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7-1-2005

## **Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for "Democratic Security"**

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### **Recommended Citation**

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<https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/738>

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**SUSTAINABILITY OF COLOMBIAN MILITARY/STRATEGIC  
SUPPORT FOR “DEMOCRATIC SECURITY”**

**Thomas A. Marks**

**July 2005**

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ISBN 1-58487-212-8

## FOREWORD

A sea-change has occurred in troubled Colombia, as detailed in this monograph. For the first time in 40 years, cautious optimism pervades discussions of Bogota's seemingly intractable situation. Drugs, terrorism, and insurgency continue in their explosive mix, but the current government of President Alvaro Uribe has fashioned a counterinsurgency approach that holds the strategic initiative and has a chance of negating a long-standing security threat to the state.

This is critical if Colombian democratic and economic advances are to continue. Colombia has become synonymous in the popular mind with an intractable war waged against narco-terrorists. Not as understood is the strategic setting, wherein the illegal drug trade is not just linked to terrorism but rather is an integral part of a left-wing insurgency that continues to talk the language of the Cold War. This insurgency is the greatest threat to Bogota and to Washington's interests in the region.

Thus it is of particular moment to see an indigenously generated response succeed in turning the tide. What has been particularly remarkable has been a military reform movement engineered by Colombian officers committed to strengthening military professionalism and accountability to civilian authority.

Washington has played a crucial but supporting role in the process, working closely with what many are beginning to call a model in dealing with the complexities of state integration, development, and internal security. Built upon the common sense notion that none of these are possible without *personal security*, there is much that bears examination in the Colombian approach.



DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.

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THOMAS A. MARKS is Professor of Insurgency, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism at the School for National Security Executive Education (SNSEE) of National Defense University (NDU) in Washington, DC. A former U.S. government officer, he served as the Oppenheimer Chair of Warfighting Strategy at the Marine Corps University (Quantico), where he taught “Insurgency and Operational Art,” and is an Adjunct Professor at the U.S. Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), Hurlburt Field, FL. In recent years, Dr. Marks has, in a variety of publications, for a variety of clients, analyzed conflicts as far-flung as those in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Peru, Papua New Guinea, Laos, the Philippines, and Northern Ireland. His most recent operational endeavor was service, in a contract capacity, as the operations consultant for a newly raised Saudi Arabian commando unit. His scholarly and journalistic works number in the hundreds. He is the author of *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London, 1996), which is considered the current standard on the subject of “people’s war.” His latest book, *Maoist People’s War in Post-Vietnam Asia*, will be published this year in Bangkok. Dr. Marks graduated from the U.S. Military Academy, and in his Ph.D. work at the University of Hawaii focused on the relationship between popular upheaval and revolutionary crisis (published as *Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective*, Bangkok: White Lotus).

## SUMMARY

Upon taking office in August 2002, President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia was faced with a difficult strategic situation that required a fresh approach. This was forthcoming in a *Democratic Security and Defence Policy* which radically reoriented the state posture towards its principal security challenge—an insurgency inextricably linked to the narcotics trade and other criminal activity. Previously committed to negotiation, the government opted for counterinsurgency. Though multifaceted in its dimensions, the new policy effectively assigned the cutting edge role to the Colombian armed forces (COLMIL), most prominently the dominant service, the army (COLAR). This required that the forces aggressively pursue a well-funded, entrenched adversary within a complex international environment decidedly hostile to state efforts at stability operations. This they have done in impressive fashion.

These same armed forces had already set the stage for the shift in policy by pursuing a reform movement that had allowed them to wage more aggressive operations, while the previous administration of President Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) had unsuccessfully sought a negotiated settlement with the main insurgent group, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and to a lesser extent with the distant second group, *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional*, or National Liberation Army (ELN). The self-defense groups of the *Autodefensas Unidas Colombia*, or United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC), the so-called “paramilitaries,” were a symptom as opposed to a cause and did not threaten the government through insurgent activity. Continued combat was necessary, because neither FARC nor ELN altered their military posture during negotiations. To the contrary, FARC used Bogota’s provision of what was to be demilitarized space, the *Zona de Despeje*, to facilitate an intensification of the conflict through the use of main force warfare, while terror and guerrilla action continued.

Thus Colombia’s counterinsurgency approach under President Uribe built upon a foundation already put in place by the armed forces, a foundation upon which a *national* as opposed to a virtually stand-alone armed forces campaign could be constructed. This has

resulted in a level of *state* commitment, led by continuous *military* operations. The insurgents thus far have been unable to counter *strategically*.

Bogota's strategy recognized the need to dominate local areas by providing a security umbrella under which the normal functions of the state could be exercised. The operational vehicle for carrying out the effort was to place a "grid" over the target area, with specific forces carrying out specific missions, all coordinated in such manner as to stifle insurgent activity. The basis for all else was the deployment of local forces. These *Soldados de mi Pueblo* ("Home Guards") were indispensable to establishing state presence in affected areas. Local forces had all the more impact, because the police, using the same approach, systematically established presence in every *municipio* (county) in the country.

Military-police integration highlights the increasingly joint nature of Colombian operations. Though answering to a Commanding General (CG) Joint Command, the military services themselves had functioned together more as a matter of courtesy than command. This had not posed any insuperable problems, particularly given COLAR's dominance, but it was not the ideal way to conduct counterinsurgency, where unity of command was crucial. Plans to implement military "joint operational commands" in place of the exclusively COLAR divisional areas were tabled in Summer 2004—and met with fierce resistance in parochial circles—but had the support of President Uribe and began to be implemented in December 2004. It is planned that the individual services will become more "service providers" in the U.S. sense, while CG Joint Command will exercise operational control of forces that resemble U.S. combatant commands. Such a development is entirely logical in waging counterinsurgency, but is a sea-change in the way Colombian services have functioned throughout their history.

Integration extends beyond the military. The involvement of the state has brought a new closeness to working relationships that hitherto normally depended upon interpersonal relations in areas of operation. In particular, law enforcement and judicial authorities have become an important part of operations. This provides government forces with enhanced flexibility, because the police and officials are able to engage in actions not legally devolved to the armed forces.

In the field, the strategic initiative has inevitably featured tactical setbacks. The insurgents, as with government forces, have a learning curve and have sought to exploit the very weaknesses created by the government's success and a zero-defects political mentality. As military action has forced the insurgents to break up into small units, the security forces have done likewise. This, however, creates opportunities for medium-size insurgent concentrations to surprise isolated or tactically sloppy units with rapid concentrations which then disperse. The insurgents appear to recognize the pressure for "no bad news" placed upon the military by the political structure and thus have moved adroitly to exploit it.

Regardless of substantial progress, the single 4-year, constitutionally mandated presidential term is not enough time to negate the tactical ability of FARC to initiate guerrilla and terror actions. The large number of mine casualties among the security forces, for instance, has little to do with anything save FARC's extensive use of the internationally banned weapons systems. Likewise, pushing ever deeper into previously denied areas can only expose troops still further to such dangers—even as the dismantling of the counterstate so laboriously built over the past 40-some years steadily diminishes FARC's ability to launch actions of significance by ending its apparatus for pushing through serious warmaking supplies to its units.

Faced with this profound threat to its viability as an insurgent movement, FARC must respond. As a consequence, there should be no doubt that "violence" in Colombia will continue indefinitely. Yet the counter by the state lies in precisely what is being done: creating a situation where the response is both "correct" and sustainable. The Uribe approach is certainly "correct" in the manner in which it conceptualizes the problem and seeks to respond to it; it is sustainable in its present form, because it demands no unacceptable investments of resources, human or material. It will face adjustments if the U.S. contribution ends, but it is unlikely this will happen for some time. The result, then, is likely to be a Colombia more integrated than at any time in its history, economically and democratically sound, and safer than it has been in 4 decades.





## SUSTAINABILITY OF COLOMBIAN MILITARY/STRATEGIC SUPPORT FOR “DEMOCRATIC SECURITY”

Upon taking office in August 2002, President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia was faced with a difficult strategic situation that required a fresh approach.<sup>1</sup> This was forthcoming in a *Democratic Security and Defence Policy*,<sup>2</sup> which radically reoriented the state posture towards its principal security challenge—an insurgency inextricably linked to the narcotics trade and other criminal activity. Previously committed to negotiation, the government opted for counterinsurgency. Though multifaceted in its dimensions, the new policy effectively assigned the cutting edge role to the Colombian armed forces (COLMIL), most prominently the dominant service, the army (COLAR). This required that the forces aggressively pursue a well-funded, entrenched adversary within a complex international environment decidedly hostile to state efforts at stability operations. This they have done in impressive fashion.<sup>3</sup>

These same armed forces had already set the stage for the shift in policy by pursuing a reform movement<sup>4</sup> that allowed them to wage more aggressive operations. The previous administration of President Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) unsuccessfully had sought a negotiated settlement with the main insurgent group, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and to a lesser extent with the distant second group, *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional*, or ELN (National Liberation Army). The self-defense groups of the AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas Colombia*, or United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia), the so-called “paramilitaries,” were a symptom, as opposed to a cause, and did not threaten the government through insurgent activity. Continued combat was necessary, because neither FARC nor ELN altered their military posture during negotiations. To the contrary, FARC used Bogota’s provision of what was to be demilitarized space, the *Zona de Despeje* (or *Area de Distension*), to facilitate an intensification of the conflict through the use of main force warfare, while terror and guerrilla action continued.

Thus Colombia’s counterinsurgency approach under President Uribe built upon a foundation already put in place by the armed

forces, a foundation upon which a *national*, as opposed to a virtually stand-alone armed forces campaign, could be constructed. In its planning and implementation, the campaign has been so impressive that it currently is being viewed as a model for other countries facing similar but certainly less intractable, complex challenges. Sustainability necessarily has been a central issue for Bogota, to the extent that calculations of funding and force levels were worked out in some detail even prior to assumption of office. This has resulted in a level of *state* commitment, led by continuous *military* operations. The insurgents thus far have been unable to counter *strategically*.

## SITUATION PRIOR TO ELECTION OF URIBE

Lack of *government* leadership during the Pastrana years had left security matters to the military—army (*Ejercito Nacional*, but COLAR); navy (*Armada Nacional*, or ARC), of which the marines, *Brigada Fluvial* (River Brigade), were a part; and air force (*Fuerza Aerea Colombiana*, or FAC). The state, in other words, did not engage in counterinsurgency. This meant annual military plans, while they included a basic civic action component, were necessarily incomplete.<sup>5</sup> That this did not prove disastrous stemmed from the nature of the major security threat, FARC (ELN was essentially a law and order concern; the AUC essentially a product of the need for local protection where the state was absent).

Committed ideologically to Marxist-Leninism, FARC had drifted increasingly to a vaguely defined “Bolivarian” populism that had little appeal in Colombia. Polls consistently found the movement with minimal popular support or even sympathy. Its efforts at armed propaganda had fallen off to nothing after a mid-1980s high, and it was increasingly corrupted by reliance for funding upon criminal activity—drugs, kidnapping, and extortion (in that order, perhaps \$250 million in total).<sup>6</sup> Consequently, its approach to insurgency, modeled after “people’s war” doctrine of the Vietnamese variant as filtered through, in particular, the FMLN (*Frente Faribundo Marti de Liberacion Nacional*, or Faribundo Marti Liberation Front) of El Salvador, had become a perversion of the original and had more in common with *focismo* than armed political action built upon mass mobilization.<sup>7</sup>

FARC's reliance upon the normal apparatus necessary to support armed campaigning, base areas, and mobility corridors, resulted in a dual center of gravity vulnerable to Colombian military attack: the insurgent units themselves and their sources of sustenance.<sup>8</sup> Allowing for the low numbers organized in a nationwide support base (frequently inspired by terror), the armed units comprised the movement.

This had been recognized by the new military leadership that emerged following Pastrana's inauguration. They had crafted their approach based upon the neutralization of FARC's strategy, even as they instituted a far-reaching and comprehensive military reform process that affected everything from recruiting (a largely draftee COLAR became one-third volunteer, with key units essentially 100 percent "professionals"), to military schooling, to assignment policies, to structure, to operational art. The result was a reclaiming of the strategic initiative by the Uribe advent.

Military reform was central to all that occurred during the Pastrana years. A combination of internal dislocation caused by the growing drug trade, U.S. efforts to "punish" Colombia during the Samper administration (1994-98) for inadequate "cooperation" in counternarcotics (CN) efforts, and mediocre senior military leadership; all had combined to cripple what had been known as a sound armed forces. Reform, primarily a COLAR project, touched upon virtually every aspect of the institution but focused in particular upon revitalizing the military education system, absorbing lessons learned through operational and organizational modifications, and developing sound noncommissioned officer (NCO) leadership to enhance small unit performance. Simultaneously, greater attention was paid to human rights instruction, information warfare, and joint and special operations.

The profound institutional and strategic shifts outlined above occurred as, in the aftermath of "9-11," the United States altered the approach of the Clinton years and dropped the artificial barrier which had separated CN from counterinsurgency (COIN). This was critical because during the Clinton administrations (1992-2000), the war had been divided artificially as a consequence of the demands of American domestic politics. The U.S. contribution to *Plan Colombia*,

a multifaceted effort to identify Colombia's critical areas for action to facilitate societal revitalization, was structured wholly to support CN.

Of greater consequence than lost assets was the intense U.S. pressure upon the Colombians for battlefield fragmentation and distortion. Committed to assistance in the only fashion politically viable—in an America forced to focus upon the supply side of its own drug problem—U.S. officials, forces, and individuals tended to embrace the flawed logic that Colombia's problem was one of narcotics, with the security battle a consequence. Insurgent reality was stood on its head. American urgings that Colombian armed action focus upon a narcotics center of gravity were rejected by the military leadership (apparently, often in conflict with Pastrana officials). As a consequence, the U.S. role during this period, as far as Colombian military leadership was concerned, was appreciated but not directed at the real issue, counterinsurgency. The target of the internal war, in COLMIL's estimation, had to be the population, 95-96 percent of which lived *outside* the drug-producing zones of the *llanos*, or eastern savannah.

Ironically, even the drop in the "bar," between CN and what came to be labeled counterterrorism (CT) assistance did not change fundamentally the U.S. orientation. U.S. funding, though impressive in raw figures—at one point Colombia was third in foreign aid behind only Israel and Egypt—was still overwhelmingly committed to a CN campaign driven by its own internal measures (most prominently, hectares of narcotics fields neutralized). Further clouding the picture, periodicals-of-record in the United States tended to lump overall U.S. aid figures into "support for the Colombian military," thus reviving a Vietnam era stereotype of hapless Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) held together by American money and "advisors."<sup>9</sup> Nothing could have been further from reality.

Colombia's armed forces were quite on their own in both their operations and their reform movement, which was driven wholly by Colombian personalities. The basic military framework for waging counterinsurgency was created by the geographical assignment of the 5 COLAR divisions (18 x brigades) and a Joint Task Force, with a division-strength national reaction force in reserve.<sup>10</sup> Of its 145,000

men, COLAR had some 20,000 in volunteer, counter guerrilla units, organic to its brigades and divisions. The warfighting army, then, was 47 counter guerrilla battalions (*bataillones contraguerrillas*, or BCG) and 3 mobile brigades (*brigades moviles*, or BRIM, each comprised of 4 x BCG), a total of approximately 59 BCG.<sup>11</sup>

The regular formations that comprised the rest of COLAR were overwhelmingly draftees. Domination of local areas was the lynchpin of the counterinsurgent effort, and a variety of imaginative solutions were tried to maintain state presence in affected areas. Essentially, the draftee regular units were used to engage in area domination and conduct local operations; the BCG and BRIM to strike at targets of opportunity. Specific missions that required specific skills, such as guarding critical infrastructure or operating in urban areas, were carried out by dedicated assets, as were special operations.

But in the absence of local forces, which had fallen afoul of constitutional court restrictions and thus disbanded, it was difficult to consolidate gains. As areas were retaken, they could not be garrisoned with home guards. Instead, regular units rotated in and out, a perpetual shell game designed to keep FARC off balance (to a lesser extent ELN; only FARC operated as main forces).

Further complicating the situation, a legal framework that did not respond to the needs of internal war meant all such action was carried out under the provisions of peacetime civilian law. Under Pastrana, no emergency or anti/counterterrorist legislation of any sort was passed. This placed individuals in what were at time absurd situations, particularly since the police generally were not available to accompany operations, being preoccupied with their own efforts to survive (numerous times, for instance, towns and their police garrisons found themselves attacked by FARC forces using homemade but nonetheless potent armor).

Faced with such an array of challenges, it was a credit to the power of the military reform movement and the improvements made by its leadership in strategy, operational art, and tactics that the strategic initiative had been regained by mid-2002. This occurred because the reform movement in the dominant service, COLAR, was driven by personalities who, beyond their military knowledge, evinced an understanding of both counterinsurgency

and Colombia's unique circumstances. They were able, despite the lack of strategic involvement by the state, to arrest the negative trends that had emerged with growing force even during the Samper administration.

Most importantly, the reform leadership defeated FARC's attempt to transition to main force warfare (i.e., mobile or maneuver warfare; Stage II in the people's war framework). Using the *Zona* as the staging ground for attacks by "strategic columns" comprised of multiple battalion-strength units, FARC found itself bested by CG IV Division, Major General Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle, who worked intimately with his superior, CG COLAR (*Comandante del Ejercito*), General Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel, and CG Joint Command (*Comando General de las Fuerzas Militares*<sup>12</sup>), General Fernando Tapias Stahelin.

This trio dominated operational planning throughout the Pastrana years, with Mora eventually taking the place of Tapias (upon his retirement). Ospina, after CG IV Division, became, first, COLAR Director of Operations under Mora; then Inspector General (IG) Joint Command under Tapias, who used the IG principally as a combat inspectorate; and, finally, CG COLAR (with General rank) when Mora moved up upon Uribe's inauguration. When Mora himself retired in November 2003, Ospina became CG Joint Command.

What these officers shared was a correct understanding of Colombia's war and a well-developed approach to institutional transformation and operational art. Mora and Ospina were noteworthy for their close working relationship and the esteem with which they were held throughout not only COLAR, but the armed forces. Both had proved themselves tactically time and again as they had advanced through the junior ranks, then operationally as more senior commanders. Ospina, an officer of considerable field experience and attainment, was regarded as COLAR's "brain trust," with a deep knowledge of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Together, working under Tapias, Mora and Ospina fashioned highly effective COLAR annual campaign plans which, as they were instituted, forced FARC onto the defensive. Their correct appreciation of the situation, though, could not be translated into a true national counterinsurgency until the election of Uribe.

## URIBE'S DEMOCRATIC SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

A third party candidate who won an unprecedented first round victory in May 2002 (he took office in August), Uribe introduced a dynamic style to security affairs that prominently included producing, early in his administration and with U.S. encouragement, a national plan. Unlike the predecessor *Plan Colombia* of the Pastrana/Clinton years (written with U.S. input), which had been a virtual catalogue of national ills with proposed solutions beyond Bogota's ability to operationalize or fund, the new *Democratic Security and Defence Policy* (officially released in June 2003) was intended as a course of action. As such, it was built upon three basic tenets:

- A lack of personal security is at the roots of Colombia's social, economic, and political ills.
- This lack of personal security stems from the absence of the state in large swaths of the national territory.
- Therefore, all elements of national power need to be directed towards ending this lack of national integration.

Addressing this assessment was the policy itself, its thrust stated directly:

Security is not regarded primarily as the security of the State, nor as the security of the citizen without the assistance of the State. Rather, it is the protection of the citizen and democracy by the State with the solidarity and co-operation of the whole of society . . . This is, in short, a policy for the protection of the population.<sup>13</sup>

Threatening citizens and the stability of the country, stated the policy, was an explosive combination of: "terrorism; the illegal drugs trade; illicit finance; traffic of arms, ammunition, and explosives; kidnapping and extortion; and homicide."<sup>14</sup> The hitherto intractable nature of Colombia's security conundrum stemmed from the interlocking nature of these threats.

It was this dynamic at which Uribe's plan was aimed. If one course of action stands out as central to the whole, it is "consolidating control of national territory," the indispensable element of any counterinsurgency. A "cycle of recovery" is detailed that evokes



images of the approach used in successful counterinsurgencies such as those of Thailand, the Philippines, or Peru.<sup>15</sup> It further outlines precisely the strategic approach to be used:<sup>16</sup>

- “The Government will gradually restore state presence and the authority of state institutions, starting in strategically important areas.”
- “Once the Armed Forces and the National Police have reestablished control over an area, units comprising professional soldiers, *campesino* soldiers [i.e., local forces] and National Police *carabineros* [police field force] will maintain security and protect the civilian population. This will enable state organizations and criminal investigation authorities to work in the area.”
- “Once a basic level of security has been established, the State will embark upon a policy of territorial consolidation, reestablishing the normal operation of the justice system, strengthening local democracy, meeting the most urgent needs of the population, broadening state services and initiating medium to long term projects aimed at creating sustainable development.”

Necessarily, since what is under consideration is a strategic plan for waging internal war against a hydra-headed threat, the security forces undertake the most prominent and difficult tasks. Though responsibilities are outlined for all state bodies, the security forces are to provide the shield behind which restoration of legitimate government writ takes place.

Under the Ministry of Defence (*Ministerio de Defensa Nacional*, or MDN<sup>17</sup>), the security forces prepared their own plans to implement the *Democratic Security and Defence Policy*. Both the military’s Joint Command and the CNP were subordinate to MDN and used as their guide the strategic document drawn up by Defence Minister Marta Lucia Ramirez de Rincon and her staff after consideration of the Uribe policy—their product was issued as a 4-year vision applicable to the entire Uribe presidency.<sup>18</sup> COLAR’s objectives were for all practical purposes those of the Joint Command.<sup>19</sup>

The central elements remained “protection of the population” and “elimination of the illegal drugs trade in Colombia,”<sup>20</sup> to be accomplished through the application of national will, resources, and power. As the premier element of national power in the internal war at hand, therefore, the military clarified its role further in a “general military strategy” issued by CG Joint Command General Mora. This has remained the key document for the application of military action to support the president’s “democratic security” counterinsurgency approach.

## OPERATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF PLANS AND POLICY

With the framework established, there remained implementation. In this, the military was far ahead of other elements of the state since it had already gone through dramatic change during the Pastrana administration. So far-reaching were the military reforms that, in many respects, the armed forces presented Uribe with a new tool upon taking office.<sup>21</sup> Key had been continuity of exceptional leadership able to implement, under difficult operational and material conditions, a reorientation of the military’s warfighting posture.

Central to this reorientation was the inculcation within the officer corps of greater professional knowledge concerning not only the operational and tactical mechanics of internal war, but strategic knowledge of insurgent approaches and aims. Here Mora’s faith in Ospina’s knowledge of counterinsurgency paid off. For Ospina was adamant that seeing the insurgents as merely narcotics traffickers or criminals or terrorists obscured the deadly *symbiosis* that drove the movement. Whatever it engaged in tactically, whether terror or the drug trade, FARC continued to see itself as a revolutionary movement and sought to implement people’s war as its operational form, to include focusing upon the rural areas to surround the urban areas. ELN, as already noted, had deteriorated to the point of being a threat to public order as opposed to national security.

The AUC was nearly equal in combatant numbers to FARC, but very different in ideology and combat doctrine. It was an umbrella organization of most independent vigilante groups that had become one of the leading perpetrators of violence, on a par with FARC. The

AUC had gained its potent combatant numbers by mobilizing the demand for security that exploded in the “unincorporated” rural areas ravaged by FARC (and, to a lesser extent, ELN). It funded itself through donations but also, eventually more prominently, by exploiting the drug trade (just as did FARC and ELN). It was a primary contributor to internal violence because it ruthlessly attacked FARC’s support base. Efforts to portray the AUC as but an extension of the narcotics trade or as a stalking horse for the military quite missed the interactive dynamic at work.<sup>22</sup> Uribe’s plan was aimed at this dynamic.

Hence, as concerned the security forces, the threat to be countered had remained relatively constant in nature, regardless of increasing insurgent (especially FARC) involvement in the drug trade and other criminal activity. The insurgents sought to dominate local areas, eliminating through terror those who persisted in their opposition. Guerrilla action targeted the police and smaller military units, with task-organized columns (*columnas*) appearing as main forces whenever a target invited. Other elements of the people’s war approach—mass line, united front, political warfare, and international action<sup>23</sup>—remained anemic to the point of irrelevance, leaving the military threat the issue.

As noted previously, when Uribe took office, the military had already spent nearly 4 years developing a correct approach to its own facets of counterinsurgency. *The strategy recognized the need to dominate local areas by providing a security umbrella under which the normal functions of the state could be exercised.* The operational vehicle for carrying out the effort was to place a “grid” over the target area, with specific forces carrying out specific missions, all coordinated in such manner as to stifle insurgent activity.<sup>24</sup> The problem was that there had not been enough units or enough funding.<sup>25</sup>

Counterinsurgency is manpower and resource intensive. Uribe sought to provide both of these with a military leadership that was already out of the starting gate. Not only was the general funding level provided to the military raised; but, in a dramatic gesture of commitment, the president asked Congress to levy a one-time “war tax” for a substantial expansion of actual forces, primarily COLAR (which in mid-2004 reached a strength of some 202,000). This brought

in approximately \$670 million, which was allocated to *Plan de Choque 2002-2006* (“Plan Shock”), a phased scheme to substantially increase the specialized COLAR forces needed to make the “grid” viable.<sup>26</sup>

Units of all types were integrated into the force structure according to plans pre-dating Uribe but now funded: new BCG and BRIM, with every division being given its own organic BRIM (IV Division received two; there are a total of 12—with three more planned—up from the previous three) and others going to the general reserve (if all formations are considered, there are now 78 × BCG, up from the Pastrana total of 59); urban special forces (joining “rural special forces,” the traditional mode of operation); special transportation network protection units (*Plan Meteoro*, or “Plan Meteor”); high mountain battalions specifically situated and equipped to block insurgent mobility corridors through hitherto inaccessible heights; strengthened infrastructure protection units (PEEV, from *Plan Energetico y Vial*); and local forces to provide security, in particular, for rural urban centers. Simultaneously, from the same funding source, enhancement of individual effectiveness was to be improved by converting draftee slots to volunteers at the rate of 10,000 per year—an expensive undertaking, since it cost approximately ten times for a volunteer as for a draftee.

All components related to each other. Standing up of local forces platoons, for instance, though intended initially as a step to enhance security of the population, was soon found to produce greatly enhanced information flow to the forces and thus served as the basis for more accurate and intense employment of regular and strike units. Greater activity in an area forced the insurgents to move, especially the leadership, presenting targets for enhanced special operations capability. Loss of leaders led to surrenders, which allowed psychological warfare units to exploit defections with a variety of innovative programs, from rallies to radio broadcast. Fewer insurgents meant greater freedom of movement, and special units secured the transportation arteries just as they did the critical infrastructure. Business picked up; the economy improved; kidnappings and murders dropped substantially.<sup>27</sup>

If there was one element in the “grid” that provided the missing link, it was the deployment of local forces. These were indispensable to establishing state presence in affected areas and neatly sidestepped

legal objections (and fierce opposition from international human rights organizations) by utilizing a 1940s era law, discovered still on the books, which allowed a portion of the national draft levy to opt for service in their home towns—in local defense units. Initially called *Soldados Campesinos* (“Peasant Soldiers”), a name the troops themselves disliked—Colombia, despite its substantial agricultural sector, is classified as approximately three-quarters urban, and the units were universally located in rural towns. Hence, *Soldados de mi Pueblo* (“Home Guards” would be the most useful rendering) came to be used simultaneously.

Constituted as platoons assigned as part of the complement of the appropriate nearby regular battalion; trained, armed, and equipped as regular soldiers; officered by regulars; and fielded systematically according to *Plan de Choque* funding; the 40-man units were soon present in more than 600 locations selected according to the Joint Command campaign plan. Most were COLAR assets, though a number were run by the Marines, particularly in a special “minidivisional zone” assigned to the marines, south of navy (ARC) headquarters in Cartagena on the Caribbean coast.

Local forces had all the more impact, because the police, using the same approach as the *Soldados de mi Pueblo* program, systematically established presence in every *municipio* (county) in the country. Those areas from which they had been driven, or which historically had been considered too dangerous for police presence, were manned by what, effectively, was a police field force (*Carabineros*), though under regular CNP jurisdiction. They functioned in units of the same size and nature as the COLAR local forces but were more mobile and often better armed. Where necessary, virtual forts were constructed to allow secure stations for the projection of state presence. Backing them up was a highly-trained reaction force.<sup>28</sup>

Such police involvement as an integral component of the “grid” highlights a further development: the increasingly joint nature of Colombian operations. Though answering to a CG Joint Command, the military services themselves had functioned together more as a matter of courtesy than command. This had not posed any insuperable problems, particularly given COLAR’s dominance, but it was not the ideal way to conduct counterinsurgency, where unity of command was crucial.<sup>29</sup> It was especially the case that the CNP,

under Pastrana, were not integrated at the national level in any of the counterinsurgency planning.<sup>30</sup> This ended under Uribe.

Within the military itself, a clear trend towards greater “jointness” that had emerged under Tapias as CG Joint Command, matured under Mora (during the Uribe administration), and then blossomed under Ospina. Plans to implement “joint operational commands” in place of the exclusively COLAR divisional areas were tabled in Summer 2004—and met with fierce resistance in parochial circles—but had the support of President Uribe and began to be implemented in December 2004, when 1st Division became a joint command.

This transformation alone would be enough to produce a measure of turmoil within the military. Even the existence of the *Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta*, which as a joint force is controlled by CG Joint Command, has generated disquiet in some circles—particularly as it becomes clear that it is a model of what is to come. If present plans are pushed through, the individual services will become more “service providers” in the U.S. sense, while CG Joint Command will exercise operational control of joint forces that resemble U.S. major component commands (e.g., Southern Command, or SOUTHCOM, which supports Colombia’s effort). Such a development is entirely logical in waging counterinsurgency but is a sea-change in the way Colombian services have functioned throughout their history.

Such integration extended beyond the military. The involvement of the state brought a new closeness to working relationships that hitherto had normally depended upon interpersonal relations in areas of operation. In particular, law enforcement and judicial authorities became an important part of operations. This provided government forces with enhanced flexibility, because the police and officials could engage in actions not legally devolved to the armed forces (e.g., the right to search).

On a higher plane, a *Centro de Coordinacion de Accion Integral* (Coordination Center for Integrated Action, or CCAI<sup>31</sup>) was formed, both as a physical entity located on the grounds of the presidential palace, and as an organizational reality. Its purpose was to coordinate—to a degree essential in counterinsurgency—the measures necessary to reincorporate (or incorporate) reclaimed areas into the polity. Provided with a steadily increasing level of U.S. support, CCAI

steadily became a more important factor, not only in reclaimed areas but in the larger functioning of Colombian ministerial affairs.<sup>32</sup>

Operationally, the guiding document was the Joint Command's multiyear *Plan Patriota* ("Plan Patriot"), which prioritized areas of insurgent activity (with FARC's dispositions and activities the determining factors) and outlined subplans for their neutralization. This was to be achieved by the classic technique of "holding" in "strategic maintenance areas"—those where the situation was already considered in hand—while concentrating forces in "strategic operational areas." The first of these was Cundinamarca, the state surrounding Bogota, which throughout 2003 was systematically cleared of major insurgent presence. The effort was so complete that FARC assessments outlined a disaster of the first magnitude,<sup>33</sup> even as the security forces "moved on" to the area of the former *Zona*.

"Moved on," of course, has meant only a concentration of forces for the purpose of conducting the continuous operations, unlimited in time but directed at a particular space—"dispersed mass" (*masa dispersa*<sup>34</sup>) in the Joint Command terminology. These are conducted without fanfare or press releases under tight operational security. Having cleared Cundinamarca, a joint task force of division strength, *Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta*, commanded until recently by Major General Reinaldo Castellanos Trujillo, has priority of effort and is systematically combing the former *Zona* (as well as large areas to the east) and restoring government presence and popular freedom of movement and livelihood. A particular chore has been to clear the numerous minefields placed in unmarked, widespread fashion by FARC.<sup>35</sup>

The overall picture, then, is one of a dramatically improved security environment. This has seen improvement in other indicators, the very intent of the *Democratic Security and Defence Policy*.

## CONCLUSIONS: ASSESSING SUSTAINABILITY

What will emerge in the short term is set already by the operational implementation of President Uribe's strategic framework. It is correct, and it is sustainable.<sup>36</sup> What will emerge in the long term, though, depends upon a host of imponderables, not least whether Uribe gives way to a successor or is allowed a second term.

That, of course, highlights the third element in counterinsurgency, little understood. With a correct and sustainable approach in place, the counterinsurgent “plays for the breaks,” those shifts in the internal or external situation that work against the insurgent and favor the state. This normally involves an extended period of time, a “protracted war.” This makes it difficult for democracies to sustain counterinsurgent campaigns, particularly in the present world-environment where there is little agreement upon strategic ends and means, much less operational and tactical concerns, but it does not in any way obviate the reality that there is no other option.<sup>37</sup>

How, then, to think about the tremendous progress that has been made, as well as future steps that allow us not only to assess sustainability of the present effort, but to contribute to its continued success?

What will drive any assessment will be the nature of the situation on the ground—as it can be measured. Efforts to do so have produced a variety of statistics. These have been used to support both proponents of the present approach’s efficacy and opponents who question, if not the approach as a whole, certain of its emphases and components.

Statistics are a double-edged sword. First, there is the *political* reality that efforts to arrive at metrics for assessing the progress of an approach—though absolutely necessary—take on meaning only as they are interpreted by the audience. All parties to the present Colombian political debate, for example, agree that there has been demonstrable progress toward normalcy by any metric utilized, such as the decline in kidnapping and murder.<sup>38</sup> Yet there is little agreement as to what “normalcy” as an end-state actually should look like.<sup>39</sup> Second, there is the empirical reality that no efforts have proved successful at “explaining” statistically the causes of insurgency. Hence, to measure “progress” in moving “back to” a notional state of “normalcy” is as if we were looking at annual percentage increases in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) without actually being able to measure the GDP itself.<sup>40</sup> “Progress,” then, ends up being a state of popular mind, a belief upon the part of the populace (and its leaders) that the situation is improving.<sup>41</sup> That belief is certainly present in Colombia, as demonstrated by the polling data



discussed earlier, though there remains an element of the “chattering classes” that holds the situation, if not precisely worse, is nonetheless “not acceptable.”<sup>42</sup>

This preliminary discussion is necessary, because one’s position on the issues raised has everything to do with how one assesses current realities and how one would recommend proceeding. “Sustainability” is not an issue that should engage us further, if the assessment is that the present approach is not advancing Colombia towards the desired end-state. This would lead to a recommendation that *Democratic Security*, minimally, be modified; maximally, be abandoned. As this is not the position of this analysis, it must be made clear that my assessment rests upon the positive trends outlined but is neither static nor unqualified.

In the matter of statistics, it is the combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators that gives rise to the judgment that progress is being made. This does not mean, however, that merely advocating “more of the same” is the prescription for further action so much as “staying the course.”

*Democratic Security* has been built upon the acceptance, by the political authorities of the Uribe administration, of the position (discussed at length above) that the Gordian knot to Colombia’s security impasse is FARC. Only FARC continues to seek state power *while simultaneously demonstrating the capacity to negate state armed capacity*. ELN is a nuisance, the AUC historically a consequence of lack of state presence. Negotiations having been tried unsuccessfully with FARC, so only armed action remains—even as a simultaneous negotiating track has been used as the principal weapon to address AUC, to a lesser extent ELN. The desired goal is reincorporation of FARC into the political process, but it is recognized that incentive must be created by armed action.

Compelling FARC to see a course of action necessarily involves neutralizing its ability as an organization to do what it must do to retain its viability. Attacking its ability to recruit, sustain itself, move, and initiate actions is the intent of the “grid” that has been created. Domination of populated areas, such as Cundinamarca, prepared the way for the present operations against FARC’s “strategic rearguard” (FARC’s terminology) in the former *Zona*. The forces committed to

each of these and other priority efforts have *not* been robbed from the established counterinsurgency areas (effectively, COLAR's divisional zones) but deployed from new assets.<sup>43</sup> Their actions are sustainable virtually indefinitely. That their operations indeed have made life more difficult for FARC is without question. Just "how difficult?" is the query that cannot be answered definitively.

The least reliable way to judge results is to match FARC casualties with the order-of-battle. The top figure of some 17,000 combatants (reached during the Pastrana administration) is now put at some 13,000, with most counts claiming that AUC combatants outnumber their FARC rivals (ELN is such a distant third that consideration of its numbers does not enter into this discussion). It is not that these numbers are necessarily wrong, rather that it is unlikely that they reflect the realities of an insurgent movement operating with a support base. Accuracy in the combatant figures of the Fighting Fronts, in other words, likely is not replicated when it comes to counting the numerous local actors who are certainly the bulk of the casualties being recorded. Put in terms of FARC's structure, then, it seems the case that the *companias* and other combatant units (generally associated with various Fighting Fronts) are being fairly well-assessed. However, it seems also that this becomes increasingly less the case as one moves further into the local areas from which not only FARC main force strength, but its logistical support, ultimately derives.<sup>44</sup>

Ironically, the need to count numbers is driven not by the Colombian military, which has made a concerted effort to stay away from the "Vietnam body count trap." Instead, it is the need for the political authorities (many of whom have business backgrounds) and the press to put forward for the public the numerical equivalent of sound-bites that has elevated quantitative measures to heights not found within the military itself. The military approach is clear if one inspects its internal documents. These give pride of place not to body count, but instead to insurgent versus government-initiated actions, ability of FARC to carry out simultaneous actions (ELN does not at present have this capability), and the largest massing of insurgent forces carried out.<sup>45</sup>

Not only are these metrics in sharp contrast to the indicators favored by the political authorities and the press, they serve to

highlight the abuse of statistics that has become a routine part of the present political debate concerning President Uribe himself. Thus critics of Uribe and the *Democratic Security* approach regularly claim to possess data showing an explosion of incidents and insurgent initiative,<sup>46</sup> a position not backed by realities on the ground. What ultimately must drive any assessment, as the military has incorporated into its own analysis, is *the nature* of the incidents being counted. This can involve anything from size to context. An insurgent group such as FARC, forced from mobile warfare back to guerrilla and terror actions, of necessity needs to up the ante. This FARC attempted to do through its association with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). Its efforts to utilize a variety of PIRA terror techniques that hitherto had not been seen in Colombia (or used as exception rather than rule), ranging from the precise placement of bombs to inflict maximum structural damage, to the use of secondary explosions to wreak havoc upon response crews to incidents, were all designed to inflict maximum casualties—and generate maximum terror.<sup>47</sup> That they failed left FARC with only the option it has now pursued: pin-prick attacks that can produce tactical heat but lack strategic fire.

In only one way could these tactical actions have strategic or even operational significance: if they could be parlayed into political consequence. The strategic, operational, and even tactical techniques for using violent action to effect political gain are a central element of the people's war approach used by FARC and are recognized as such in FARC doctrine. They were critical to the effort of the FMLN—so important to FARC's own doctrinal evolution—and were sharpened through direct instruction by the Vietnamese (of key FMLN personnel) in Vietnam.<sup>48</sup> A key issue is whether FARC is attempting to use its tactical efforts to exploit the rifts within the Colombian political spectrum. It would appear FARC is well aware that, by inflicting casualties and appearing to be "alive," despite all the security forces have done, it can provoke political problems of sufficient magnitude to damage or even end *Democratic Security*.<sup>49</sup>

It is particularly ironic that the strategic progress of *Democratic Security* at this point in time will not be able to negate the tactical ability of FARC to initiate guerrilla and terror actions. The large number of mine casualties among the security forces, for instance, as

noted earlier, has little to do with anything save FARC's extensive use of the internationally banned weapons systems. Likewise, pushing ever deeper into previously denied areas can only expose troops still further to such dangers—even as the dismantling of the counterstate so laboriously built over the past 40-some years diminishes steadily FARC's ability to launch actions of significance by ending its ability to push through serious warmaking supplies to its units.<sup>50</sup>

Faced with this profound threat to its viability as an insurgent movement, FARC must respond. As a consequence, there should be no doubt that "violence" in Colombia will continue indefinitely. Yet the counter by the state lies in precisely what is being done: creating a situation where the response is both "correct" and sustainable. The Uribe approach is certainly "correct" in the manner it conceptualizes the problem and seeks to respond to it; it is sustainable in its present form, because it demands no unacceptable investments of resources, human or material. It will face adjustments if the U.S. contribution ends, but it is unlikely this will happen for some time.

What has not registered fully on the Colombian political class is that a correct and sustainable approach is always put in place in order to "play for the breaks." In the Philippines, approximately a half-dozen years were required for the correct approach of OPLAN *Lambat Betag* ("Net Trap") to produce dramatic results; in Thailand roughly half that figure after the implementation of Prime Minister (PM) Order No. 66/23, "The Policy for the Fight to Defeat the Communists." Still, if the spectacularly successful Peruvian approach against *Sendero Luminoso* took just somewhere in-between the length of these two campaigns, normalcy in Ulster was achieved only through a grueling, virtually 25-year effort. And Ulster was but the size of the small American state of Connecticut, with just half its population. Patience is as much a part of the equation as a desire to create precisely the correct mix of techniques that will produce demonstrable results.

President Uribe was able to deliver the state's commitment, strategic framework, and enhanced resources that a meshing of national and military strategies required. He provided a dynamic leadership; the Defence Ministry offered further guidance but in particular engaged in matters of policy which allowed the military forces to operate. Roles became confused, however, and a desire to

lead the military rather than manage it led to the replacement of Minister Ramirez in November 2003 after repeated clashes with the military leadership. CG Joint Command Jorge Mora also stepped down.

The Minister and CG were replaced, respectively, by Jorge Alberto Uribe Echauarria and Carlos Ospina. Moving into CG COLAR position was the COLAR Director of Operations, MG Martin Orlando Carreno Sandoval. Mora had planned to step down in December, in any case, so the transition was smooth. Minister Uribe adopted a more careful style than his predecessor, and there were no significant changes in the 2004 planning and policy guidance.<sup>51</sup> The military was left to lead the implementation of the counterinsurgency. In this, however, Carreno did not inspire the support necessary to remain more than a year in his position. He was replaced in November 2004 by the *Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta* commander, Major General Castellanos.<sup>52</sup>

This is where the situation remains. The military support for the *Democratic Security and Defence Policy* has proceeded in near-textbook fashion. As might be expected, this is not widely understood, with commentary from alleged “experts” on counterinsurgency often wide of the mark.<sup>53</sup> Politically, the danger is that Colombia will become distracted, as already evidenced in the debate that has surfaced surrounding Uribe’s plans to run for a second term. To oppose a second term for Uribe all but demands that his first term record be attacked. This debate has not involved direct assaults on the security forces but on their approach, as well as claiming “social matters are as important as security.”<sup>54</sup> That one is not possible without the other would seem to be precisely the point of the Uribe approach.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, the growing debate over a second term does serve to highlight two issues that emerge time and again in the assessment of any counterinsurgency.

## **Leadership Matters.**

Uribe has proved the right man, at the right time, as have figures in other places, in other times—one thinks of Magsaysay in the Philippines or Templar in Malaya.<sup>56</sup> By extension, 4 years, in fact, is not an adequate period of time within which to see through a

counterinsurgency. Any number of pros and cons can be advanced concerning a “second term.” These are not for consideration here—a persuasive case can be made on either side of the question. What does seem obvious is that likely successors will have been presented with a model of skillful, dynamic leadership.

Such might also be said of the substantial advances made to date. “Have they been institutionalized? Can they be sustained?” is the most common way of posing the purported conundrum. This seems to miss the point. Institutionalization is as much a function of individuals as structure and procedures. Considered in this light, all “systems,” to include militaries, are inadequate to a degree. Mora/Ospina, for instance, sought to institutionalize their changes through myriad ways, from regulations concerning uniform wear to fostering a new ethos within the officer corps. President Uribe has sought to institutionalize his own reforms through a similar methodology, from demanding accountability and transparency to standing up new structures, such as CCAI. In terms of sustainability, distribution of resources is well within the ranges Colombia is capable of delivering for any short-term or even longer-term projection.<sup>57</sup>

As concerns the military specifically, the commentary above is not intended to underestimate the extent of the challenges facing the military (but mainly COLAR) as a result of its expansion and increased operational tempo (“ops tempo”). COLAR was previously a draftee force of “in and out” enlisted ranks, led by a professional officer corps. It now is one-third volunteer. These individuals expect to make the military a career. A host of issues, from family welfare to promotion requirements to NCO rank, must be codified and then allowed to mature. Adding to the challenge is the very nature of continuous small unit operations conducted so as to give FARC no time to recover.<sup>58</sup> Everything from “block leave” procedures to family counseling (e.g., to cope with a rising level of internal turmoil within families in a force that historically has had relatively few disciplinary problems) has had to be instituted. Topping all this is the ever-present threat of corruption in an environment saturated with the easy money of the narcotics trade.

In the field, the strategic initiative has inevitably, as is to be expected, also featured tactical setbacks. The insurgents, after all, also have a learning curve and have sought to exploit the very

weaknesses created by the government's success and a zero-defects political mentality. As military action has forced the insurgents to break up into small units, the security forces have done likewise. This, however, creates opportunities for medium-size concentrations to surprise isolated or tactically sloppy units with rapid concentrations which then disperse. The technique is not new, but the latest actions have seen FARC grappling for a middle ground between "large" and "small" concentrations, thus to be able to attack platoon- or squad-size positions (large *columnas* in the Samper/early Pastrana years would attack even reinforced companies). The insurgents appear to recognize the pressure for "no bad news" placed upon the military by the political structure<sup>59</sup> and thus have moved adroitly to exploit it.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, the favorable strategic situation, it has been argued, could be undone in a flash by follow-on personalities. Is this likely? No, because of all that has been discussed above. In particular, both the reforms and the demands of internal war have produced an accelerating change in the composition of military (particularly COLAR) leadership. Warfighters, who would be as comfortable in the U.S. Army as their own, have begun to dominate promotion boards, with "service in the field" as the salient factor in selection. This is a critical element, since the military is the shield for all else that occurs in the counterinsurgency.

As combat-tested officers have begun to dominate,<sup>61</sup> the question emerges as to what sort of men they are (there are no female general officers in Colombia). In terms of the institution they have made, the results falsify the constant drumbeat of lax standards and abuses that often is rattled off by outsiders, especially international human rights organizations. To the contrary, the military has in the Mora/Ospina years consistently emerged in Colombian polls as one of the most respected institutions in the country, with numbers reaching 80 percent. In terms of individuals, the reforms have endeavored to demand more from them in professional terms, particularly in terms of warfighting, both mechanics and theory. This has resulted in greater knowledge at the strategic and operational levels of war, as well as increased tactical expertise.<sup>62</sup>

Put together, military popularity and effectiveness undoubtedly have contributed to President Uribe's own consistently high

rating with the public. Uribe himself deals with the military in an increasingly sophisticated manner and has grown to respect the professional judgment, first of Mora, then of Ospina. This was in a sense predictable. Unlike the situations in many counterinsurgencies, where a dynamic leader summoned to the helm must reshape both approach and instruments of implementation, Colombia by August 2002 had a military with a correct, tested approach that desperately needed competent, aggressive, strategically astute leadership. This President Uribe provided.<sup>63</sup>

### **Strategic Approach is Critical.**

Indeed, as indicated throughout this discussion, strategic approach, with its operational (campaign) implementation, must be the foremost concern of leadership in a counterinsurgency. To this end, Uribe was fortunate to have officers of the caliber of Mora and Ospina. If Mora may be identified as having seen COLAR through its early transformation, Ospina has had not only to finish the job but implement the central operations of *Plan Patriota*. He has had to do this even while resources have remained constrained, and demands have risen for greater emphasis upon the “development” side of Uribe’s plan. It is not enough, say critics, to regain control of the population; areas seized and held must be consolidated. As the military is keenly aware of the point at issue—and has U.S.-supported programs designed to address this dimension of the conflict<sup>64</sup>—the real questions revolve around allocation of resources and timing. Here, Uribe has stood his ground, remaining true to the spirit of his *Democratic Security and Defence Policy*—security is the necessary basis for all that follows.

It is precisely the substantial progress made in restoring a semblance of “normal life” that has allowed internal debate over issues such as the displaced—several million Colombians have had to flee areas of conflict over the course of the war—and trends in civil-military relations. The latter is often overlooked in judging the effectiveness of military leaders; but here, too, Colombia has been well-served.

Ospina, in particular, has sought to implement a very “American” vision of the military’s relationship to civil authority. As with the



emphasis upon combat as the key determinant for promotion, the reinforcement of civilian authority's position as the final word in matters of moment has not sat well with some military elements. It was, at least in part, Uribe's understanding that healthy civil-military relations depended upon an invisible line's not being crossed (where military core prerogatives were concerned) that led to the replacement of Marta Lucia Ramirez as Defence Minister by Jorge Alberto Uribe. Once having been given its strategic marching orders by civilian authority, the military has maintained firmly its right to determine operational and tactical particulars.<sup>65</sup>

Still, as the present dominant military figure, Ospina has demonstrated an astute understanding of an elected president's needs, just as Uribe has of the military's strengths in facilitating *his* campaign to redeem Colombia. Even while focusing upon the military domination of local areas and the pursuit of FARC into its base areas, Ospina has sought to deliver "progress" in whatever form necessary to Uribe's viability as wartime leader.<sup>66</sup> This has meant added emphasis upon not only civic action (*accion integral*) but also upon nurturing local government back to health in reclaimed areas.<sup>67</sup>

In the larger sense, Uribe's national policy has always stood upon three legs, not merely security but also fiscal health and social development. The former is necessary for all else to proceed and has given no grounds for complaint. The latter remains at the heart of all illegal actors' ability to recruit manpower. It, too, has been addressed as dictated by the progress in the other two sides of the triangle. That one would wish greater emphasis or speed is a judgment call that flies in the face of demonstrable progress.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

If it cannot be judged that the *Democratic Security* approach requires major adjustments, there are areas which bear close monitoring as concern the military/strategic support for the plan.

- Ongoing efforts of the *Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta* in the former *Zona* (and to the east) should be constantly assessed to validate their continued achievement of desired end: the degradation of FARC's ability to launch significant action. This will require careful analysis of FARC's funding and supply profiles, as

well as precise determination of how its local presence relates to the larger movement and to the “strategic rearguard.” A moment may well be near when the next phase of *Plan Patriota* should be initiated, because continued priority of effort to the Joint Task Force is a matter of diminishing returns.

- Analysis must continue to assess more accurately FARC’s funding profile and to determine the impact of counternarcotics efforts upon the warfighting capacity of the movement. Integration of the counternarcotics effort within the larger counterinsurgency must be a matter of ongoing focus, with metrics keyed as much to Colombia’s counterinsurgency needs as to the need to fight drugs.
- Greater coordination and cooperation with neighboring states should be given a high priority in an effort to enlist their resources and forces in the common effort to prevent the use of frontiers for illicit activity. Of particular concern should be the movement of insurgent bases into relative sanctuaries in neighboring states and the continued use of mobility corridors that originate in those same neighboring states. Necessarily, military representatives will be an important part of such activity.
- Within Colombia, the key to the domination of local space remains the viability of the “peasant soldiers” program. No effort should be spared to continue its expansion and enhancement. Those who have served their time should be mobilized into a second-tier national guard framework that can continue to utilize the skills and motivation developed in first-tier active service.
- Further enhancement of the “grid” can be gained through completing the transition of divisional to joint commands, and the continuing integration of police and civil elements into planning and operations. It is particularly important to continue the developing relationship between the military and the police.
- Greater resources should be put into the consolidation effort represented by CCAI. The reincorporation of alienated localities is the ultimate test of success in the counterinsurgency.

A complementary effort is assessment of the nature of local realities after normalcy is restored. Neutralization of FARC (or ELN) must be accompanied by the writ of the state and not by the revitalization of AUC presence.

- A more robust information warfare campaign should be waged. Successes need to be utilized to a much greater extent to demonstrate the progress that has been made and to foster the continued legitimacy accorded the state by the population.
- The maturation of the “grid,” as the fielding of new units is completed, should be looked upon as an opportunity to codify techniques and successes in revised doctrine. This can inform training and schooling in such manner as to institutionalize the advances made.
- Efforts should be focused upon resolving contradictions in military personnel policies and logistical procedures which have retarded maturation of the forces and the war effort.

Similarly, there are areas where the U.S. component of the campaign needs to be monitored.

- The battle is not over. U.S. support, in material and personnel, will play an important role for the foreseeable future. These must be maintained. To the contrary, a tendency has emerged in U.S. circles that seeks to interpret realities on the ground in terms that speak to the artificial deadlines created by funding legislation. This is extraordinarily dangerous, particularly the notion that the war is won, and it is time to talk of running down U.S. aid and converting Colombian forces to other uses (such as United Nations peacekeeping).
- Hand-in-hand with this misjudgment is analysis that persists in viewing the struggle through an incorrect lens. This has been especially visible in some U.S. political and media circles, where the conflict is yet labeled as either CN or CT or something else. It is all of these things and must be approached in a unified manner. This is precisely what the Colombians have been fighting to achieve, and they have made dramatic

strides. These have come at considerable political and personal cost for key players such as President Uribe, Minister Uribe, and CG Joint Command Ospina.

- This drive towards unity of effort must extend to the U.S. side. Greater effort is necessary to raise the level of awareness in Washington that what happens in Colombia is the lynchpin of our Latin American position. This is not a new domino theory so much as a recognition that, in the present strategic environment, Latin America is the forgotten theatre; SOUTHCOM, the forgotten command; and Colombia, our forgotten but closest, most reliable ally. At a time when the forces of the radical left are again on the march throughout the Hemisphere, to include advocating a severely restricted fight against drugs, Colombia has emerged as having interests most coincident with the United States. More than that, it remains a stable democratic state committed to reform and the market economy. The contrast with an increasingly unstable and strategically dangerous Venezuela could not be greater.
- Operationally, recognition of the points above should take the form of an enhanced relationship between U.S. and Colombian forces, as well as between the strategic cultures of the two countries. Military cooperation could be enhanced in myriad ways, in particular by augmenting training programs so that they reflect more accurately the nature of the close relations between Washington and Bogota. Simultaneously, closer relations should be facilitated between U.S. centers of strategic, risk assessment, and regional analysis and those in Colombia. The latter have a level of expertise and analytical capability surpassing any in Latin America but have been underutilized. They could make a greater contribution to *Democratic Security*, as well as the larger Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).
- There are areas one could further highlight, such as the desire for even greater force strengths or mobility assets. Yet these must be carefully balanced against available resources and the ability of the system itself to absorb any more inputs. Burnishing what has come to exist in the nearly 3 years of

the Uribe administration might well pay greater gains than seeking to load any more onto the system.

What bears repeating is the point to which this analysis has returned often: the present effort is both correct and sustainable. It is the strategic posture required for progress and popular security. Hence continued care must be exercised to ensure that *Democratic Security* remains a multifaceted approach, a strengthening of the state—of its governance and finances—and of democratic capacity. These are carried out behind the ever more powerful and capable shield provided by the security forces. But they only *enable* the solution, which lies in the use of *legitimacy* to *mobilize* response against those using political violence to seek illegitimate ends.

## ENDNOTES

1. Funding for this monograph was provided by two sources: the Institute for National Strategic Studies, INSS) of National Defense University, NDU, Washington, DC; and *Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia*, Bogota, Colombia. Various portions of the text were presented on January 7, 2005, at an INSS symposium, “Colombia’s Democratic Security: Assessing Progress and Near-Term Risks,” and are incorporated in a chapter, “Colombian Military Support for ‘Democratic Security,’” which will appear in the forthcoming NDU volume that resulted from that conference. Particularly helpful were the suggestions and analytical challenges offered by Jay Cope of INSS/NDU. Other portions of the text were presented on February 23, 2005, in Bogota at a *Fundacion* conference, “*Sostenibilidad de la Seguridad Democratica*,” and subsequently appeared in Spanish, in the published conference proceedings, as “*La Sostenibilidad del Apoyo Estrategico-Militar a la ‘Seguridad Democratica’*,” Andres Villamazar, trans. See <http://www.seguridadydemocracia.org/docs/pdf/ocasionales/thomasMarks.pdf>.

2. Presidency of the Republic/Ministry of Defence, *Politica de Defensa y Seguridad Democratica*, Bogota: Ministry of Defence, 2003. Released simultaneously, an English version, *Democratic Security and Defence Policy*, is slightly shorter than the original Spanish version but is identical in all other respects.

3. For details, see Tom Marks, “Colombian Army Counterinsurgency,” *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 40, 2003, pp. 77-105.

4. For details, see Thomas A. Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, January 2002. The work cited in n. 3 above is an expanded, updated version, with maps and illustrations. The military reform under discussion was certainly the most extensive since that at the early part of the 20th Century. For background concerning earlier reform efforts, see Jose Jaime Rodriguez R., “La Reforma Militar,” in Alvaro Valencia Tovar, ed., *Historia de*

*las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia*, Vol. 2, *Ejercito*, Bogota: Planeta, 1993, pp. 311-360; as well as Registro Historico del Ejercito, *Documentos Acerca de la Modernizacion del Ejercito Nacional 1907, de la Coleccion Uribe Uribe*, Bogota: COLAR, 1998.

5. Strategic guidance and command policy were normally issued publicly in October for the next year, generally as a single document for each service, in Spanish only. Most important was the COLAR publication—due to the army’s leading role within the armed forces. Detailed operational plans, to include the annual campaign document produced by the Joint Command, were classified, released to a very limited distribution list.

6. Most recent public data is “FARC Inc.,” *Semana*, February 2, 2005, unpaginated [web download], at <http://semana2.terra.com.co/opencms/opencms/Semana/articulo.html?id=84464>.

7. Best single work on the Vietnamese approach prior to the launching of the war of attrition against U.S. forces in the Second Indochina War is Truong Chinh, *Primer for Revolt: The Communist Takeover in Viet-Nam*, Fall, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963. This book regularly turns up (in Spanish translation) in captured FARC document caches, as well as in the files on the captured laptop computers of FARC leadership personnel. For discussion of the FMLN version of people’s war, see David E. Spencer and Jose Angel Moroni Bracamonte, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995; and Spencer, *From Vietnam to El Salvador: The Saga of the FMLN Sappers and Other Guerrilla Special Forces in Latin America*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996. FARC strategy, operational art, and tactics are, when all is said and done, those of the FMLN.

8. American military sources, relying upon their own misinterpretation of Clausewitz, often assert that there can be but one center of gravity. This is not correct and is not the interpretation taught in the COLMIL schools. Best discussion on the controversy in general is “Clauswitz and War: Two Perspectives on Center of Gravity,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 35, undated; therein, Antulio J. Echevarria II, “Center of Gravity: Recommendations for Joint Doctrine,” pp. 10-17; Christopher Bassford, “Interpreting the Legacy of Clausewitz,” pp. 18-19; and Joseph L. Strange and Richard Iron, “Center of Gravity: What Clauswitz Really Meant,” pp. 20-27.

9. This remains a dominant theme of U.S. media reporting on Colombia, with the line being that “billions of dollars” in equipment, training, and advice have gone into retraining and re-equipping “Colombia’s military.” See, e.g., Peter Canby, “Latin America’s Longest War,” *The Nation*, Vol. 16, August 2004 [internet; no pagination]: “This is part of the Administration’s effort to renew, in 2006, ‘Plan Colombia,’ a program under which the United States has already spent some \$3 billion, more than 75 percent of it on military aid.” To the contrary, the bulk of U.S. funding to date has gone to the CN effort and has had only incidental impact upon the Colombian forces. Nevertheless, such funding as has reached the Colombian military has been important, especially as dispersed through the actions and programs of the highly regarded military assistance mission (U.S. MILGP), until recently at roughly 400 military and civilian personnel. Virtually an equal number of civilian personnel were present under State Department auspices, a majority in connection with CN.

These figures are now being reported at a higher 800 military and 600 civilians. For a breakout of aid see the Center for International Policy's "Colombia Project" at <http://www.ciponline.org/Colombia/aidtable.htm>.

10. A sixth division was organized during the Uribe administration from what previously had been the Joint Task Force, which had been in the extreme south of the country. The COLAR order of battle became: I Div: 2, 4, 11, 17 Bdes; II Div: 5, 14, 16, 18 Bdes; III Div: 3, 8 Bdes; IV Div: 7, 9 Bdes; V Div: 1, 6, 13 Bdes; and VI Div: 12, 26, 27 Bdes. The national reaction force, *Fuerza de Despliegue Rapido* (FUDRA) which matured during the Pastrana administration, is a light division equivalent, with 3 x BRIM (mobile brigades) and 1 x Special Forces Brigade, of 4 x SF Bns. An independent task force of virtual division strength, *Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta*, has been operating in the south (mainly the former *Zona*) for nearly a year-and-a-half, while 2005 saw I Division given command of a joint command.

11. In the field, BCG were normally 300-350 men, though at least one official manning table called for nearly 400 men. They had a higher allocation of machineguns and grenade launchers than regular battalions. After-action reports consistently identified their major tactical problem as over-aggressiveness by the soldiers, resulting in lack of mutual support by small units.

12. Literally, "Commanding General of the Military Forces," which accurately defines the authority and responsibility inherent to the position. It is rendered as "CG Joint Command" to facilitate the analysis presented here.

13. *Democratic Security and Defence Policy*, pp. 13-14.

14. See *Ibid.*, pp. 23-30.

15. For details, see Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, London: Frank Cass, 1996, as well as the follow-on volume, *Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia*, Bangkok: White Lotus, forthcoming.

16. Colombian documents cited throughout this article are accurate in their presentation of plans, courses of action, and particulars. They are quite straightforward in approach and abundant in detail. For the three quoted elements that follow, see *Democratic Security and Defence Policy*, p. 42.

17. Recent official documents drop "national" in their translations.

18. See Presidencia de la Republic/Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, *Sector Defensa: Una Vision, Una Mision—Plan Estrategico 2002-2006*, Bogota: MDN, undated, in Spanish only.

19. Comandante del Ejercito, Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle, *Guia Operacional y Politicas de Comando 2003*, Bogota: COLAR, undated, pp. 22-23; in Spanish only. The "strategic alignment of the objectives" for all levels discussed thus far—national, defense, military, and army—is found at pp. 34-35.

20. It is important to emphasize the distinction between this integration of the assault on narcotics into a larger counterinsurgency plan, which made the CN campaign quite different from what had gone before. Indeed, use of the label "narcoterrorist organizations" (ONT) for the various insurgent entities stems, at least

in part, from Colombian security forces' awareness that its terminology needs to be in harmony with that of its principal benefactor, the United States. If, in Washington, "insurgents" are to be called "terrorists" and "narcotraffickers," Bogota will go along tactically—while operationally and strategically seeking to avoid analytical confusion.

21. Excellent reference is Ejercito Nacional de Colombia, *Logros de la Reestructuracion*, Bogota: COLAR, undated; in Spanish only. Various translations of the title are possible, but the most logical would be "Success of the Transformation" or "Achievements of Restructuring." Though undated, the document contains statistics through the end of July 2002 and is signed in the introduction by Mora as CG COLAR. Thus it appears to have been published as his assessment of what had been accomplished during his tenure as army head.

22. Attacks upon Colombia's administration and its security forces by human rights organizations, most prominently international, lack transparency in their data preparation and often contain inaccuracies that detract from their value. They must consequently be used with care. The problem was highlighted in a much-publicized cable critical of human rights statistical practices from the American Embassy in Bogota to distribution list recipients. See AmEmbassy Bogota, "A Closer Look at Human Rights Statistics," October 10, 2003, Unclassified. The information contained therein had been in general circulation for several years but had not been publicly documented.

23. Complete discussion may be found in Marks, *Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia*.

24. "Grid," the interlocking deployment of forces and programs to dominate an area, is a counterinsurgency term not used in Colombia, either in Spanish or English. The principles involved, though, are well-understood. For background, albeit with application to another insurgency, see Thomas A. Marks, "At the Frontlines of the GWOT: State Response to Insurgency in Jammu," *Journal of Counterterrorism and Homeland Security International*, October 1, 2004, pp. 38-46.

25. That the Colombian approach in this period was not well-understood, even by American personnel serving in the country, can be readily assessed by examining the commentary they produced.

26. See Ejercito-Policia Nacional, *Plan de Choque*, Power Point presentation, undated.

27. Progress in restoring normal life indeed has been nothing short of dramatic. A variety of sources are available, but particularly useful for its wealth of data is a monthly update released by the U.S. Embassy, "Colombia Progress Information Sheet," a single page PDF file available for the asking. Context for the early Uribe period may be found in Federacion de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales, *Verdad Colombia*, Power Point presentation, undated; data cutoff in the body is December 31, 2003.

28. For details on the program, but not the reaction force, see Policia Nacional, *Direccion Operativa, Programa Escuadrons Movils de Carabineros*, Power Point presentation, undated.



29. Interestingly, major Colombian multi-service operations, such as Operation TSUNAMI in May 2001, where all forces were intimately involved, experienced few difficulties operating without a rigidly designated chain-of-command. Even the six helicopters utilized (all that were available) were “joint,” two each from the three services. *Field notes*, May 2001. Lack of clashes may stem in part from the small size of the senior officer corps. There are normally approximately 38-42 COLAR generals (in three grades) on active duty, and 15-17 generals/admirals (also in three grades) for FAC and ARC, each, which results in but six dozen officers who generally know one another. This factor combines in an indeterminate but very definite way with the personalistic nature of Colombian society to minimize friction.

30. Such friction was less a factor at local or regional levels, where the police and the military often worked together closely.

31. By mutual consent of Colombian and American parties, the Spanish-language acronym is used, even with the English rendering, thus to avoid the inevitable tittering that would accompany “CCIA.”

32. Representatives from ministries and organizations, as well as various support organizations, provide fulltime staffing. U.S. personnel are also present.

33. See, e.g., the captured (June 2004) FARC document, *Informe Para Balance de los Frentes Policarpa Salavarrieta y 42 del Bloque Oriental de las FARC-EP*, dated March 15, 2004.

34. As verbally rendered, not a formal term.

35. *Field notes*, June 2004. Mines, in fact, have become a major source of casualties, the cause of 36.3 percent of the 466 armed forces dead suffered in 2003, 39.1 percent of the 1,182 wounded. Casualties themselves have decreased slightly in Uribe’s second year in office (August 7, 2003-August 4, 2004)—436 military dead, 1,119 wounded—compared to the previous calendar year, this despite the stepped up operations tempo outlined above. Simultaneously, indicators of personal security have continued their inexorable trend for the better. Kidnappings, for instance, which had already dropped sharply during 2003, were down a further 41 percent for the first 7 months of 2004, 896 for the period January 1-August 4, 2004, compared to 1,507 for the same 2003 period.

36. Fiscally, sustainability has rested upon expansion of the tax base—a consequence of greater local security—that has resulted in enhanced government revenues. These have made possible continued funding levels previously possible only as a consequence of the one-time special tax.

37. This formulation was outlined for me by the legendary Sir Robert Thompson shortly before his death. For the interview, see Tom Marks, “The Counter-Revolutionary: Sir Robert Thompson—Grand Master of Unconventional Warfare,” *Soldier of Fortune*, Vol. 14, No. 10, October 1989, pp. 58-65, 77-80. Thompson’s seminal text remains as useful today as when it was written, regardless of the precise ideology adopted by the insurgents: *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, NY: Praeger, 1966.

38. Readily available are the releases of the National Department of Planning, *Departamento Nacional de Planeacion*, “Measures [Numbers] of Violence,” *Cifras de*

*Violencia*, issued by the Directorate of Justice and Security, Direccion de Justicia y Seguridad, at [http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas\\_detalle.aspx?idp=562](http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas_detalle.aspx?idp=562).

39. The issue is highlighted in a recent publication, wherein I note that the bloodiest conflict (apparently—as measured by fatalities) presently ongoing in Asia, that in the Indian Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir, scales as slightly safer than the U.S. city of Baltimore, Maryland. This may be cold comfort to the victims, but it does speak volumes to our point: what is acceptable to a society as criminal violence, unacceptable to another as political violence, at least as measured purely in quantitative terms. See Thomas A. Marks, “Jammu & Kashmir: State Response to Insurgency—The Case of Jammu,” *Faultlines* [Delhi], Vol. 16, No. 1, January 2005, pp. 1-28. One could do the same analysis for virtually any major Colombian city and state that “the war” is quite a safe place to be compared to, say, the normal, criminally-affected environment of Medellin! The point is that society must decide what it “can live with.” Perhaps the ultimate illustration might be provided by “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland, which generated a huge body of analysis. Yet in purely lethal statistical terms, i.e., measured by fatalities, Ulster was marginally *less* dangerous than Anchorage, Alaska. See “Northern Ireland and Urban America,” *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* [London], Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 1993, pp. 52-86; reprinted as Chapter 3, “Northern Ireland and Urban America on the Eve of the 21st Century,” in Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., ed., *Global Dimensions of High Intensity Crime and Low Intensity Conflict*, Chicago: Office of International Criminal Justice/University of Illinois at Chicago, 1995, pp. 53-96.

40. For a discussion of the quantitative issues, see Tom Marks, “Insurgency by the Numbers II: The Search for a Quantitative Relationship Between Agrarian Revolution and Land Tenure in South and Southeast Asia,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Autumn 1994, pp. 218-291. The contents extended beyond the range implied by the title.

41. Discussed in Thomas A. Marks, “Evaluating Insurgent/Counterinsurgent Performance,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Winter 2000, pp. 21-46.

42. Precise phraseology here is important, since there appears to be a fragment of the Colombian political elite, representative of the 15-17 percent of the population who, in all polling data, have steadfastly espoused a negative position on the Uribe administration from (literally) the day it took office. For this element of the population, “*not acceptable*” would seem the appropriate phrase, as it incorporates both an assessment of tangible realities and as a value judgment upon those held responsible—this as opposed to merely “unacceptable,” which merely is an assessment of present situation absent the moral approbation.

43. The argument could be made that COLAR’s normal procedures for manning the new units have caused difficulties for the established counterinsurgency areas. New combat units typically are formed by transferring experienced manpower from existing volunteer but nonstrike elements, replacing those transferred soldiers with new or lesser experienced individuals.

44. To my knowledge, there is no study of any sort, Colombian or American, classified or open, that deals with this essential issue. Significantly, it is the same consideration that provoked a fierce debate within the ranks of American

operational and intelligence players during the Vietnam War. In that case, the Vietnamese communist insurgent support structure, notably the local militia, was not enumerated in the American order of battle, because it was felt the figures leaned too heavily upon estimates and only clouded any efforts to assess actual strength of the enemy. Central works in laying out the issues are both by the key figure involved in the effort to include the support structure and militia, former CIA analyst Sam Adams: "Vietnam Cover-up: Playing With the Numbers—Statistics on Viet Cong Strength Ignored by the CIA," *Harper's*, May 1975, pp. 41-45; and *War of Numbers: An Intelligence Memoir*, South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 1995. The post-war legal action began when television network CBS charged in a documentary (that featured prominently Sam Adams) that the military authorities, rather than being motivated by a desire to avoid confusion and misstatement, instead were seeking to mislead their political masters. General William Westmoreland, commander during the period in question, pursued legal action that, among other things, generated considerable useful data of relevance to our discussion of the Colombian case. See, e.g., Bob Brewin and Sydney Shaw, *Vietnam on Trial: Westmoreland vs. CBS*, NY: Atheneum, 1987; Don Kowet, *A Matter of Honor: General William C. Westmoreland Versus CBS*, New York: Macmillan, 1984. Adams, though remaining a "must read" in any Vietnam bibliography, has been debunked effectively on both matters of military motive and order of battle particulars. See James J. Wirtz, "Intelligence to Please? The Order of Battle Controversy During the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, Summer 1991, pp. 239-263, reprinted in Wirtz and James K. Johnson, *Strategic Intelligence*, Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2004, pp. 183-197.

45. See, e.g., General Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle, *Politica de Seguridad Democratica y la Situacion en Colombia*, Power Point briefing, undated but delivered publicly in both Colombia and the United States during the past year. FARC increasingly has been driven to small unit action.

46. See, e.g., the discussion contained in Angel Romero, "Abandono en fronteras facilita ingreso de armas," *La Opinión Online*, April 7, 2005, at [www.laopinion.com.co](http://www.laopinion.com.co).

47. For quick reference on PIRA relationship with FARC, see Jeremy McDermott, "'IRA Influence' in FARC Attacks," BBC, May 9, 2005.

48. Former FMLN personnel who were trained in Vietnam and have worked with the Colombian security forces have noted that prior to any "technical" instruction, i.e., military methods, they were required to attend courses on the use of military action to accomplish political goals. The use of violence to facilitate Hanoi's position in the Paris "peace talks" was the central case story. *Field notes*, March-April 2004.

49. My analysis here jibes with that of Dave Spencer—i.e., that FARC, as judged by data contained in interrogation reports and in captured documents, understands what it is doing and has displayed considerable astuteness in exploiting the present Colombian political debate. The intensity of the debate is well-publicized and is understood by FARC through reports relayed by its urban operatives. My assessment, however, is not shared by all observers of the Colombian scene.

50. A common misconception is that "guerrillas" are self-sustaining, obtaining all they need either by generating it or capturing it from the government. In reality, insurgents can rarely, if ever, obtain crucial components of their war effort, notably

arms and ammunition, from within the battle space and thus must seek acquisition outside. FARC gains most of its weapons and ammunition from abroad. Even food, as demonstrated by massive caches uncovered in the former *Zona* throughout 2004 and now 2005, is stockpiled and pushed forward to combatants. *Field notes*, February 2005.

51. See Comandante General Fuerzas Militares, Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle, *Direccionamiento Estrategico y Politicas de Comando 2004*, Bogota: Joint Command, undated; and Comandante Ejercito Nacional, Martin Orlando Carreno Sandoval, *Direccionamiento y Politicas de Comando 2004*, Bogota: COLAR, undated; both in Spanish only.

52. In early 2005, a further four senior COLAR officers were separated from service for continuing to resist the joint command concept and engaging in other actions deemed inappropriate by the Minister of Defense and CG Joint Command.

53. See, e.g., the commentary within Rachel Van Dongen, "Plan Puts Colombia on Offensive," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 22, 2004, internet. Western periodicals-of-record continue to be inadequate in their treatment of the counterinsurgency, displaying little understanding of either the security forces or their operations.

54. A useful discussion of the topic, albeit one that appears to underestimate the security dimension of the issue it discusses, is Michael Shifter and Vinay Jawahar, "State Building in Colombia: Getting Priorities Straight," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 1, Fall 2004, pp. 143-154.

55. Hence the title of the first chapter, "Order, the First Need of All," in the famous work by Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1991.

56. For an overview, see Franklin Mark Osanaka, ed., *Modern Guerrilla Warfare: Fighting Communist Guerrilla Movements, 1941-1961*, New York: Free Press, 1962.

57. Analyst Dave Spencer, of Hicks & Associates, widely known for his superior commentary on Colombia, has noted:

Colombians could dig much deeper if they wanted to, but "if they wanted to" is the key. They haven't really been forced to do so thus far. There are elements in the population who want to fight a war and be comfortable at the same time, similar to the U.S. during Vietnam. The Colombians should be leery of being victims of their own success. They unified to elect Uribe and to kick off the Democratic Security program. Now that the war has returned to the pre-Serpa/Pastrana levels, they want to haggle and fight with each other. They—not the FARC—are their own worst enemy.

Personal communication, February 9, 2005.

58. The actual nature of COLAR ground operations is fairly consistently misrepresented in the Colombian press, particularly the claim that "big units" are engaging in aimless "search and destroy" in circumstances more appropriate to "small units." Of necessity, "units" deploy as per their identity—there are, for instance, half a dozen BRIM presently active in the former *Zona*, and areas to the east. Yet their deployment particulars are driven by the anticipated ability of the

insurgents to mass. What is critical, in areas where the insurgents have a capacity to appear in substantial numbers, is for subordinate units to remain within reinforcing distance of one another. As the threat posture changes, greater distances between units are allowed, thus breaking up into numerous smaller "patrols." For further discussion of the situation, see Zachariah Bruyn Decker, "Las Farc en los tiempos de Uribe," *El Espectador*, October 10, 2004, p. 1.

59. This problem predates President Uribe and revolves around the concept of "omission," similar to the concept in the United States that emergency services may be found negligent for failing to respond in a reasonable and timely manner to emergencies. In Colombia, the legal system was used by activists to generate the requirement that all instances of "threat" be acted upon—with extensive documentation required to make a case for doing otherwise. The result was an untenable situation in which the tactical initiative was ceded to rumor and insurgent exploitation of the mechanism. False calls led to ambush, but to use military sense to sort out reality from fancy risked the end of a career. The same dynamic, unfortunately, has been created by the present administration's "zero defects" approach to the conflict. As a result, ill-considered responses often are seen as preferable to rebuke, with tactical miscues leading to unnecessary casualties. In turn, tactical setbacks have resulted in command-reliefs, through presidential intercession, in circumstances that can only be deemed questionable.

60. As February-May 2005 unfolded, FARC clearly was engaged in an offensive designed to inflict maximum casualties, thus exploiting both the zero-defects mentality of the administration and the tendency of at least a proportion of the Colombian "chattering classes" to view the normal give-and-take of tactical action as a sign of larger strategic defect. In reality, the small, hard-to-prevent tactical successes have meant nothing to the strategic situation—but could have a strategic impact by manipulating perception and spurring further the debate as to "sustainability."

61. Results of promotion boards and attendance at key schools are revealing in this respect. The 130 COLAR Majors who attended the 2003 staff school, for instance, included 29 percent (38) who had already commanded BCG; 50 percent of the class had been decorated for valor—with 20 percent (26) of the entire class having received multiple awards. Selection for middle and upper level COLAR service schools remains tied to advancement. Lest the point be missed: nearly a third of a staff course already, as majors, had commanded light infantry battalions in combat and been extensively decorated. They graduated to fill staff positions (most desired, those in the 12 x BRIM) and take command of regular battalions. Since BCG command is "branch immaterial," the driving force of COLAR is being systematically tested, evaluated, and promoted through combat.

62. Important in this effort has been a continuing series of command seminars and special courses ordered by Ospina, first as CG COLAR, then as CG Joint Command. These have principally focused upon upgrading the overall knowledge of military theory and art, but they have also included "combat refresher" courses for all ranks from lieutenant colonel up.

63. Thus Colombia faced the opposite dilemma of Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, wherein he went through any number of commanders before

finding in Ulysses S. Grant, the man—"he fights." Colombia's military, having restored its ability to fight, needed a president who did likewise. For exact wording and context of Abraham Lincoln's famous observation concerning Grant, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1988, pp. 414-415. For discussion of the profound challenges and evolution in Civil War civil-military relations, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Partners in Command*, New York: The Free Press, 1994; and T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, New York: Gramercy Books, 2000. Lest such comparison be regarded as strained, recourse need only be had to surveying the normally inadequate initial military response to insurgencies since the end of World War II. Invariably, whether one considers so basic a step as arming citizens desperate to defend themselves, or framing strategic and operational response to the insurgents, militaries generally have been slow to find their counterinsurgent stride and often have required external stimulus provided by new political leadership.

64. Current operations of the *Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta*, for instance, have received growing input in U.S. civic action support for a variety of projects from infrastructure development, to medical assistance, to bringing or restoring judicial services to isolated communities. Of greatest moment is that the projects are implemented by joint military/civilian efforts, designed to facilitate implementation of more permanent arrangements, and often embedded in far-reaching micro-development initiatives, such as pursuing alternative crops from a "systems" perspective, production to market. *Field notes*, September 2004.

65. That COLAR, in particular, is in a period of transition from its "German" heritage (transmitted historically through Chilean vectors) to an "American" model has been stated directly in briefings to officers. (The air force [FAC] has long looked to America for inspiration, the navy [ARC] to the British.) This has not meant, however, the uncritical adoption of either U.S. forms or procedures. American difficulties in Iraq, stemming at least in part from the intervention of civilian leadership in military operational efforts, have been a poignant reminder that a balance must be struck between obedience to civilian authority and institutional independence. What this balance should be remains indeterminate.

66. Indispensable for a general treatment of this subject—"an elected president's needs in wartime"—is Herman Hattaway and J. Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.

67. Frequently referred to as "back-filling" in counterinsurgency parlance, this restoration of legitimate government writ is often the most difficult aspect counterinsurgency. It requires a coordination of manpower and resources that is difficult to achieve even in peacetime, much less time of strife. It also is inherently costly. In Colombia, the effort is greatly complicated by the large number of displaced persons who desperately need assistance.