in United States military aid.² Uribe utilized this new military to suppress the narcotics trade that finances both the guerillas and the paramilitaries. This armed build-up changed the conflict, driving the once dominant FARC and the ELN away from Colombia’s under-siege urban centers.


² Ibid.
Government estimates show the FARC dropping from 18,900 fighters in 2002 to as low as 9,000 in 2007, with only ten of the FARC’s 71 fronts and units regularly active.\(^3\) Overall statistics also prove declining crime rates during the Uribe era. In May 2008, the government announced that kidnappings and murders were at a 20-year low, falling from a high in 2000 of 3,500 kidnap victims to a low in 2007 of fewer than 400 hostages.\(^4\)\(^5\) Each loss seems to be the final nail in the coffin for the FARC, and in spite of that the FARC remains. Prominent media outlets such as *The Economist* preach the inevitability of the end of the conflict with headlines such as “Without its veteran leader, the FARC’s defeat looks to be only a matter of time.”\(^6\) Yet despite these enormous achievements, is Colombia’s march towards peace inevitable? Will the defeat of the guerillas and the demobilization of the paramilitaries result in an automatic and enduring peace in Colombia? This paper examines the problem of treating these gains as part of an inevitable march towards peace. This paper argues that Colombia must treat these positive gains as a sign of opportunity, not inevitability.

\(^3\) *Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off* (Bogotá/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2008), 1.


\(^6\) *Colombia: After Sureshot*, 1.
The conclusions of this paper are that the U.S. survey team and the later efforts by Colombian President Pastrana were correct when they acknowledged that the problems in Colombia are deep and require comprehensive reform. If Colombia continues to focus on a military solution for the leftists, the narco-traffickers, or the narco-terrorists, they will find themselves fighting the symptoms for another 50 years. By taking advantage of these countries offers for assistance Colombians can continue to focus on the much needed security, combating the symptoms, while also taking some very important steps forward towards long term change, and have a chance to finally cure the disease.

Colombia becomes an unbelievably unique example in an era of so much civil conflict in countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, and Sudan. In comparison, Colombia’s slow and steady improvements are an inspiration. An interesting comparison is the ongoing conflict in Iraq. The US has been engaged in a conflict situation in Iraq for roughly the same time period as Uribe’s tenure in office. When comparing Colombia to Iraq, the advances in security and de-escalation of violence in Colombia become a potential source for knowledge and skills on how to effectively manage conflict. If Uribe and the government can take advantage of this opportunity and finally end the longest civil conflict in history, there is the chance to make Colombia’s temporary renaissance permanent. More so than that there is the chance that we can take what we have learned from Colombia and spread that renaissance to the world.
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CHAPTER 1: THE STORY SO FAR

Colombia is potentially a wealthy country, rich in natural resources such as oil, gold, silver and coal. Its wealth, however, has always been concentrated in an elite upper class, while most of the population lives in poverty, which provides the foundation for much of the conflict in Colombia. Throughout the 20th Century, the fighting evolved from a two-sided war between the military and guerilla insurgent groups, representing the interests of the poor, to a more complex three-way conflict between guerillas financed by drug trafficking, Colombia’s government, and brutal paramilitary groups that function symbiotically with the Colombian army to protect the interests of powerful elites. Unfortunately, instead of direct engagement, Colombia’s armed groups use attacks against civilians as a means to further their cause. This makes the majority of victims in Colombia, women and families, hundreds of thousands of whom have been assaulted, displaced from their homes or killed.¹

In the mid-1960s, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) began as a Marxist political movement demanding land redistribution and social reform. The FARC’s political base originated in issues of social welfare, economic development, agrarian and judiciary reform and reorganization of the military.² However, after the end of the Cold War, the FARC lost most of its political ideology, focusing instead on vicious


tactics and had an increasing reliance on narco-trafficking and hostage taking.\(^3\) Recently the FARC has suffered multiple military defeats, driving it back from the urban centers in Colombia into the rural jungles. The FARC has suffered the loss of many of its leaders, including its supreme leader Manuel Marulanda Vélez, who died of a heart attack in May, 2008. Despite these defeats and desertions the FARC still has about 9,000 members making it the largest terrorist organization and guerilla movement in the western hemisphere.\(^4\)

The National Liberation Army, or Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist insurgent movement once boasted over 5000 fighters at its peak in the late 1990s.\(^5\) In recent years, however, direct encounters with paramilitaries and Colombian army have severely reduced the ELN's numbers to perhaps 3,000 fighters.\(^6\) Unlike FARC, the ELN strongly opposes narco-trafficking on moral grounds. Instead, the ELN has emphasized kidnapping and extortion for its funding. In the year 2001 alone, it held over 800 hostages for ransom.\(^7\) Most of these "financing" actions have targeted employees of foreign petroleum corporations, which

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\(^5\) Hanson, *FARC, ELN: Colombia’s Left-Wing Guerrillas*, 9.

\(^6\) Ibid, 9.

the guerillas view as exploitative of the people. The ELN has adopted these issues as ostensible justifications for its belligerent pursuits. In contrast to the FARC, whose activities and internal structure exhibit a stronger military orientation, the ELN has divided its efforts between both social work and military functions.

In opposition to the FARC and the ELN are the paramilitary groups, who were, until recently, mainly under the umbrella of the United Self-Defense Units of Colombia or Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). The paramilitary forces were maintained as an exclusive police for the interests of various elites, including US-based corporations, large landowners and drug traffickers. Though often used in an enforcement capacity, allegedly paramilitaries are not formally linked to the government. Human Rights Watch, however, reports that half of the Army’s eighteen brigades have clear links to paramilitaries. Ironically, even though the paramilitaries were hired to combat narco-traffickers, 70% of the AUC’s funds come from drug trafficking.⁸

Adding to the irony, though intended originally as protection for the people, many paramilitaries have been accused of gross human rights violations. Eyewitness reports testify to paramilitaries carving up body parts of supposed “insurgents” and dumping them into the river and decapitating their targets with chainsaws.⁹

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same reports also describe the resurrection of infamous historical forms of killing in Colombia—such as the "necktie," formed by slitting the throat of the victim and pulling down the tongue, which have not been seen since the violence of the 1940s and 1950s. Amnesty International estimates that paramilitaries are responsible for 75% of Colombia’s human rights abuses.

The Colombian government’s tolerance of human rights violations and massive mercenary forces were not positive policies in the conflict to this point. The government historically refused to address the factors that create the desperate conditions of the poor majority. Colombia has long been controlled by the elite upper class organized into two ruling parties. Since 1946 the government has had only tentative control over the army and thus the country. As a result, groups ranging from armed guerrillas to labor organizations, human rights workers, popular movements, indigenous organizations, oppositional political parties, peasant movements, intellectuals and religious leaders, youth and student groups and neighborhood organizations all suffered violence from intra-state conflict. Despite this history, under Alvaro Uribe, the Colombian government made significant improvements that I will demonstrate lead to an incredible opportunity for Colombia.

\[Ibid.\]
CHAPTER 2: COLOMBIA’S HISTORIC MOMENT

Colombia faces the historic prospect to resolve the longest standing civil conflict in the world. After surrendering a Switzerland-sized piece of Colombia to the FARC, Colombians elected Álvaro Uribe on a platform of “Democratic Security.” Uribe placed the focus on security first by expanding forces by a third, to 270,000, including a core of 80,000 professional soldiers, with mobile brigades and Special Forces.¹ The army is backed by a large helicopter fleet, tactical bombers and approx $4 billion in United States military aid.²

Uribe utilized this new military to suppress the narcotics trade that finances both the guerillas and the paramilitaries. This armed build-up changed the conflict, driving the once dominant FARC and the ELN away from Colombia’s under-siege urban centers. Government estimates show the FARC dropping from 18,900 fighters in 2002 to as low as 9,000 in 2007, with only ten of the FARC’s 71 fronts and units regularly active.³ Overall statistics also prove declining crime rates during the Uribe era. In May 2008, the government announced that kidnappings and murders were at a


² Ibid.

20-year low, falling from a high in 2000 of 3,500 kidnap victims to a low in 2007 of fewer than 400 hostages.⁴ ⁵

Uribe’s second strategy focuses on encouraging guerrilla desertions and targeting the leadership utilizing intelligence gleaned from the former narco-traffickers.⁶ The FARC are now losing more in deserters than they are gaining in new recruits, according to Colombian General Freddy Padilla de León. “They are reduced militarily, isolated politically, have a reduced social base and we are cutting their finance [by acting against their drug business].”⁷ Since June 2007 the FARC have lost four front commanders, three Secretariat members, their supreme leader Manuel Marulanda, suffered the embarrassing “baby Emmanuel” episode, endured two massive anti-FARC protest marches in Colombia, saw their internal communications revealed via a capture computer, had their former supporter Fidel Castro tell them to disband and most recently lost fourteen of their most valuable political hostages including former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, and three US civilians

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defense contractors held for over five years. Analysts from the Security and Democracy Foundation in Bogota predict “For the FARC this is a mortal blow. They will never be able to recover from this.” Yet all these amazing gains against the FARC are meaningless without the notable demobilization of the paramilitary forces in Colombia.

In 2003, Uribe initiated a peace process with the AUC, the largest umbrella organization of right-wing paramilitary factions. Since then, nearly 32,000 fighters have laid down their arms. In July 2005, Colombia passed a Justice and Peace Law which set out the framework for demobilization including the punishments paramilitaries would receive and what compensation victims could expect. The law provides immunity from extradition to the United States (U.S) and a maximum eight-year prison sentence. In 2006, Uribe ordered the arrests of many roaming paramilitary commanders that had not complied with the demobilization strategy and the Justice and Peace Law. Within days of these public arrests, dozens of demobilized paramilitary leaders voluntarily turned themselves over to authorities at police stations

8 “Don’t Copy Plan Colombia, Learn from it,” Plan Colombia and Beyond, July 8th, 2008 (accessed 7/26/2008), 1.


across the country. Around 25 ex-AUC commanders are currently being held in custody.\textsuperscript{11}

Many observe these positive gains against the guerilla and paramilitary forces and see a light of hope at the end of Colombia’s long war-torn tunnel. Throughout 2007 nearly 300 guerrillas are deserted every month, totaling 2,480 deserted FARC members, more than double the number for 2005.\textsuperscript{12} The FARC has lost another long time former backer when Hugo Chávez reversed his longstanding policy of recognizing the FARC as a legitimate army and called on the group to lay down its arms and release its hostages, adding, “At this moment in Latin America, an armed guerrilla movement is out of place.”\textsuperscript{13} In response Colombia’s economic growth has soared. The investment rate as a percentage of GDP in the first nine months of 2007 was 27.5\%, compared to less than 15\% in 1999.\textsuperscript{14}

Each loss seems to be the final nail in the coffin for the FARC, and in spite of that the FARC remains. Prominent media outlets such as \textit{The Economist} preach the inevitability of the end of the conflict with headlines such as “Without its veteran

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 7.


\textsuperscript{13} The Editors of the NRO, "The Editors on Hugo Chávez, FARC & Trade on National Review Online," http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=NThhYjM2MTdjMWMxYjYyYTdmY2U1ZDcxOGU3NGU3Y2M= (accessed 7/6/2008).

\textsuperscript{14} Mary Anastasia O'Grady, "Álvaro Uribe Colombia's Peacemaker," \textit{The Wall Street Journal}, June 14th, 2008 (accessed 7/6/2008).
leader, the FARC's defeat looks to be only a matter of time.\textsuperscript{15} Yet despite these enormous achievements, is Colombia’s march towards peace inevitable? Will the defeat of the guerillas and the demobilization of the paramilitaries result in an automatic and enduring peace in Colombia? This paper argues that Colombia must treat these positive gains as a sign of opportunity, not inevitability.

\textsuperscript{15} Colombia: After Sareshot, 1.
CHAPTER 3: URIBE’S DEMOCRATIC SECURITY & ROLE OF DDR

The core of Uribe’s policy, titled Democratic Security Policy (DSP) is the recognition that a military strategy that is not complemented by a political strategy stands a good chance of being insufficient.\(^1\) This is extremely important in the context of the multiple approaches throughout Colombian history to a peaceful resolution of the conflict with different armed groups.\(^2\) Amongst these, two genuinely different philosophies stand out. The first model utilizes talks with the guerrillas based on a ‘broad’ agenda (political and social reforms) but within a process framework that was insufficiently institutionalized or supported by society.\(^3\) The second pursued a model of dialogue with the guerrillas with a ‘limited’ agenda centered on demobilization which hinged on the creation a legal political party.\(^4\) Uribe’s policy more closely follows the latter, utilizing a highly restricted, limited agenda in dialogue with the FARC and ELN. While the Colombian government no longer recognizes a guerilla political movement, the DSP does have a notable focus on the DDR of combatants.

President Uribe coupled this strategy with massive amounts of aid from the United States in a program called Plan Colombia. Together DSP and Plan Colombia

\(^1\) Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off, 1-12.


\(^4\) Ibid.,1.
prioritized combating the insurgents and the reestablishment of order and security as the overriding priority and defining objective of the Colombian government. The statistics of Chapter 2 demonstrate that the Colombian government’s forces have largely returned public security to Colombia, through mainly military achievements, allowing the opportunity for other important steps towards conflict resolution.

Under the DSP, Uribe has regained control of most the country by focusing principally on security. When under fire for his security-first model, President Uribe defended the DSP stating "Of course we need to eliminate social injustice in Colombia ... but what is first? Peace. Without peace, there is no investment. Without investment, there are no fiscal resources for the government to invest in the welfare of the people."\(^5\) Uribe increased the numbers and capacity of troops and police units and deployed them aggressively across the country and into the jungles to confront the guerrillas and the paramilitaries. “I have called my program democratic security," Uribe said. "Security for trade unionists, employers, investors, people of the opposition and my own followers... We don't have discrimination in Colombia." This powerful message contains a key note of equality; that security in Colombia under the DSP is security for all, not just the wealthy, as has been the case for so many years in Colombia.\(^6\)

This strategy is coupled by a major increase in the eradication of cocaine and other illicit crops, aimed specifically at obstructing the financial support for both the


\(^6\) Ibid.
guerrillas and paramilitary groups. With funding from the United States, combined
with Plan Colombia – also a tough drug eradication program, Uribe has realized "If we
do not defeat illegal drugs, we are unable to defeat terrorism - illegal drugs are funding
terrorism." At the same time, the government has placed emphasis military security of
key natural resources such as oil and natural gas pipelines to safeguard the
government’s primary source of income and deny another potential lifeline to illegal
armed groups, who previously obtained almost as much financing from extorting
payoffs by threatening attacks against those facilities as they did through the illicit drug
trade.

Democratic Security has successfully reframed the language of the conflict,
robbing the FARC and the ELN of much of their credibility as opponents. The
Colombian government refuses to talk about conflict in terms of a civil war, instead
Uribe adopted the language of the Bush administration’s War on Terror "On one side
we have a democratic country... and on the other side, a group of terrorists." This has
transformed the FARC and the ELN from potentially noble freedom fighters into
criminal narco-terrorists. Despite this distinction DSP does leave open the possibility
of negotiations and dialogue with the guerillas. President Uribe has stated formally that

7 Ibid.
8 Colombia: President Uribe's Democratic Security (International Crisis Group, 2003)
(accessed 7/10/2008).
the government was "open to dialogue" with every group which "showed good faith".\textsuperscript{9} So far only right-wing paramilitaries thus far had chosen to take advantage of that offer, but President Uribe has insisted on several counts that the government is prepared to also talk with the FARC and the ELN.\textsuperscript{10}

Even with these successes, however, Uribe’s DSP faces criticism and arguments over how best to bring a lasting and successful peace to a 40-year civil conflict. While strengthening Colombia’s formal security structure, Uribe unveiled three other, less orthodox, mechanisms to boost security, which have generated widespread controversy. First, he initiated a network of more than one million civilian collaborators and informants who are paid to provide information about the leftist guerillas. This has raised serious concerns that the collaborators may use their power to pursue personal vendettas. Additionally there has been no long-term plan to shut down the system after the conflict. There are major fears that the system undermines community trust by encouraging neighbors to collect intelligence on one another.

Secondly, Uribe organized a semi-trained peasant militia force whose members operate in their own home communities. This only encourages the kind of paramilitary violence already rampant in Colombia. Moreover the militia’s isolation and lack of training make them very ineffective against the FARC and the ELN. Thirdly, through executive decree, anti-terrorist and other proposed legislation, Uribe conferred on the

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military a range of police powers. These powers do not have judicial approval or oversight, thereby limiting individual civil liberties in the process. These policies create the potential for arbitrary action by the security forces that would diminish the already damaged credibility of the government’s appeal for international support and regional cooperation and threaten to cloud somewhat the legitimacy of its actions against the illegal armed groups.

Uribe correctly recognized that the right-wing paramilitary groups, operating outside of the law and control of the government, are central to the question of conflict management in Colombia. Under DSP Uribe selected and pushed the DDR for the paramilitaries first, before the FARC and ELN. Compared to the guerrillas and government forces, the paramilitaries have an exceptionally high ratio of killings to injuries in conflict events in which they have participated. These killings were part of an explicit strategy of killing civilians whom the paramilitaries suspected of helping the guerrillas. During their major growth phase of 1998 to 2002 the paramilitaries became one of the best-stocked and largest non-state armed groups in the world, armed with US made AR-15 assault rifles, M60 machine guns and Galil rifles. There is evidence that despite DDR, paramilitaries can quickly reorganize and are still very dangerous. As recently as July 2008 continued clashes between FARC and Aguilas


12 Ibid.,4.
Negras (Black Eagles), an illegal armed group, caused the mass-displacement of approximately 1,200 people.\textsuperscript{13}

Disarmament and demobilization of Colombia’s paramilitaries was critical in restoring the monopoly of force to the government of Colombia. In 2006, the paramilitaries disarmed, handing in almost 17,000 high-quality weapons through the DDR process.\textsuperscript{14} In total, 2,695 paramilitary leaders currently charged with crimes against humanity demobilized, and signed up for recourse under the Justice and Peace Law.\textsuperscript{15} Despite these initial successes with demobilization and disarmament, disputes between the government and top paramilitary leaders surfaced with respect to several issues, including the conditions of confinement and the need for assurances regarding extradition to the U.S. in December 2006. The government was forced to move 59 paramilitary leaders to a maximum security prison after alleging that an escape was being planned from their previous location.\textsuperscript{16} Carefully ensuring justice is done, and then reintegrating men like these paramilitary leaders, will be the biggest challenge that Uribe will face.

In line with President Uribe’s policies, Colombia’s DDR strategy focuses on security first in order to re-establish its essential government functions and institutions,

\textsuperscript{13} Humanitarian Situation Report (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2008), 1.

\textsuperscript{14} Spagat, Colombia’s Paramilitary DDR: Quiet and Tentative Success, 2.

\textsuperscript{15} Country Report - Colombia: Rule of Law, 1.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
and then promote economic improvement. Despite its early achievements, failure is still possible and could have significant negative repercussions. The current DDR process is still very new, and is evolving rapidly. The Uribe government, driven by its popular and Congressional support, may have underestimated the difficulty of the reintegration problem. Colombia has a long history of DDRs for groups that gave total impunity, collected few weapons and yielded no reparations for victims. Despite this knowledge and popular support, the government pushed through a policy that did not have a broad consensus and forfeited a good deal of international support along the way. The next Chapter deals with the criticisms of Colombia’s DDR Strategy as applied to the paramilitaries, and the necessary changes that could lead to a positive return for Colombia’s DDR strategy.

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17 Durán, Colombia: Challenges and Dilemmas in the Search for Peace, 1.
CHAPTER 4: DDR STRATEGIES IN COLOMBIA FOR THE PARAMILITARIES

The situation in Colombia is tenuous, recent gains in security are not all they appear to be, and there is no guarantee of victory or peace in Colombia. For example, the Colombian Commission of Jurists reports that during the first four years of Uribe’s presidency over 11,000 individuals were murdered or vanished, an average of 7 people per day.\(^1\) Compare that to U.S. soldiers killed so far in Iraq, and the death toll from political violence during the Uribe Administration is four times higher.\(^2\) OAS Assistant Secretary General Albert Ramdin summed up the fragile situation “[Colombia’s DDR process] could trigger a truth and justice process that would put an end to paramilitary groups in the regions, and lead to reconstruction of the state. Or, on the other hand, it could accentuate the influence of paramilitary groups linked to drug trafficking.”\(^3\) Colombia stands poised at this juncture, a pivotal moment in Colombian history that requires well-thought-out conflict resolution strategies, starting with an improved DDR for the paramilitaries in Colombia.

A major reason the situation is so reversible stems from the Colombian government’s inability to end the conflict prior to implementing a DDR strategy. In a study conducted by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Colombia represented a

\(^1\) Hanson, Heather and Sánchez-Garzoli, Gimena, *Threats and Attacks Against Civil Society Suggest Paramilitary Networks Remain Intact* (US Office on Colombia, 2006), 1.

\(^2\) Ibid.

rare case where the demobilization does not affect all the armed groups collectively.⁴

In short, Colombia has begun a course of action typically described as a “peace process” while in combat operations against two major guerilla armies, namely the FARC and the ELN. This leaves Colombia in the tricky position of attempting a massive DDR policy at the same time it is conducting a war. Other countries in the region, such as Venezuela, had successful DDR strategies only after an end to armed conflict, where there was less power given to the defeated party in negotiations.⁵

While important to observe this notable fault, until the Colombian government is in a position to begin a DDR with the FARC and the ELN, it is more vital to focus on the numerous improvements that can and must be made to Colombia’s DDR process in order to ensure a stable and lasting peace.

There is an intrinsic ethical problem in all DDR programs. In order to encourage demobilization of militants, it is necessary to offer some form of amnesty for previous crimes, whether they be against the state or other groups in the state.⁶ It is delicate to establish a workable DDR framework that balances justice for past crimes and the possibilities for a more peaceful future. Uribe and the Colombian government must always be cognizant of how far justice can be pushed without destroying potential


deals with armed groups that have not been defeated in the field. For example, Carlos Castaño, leader of the AUC, clearly stated that “if the alternative at the end of the road is jail, none of the AUC commanders and his troops would walk in that direction.”

Most human rights organizations accept that a degree of impunity is justified when a peace process includes all parties, and the likelihood of ending the confrontation is high. Uribe has described this necessary evil as the “cost of peace.”

In the case of Colombia, however, groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have been quick to condemn the Colombian DDR strategy for lacking an adequate legal framework for the prosecution of human rights violations. For example, Human Rights Watch has been calling on the Colombian government for years to use the option of extradition effectively on top-level paramilitary commanders who are not meeting their commitments to the DDR process. Human Rights Watch issued a statement asserting as follows:

We welcome the prospect that some of the worst human rights violators in Colombia’s recent history could now face serious jail time in the U.S. for some of their drug crimes. It means that they will no longer be able to manage their nefarious organizations or continue ordering criminal acts. It also means they can no longer look forward to regaining their freedom in just a few years on extremely lax terms – which might well have happened had they stayed in Colombia.


International NGOs have harshly criticized the government’s negotiations with the AUC for exonerating the crimes they have committed, giving the paramilitaries total impunity for horrendous assassinations and massacres.10

Human rights organizations certainly have reason to object to Colombia’s current DDR strategy. At least 15 alleged paramilitary leaders who were arrested and accused of gross human rights violations later walked past prison guards, soldiers, and police to freedom.11 Forty-four Colombian military officers accused of murder and of supporting paramilitaries were allowed to leave military installations where they were reported to be held.12 As of April 2005, of the 5,000 paramilitaries that have participated in “collective demobilization” ceremonies so far, only 25 were detained for atrocities committed before the demobilization. As of June, another 55 who did not demobilize had voluntarily gone to Santa Fe de Ralito, a specially designated zone where they would be protected from arrest while the government drafted legislation that would allow them to receive sentence reductions for their crimes.13 The Attorney General’s office claims that it is still conducting background checks on most of the demobilized paramilitaries. However, given the government’s lack of information


12 Ibid.

about most paramilitary crimes, it is unlikely that many of them will be found to have a record of atrocities.\textsuperscript{14}

While Colombia achieved the short-term goal of security, and the soldiers and mercenaries disarmed and demobilized in large numbers, it may be at the cost of increasing the possibilities for future conflict. If the victims of paramilitary violence do not feel that justice has been done, then there is the potential that they could seek justice themselves, and unfortunately in Colombia, there is no shortage of victims. In early January 2007, Luis Gonzalez, director of the Justice and Peace Chapter of the National Prosecutor’s Office, reported that their office received 100,000 total accusations of human rights violations since the law was approved in 2006.\textsuperscript{15} In 2006, the International Center for Transitional Justice published a survey on victims' perceptions and expectations of transitional justice. Overwhelmingly, nearly 90\% of those surveyed said that victims should receive some form of reparation, 79\% believe that Colombians have a right to truth, and 63\% believe that combatants must be prosecuted.\textsuperscript{16}

It should be taken into account that when I discuss the Colombian government’s responsibilities, this does not mean recognition of any criminal responsibility of state officials, but a political, moral and legal responsibility of the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Country Report - Colombia: Rule of Law, 1.

state to ensure that human rights are protected.\textsuperscript{17} This is particularly important in a conflicted state like Colombia where the legitimacy and credibility of the state is so often in question.

Uribe must prevent impunity in the paramilitary demobilization process by incorporating prison sentence provisions in the Justice and Peace Law which, despite its strong points, is still sometimes titled a “near pardon” or “veiled amnesty” bill, particularly for those who have ordered or committed crimes against humanity. Amnesty International argues that the real aim of the Justice and Peace Law is to guarantee the impunity of paramilitaries accused of human rights violations including war crimes and crimes against humanity-by failing to ensure that they are subject to full and impartial judicial investigations.\textsuperscript{18} In addition, it guarantees that the paramilitary’s government supporters and others responsible for sponsoring illegal activities will not be held accountable.\textsuperscript{19}

Further examination of the Colombian government DDR plan for the paramilitaries reveals that under current procedures, the government conducts only a cursory check of its records to determine whether the individuals who are demobilizing

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Victims are First} (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2008), 1.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Justice and Peace Law and Decree 128} (2003), 1.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
are already the subjects of ongoing prosecutions or convictions.²⁰ There is no further effort to carefully investigate each individual to determine whether he/she might be linked to crimes against humanity or other abuses.²¹ It is difficult to determine the author of most paramilitary crimes, making it very likely that many individuals who have committed massacres, kidnappings, or other crimes will avoid detection and prosecution.²² If the Colombian government does not take these critiques seriously, the endemic failures to properly investigate and prosecute paramilitary abuses of yesterday would guarantee impunity today.²³

In order to prevent the possibility of future violence, Uribe must ensure that there is an adequate system for treatment of combatants participating in demobilization. This framework must include definite eligibility criteria, a clear set of procedures and a full scope of reintegration measures. The framework must guarantee the prosecution of serious crimes. In order to enhance the possibility of complete justice, the situation of victims must be included in the design of reintegration and reconciliation programs. Solid funding and continued assistance to ex-combatants who have finished reintegration programs are essential. When enforced, The Justice and Peace Law, especially as amended in May of 2006 by the Constitutional Court, does

²⁰ Colombia: Letting Paramilitaries Off the Hook A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper: II. the Paramilitary Demobilization Process to Date, 19.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.
make paramilitary DDR far more justice-oriented than previous domestic laws. The Justice and Peace Law is a quite exceptional case on an international level, since laws of this type do not usually exist, unless they have been designed solely for the collective demobilization of only one entity in the country. Whereas in Colombia the law is applied without knowing what would occur if other armed groups were demobilized or without knowing the exact "civil and military" structure of the paramilitarism. These changes are positive, but small, steps towards a more complete and just DDR strategy.

Resources must be properly allotted in the Colombian government to handle the massive influx of paramilitaries who will require investigations, trials, and possibly prosecutions. For example, in a 2006 ruling by Colombia’s Constitutional Court, paramilitary commanders and others who have applied for reduced sentences under Law 975 of 2005 are legally required to confess and turn over illegally acquired assets. However, confessions moved slowly in 2007, in part due to a lack of sufficient prosecutors and investigators assigned to the unit of the attorney general’s office charged with interrogating the commanders.

The statistic above only highlights possible confessions, let alone the investigations required into human’s rights abuses that often take months or even


years, with detailed interviews with individuals who live deep in the Colombian jungle. This deficiency is despite the $500,000 USAID provided for technical assistance, logistical support and/or training to prosecutors, judges, public defenders, investigators and victims’ advocates to ensure proper enforcement of the legal processes for ex-combatants in 2006.²⁶ Keep in mind that comparatively the US provided $581,695,053 in military aid in that same year to combat the FARC and the ELN.²⁷

If Colombia is incapable of shouldering the burden of investigation and prosecution itself, it must turn to other outlets in the international community. Some in Colombia have called for an impartial and strict tribunal constituted by an international justice unit, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC).²⁸ An international tribunal, beside impartiality, would enhance the sense of justice needed for victims of human rights violations. Colombia should take advantage of its participation in the Rome Statute of the ICC, a body that can try cases of abuse when domestic judicial systems cannot.²⁹ Without proper distribution of its resources more effectively towards the DDR strategy, Colombia could find itself once again fighting a war on three fronts.

²⁶ Data Sheet - Colombia: Support for Demobilization and Reintegration (USAID, 2006), 1.
²⁷ U.S. Aid to Colombia, all Programs, 2006-2006, 1.
Financial reparations are a delicate tool in any reconciliation movement. Upon first glance they seem a cure-all for victims of violence. Funds are fairly easy logistically to distribute, and people often assume that most wrongs can be righted with money; it’s just a matter of the price. Upon closer inspection, however, financial reparations are fraught with challenges. The first and most obvious is the danger of the government quantifying human suffering monetarily. Even when appropriately classified, studies conducted on financial reparations revealed that many of the ex-combatants who did not immediately return to their hometowns reportedly spent the money they had received for their weapon, as well as other financial support, on alcohol.\(^{30}\) If warranted, to minimize misuse of reintegration funding, money should be sent to a bank account or assistance should be provided in form of material aid or credit notes. A transaction of the financial aid to the ex-combatants partners must also be considered. This would assure that assistance would benefit the partner and family of the demobilized paramilitary as well.

To assure that ex-combatants actually return to their hometowns, payable transactions ought to be executed in the respective home regions or they should be linked to the transport of the demobilized to their hometowns.\(^{31}\) More important still, Colombia must take advantage of all forms of reparation. "There is reparation that has a social and collective character," contends Ivan Cepeda, leader of one the largest

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\(^{30}\) Marcus Koth, "To End a War: Demobilization and Reintegration of Paramilitaries in Colombia," *Bonn International Center for Conversion*, no. 43 (2005).

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 9.
victims groups in Colombia.\textsuperscript{32} This non-financial reparation, must link locally to the people and creatively engage the whole of the Colombian nation.

This highlights Colombia’s need to use a variety of tools to enhance the DDR efforts in the area of reconciliation. Uribe and the government must continue positive steps such as the creation of five new restorative justice centers that have recently been established to serve hundreds of marginalized urban households. Some 3,500 rural households were provided with conflict management training and agricultural extension services to prevent domestic and community violence and improve livelihoods.\textsuperscript{33} As made successful in previous DDR strategies such as in Haiti, Colombia must establish local offices to begin promoting dialogue, public awareness, and small-scale programs to disarm mobilized groups and promote reconciliation in “communities of return.”\textsuperscript{34}

Learning from other countries is another simple way to enhance the current DDR strategy. Take for example the difficult DDR strategy implemented in South Africa. "I say to the people of Colombia...in spite of all the complexities, if peace was

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\item \textsuperscript{33} "Bringing Reconciliation to Colombia," America.gov, \url{http://www.amERICA.gov/st/washfile-english/2006/May/20060531125239AKIlennoCcM0.1190608.html} (accessed 7/9/2008).
\item \textsuperscript{34} Robert Muggah, "Securing Haiti's Transition: Prospects for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration," \textit{Small Arms Survey}, no. 14 (October, 2005), 46, 47.
\end{itemize}
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possible in South Africa, it can happen in Colombia”\textsuperscript{35} declared Bishop Desmond Tutu
at a conference in Colombia to pass on the lessons learned from South Africa. These
conferences with leaders who have undergone successful DDRs are invaluable means
of passing on precious knowledge. This will ensure that Colombia doesn’t repeat
simple mistakes from previous DDR strategies, such as neglecting certain groups not
typically associated with paramilitary violence.

The Colombian government must address all sufferers of violence, including
vulnerable groups such as women, child soldiers and the disabled. The main concern
is possibility for the criminal process to exclude certain groups of victims of
paramilitary violence. The current law does not provide specific guarantees to victims
to protect their participation, not only in terms of access to evidence and participation
in any stage of the process, but also in terms of safeguarding their security.\textsuperscript{36}

Colombian politicians such as former Interior Minister Fernando Londoño have
addressed these concerns by pushing through legislation such as the government’s
“alternate penal plan”, which aims to “facilitate national reconciliation and reparation
for the victims.”\textsuperscript{37} The government must withdraw legislative proposals to restrict the
competence of the constitutional court and the right of citizens to legal protection if
their fundamental rights are threatened. Eduardo Pizarro, as head of a newly

\textsuperscript{35} “Veterans of Global Conflict Point the Way to Peace in Colombia," Synergos,

\textsuperscript{36} Colombia: Smoke and Mirrors: I. Summary and Recommendations (Human Rights Watch,

\textsuperscript{37} Van Dongen, Colombia Seeks Peace in the Middle of War, 1.
established “reparation and reconciliation” commission, echoes this sentiment, “first thing [the commission wants to do is] put the association of victims at the heart of our work.” The first step in dealing with victims is addressing the interests of the poor rural landowners.

The main victims of paramilitary violence, including an increased number resulting from Uribe’s more aggressive security policy, including widespread attacks on cocaine production, are located in rural Colombia. The absence of any coherent rural development policy constitutes perhaps the most serious threat to the potential effectiveness of the current DDR strategies. Making lasting gains in the reconciliation portion of the strategy will be difficult unless poor rural communities see clear and immediate benefits in the government campaign. A comprehensive policy aimed at reducing poverty in the countryside, investing in social programs, and establishing the rule of law is a necessary component of the reconciliation strategy. It would certainly be sensible, in this context, to launch a rural development initiative that would assist farmers, slow the flow of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and provide a reason for the rural population to be more enthusiastic about the DDR strategy. Colombia must work doubly hard at this since, as stated earlier, due to the constant

\[38\] Ibid., 1.
state of war in Colombia, the national consciousness favorable to amnesty and forgiveness cannot develop to the same extent.\textsuperscript{39}

Children were believed to remain with the AUC and other partially demobilized paramilitary groups, such as the Peasant Self-Defence Forces of Casanare and the Cacique Pipinta Front.\textsuperscript{37} The Ombudsman's Office reported that more than 200 children in the AUC ranks had not been demobilized in 2006.\textsuperscript{38} Some 300 children were formally released by the AUC and handed over to the authorities during the demobilization process which began in 2003. However, the majority of AUC child soldiers left the groups informally and made their way to the ICBF on their own, thus failing to meet the requirements of the collective demobilization process. Concerns were expressed that many former AUC child soldiers consequently received no demobilization or reintegration support.\textsuperscript{41}

Another danger of the DDR strategy in Colombia is the possibility of a simple change in leadership and redistribution of currently existing paramilitary units. This is why DDR programs are increasingly forced to consider the ‘R’ of reintegration that has traditionally been the most difficult, and therefore the weakest, link in the chain.\textsuperscript{40} The current strategy runs the risk that demobilized combatants may take up arms and rejoin active groups. It is estimated that up to half the former members of the AUC

\textsuperscript{39} Albert Carames and Daniel Fisa Luz, \textit{Comparative Analysis on the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Programs Existing in the World during 2006}, 1.

returned to illegal armed groups. Gen. Jose Roberto Leon of the Colombian National Police estimates that there are at least 23 "emerging gangs" numbering 2,200 fighters. In a 2006 report, peace advocacy organizations such as the International Crisis Group and INDEPAZ estimated the number of gang members is at least twice that; with evidence of at least 43 re-armed groups of ex-paramilitary combatants in 22 counties. Also, there is growing concern that ex-combatants are recruiting new members and are forming a new wave of paramilitary groups in a Nueva Generación (New Generation), such as the Águilas Negras (Black Eagles).

Demobilization could break down old paramilitary groups, and make new groups even smaller, more flexible and efficient. Whereas formerly paramilitary groups were organized under the AUC umbrella and the government had a sole point of contact for negotiations, now the Colombian government potentially faces the prospect of hundreds of negotiations with smaller armed groups all seeking their own individualized package demobilization deals. This increases the chances for exploitation and corruption in the DDR system.

In the current system there is the widespread possibility of abuse of the DDR system through individuals joining paramilitary groups with the sole purpose of receiving DDR benefits. The Justice and Peace Law grants legal and economic

41 Spagat, Colombia’s Paramilitary DDR: Quiet and Tentative Success, 3.


benefits to demobilized members of armed groups. These benefits include pardons, conditional suspension of the execution of a sentence, a cessation of procedure, a resolution of preclusion of the investigation or a resolution of dismissal. For certain individuals, guerillas, ex-paramilitaries, and common run-of-the-mill criminals, joining a paramilitary organization just to demobilize becomes a very lucrative package under current Colombian standards. This is why, as detailed earlier, more detailed investigations into DDR participants is necessary to reduce abuse of the system.

Adding to the problem is a counter issue that some paramilitaries leave the DDR program without critical benefits, such as employment, increasing the risk of relapse into criminal activities. There is no fast-response, high-impact program that offers rural communities economic reintegration options linked to security, infrastructure investment, services and governance. Without this program in place some paramilitaries may find it necessary to return to the powerful and lucrative drug trade. The main motivation for the return to “counter-insurgency” activity is clearly control of drug crops and processing facilities as well as the trafficking routes to the Pacific and Ecuador. “Carlos Castano, who headed the AUC, is a major cocaine trafficker in his own right and has close links to the North Valley drug syndicate,


46 Ibid., 27.
among the most powerful drug trafficking groups in Colombia states Former DEA administrator Donnie Marshall. This is a serious deficiency in the reintegration of fighters that must be addressed in order to prevent the return of combatants to the conflict.

In order to counteract the above issues, the Colombian government must assure that entire paramilitary structures are dismantled. This hampers the possibilities of paramilitary groups quickly reforming. Attention must be paid at a minute level, focusing on each individual fighter’s DDR. This organized and detailed approach guarantees that each member of the group is dealt with, and makes it more difficult to break off into splinter paramilitary groups. The reintegration program needs a powerful centralized authority that is equipped with the appropriate communication networks, regional capacities and financing. Reinsertion assistance consists of short-term relief interventions, which provide a safety net for demobilized ex-combatants. Assistance may include housing, medical care, food, and elementary education for

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48 Ibid, 1.
The government should promote vocational training, quick-impact projects and other interventions to promote community reintegration and stigmatize arms. Examples of these micro-projects include the creation of micro-companies, and public works concerned with rehabilitating the infrastructures. It must give access to employment in various sectors, be they rural (agriculture, livestock and fishing, as in the example of the Republic of the Congo), in a more urban sphere (Sierra Leone) or even through the participation of the civil society (Angola). Colombia must learn from cases where there is a clear subdivision between economic and social reintegration, as in the cases of Angola, Eritrea, the Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Colombia must balance social integration, which consists of carrying out awareness programs. These programs support community rehabilitation and economic integration by creating new professional challenges for former combatants. The proper reinsertion assistance ensures that former paramilitaries do not need to return to their former combative methods just for to feed their families.

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50 Muggah, Securing Haiti's Transition: Prospects for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, 46, 47.

51 Albert Carames and Daniel Fisas Luz, Comparative Analysis on the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Programs Existing in the World during 2006, 6.

52 Ibid, 1.

53 Ibid.
Colombian DDR is off to a good start and now has a legal basis that merits more widespread international support. Colombia shows progress in meeting the short term goal of winning the security. According to authorities, the number of homicides during the year was the lowest in 18 years.\(^{54}\) Attacks conducted by illegally armed groups against rural towns decreased by 91% from 2002 to 2005. Between 2002 and 2007, Colombia saw an overall decrease in homicides by 37%, kidnappings by 78%, terrorist attacks by 63%, and attacks on the country's infrastructure by 60%, killings of trade union leaders by 67%, and forced displacements by more than 27%.\(^{55}\) A further calculation indicates that between 1400 and 2800 homicides have been averted so far due to the cumulative effect of all completed demobilizations.\(^{56}\) Finally, and perhaps most importantly, perceptions of corruption in the process improved slightly.\(^{57}\)

So far it would seem that paramilitary DDR has paid dividends for Colombia. Colombia must focus however on the long-term goals of a comprehensive DDR strategy. The final goal of DDR is the sustained social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants into a peaceful society. If a DDR program is to be sustainable and successful in the long term, it must be integrated with and supported by, both social


\(^{56}\) Spagat, *Colombia’s Paramilitary DDR: Quiet and Tentative Success*, 5.

\(^{57}\) *Colombia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 1.
and economic development. If the great majority of paramilitaries transition to a peaceful civilian existence, then Colombia may achieve a substantial and long-lasting reduction in violence. If, on the other hand, many paramilitaries remain criminals and narco traffickers and/or continue fighting the guerrillas and their presumed supporters then Colombian will remain a very violent place for many years. By tackling one of the most difficult issues of the war, President Uribe has demonstrated true conflict management skills. However if not handled properly, the next steps could become a minefield, creating the conditions for new cycles of revenge and deepening Colombians’ frustration.

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58 Fusato, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants. Beyond Intractability.
CHAPTER 5: DDR STRATEGIES IN COLOMBIA FOR THE FARC AND THE ELN

Successful DDR of the paramilitary groups in Colombia is an enormous first step, but as highlighted earlier, it must come in concert with long-term solutions for the FARC and the ELN. Certainly Uribe’s goal is to defeat the FARC and the ELN militarily, but the reality of the situation shows that he cannot close the door to the possibility of negotiated settlements and a DDR strategy for both the FARC and ELN. The government states that it intends to continue and even increase the military pressure so as to force the FARC to the negotiating table.\(^1\) Similarly to dealing with the paramilitaries, there are multiple guerilla groups operating in Colombia. Most prominent are the FARC and the ELN, but there are many others including The Popular Liberation Army (EPL) a remnant that refused to go along when the original EPL, a Maoist-inspired group, negotiated a peace accord with the government in 1991. The ERG (Guevarist Revolutionary Army) and ERP (Popular Revolutionary Army) are tiny groups that are essentially satellites of the FARC and ELN that carry out occasional kidnappings and terrorist attacks.\(^2\)

Here in this Chapter, we will focus on the FARC and the ELN, as they are the most prominent and powerful. For the purposes of this analysis, the reader will have to assume that many of the requirements for the DDR of the paramilitaries will be the

\(^1\) Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off, 1-12.

\(^2\) Information about the Combatants (2004), 1.
same for the FARC and the ELN. This includes the need to balance justice and effectiveness, a focus on individual demobilization, proper allocation of resources within a central authority, the need for a national peace and reconciliation process, and a strong emphasis on reintegration. In this Chapter I will focus instead on how Colombia can create a better DDR strategy from the very beginning, learning from the lessons of the paramilitary DDR, and tailored specifically to the guerilla groups in Colombia. In that regard I will focus even further, by targeting primarily on the FARC, with occasional commentary on specific strategies for the ELN, assuming that with similar political goals, tactics, and financing, DDR strategies could be applicable across all of Colombia’s leftist guerilla groups.

As we learned with the paramilitaries, much of the DDR was possible because of the paramilitaries grouping under the umbrella of the AUC. This allowed a single negotiating partner for a large swatch of the paramilitary groups in Colombia. With the FARC and the ELN this could be a difficult issue that hampers the ability to begin any kind of DDR plan. Complicating any hope for a reasonable negotiation with the FARC is their lack of strong leadership. The death of their supreme commander as well as several members of their seven-member secretariat has left the FARC demoralized and disorganized. Despite this, the new leadership of the FARC outwardly seems promising.

Alberto Puyo, a former FARC member, met with the FARC’s new leader and described him as “…a studious man. He liked to debate. He didn't shun opinions that were far from his own.” Puyo added that he thought Cano was practical; an
increasingly critical quality as Uribe tries to assess a possible settlement between Cano and the government. Even if a workable leader can be found, there is still confusion as to what any settlement would look like.

Despite their lack of cohesive leadership, the Colombian government has never had a strong negotiating position with the FARC and the ELN. Currently both groups have their numbers halved, many of their most valuable hostages lost, their leaders killed, and their financing constantly under assault, so their negotiating power is severely reduced compared to even a few years ago. Perhaps even more important is their loss of support from the people they supposedly fight for. Colombians turned out en masse in early 2008 to protest the continued violence, specifically targeting the FARC and the ELN for their use of narcotrafficking to finance their operations. In February 2008 over 230,000 Colombians from 185 cities around the world marched in protest of the FARC. With everything stacked against them, the FARC and the ELN should be begging for an opportunity to come to the negotiating table.

On the other hand, the Colombian government has not made enough effort to learn from previous DDR experiences with guerillas, often repeating procedural mistakes on problematic issues, such as verification of guerillas during the previous


administration. The periods of stagnation and the breakdowns of the previous processes are suggestive not only of the need for genuine political will and the appropriate use of basic negotiation techniques, but of the importance of power relations within the process. With a vicious history of failure such as the one between the government of Colombia, the FARC, and the ELN, it is essential to use mechanisms that help create trust and fluid interaction between the parties. This will require broad support and commitment to the process amongst those groups who are most difficult and most likely to prevent progress. Such “spoilers” might include those who are profiting from the conflict, the military hardliners in the insurgencies and also the right-wing elites. It will be critical to attain political commitment from the people of Colombia, meaning bilateral (or multilateral) commitments by the parties themselves, as recommended in the report of the Comisión de Personalidades during the previous failed Pastrana process.7

Despite any skill previously demonstrated by the FARC in peace negotiations, it is not clear if the organization has genuinely appreciated or capitalized on political opportunities with which it has been presented.8 The FARC’s roots as a political movement have long since gone, and this loss of political will makes realistic negotiations very difficult. The ELN has resisted major narco-trafficking operations,

6 Durán, Colombia: Challenges and Dilemmas in the Search for Peace, 1.


8 Ibid.
in an attempt to stay morally pure and truer to its originally-stated political goals. Even then, with both groups there are very few clearly stated, easily assessed demands that could make either the FARC or the ELN a more reasonable negotiating partner.

The Colombian government must seize two critical opportunities provided by the DDR of the paramilitaries. Firstly, with the paramilitaries slowly but surely reducing in size and strength, they also are less and less likely to have the power to spoil possible FARC/ELN negotiations. The second is that with a relatively successful DDR process of the paramilitaries underway, there are many ways to learn from the previous mistakes, and the successes, of the DDR of the paramilitaries and address the economic and political interests that obstruct the realization of a peace agreement. I believe this gives the Colombian government an important edge in infrastructure, funding, and experience. Additionally if the paramilitary DDR is successful, the credibility the Colombian government will gain will be invaluable in dealing with the FARC and the ELN.

Colombia is fortunate; many of the positive lessons learned from the relatively successful DDR of the paramilitaries are applicable to the FARC and the ELN. Similarly to the paramilitaries, it is essential that law enforcement units and armed forces commanders focus on security first and bring to justice those guerillas who do not adhere to the ceasefire and continue to be involved in kidnappings and drug trafficking. This zero tolerance policy was effective in sending the message to the paramilitaries that the government was not taking the DDR strategy lightly. As with the paramilitaries and most DDR strategies, the government must express willingness
to negotiate settlements and reduced sentences if the insurgents and guerillas meet the ceasefire conditions and end kidnapping and humanitarian law violations and begin DDR. This will require strongly conditioned political incentives to advance the hostages-for-prisoners swap with the FARC.\(^9\) This may include internationally monitored demilitarization of certain municipalities that would serve as the site of negotiations for 45 days on the basis of a prior agreement with the FARC and the ELN that the hostages and prisoners would be released during that period.\(^10\) Lastly, in and of itself, a full and complete demobilization of the paramilitaries would serve as a solid foundation, and an important first step towards a successful DDR with the FARC.

Unfortunately, in particular with hostages-for-prisoners policies, there is a long history full of bitter failures on both sides of the table, which will make it difficult to build trust towards positive negotiations. However, that same history also provides a source of recommendations that can provide a way forward that can avoid potential bottlenecks like those from previous negotiations. Firstly, it is necessary to revise and improve the models of negotiations to develop a ‘national constitutional pact’. This pact requires substantive reforms for the country, particularly in the areas of land reforms, which initially provided the base for conflict, and continue to threaten Colombia’s future. As with the paramilitaries, these reforms will help build social


\(^10\) Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off, 1-12.
collateral with the Colombian people, and help deflate any legitimacy to the archaic, yet relevant, political arguments of the FARC and the ELN.

These efforts should start from the premise that alternatives for confronting violence can be found in expanding democracy and strengthening the mobilization and organization of the pro-peace social and political alternatives. These reforms can be made regardless of the FARC or the ELN’s current status, thereby preventing roadblocks from previous negotiations, in particular with regard to a ceasefire as a precondition for the negotiation of substantive issues. This will augment the already widespread opposition to the FARC and the ELN, including civil resistance movements, social movements, and a media committed to the construction of peace.

Parallel to Colombia’s DDR of the paramilitaries, disarmament is still a critical first step of a successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. The technical threat and risks will have a major influence on the future success or failure of a disarmament program with the FARC and the ELN. Colombia can take advantage of the in-country expertise already earned from the disarmament of the paramilitaries and ensure that the appropriate expertise is involved from the beginning. The handling of weapons, ammunition and explosives by unqualified or untrained individuals or groups will always result in danger, with the potential that arms could end up back in the wrong hands if not handled carefully.

The removal of weapons, ammunition and explosives is a highly symbolic act in the ending of an individual’s active role as a combatant, very important for guerrillas like the FARC and ELN who in some cases have been fighting this war over
generations. In addition to being symbolic, the act on a practical level drastically reduces the threat of the individual, and in turn the armed group. Like the policy of Democratic Security, disarmament contributes to establishing a secure environment and makes demobilization and reintegration possible. In regards to the FARC and the ELN, this disarmament will be a challenge. The FARC utilizes a startling array of weaponry in its military operations including AK-47 assault rifles, M60 machine guns, M16 rifles, RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenades, M79 grenade launchers, and land mines. The amount and level of ordinance that needs to be taken in and dismantled is daunting, but the goal is achievable.

In order for the Colombian disarmament phase to be successful, the disarmament needs to be comprehensive, effective, efficient and safe. Many of the same procedures used in the DDR of the paramilitaries can be successfully applied here. The Colombian government must continue to reinforce countrywide security and plan for the disarmament to be coordinated with wider peace-building and recovery efforts. The disarmament phase is only the first phase of a DDR program and should be accompanied by a new Colombian national arms control management system. Reducing the weapons in the hands of the guerillas won’t be effective unless there are future internal arms controls and reduction measures.

Once the FARC and the ELN have been disarmed, then comes demobilization, previously attempted through the use of demilitarized zones. The new DDR

\[11\] Information about the Combatants (2004), 1.
framework must recognize the danger of recreating demilitarized zones, without clear controls and rules. With the FARC and the ELN in such a weak position of power they have little basis for demanding a demilitarized zone. Nevertheless even then, the government must prepare for the event where it may become a key requirement of disarmament and demobilization. If considered, the Colombian government must designate only small areas, demilitarized for short periods of time and only as the means to implement the mechanisms of demobilization and disarmament of the FARC and the ELN.\(^\text{12}\) The best model for Colombia is most likely mobile demobilization. Mobile demobilization centers are suitable in situations where the target group is scattered and not all its members are willing to demobilize, as is possible with the widely dispersed and currently disorganized FARC.\(^\text{13}\) Establishing mobile demobilization centers near to the FARC and the ELN, in the jungles of Colombia can make it easier for those willing to demobilize to take part in the process.

This requires heavy collaboration with local authorities, and must be combined with a public information campaign to inform the FARC and the ELN about the nature of the DDR program, the location of the camp and the dates at which it will be operational. In addition these zones could serve as a short term “safe haven” for negotiations with the FARC. As an alternative the Colombian government should not

\(^{12}\) Posso, Colombia: Negotiations with the FARC, 1.

discount the possibility of holding negotiations abroad, even using safe havens in nearby Ecuador and Venezuela.

Any type of safe havens in neighboring countries will require a careful clarification and articulation on the role of the regional and international community. At the moment, the only state parties involved in the DDR process are the Colombian government, and in some areas the United States. As with the paramilitaries, with so much violence inflicted in such a vicious cycle of failure and betrayal, it is necessary to include mechanisms that permit more third parties, both national and international, to provide technical support to the process. The same mechanisms such as using the ICC and the Rome Statute, are applicable here as well as with the paramilitaries. These international roles must not undermine the offices of the diverse sectors of Colombian society, nor prevent contacts between authorities and guerrilla spokesmen for humanitarian purposes at regional and local levels.

Disarmament and demobilization are comparatively easy, compared to reintegration, which is the final and most important stage of DDR. It is critical that the Colombian government maintain that the sustainable social and economic reintegration of the FARC and the ELN is the ultimate objective of Colombia’s DDR strategy. If reintegration fails, the achievements of the disarmament and demobilization phase are reduced, instability increases, and sustainable reconstruction and development are put at risk. This requires planning now, despite the fact that there is no peace process

\[14\] "IDDRS 4.30 Social and Economic Reintegration, 56."

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even on the table yet. Post demobilization and disarmament, the FARC and the ELN will finally be cut loose from their command structure and processes that are familiar to them, often re-entering societies that are equally unfamiliar and in some cases hostile.

This will be particularly difficult in Colombia, because of the guerilla’s former method of financing, mainly narco-trafficking and kidnapping. The lure to turn back to those extremely profitable professions will be strong. In Colombia the conflict has been so long that many members of the FARC and the ELN may have no experience, or memory, of pre-war peaceful patterns of life. As difficult as it sounds, this may mean that for certain members of the FARC and the ELN it may be impossible for them to reintegrate in their area of origin. Their limited skills may have more relevance and marketable value in urban settings, which are also more capable of absorbing them. In the worst cases, the guerilla’s home villages may no longer exist after a war, or, guerillas may be associated with groups that have committed atrocities in or near their own communities making it harmful for them to return to their homes.

This leads to the fundamental question of what is and what is not negotiable in a future process, in other words, how far the Colombian people are willing to go to make peaceful coexistence possible. There is currently no consensus in Colombia on this issue. Some actors believe that profound social and political reforms are needed

\[15\] Ibid.
for a sustainable peace agreement. Others believe that it is not appropriate to adopt an expansive concept of peace, but necessary instead to emphasize the provision of electoral advantage for demobilized guerrillas and the subsequent enactment of reforms. A realistic agenda will allow the parties the necessary flexibility to engage in a process that can be accomplished quickly, so as not to protract or complicate a process that is already complex and conflicted.

Just as in the DDR of the paramilitaries, there are victims of guerilla violence in Colombia. The FARC once shared widespread support in Colombia, whereas now they are seen as little more than drug-dealing thugs. This makes it essential to define what the majority of the Colombian population feel is negotiable with the guerrilla groups. Never has there been a greater need for a national reconciliation movement, such as in South Africa. So many in Colombia have suffered for so many different reasons, that if there is to be a lasting peace in Colombia, everyone, the paramilitaries, the FARC, the ELN, the people, and the government must all come together to have a dialogue about how to build a lasting peace in Colombia.

16 Carlos A. Lozano Guillén, ”Colombia: Reforms are the Key to Peace,” Conciliation Resources (2004), (accessed 7/13/2008).


19 Ibid., 1.

20 Bringing Reconciliation to Colombia, 1.
Local community support is essential for the successful reintegration of ex-combatants. The Colombian government must work hard to compensate for the vulnerabilities of local populations, which have neither the capacity nor the desire to assist a ‘lost generation’ of FARC and ELN with little education, employment or training; war trauma; and a highly militarized view of the world.\textsuperscript{21} Unsupported former combatants can be a major threat to a community’s capacity to recover because of their lack of skills or assets, their tendency to rely on violence to get what they want and their ignorance of or disrespect for local cultures, leaders and social habits.\textsuperscript{22}

To reduce their capacity for destabilization, ex-combatants will usually need specifically designed, sustainable support to help them with their transition from military to civilian life.\textsuperscript{23} This support must have Colombian government backing, but the execution and implementation will most likely be local, as reintegration increasingly turns into reconstruction and development. In Colombia in particular there must be careful attention paid to other war-affected groups, such as the paramilitaries, to ensure that they are not treated unfairly or resentment is caused within the wider community. The reintegration and reconciliation of ex-combatants must therefore be part of wider recovery strategies for all war-affected populations, but

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\textsuperscript{21} García Durán, \textit{Colombia: Challenges and Dilemmas in the Search for Peace}, 1.
\textsuperscript{22} IDDRS 4.30 Social and Economic Reintegration, 57.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
with roughly three large groups requiring reintegration benefits, the balancing act will be difficult.

An important part of reintegration and reconciliation is recognizing the entirety of the DDR population. A key problem in the current DDR process of the paramilitaries is the lack of gender-specific programs despite the fact that women account for 9 percent of the population participating in collective demobilization, 26 percent of minors in the reinsertion programs, and 12 percent of the individually demobilized.²⁴ Two girls aged 14 and 15 were reported to have been forcibly recruited in Nariño in December 2006.²⁵ Armed groups on all sides of the conflict recruit girls through either through seduction and deceit, or in many cases, forcibly hold girls under threat of violence to their families or themselves. Girls were subjected to sexual abuse including rape and forced abortions.²⁶ This leaves women vulnerable to a whole host of issues that are not well addressed in the paramilitary DDR. Ironically with the leftist guerillas, female ex-combatants often report feeling empowered by war, making a return to civilian life in a patriarchal society particularly difficult for them. No matter the issue, women and girls were given neither a voice nor a vote in the peace negotiations up until this point.


²⁶Ibid.
In addition to women and girls there is the issue of minors, and how best to reintegrate them. Similarly to the paramilitaries, children were forcibly recruited by the FARC or joined up for lack of alternatives in a context of rural poverty. Within the ranks of the FARC and the ELN there are individuals who were born into the movement. Throughout their lives they acted as combatants, laid explosives, ferried supplies, carried messages and served as guides. Child recruitment by the FARC was recorded in at least eight departments, including Arauca, Cauca and Putumayo.\textsuperscript{27} The ELN pledged in 1998 to stop child recruitment, on signing the Puerta del Cielo accord in Germany.\textsuperscript{28} Despite this pledge, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights continued to receive some reports of recruitment of children by the ELN in Arauca and other parts of the country.\textsuperscript{29} More than 50 children demobilized in 2005 and 2006 said that they had been in the ranks of the ELN, demonstrating that even with international agreements there will be children requiring special attention from the DDR plan.

Child soldiers from the FARC and ELN, many of whom came from rural areas and enlisted voluntarily for economic reasons, experienced particular difficulties adapting to life in the cities where the centers were located. They were separated from family, friends and community support systems, and faced the additional challenge of discrimination by the population. The Colombian government can again learn from the

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
current DDR process with the paramilitaries. Child soldiers demobilizing from the AUC presented greater psychological and behavioral problems, including drug addiction.\(^{30}\) In light of this evidence, special care must be taken to reintegrating children back into the Colombian society. Returning children should initially receive medical attention and counseling at a "transition home". Then they will require transfer to specialized institutional care centers for adolescents up to the age of 18 for nine to 12 months in preparation for "reintegration".\(^{31}\)

The program should aim to reunite children with their families or in the cases they can, place them in a foster home. In practice, security concerns and the risk of re-recruitment made it impossible for many child soldiers to return to their families in areas affected by the armed conflict. Foster care presents a major challenge, with families fearful of being targeted by the armed groups. The stereotype of child soldiers, frequently perceived as violent and threatening, mean that families are often reluctant to receive former child soldiers. Those leaving the specialized care centers moved either to youth homes or youth protection facilities for those with special protection problems.

The proper planning now, based on the lessons learned from the paramilitary DDR process, gives Colombia the edge it needs to accomplish the challenging DDR of the FARC, the ELN and other guerilla groups in Colombia. Some positive steps are

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
being made in that direction. In response to the recent victories against the FARC, the government has engaged in outreach campaigns to the FARC and other guerillas. The campaigns offer ex-combatants education, training and rewards for information about arms stashes and commanders. “Guerrilla, demobilize” say the adverts. “Colombia and your family are waiting for you.”

Daringly Ingrid Betancourt, former hostage, participated in the campaign boldly calling out to the FARC, “Hey, guerrillas! Take the decision to demobilize now,” Betancourt urges. “We guarantee you a better life; you'll recover your family, your honor, your liberty... I want you to recover your liberty as I recovered mine.” Another of the fliers shows a picture of Betancourt walking to freedom, and the powerful words, “Guerrilla, you too can be free.”

As we will find out in the next Chapter, strangely enough, Uribe may find his most powerful ally in the most unlikely place, in the neighboring ruler of Venezuela Hugo Chávez. As stated earlier this long-time supporter of the FARC has recently reversed his position, asking the FARC to abandon their “revolutionary” campaign in Colombia. This change in stance as well as the strength of his connection with the FARC may make Chávez a strangely suitable third party negotiator for dealing with the FARC and the ELN. Chávez certainly would relish the opportunity to stand on the world stage and take credit for something as historic as the negotiation to the end of the

32 Rory Carroll and Matthew Bristow, Colombia: Pinned Down in their Jungle Lairs, Wounded FARC Face Long War's End, 1.

longest civil conflict in history. The FARC most likely still sees Chávez as a relatively neutral figure, and would most likely place trust in him before placing trust in the Colombian government. Even the United States supports President Chávez’s possible role as an arbitrator.\(^{34}\) Other local regional and international leaders such as Brazil have already offered their assistance in the DDR process.\(^{35}\) International perspectives can be of great value in finding options to tackle the most controversial and unresolved issues, such as ceasefires, humanitarian accords, demilitarized zones, military participation at the negotiating table, confidentiality and/or the transparency of the process, procedures and decision-making.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{36}\) García Durán, *Colombia: Challenges and Dilemmas in the Search for Peace*, 2.
CHAPTER 6: US ROLE IN COLOMBIA

The relationship between the U.S. and Colombia has deep roots, beginning as far back as 1822, when the U.S. was among the first nations to establish a resident diplomatic mission.¹ U.S. Colombian relations progressed steadily until World War II, when U.S. involvement changed and attention to Colombia increased. As an example of the increased interest over the course of the 20th century, the U.S. provided Colombia with over $3.6 billion in economic and military assistance.² By the end of the 20th century Colombia was the third largest recipient of U.S. security aid after Israel and Egypt.³ U.S. interests in Colombia address a wide range; peace and regional stability; democracy, human rights, the rule of law, socio-economic development and natural resources.⁴ However, U.S. policy in Colombia has mainly pursued three targeted efforts; counter-Communist, counter-narcotics, and then counter-terrorism. Each of these policies was intended to make Colombia a firm ground for democracy, development, and stability in a troubled region. The first major U.S. intervention began in the 1960s, moving against communist revolutionaries in Colombia under Plan __________________

¹ Colombia-Background Note, 1.


This action led directly to the creation of the FARC and the ELN which have been the focus of first U.S. counter-narcotics policies during the 1970 and 80s, then as the focus of counter-terrorist operations after September 11th.

Colombia is a strategically important country for the United States. It is South America's fourth largest country in area and the second largest in population. It is the only South American country with port access to both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and it is contiguous to the Caribbean basin, Central America, Venezuela, Panama and the Canal. Additionally, Colombia has some of the largest untapped petroleum reserves in the Western Hemisphere. All of these give Colombia geo-political importance to the United States as a critical component of the Latin American “backyard”.

U.S. interest in Colombia began to evolve in 1958 when President Eisenhower and CIA Director Allen Dulles sent a special team to evaluate conditions in Colombia after more than 200,000 people died in a decade-long conflict known as La Violencia. The study properly identified some of the key problems in Colombia: that its predilection for violence, the absence of state authority in rural areas, vastly inequitable land distribution, and widespread lawlessness and poverty put Colombia at


6 Ibid.

risk of political upheaval. This alarmed U.S. policy makers, who were concerned that the turmoil would lead to a Communist or left-leaning governments more friendly to the Soviet Union. U.S. policy at the time was to maintain access to strategic natural resources in Latin America to increase advantage against the Soviets.

It was believed both in Colombia and in the U.S. that the deteriorating conditions in Colombia, listed in the survey team’s report, created a growing Communist guerrilla insurgency. At the time these forces received propaganda support from the Colombian Communist Party, the Fedepetrol Union, Communist Youth and other extremists groups. The U.S. and the Colombian government believed this guerilla insurgency could potentially topple the pro-American Colombian government, and in response the later administration of John F. Kennedy initiated the Latin American Security Operation (Plan LASO), which actively targeted growing Communist movements all over Latin America., which were on the rise after the success of the Cuban Revolution.

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11 Samia Montalvo, "Colombia Paramilitaries, Drug Trafficking and U.S. Policy in Colombia," Dollars and Sense, July/August, 2000, 1,
Plan LASO in Colombia began with the recommendations from the U.S. survey team, which included a comprehensive nation-building package.\textsuperscript{12} This original plan dealt with the deep-seeded issues in Colombia, with aid to strengthen its judiciary and significant land reform.\textsuperscript{13} Unfortunately U.S. and Colombian policy makers focused most of their efforts on eliminating the growing leftist guerilla forces, numbering between 1,200 and 2,000 members.\textsuperscript{14} In this regard, Plan LASO merely added on to previous U.S. military assistance to Colombia, which had already begun as early 1946, in the form of military surplus equipment supplied to the Colombian army. This shifted Plan LASO’s primary goal away from comprehensive national reform to specifically targeting Communist military and social infrastructure in the Tolima Department of southern Colombia. This included military training for small groups of civilians throughout Colombia as informants and security personnel in order to give aid in counterinsurgency operations and to establish a permanent citizen militia and intelligence network.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Sweig, Challenges for U.S. Policy Toward Colombia: Is Plan Colombia Working--the Regional Dimensions?, 1.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

After the end of Plan LASO, U.S. policy in Colombia in the 1980s evolved from the Cold War anti-Communist policies to new anti-narcotics policies in the War on Drugs. Despite the “new” war, interest and policies in Colombia remained remarkably similar. Economic interest in Colombia was even stronger; by 1982 total assets of U.S. firms in Colombia amounted to $4.2 billion. The War on Drugs was a key U.S. domestic policy at the time as well. Politicians of both parties believed that they would receive popular support at home if they were tough on drugs abroad. Key allies in the U.S. military, such as the U.S. Southern Command, also supported the War on Drugs. These commanders felt they were losing their raison d'etre for staying involved in the Latin American region. Summed up aptly by one former Army Commander “[The War on Drugs], it's the only war we've got.”

Adding fuel to the growing fires for intervention were significant increases in domestic consumption of illegal substances in the U.S., as well as a growth in crime figures associated with drug use. In April 1986, President Reagan, through National Security Decision Directive 221, declared that illicit drugs constituted a lethal threat to


17 Coletta Youngers, "Into the Quagmire: Colombia and the War on Drugs," Foreign Policy in Focus (May 2, 2000), (accessed 11/9/2008).

18 Ibid.

U.S. national security.\footnote{20} Directive 221, similarly to Plan LASO, led directly to the consequent militarization of U.S. anti-drug strategy. Supply-side policies such as interdiction, crop fumigation and eradication, and penalization of the traffic, distribution and consumption of narcotics, began to receive greater priority than demand-side domestic policies such as rehabilitation and education.\footnote{21}

Unfortunately much like the FARC, the drug problem historically started much earlier in the 1960s, where the cultivation and shipment of marijuana began as a consequence of the increased poverty in Colombia.\footnote{22} Soon after that, 70 percent of the marijuana that came into the U.S. was grown in Colombia.\footnote{23} As early as 1974, a small number of U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agents were training Colombian police to crack down on the growers and stop trafficking in Bogota.\footnote{24} Despite the initial joint efforts, the drug cartels continued to grow in power and audacity. On December 13, 1976, a double agent drug informer working for the Colombian cartels

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{20} Arlene B. Tickner, \textit{U.S. Foreign Policy in Colombia: “Bizzare Side Effects of the War on Drugs.”} (Democracy and Human Rights in Colombia: Universidad de Los Andes, 2007), 1, \url{http://kellogg.nd.edu/events/pdfs/Tickner.pdf} (accessed 11/10/08).
  \item \footnote{21} Ibid.
  \item \footnote{23} Ibid.
  \item \footnote{24} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
}
walked into DEA headquarters in Bogota and gunned down a special agent. This was the first official U.S. casualty of the drug war in Colombia.\textsuperscript{25}

All of the above led to an increase of diplomatic pressure on Colombia to clean up the corruption that drug money was causing within the ranks of the national police and the government bureaucracy. As the cocaine industry exploded in the late 1970's and early '80s, the money flowed to loosely organized cartels that used the cash to buy off or threaten officials who stood in their way.\textsuperscript{26} “The system was extremely effective; in the 1980’s Colombia produced 90% of the world’s cocaine and 70% of U.S. heroin.\textsuperscript{27} The Medellin Cartel achieved almost total control by specifically monopolizing the market on refining the coca plant into cocaine, as opposed to growing the coca plant themselves.\textsuperscript{28} This made Colombia the “hub” of drug-trafficking for the majority of South America.

Desperate for financing, the FARC, the ELN and other insurgent groups began to rely increasingly on drugs and the drug trade to finance their operations.\textsuperscript{29} The dramatic increase in coca cultivation in southern Colombia, a FARC stronghold since

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{28} Serafino, \textit{Colombia: Conditions and U.S. Policy Options}, 1-34.

\textsuperscript{29} Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, \textit{The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance}: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 317.
the 1960s, coincided with the organization’s strategic effort to increase its military capabilities in the mid-1990s. Over half of the FARC’s income comes from “taxes” on cocaine and other drugs. U.S. State Department officials used arrests of individuals allegedly linked with FARC in Mexico and Brazil to create the label of “narco-guerrillas” and to explain the integration of Colombia’s drug cartels and the leftist guerrillas.

There was almost constant diplomatic struggle between the U.S. and the Colombian government, as well as a national debate, over sending drug kingpins and narco-guerillas to the U.S. to face trial, rather than allowing corrupt courts in Colombia to try them. The U.S. consistently insisted on institutional measures for the extradition of drug traffickers and human rights violators to the United States. As an example, the U.S. government signed the U.S.-Colombian Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance on August 20, 1982. The Treaty ensured cooperation in a range of


32 Winifred Tate, "Colombia’s Role in International Drug Industry," Foreign Policy in Focus 4, no. 30 (June, 2001), (accessed 11/9/2008).

33 Banville, Colombia’s Civil War: U.S. Role, 4.

34 Ibid.

criminal and judicial issues pertaining to illicit drug trafficking. Continuing the trend towards militarization, this also included an additional U.S. $13.2 million to support various Colombian counter-narcotics efforts including the supply and maintenance of helicopters and for training personnel in the field of narcotics interdiction.\footnote{Ibid.}

There was a lull in U.S. Colombian relations in the late 90s. However, the War on Drugs was too important to U.S. politics and the U.S. began new assistance to Colombia in the form of more militarized counter-narcotics operations. President Clinton’s $1.3 billion “emergency” counter-narcotics package made Colombia the third-largest recipient of U.S. security assistance in the world.\footnote{Tate, \textit{Colombia’s Role in International Drug Industry}, 11/9/2008.} The money was limited to equipping and training three Colombian army battalions to provide ground support for aerial herbicide campaigns.\footnote{Ibid.} The Colombian government, in turn, authorized the shooting down of planes transporting narcotics to the U.S. and added 10,000 soldiers to southern Colombia in an attempt to eliminate the cultivation and transportation of marijuana.\footnote{Ibid.} This militarization initially began as part of the War on Drugs, but post-9/11 would soon become overwhelmed by a new conflict, the War on Terror.
Plan Colombia was initially introduced by former Colombian president Andres Pastrana (1998-2002), as a national development strategy originally likened to the Marshall Plan.\textsuperscript{40} It accurately targeted the growing violence and illicit crop cultivation in Colombia as symptoms of deeper issues of poverty, exclusion, and social and economic inequities.\textsuperscript{41} By 1999, Colombia’s unemployment rate had risen to a historic high of 20\% and GDP had plummeted.\textsuperscript{42} July 13, 2000 marked the beginning of the U.S. led shift from peace and social investment to security.\textsuperscript{43} U.S. policymakers encouraged the Colombians to shift the bulk of the proposed aid away from development aid toward military aid and police training.\textsuperscript{44} The United States promised an initial $1.3 billion; $250 million to buy planes and equipment for U.S. agencies, and another $860 million in other aid for Colombia.\textsuperscript{45} Some 80\% of this aid went to the military and police for counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, and oil pipeline protection.\textsuperscript{46}


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
Concern about how the conflict in the Middle East might affect U.S. oil supplies increased the importance of protecting oil reserves in key countries in Latin America. More than 20 U.S. based companies share $178 million per year in contracts in Colombia alone. In 2001, 20 percent of U.S. oil imports came from Colombia and neighbors Venezuela and Ecuador. Plan Colombia particularly included specific training to Colombian soldiers in Arauca province to protect the Cano-Limon oil pipeline from being bombed by the now labeled “narco-terrorists.”

Plan Colombia gained even more momentum under Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe. Uribe provided unequivocal backing for the U.S. War on Terror and made the important step of re-framing the long-term internal armed conflict in Columbia as the problem of a state besieged by terrorists. In April 2003 the U.S. Congress granted Colombia an additional $105 million under the emergency supplemental bill for the War in Iraq, specifically because the conflict in Colombia was now a part the larger War on Terror. The U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, Anne Patterson described the uniting of the two causes. “The U.S. strategy is to give the


50 Bouvier, Evaluating U.S. Policy in Colombia, 1.

Colombian government the tools to combat terrorism and narco-trafficking, two struggles that have become one. To fight against narco-trafficking and terrorism, it is necessary to attack all the links of the chain simultaneously.”

Dialog in the United States continued to reflect the shift of U.S. policy from narco-trafficker to narco-terrorist. U.S. Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL), chair of the powerful House International Relations Committee, said of Colombia that “three hours by plane from Miami, we face a potential breeding ground for international terror equaled perhaps only by Afghanistan.” Former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Curtis Kamman stated that “the terrorists who operate in Colombia have not explicitly declared the United States to be their target. But their political and economic objectives are incompatible with our values, and they could ultimately represent a force of evil no less troublesome than al Qaeda.” The language for Plan Colombia stated clearly that the objectives of U.S. funding focused on helping the Colombian military “regain control and increase eradication activities in the southern coca growing region currently dominated by narco-traffickers and the FARC insurgents.” The transformation of Plan Colombia was complete when the same leftist groups that Plan LASO targeted decades before and the chief adversaries of the Drug War, the


54 Ibid.

55 Bouvier, Evaluating U.S. Policy in Colombia, 1.

Unfortunately the largely military solutions of Plan Colombia have yet to defeat the terrorist organizations they target, or reduce the drug trade that they profit from. Attacking local supply without addressing demand guarantees that drug markets and drug sales will continue, at an even greater profit. Coca growers and narco-traffickers will simply move to another area momentarily untargeted the Colombian government. With more raids and arrests, this new market will collapse too and move again, and again and again. It's a mobile supply base -- Peru to Bolivia to Colombia – all made possible by unchanging demand. The future of U.S. Policy in Colombia requires a subtle shift away from supply-side policies so prevalent since the 1908s. A 1994 RAND study found that investing $34 million in treatment reduces cocaine use as much as spending $783 million for foreign source country programs (e.g., spraying) or $366 million for interdiction.\footnote{Daniel Christman and John G. Heimann, "Andean Policy Falls Short of Region's Needs," Miami Herald, the (FL), March 26, 2004, http://www.cfr.org/publication/6890/andean_policy_falls_short_of_regions_needs.html?breadcrumb=/bios/5349/john_g_heimann (accessed 5/10/2009).}

There has been some recognition of the role of U.S. demand for narcotics in early 2009. Secretary of State Clinton frankly accepted US responsibility for drug related violence, saying that the previous decades of US anti-drug policies have been a failure and that US demand for drugs drove the trade. “Clearly what we’ve been doing
has not worked…our insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade,”

Clinton was in Mexico, another Latin American country affected by narcotics violence. Importantly this visit came in the context of many nations calling for change in US prohibitionist drug policies. In March of 2009, former presidents of Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico called on the US to radically reassess its drug policies. U.S. policy in Colombia, just like Colombian policy, is achieving certain goals, but in order to get at a lasting peace, there must be substantive changes.

Ironically, the future of U.S. policy in Colombia lies in the past. U.S. and Colombian policy makers may find that counter-terrorism is an understatement, and the original 1960s policy of counter-insurgency might be better suited. Unlike other second-tier War on Terror countries like the Philippines, Georgia or Yemen, where the terrorist enemy is a few dozen or a few hundred, Colombia’s terrorist groups are real armies with troops still numbering in the thousands. As we will explore in Chapter 5, full military defeat of the guerilla forces in Colombia is unlikely. Dealing with the FARC, the ELN and other insurgent groups in Colombia will require a complex disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) strategy in order to seize the advantage of this historic moment. U.S.-backed policies combined with Democratic Security have provided important stability in the country, but as we will see in the next


59 Ingrid Vaicius and Adam Isacson, ”The "War on Drugs" Meets the "War on Terror”,“ The Center for International Policy's Colombia Program: International Policy Report (February 2003), (accessed 11/9/2008).
Chapters, it will not be enough if the government doesn’t complete the difficult R of reintegration of the first the paramilitaries, then FARC and the ELN. Only then can the Colombian government prevent the cycle of violence from recurring, and encourage an atmosphere of healing and reconciliation.
CHAPTER 7: REGIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

In order to take advantage of this historic moment Colombia must work with regional as well as international partners to help manage the conflict in Colombia. This means the Colombian government must promptly incorporate its current conflict management strategies into a regional and international conflict management strategy that would allow for working relations with its neighbor states of Ecuador and Venezuela and This necessitates a direct dialogue with inflammatory figures like Hugo Chavez, testing already strained relations with Ecuador, and using regional leaders like Brazil as interlocutors and intermediaries. Additionally it means utilizing an already strong relationship with the United States, and bringing in international partners like the U.N. and the EU, all of whom have some stake, no matter how small, in resolving the conflict in Colombia.

As in many instances, the hope for Colombia’s future lies in its past. Andrés Pastrana, the original creator of Plan Colombia, understood the conflict in Colombia was a threat to the peace and security of the region and hemisphere. Colombia faced the increased internationalization of the conflict and Pastrana recognized that it needed an international solution. Pastrana’s proposal, “Peace Diplomacy” invited the international community to understand and cooperate in finding solutions to problems resulting from both the causes and consequences of the armed conflict. During the negotiations from 7 January 1999 - 28 February 2002, an active international presence

served to safeguard the continuity and development of this difficult process, supporting a political solution to the conflict.\textsuperscript{2} The international community pressured Colombia’s various armed actors, declaring that their war tactics and financing by drugs, extortion and kidnapping disregarded agreed multilateral principles.\textsuperscript{3} Most importantly they also provided technical and financial assistance to the negotiations and to conflict reduction projects. Colombian society, the government, and the international community declared that the peace process had to include the defense of human rights and international humanitarian law.\textsuperscript{4} Notably many of the same key points are still required today.

As far back as 1998 there was growing support for efforts to obtain financial resources for peacemaking, in a similar form to the hugely successful fund-raising for the Central American peace processes.\textsuperscript{5} In response to a request by the Presidents of Central America in 1998, the UN Secretary General proposed a Special Coordination Plan (PEC) to support peace efforts in Central America, approved by consensus by an extraordinary Assembly of the United Nations. This plan committed $2 billion to debt relief, $2.2 billion for special projects for the internally displaced, the reconstruction of

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{4} Ocampo, \textit{Colombia: The Role of the International Community in Colombia}, 7.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
sub-regional integration, institutional strengthening and democratization. The UNDP implemented the Plan over a five-year period and to this day is still considered an excellent model of international cooperation.

Additional steps towards internationalizing the solution included the formation of an organization called The Group of Friends for Peace in Colombia and the appointment of a Special adviser to the UN Secretary General. The Group of Friends for Peace in Colombia comprised 26 friendly nations and the Special Delegates of UN Secretary General and the European Commission. The group designated a smaller ‘Facilitating Commission’ of ten nations, with one representative each from Canada, Cuba, Spain, France, Italy, México, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Venezuela. The Commission’s role was to coordinate meetings with the wider group and stimulate their cooperation across the many different activities required to bring peace to Colombia. The Commission worked with diligence, supporting the process as a neutral observer, but in key moments taking up the functions of facilitator and even mediator. Their representatives were always present in the talks as facilitators and actively participated in numerous meetings in Colombia. The Group of Friends offered

6 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ocampo, Colombia: The Role of the International Community in Colombia, 8.
technical assistance on crucial issues such as the regulation of the meeting zone in the Sur de Bolívar, and worked in concert with the UN.\textsuperscript{10}

The UN has played a prominent role in Colombia since 1999 when the UN Secretary General named a special adviser for Colombia, Jan Egeland.\textsuperscript{11} Despite its importance the UN has had trouble clarifying its role in the peace negotiations with both the FARC and the ELN. During the Pastrana administration, both parties accepted UN intervention, offering a semi-formal role that was neither facilitation nor mediation.\textsuperscript{12} This lack of definition meant that the special adviser’s many efforts were at times ignored during the various breakdowns in the negotiations. Nonetheless, without this participation the negotiations would probably have been more short-lived and current recognition of the need for international presence in the processes would not have been possible.

During this period there were also meetings of a group of potential donors (the EU, Norway, USA, Canada and Japan) under the banner of the Support Group to the Peace Process, in Madrid (July 2000), Bogotá (October 2000) and Brussels (April 2001).\textsuperscript{13} During this time the EU presented an aid package equivalent to $330mil Euro

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\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Ibid.}
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\textsuperscript{12} Ocampo, \textit{Colombia: The Role of the International Community in Colombia}, 10.
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\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}
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over a five-year period, to be used according to four principal strategies: economic and social regeneration, institution strengthening and social development, the peace process and the fight against drugs. They also announced that $45mil Euro of funding would support projects like the ‘peace laboratory’ in Magdalena Medio.\textsuperscript{14} The EU has also insisted that the war against drugs must be tackled by both the producers and the consumers.\textsuperscript{15} The EU favored the manual eradication of illicit crops, and continues to supports plans for alternative income-generation methods and to addressing social needs.\textsuperscript{16}

The Support Group had limited success in its principal objective of securing the support of other important donors for Plan Colombia, with the exception of some bilateral promises from the EU, Japan and Spain. Due to the paralysis of the peace negotiations, the Group as a whole has not met again but the EU and Canada have followed the United States’ example in declaring the FARC and the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC) terrorist organizations, deepening their international isolation.\textsuperscript{17} They have also exerted constant pressure for the release of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} "The European Union and Colombia: An Alternative Approach," \textit{Peace Research Center - Centro De Investigación Para La Paz} (October, 2004), 1, \url{www.cipresearch.fuhem.es/pazyseguridad/docs/DocEstrategico-Ingles.pdf}.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
kidnap victims, most notably in the case of former senator and presidential candidate Ingrid Betancur.\(^\text{18}\)

Despite his unwillingness to engage in dialogue with the FARC without a unilateral ceasefire, President Uribe did initially ask the UN to intervene in the Colombian armed conflict on the day he took office, and asked for the presence of UN peacekeepers to protect the displaced population from the inclemency of war.\(^\text{19}\) This was subsequently modified to a request for a Civil Accompaniment Commission to assist in the return of internally displaced persons to their place of origin. He also wanted to use such a mechanism to verify the negotiation process initiated with the AUC. \(^\text{20}\)

The UN has maintained contact with the FARC for the purpose of monitoring and potentially creating a formal process. UN sponsored talks haven’t made much headway because of UN demands that it take place outside Colombia (perhaps in Brazil), without the presence of other actors and without excessive publicity.\(^\text{21}\) Despite refusing the UN’s offer to mediate, the FARC sent an open letter to the UN asking for


an opportunity to make its case.\textsuperscript{22} It is not inconceivable that the UN could begin again to ‘facilitate’ the resolution of the armed conflict in Colombia if requested and accepted by the parties as the UN Charter allows.

At a meeting in London on 9–10 July 2003 attended by ten governments and six organizations, including the UN, EU, and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) the various parties all agreed on a need to support the UN’s work in Colombia and its office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.\textsuperscript{23} Participants also expressed full support for the Colombian government’s fight against violence and drugs, the search for a negotiated solution to the internal conflict, and the important role played by Colombian civil society. At the same time, donor countries expressed their concern regarding the humanitarian crisis, forced displacements and the serious human rights and International Humanitarian Law situation. They offered to reorient their cooperation programs and continue discussions in the next conference on donor coordination.\textsuperscript{24}

Following this example, with the support of the IDB, the Colombian government developed a project estimated at US$3 billion. It was to be administrated by the Peace Investment Fund and implemented over a three-year period serving as the “Bank of the Process,” providing alternative development to facilitate the eradication

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
of drug-crops and assisting the 1.5 million internally displaced people.\textsuperscript{25} The Colombian contribution of US$1.2 billion was raised through a special tax. However, the Colombian government, with the support of the US, subsequently included the need to strengthen Colombia security forces in this initiative.\textsuperscript{26} Uribe believed that modernization was a necessity in order to recover the monopoly of force for the rule of law, the legitimization of the armed forces and the success of negotiations through a new balance of military power. This led directly to the birth of Plan Colombia, which generated a strong reaction from the rest of the International Community, because of the weight of US military aid to Colombia, the Andean Region and the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{27}

The US converted Colombia into an issue of national and regional security, epicenter of the war on drugs at the global level. Notably only US$323 million was dedicated to non-security objectives.\textsuperscript{28} Following this, a three-year extension of the Andean Trade Preferences was also achieved, and the Andean Trade Promotion Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA) was passed in recognition of the antinarcotics effort. With regard to the treatment of the drugs trade and its influence on the internal armed conflict, the European Union (EU) and US applied clearly different criteria, with

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\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.


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obvious consequences in the economic, social and political domains. The EU and other nations refused to contribute to the military budget and instead directed its support to the defense of human rights and International Humanitarian Law, and initiatives aimed at supporting the internally displaced and alternative development.  

Since 11 September 2001, the approach to terrorism in the Colombian context has changed in emphasis, particularly with regard to US assistance and has stunted what was a promising start to international assistance. The US, an important partner, is one of few who has accepted that its military aid be used not only in the war against drugs but also in combating the FARC and the AUC. Other nations, such as the EU, refuse to give any aid that might be used for security or military purposes.  

Unfortunately, while Uribe was strengthening Colombia’s formal security structure, some of his most successful policies to boost security have generated widespread international controversy. For example, the creation of a network of more than one million civilian collaborators and informants who are paid to provide information about the insurgents. This has raised concerns that the collaborators may use their power to pursue personal vendettas and that such a system undermines community trust.

29 Ocampo, Colombia: The Role of the International Community in Colombia, 4.

30 Ibid.

31 Colombia: President Uribe's Democratic Security, 1.
Initially through executive decree and subsequently through anti-terrorist and other proposed legislation, Uribe has begun to grant the military a range of police powers, with neither judicial approval nor oversight, limiting individual civil liberties in the process.\textsuperscript{32} Other policies such as the policy of semi-trained peasant militia force whose members operate in their home communities create the potential for arbitrary action. Without tight control these peasant militias are little better than the paramilitary groups they are trying to replace. These policies have the potential to diminish the already damaged credibility of the government’s appeal for international support and regional cooperation and threaten to cloud somewhat the legitimacy of its actions against the illegal armed groups. This brings us back to our critical historical moment, and how Colombia can re-galvanize the international community to help put an end to the conflict in Colombia for good.

In a conflict like the Colombian one, in a moment like the present, a solution is unlikely without the presence of the international community, both nation-states and international organizations. The “carrot” of involving international organizations and states is obvious. Their participation can be critical in each of the distinct phases of a peace process including DDR. From the early contacts between the parties to create the necessary conditions for dialogue, to helping the parties during the negotiations, witnessing the signing of accords, verifying their implementation and accompanying the national reconstruction and consolidation phase. The powers of international

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.
players have been seen everywhere from Central America to Eastern Europe. The participation of the international community will be essential in the future administration of the peace to guarantee compliance with and the sustainability of the agreements.

The most important “stick” needed to pressure the international community is the evidence that the narcotics trade is a multinational issue that requires multilateral initiatives. The eradication of illicit crops on a regional level is vital in cutting off sources of finance from the guerrillas and paramilitaries. While success can be achieved through initiatives that combine crop eradication with alternative development, it must also be combined with efforts outside Colombia to reduce levels of consumption, end the trade of chemicals and halt the money-laundering activities taking place in rich countries (the majority of whom are members of the EU).

After the introduction of Plan Colombia, the overwhelming presence of the U.S., and the principle of Democratic Security, international support for the conflict has trailed off. This is a mistake that must be remedied soonest in order to give Colombia the greatest chance to take advantage of the opportunities present in the conflict now. In the Colombian context both the government and the FARC have been

33 Ocampo, Colombia: The Role of the International Community in Colombia. 6.


fairly reluctant to accept greater social and international participation in the process. As Augusto Ramírez Ocampo illustrates in his article, it is necessary to recall the significant impact that international participation has had until now (the UN, the Friends of the Process, neighbouring countries, etc.). However, it is equally important to recognize it would be very difficult for Colombia to embark on any peace process without the approval of the US government. Simply put there is little doubt that the U.S. will be involved in Colombia for the foreseeable future, and involved in a powerful way. Most efforts in the international arena will involve both the U.S. and Colombia working in concert on the world stage.

Given the history and the foundations of international support, when countries are unwilling to provide aid for security purposes, the Colombian government must ensure that aid can be used for other purposes. For example international and regional donors could provide technical, financial and communication aid to the Colombian government and civil society to design, fund and implement the comprehensive national rural development strategy to reduce rural poverty. This critical component of the next step of the Colombian peace process should be

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37 García Durán, Colombia: Challenges and Dilemmas in the Search for Peace, 5.


39 Ocampo, Colombia: The Role of the International Community in Colombia, 4.
centerpiece of international efforts in Colombia and be implemented incrementally as security conditions permit.

The first step the Colombian government and the U.S. must take is establishing and maintaining the credibility of the Colombian government. Despite the successes of Plan Colombia, the Colombian government still suffers from a corrupt reputation, and an association with crooked paramilitaries.\(^\text{40}\) This hinders other nations ability to lend aid to Colombia, as they fear that their funding, supplies or other forms of assistance will end up in the next human rights scandal in Colombia. The Colombian government must declare that any security assistance be conditioned on respect for human rights, measures to end impunity, and the severing of remaining linkages between security forces and the paramilitaries. Colombia has already taken steps, but must continue to insist that demobilization of the paramilitaries and the insurgents adhere to international human rights standards, ensuring that those who were responsible for crimes against humanity neither escape jail nor are permitted to retain land or other assets obtained through murder, intimidation or other illegal action.\(^\text{41}\)

An excellent step towards establishing the Colombian’s government’s integrity is to amend the Democratic Security Policy (DSP) to incorporate both a strategy to reinforce the judiciary and the rule of law and a high priority development initiative.

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\(^{41}\) Colombia: President Uribe's Democratic Security, 2.
that includes a sustainable land reform program to reduce rural poverty. Other needs are to introduce civilian control and Congressional oversight of the informants program and establish the National Defense Council to guarantee effective civilian-military cooperation in security policy. Continue to improve the capabilities and professionalism of the armed forces and conduct military operations aimed at denying territorial control and sanctuary to illegal forces. Strengthen fundamental rights by putting an end to arbitrary detentions and house arrests based on evidence “provided by informants”.

The next step is bringing in regional partners, and while a seemingly obvious step, it is challenging, due to the neighborhood. Adjacent countries are those most obviously affected by the conflict in Colombia and have increasingly voiced concerns about the cross-border effects of the conflict. Ecuador, for example, has complained for years of previous Colombian Army incursions when hunting FARC camps just over the border in Ecuador. Additionally Ecuador and Venezuela both complain that Colombia's US-funded aerial fumigation of drug crops along the border destroys legal crops on their side of the border. In addition, Ecuador has taken in as many as 250,000 Colombian refugees, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, putting a strain on its health and social services.


43 Ibid.
corridor for illegal narcotics trafficking, as well as a destination for injured guerrillas and paramilitaries requiring hospital treatment.\textsuperscript{44} Brazil, and to a lesser degree Peru have experienced problems relating to the drug trade and local guerrilla activity. In May 2003, the Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, composed of all Latin American countries, the President of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Haiti called on the UN Secretary General to use his good offices to ‘promote with rigor a peace process in Colombia’, exhorting the guerrilla movements to engage in dialogue. This call was supported in June by the OAS member states’ meeting in the XXXIII session of the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{45}

Neither Colombia nor Ecuador need a repeat of the 2007 incident in which Colombian troops crossed Ecuador’s borders after the FARC troops stationed there.\textsuperscript{46} While that strike dealt an unprecedented blow to the insurgents, it prompted the most serious diplomatic and political crisis between Colombia and Venezuela and Ecuador in many years. Chávez broke relations and ordered tanks and fighter aircraft to the border.\textsuperscript{47} Ecuador (as well as Nicaragua) also severed diplomatic ties and denounced the Uribe government for violating its territory, both at the OAS and during the summit


\textsuperscript{45} Ocampo, \textit{Colombia: The Role of the International Community in Colombia}, 1.

\textsuperscript{46} Brodzinsky, \textit{On Ecuador’s Border, FARC Rebels Visit often}, 1-1.

of the Río Group in Santo Domingo on 7 March. With U.S. support, Bogotá justified its action as self-defense against a terrorist group attacking it from neighboring states. Despite that defense, it further isolated Colombia and the U.S., as the resolutions passed by the OAS on 5 March 2008, the Río Group on 7 March and OAS foreign ministers on 17 March showed. The main thrust of those resolutions was unequivocally “to reject the incursion by Colombian military forces and police personnel.” These kinds of incidents can easily lead to potentially damaging and unnecessary interstate conflict that will at best distract, and at worst derail the DDR process.

Uribe and Colombia will face their greatest challenge in dealing with Venezuela and it’s eccentric dictator, Hugo Chavez. Chávez can prove that his recent statement on the diminished relevance of the FARC’s guerrilla war was more than just a publicity stunt on his part (an accusation which Washington is likely to make) by committing a portion of his country’s resources to the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program in Colombia. Such assistance might begin by an offer to house the entire guerrilla force in newly established barracks scattered across under-populated areas of his country. The reasons for putting geographical distance between the FARC and their long-favored jungle hideouts are three-fold and build on

48 Ibid.

49 Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off, 1-12.

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lessons learned during the catastrophic failure of Colombian President Pastrana's demilitarized zone.\(^{50}\)

First, Venezuelan-located FARC camp sites would serve as a way to prevent the demobilizing guerrilla fighters from becoming easy targets for political assassination. Second, it would remove the FARC's home field advantage and create transparency that would insure that the guerrilla army does not preach negotiation and go through the motions of demobilization all the while continuing to strengthen its military posture. Additionally, it would create a physical barrier between the former combatants and cocaine production labs, which, in recent years, have been among the main sources of the guerrilla army's funding. Lastly and perhaps most importantly it would distance the FARC from the victims of their violence, helping to reduce the opportunities of reprisal from angry Colombians. Overall, Venezuela’s support could allow Colombian forces the critical time and space required to handle some the touchiest parts of the DDR strategy.

The physical housing of the guerrillas would comprise just one component of a larger, more comprehensive process. Following the United Nation's Integrated DDR Standards, issued in 2005, Chávez could be called upon to provide funding for the necessary resources to initiate the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs. Responsible arms management, processing of former military units and their weapons, post-conflict psychological care, and vocational training programs are all

\(^{50}\) Durán, Colombia: Challenges and Dilemmas in the Search for Peace, 1.
essential elements of a successful DDR and could be readily subsidized by financial assistance from the Venezuelan President. International implementation and observation of these programs would forestall any accusations that the guerrillas are receiving a free ride from a regime that may have previously helped to sponsor the violence perpetrated by the FARC.

Meanwhile, the Uribe administration would still have the task of creating long-term job opportunities and reintegration for former FARC members who express a desire to re-enter society. Upon completion of the DDR program, small groups of ex-combatants might return to cities across Colombia to fill job vacancies or be granted land provided by the Colombian government. The gradual process of reintegration would prevent another influx of impoverished, unskilled former soldiers into civilian life, such as those that undermined peace processes in the past. This type of reintegration would also allow communities to form localized truth and reconciliation committees in order to confront the effects of a war which has led to the displacement of more than three million people since 2002 alone and has negatively affected the life of every Colombian.51

Colombia’s neighbors have some of the most important roles to play as they have the most to gain from resolution of conflict in Colombia. An important second step is to share intelligence and military information with the Colombian military to stem the movement of illegal forces, weapons and drugs across common borders. This

means engaging Ecuador immediately, and Venezuela subsequently, in order to reinforce border cooperation and prevent the use of sanctuaries, including by enhancing the communications and helicopter mobility of the new OAS monitoring mechanism; \(^{52}\) In addition, the Organization for American States or the United Nations should send peacekeeping troops to the Colombia-Venezuela border. \(^{53}\) The FARC is by no means defeated, and no country in the region benefits from the presence of the FARC, the ELN, and any leftover elements of the AUC operating as narcotraffickers. Unless the countries of the region can learn to work together these guerilla groups will continue to use border crossings as a means to escape, rearm and resupply, only to attack again later.

Colombia should also engage other Latin-American regional powers. These players should have a limited mandate, specifically for the hostages-for-prisoners swap. In this capacity Brazil has demonstrated the capability and the willingness to act in a regional leadership capacity. In January, 2009 Brazil offered to supply helicopters to pick up a group of hostages whom Colombia's FARC rebels planned to release soon from their jungle camps. "Brazil has been asked to provide logistical

\(^{52}\) Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off, 1-12.

support for the operation, we have always expressed a willingness to help," said Brazilian ambassador Valdemar Carneiro.\textsuperscript{54}

Colombia must open itself to the use of international facilitators. As referenced earlier, with the Colombian government’s credibility in question, in the event of a first-track peace process the government must be willing to use international facilitators or mediators in a neutral setting outside Colombia. While the potential involvement of high-profile international figures is tempting from a public relations standpoint, it cannot be expected that these figures will commit the amount of time and effort required to act as mediators of the conflict. The use of low-profile, nonofficial, external mediators can be more fruitful and contribute effectively to the process. These individuals can be essential for the success of a peace process. They can complement the efforts of both the internal parties and the international personalities. However, their work must be tactful and confidential. They must be respected by all the parties involved in order to be very successful.\textsuperscript{55}

There has been some increased international support to Colombia and the Andean region that accurately corresponds to increasing success. Successful programs funded by other donor countries in Colombia are primarily focused on alternative development, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and good governance. As such, 


\textsuperscript{55} Camilo Azcarate, "Why did the Colombia Peace Process Fail?" \textit{The Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution} 5.1 (Summer, 2003), 57.
they are a welcome addition to security programs and better balance all the donors’ shared goals. The Government of Colombia’s “Shared Responsibility” campaign, spearheaded by Vice President Santos in late 2006, was aimed at increasing European support for Colombia’s counter-narcotics and other programs. During her mid-April 2007 visit to Colombia, EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner announced plans to grant Colombia over 160 million Euros (approximately $217 million) in program assistance for 2007 to 2013.\textsuperscript{56} In addition, Norway, Spain, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada, Korea, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile, among others, provide bilateral assistance and/or support the Organization of American States mission in Colombia.\textsuperscript{57}

Given the focus by Colombia and the United States on security-first initiatives in Colombia, the international community becomes an increasingly important component for peace in Colombia. As I have demonstrated, most international actors can perform critically important functions to assist in the DDR strategy in Colombia, and many stand to gain from a reduction in conflict in Colombia. The strategies of alternative development, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and good governance are an important counterweight to Colombia’s Democratic Security, and go a long way towards addressing the deep-seeded true issues of conflict in Colombia.


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
CHAPTER 8: MEDELLÍN

Medellín, Colombia is the microcosm that I can use as an analytical tool to illustrate the precarious position Colombia is in, and also show that the opportunity is there for a permanent peace in Colombia. Medellín has a strong connection with the kind of violent crime and conflict that has seized Colombia for so long, and provides an excellent example of the tentative progress made against that violence. Last year, after three years of steeply declining violence, Medellín’s murder rate totaled 32.5 killings for every 100,000 inhabitants.¹ This compares favorably with U.S. cities like Washington (45), Detroit (42) and Baltimore (42).² Citizens in Medellín no longer fear kidnappers or hit men, and enjoy the ability to enter any neighborhood without aggression from territorial gangs. Why all this success? It resulted from President Uribe’s DSP, which placed security first, and brought a greater police and military presence in the vast, lawless slums that surround the city. This presence has an investment in a controversial, but successful “community policing” model focusing on improved response times, building community members’ trust, and a less adversarial approach to dealing with criminals.

The increased security in Medellin gave the opportunity for other critical reforms to take place. Notably, a significant component is the demobilization of the paramilitaries, which has had a huge effect on the city. Over 4,000 of the 31,000 who

¹ Adam Isacson, Plan Colombia - Six Years Later (The Center for International Policy's Colombia Program, 2006).

² Ibid., 2.
took part in collective demobilizations since 2003 now live in Medellín. Most importantly, once disarmed and demobilized, the government hasn’t abandoned these paramilitaries. The Colombian government is spending US$10 million on reintegration of the demobilized paramilitary population in Colombia.

In order to ensure that the paramilitaries are properly integrated, the Colombian government engaged the local population. The city government has recently launched a series of programs to provide psychological attention, offer employment assistance and “recovery of memory” to the victims of paramilitary violence in Colombia. The city invested in psychological attention to the former fighters, including workshops in socialization and relationships with their communities. In some cases, this has included efforts at reconciliation with victims, including the simple but powerful act of asking for forgiveness. Medellín’s city government has made investments with the people, including projects in poor neighborhoods and programs to reintegrate former fighters, including numerous infrastructure projects in the poor hillside neighborhoods, building transportation, parks, libraries, museums and schools. All of the above reflect the success of conflict management in Colombia, Uribe’s “Democratic Security” strategy, the end of the paramilitaries’ former unchallenged control, now reduced because of the DDR strategy, and the local government’s investment in the

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3 Ibid., 4.

4 U.S. Aid to Colombia, all Programs, 2006-2006, 1.

5 Isacson, Plan Colombia - Six Years Later, 8.
long term R of reconciliation combine in several ways to explain Medellín’s “renaissance.”

Just as in Colombia, Medellín’s advances are significant, but they may be fragile and easily reversible. Until the government invests far more in non-military needs and institutional strengthening, at least three key factors put Medellín’s recovery at risks; factors that mirror those of all of Colombia. First, security cannot be forgotten as a critical first step that allows other initiatives to succeed. While there is now a government presence in Medellín’s poor neighborhoods, the police alone do not appear to be enough. At a July 24, 2006 security meeting, Mayor Fajardo of Medellín repeated a longtime request that President Uribe send another 2,000 police to the city, demonstrating a need for continued security. Second, despite the changes in the Justice and Peace Law, Colombia has not managed to reduce the near-total impunity enjoyed by those in the security forces who abuse human rights or work with paramilitaries. There is still the absence of a coherent central government reintegration strategy and a credible system for punishing abuse and corruption. If not punished when they happen, abuses and collaboration with human rights violators and criminals are likely to remain common, and even to increase. Third, a future Medellín government must continue to put the same value on reintegration, attention to victims, and projects in poor neighborhoods. Medellín is constantly under threat of seeing these costly programs shut down by an economic downturn or overwhelmed by the

6 Ibid.,6.
arrival of still more demobilized paramilitaries. Attracted by its generous reintegration efforts, ex-paramilitaries are believed to be pouring into the city. The Corporación Democracia estimates that their numbers could grow from the current 4,000 to as many as 10,000.  

In Medellín, as in the rest of Colombia, the government must continue to listen to the victims of conflict. Despite the recent successes, disturbingly, everyone interviewed in Medellín – from the local government to the ex-paramilitaries to non-governmental human rights advocates – was frustrated with the Uribe government’s handling of the paramilitary DDR process. The words “improvisation” and “neglect” were frequently invoked to describe the central government’s approach to the challenge of helping more than 30,000 former combatants become citizens and participants in the legal economy. It appears that much of the success in Medellín is achieved at the local level, with Uribe’s government providing little more than stipends and vocational training. Without more support, the government of Medellín will struggle to adjudicate the cases of stolen property or pay reparations to the conflict’s hundreds of thousands of victims. Medellín is not unique-beset by a flood of unemployed young men with few marketable skills, dozens of cash-strapped cities and towns throughout Colombia will have little hope of emulating Medellín’s recent, but precarious, successes.

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7 Ibid., 3.
8 Ibid.
CONCLUSION: COLOMBIA AS A WAY FORWARD

Colombia is what Iraq should eventually look like, in our best dreams. Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has fought -- and is winning -- a counterinsurgency war even as he has liberalized the economy, strengthened institutions, and improved human rights. Nuri al Maliki and Hamid Karzai could learn from him.¹

- Robert D. Kaplan, A Colombian Vision for Iraq

In the battle against the leftist guerrillas, U.S. policies and the Colombian government have almost reached their goal; however neither policy, Democratic Security or Plan Colombia address the underlying problems in Colombia. If the FARC and the ELN disappeared tomorrow, Colombia would still be one of the most economically unequal countries on earth, and the world’s number-one cocaine producer.² It would still have an almost completely ungoverned countryside and lopsided land tenure.³ It would still have a weak judicial system, and few checks and balances over the executive branch.⁴ Colombia has produced the world’s fourth-largest uprooted population: a total of 2.6 million Colombians are refugees or internally displaced.⁵ In the year 2002 alone, 412,000 people were internally displaced by


² Don't Copy Plan Colombia, Learn from it, 1.

³ Sweig, Challenges for U.S. Policy Toward Colombia: Is Plan Colombia Working--the Regional Dimensions?, 1.

⁴ Don't Copy Plan Colombia, Learn from it, 1.

violence. All of these points represent the true problems of Colombia that originally gave birth to the FARC, the ELN, and the paramilitaries in the first place.

Colombia appears to have turned the corner against the FARC, and to some extent also in the drug war. The once-nightmarish city of Medellín has become a showcase of President Alvaro Uribe’s success in fighting the enemies of democracy in his own country. Combining “people power,” through civil society and cultural programs, with “alliance power,” through the U.S.-sponsored Plan Colombia, Uribe has been a rare success in the War on Terror. However, Plan Colombia has now largely run its course. Meanwhile, the narco-radical forces continue to get stronger, and President Obama’s does not share President Bush’s interest in Colombia at this critical juncture.

President Uribe, DSP, and Plan Colombia have given Colombia the foundation in security required to tackle those fundamental issues. The hope for Colombia is based on the Colombian government, and to some extent the world, recognizing this momentous opportunity. As described in Chapter, 3 Democratic Security has provided important stability in the country, but it will not be enough if the government doesn’t follow through on the DDR of the paramilitaries and complete the difficult R of reintegration. This will require a delicate balance between justice and effectiveness. The demobilization and disarmament must be complete, down to the individual level. Human rights violators must be prosecuted, and in turn, those that were not guilty of

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
crimes must be given opportunities to return to skilled jobs in order to reintebrate into Colombian society. The government must focus on the needs of victims in Colombia to prevent the cycle of violence from recurring, and encourage an atmosphere of healing and reconciliation.

The government has to look forward to when these same policies will be needed for the FARC and the ELN. Complete military defeat is unlikely and an effective DDR strategy for the FARC and the ELN, based on the lessons learned from the DDR of the paramilitaries, is a sound investment in the future of peace in Colombia. It is not a coincidence that for over 50 years Colombia has had to battle the FARC and the ELN, first as Communist Rebellion, then as drug lords, and finally as narco-terrorists. While the FARC and the ELN are merely symptoms of the deeper problems in Colombia, their original political platforms give us clues as to the disease plaguing the country. The group's political perspective is outlined in the form of six anniversary greetings, written from 1994 to 1999. All the documents were written by Marulanda, the FARC-EP's now deceased commander-in-chief. What emerges from these documents is a clear political vision of the "New Colombia" that the FARC-EP is fighting for. In particular, in the revolutionary struggle that it is carrying out, "massive and conscious popular participation is indispensable."

"This is not a confrontation of military machines, but rather of classes contending over the political leadership of the country," Marulanda writes. "War has been the consequence of the implacable aggression by the oligarchy against the people rising up in struggle for its liberty." (May 1996) The FARC-EP openly expresses its
goal as a socialist society "without exploiters or exploited." The immediate aims expressed in the 1993 "Platform" (and in the 1964 "Agrarian Program of the Guerrillas of the FARC-EP") are concrete steps toward that goal: reorient the economy toward national social needs; genuine and thorough land reform; completely restructure the Armed Forces; a sovereign foreign policy independent of the demands of U.S. imperialism. This policy is described as "Bolivarian"--in the spirit of Simón Bolívar, the great Latin American national-liberation leader of the 19th century. The FARC-EP uses the term in the sense of national unity in the face of imperialism.\(^7\)

In the same regard, U.S. must back wide-ranging policies to improve the economic conditions to break the cycle of narcotics trafficking in Colombia. A GAO report correctly identified that even with all of the success against the FARC and ELN, Plan Colombia’s main goal of reducing narcotic’s production by 50% in 6 years was a complete failure.\(^8\) Without policies to address the economic inequality and uneven


land distribution, for every FARC or ELN member who disbands and goes home, another will merely resume the growth and trafficking of narcotics in order to improve his economic condition.

The key to addressing those very valid original goals of the FARC and the ELN is soliciting international support. Nation-states and other international organizations can add much needed expertise, funding, and credibility to the peace process. Many international actors recognize the true problems that are fundamentally plaguing Colombia, and in some cases have addressed them. The U.S. survey team and the later efforts by Colombian President Pastrana were correct when they acknowledged that the problems in Colombia are deep and require comprehensive reform. If Colombia’s leaders continue to focus on a military solution for the leftists, the narco-traffickers, or the narco-terrorists, they will find themselves fighting the symptoms for another 50 years. By taking advantage of these countries offers for assistance, Colombians can continue to focus on the much needed security, combating the symptoms, while also taking some very important steps forward towards long-term change, and have a chance to finally cure the disease.

Colombia becomes a unique example in an era of so much civil conflict in countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, and Sudan. In comparison, Colombia’s slow and steady improvements are an inspiration. An interesting comparison is the ongoing conflict in Iraq. The US has been engaged in a conflict situation in Iraq for roughly the
same time period as Uribe’s tenure in office. When comparing Colombia to Iraq, the advances in security and de-escalation of violence in Colombia become a potential source for knowledge and skills on how to effectively manage conflict. If Uribe and the government can take advantage of this opportunity and finally end the longest civil conflict in history, there is the chance to make Colombia’s temporary renaissance permanent. More than that, there is the chance that we can take what we have learned from Colombia and spread that renaissance to the world.
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