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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**LAND REFORM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN
COLOMBIA**

by

Mark S. Nieswiadomy

December 2003

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE December 2003	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE: Land Reform and Conflict Resolution in Colombia			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Mark S. Nieswiadomy				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
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14. SUBJECT TERMS Colombia, Land Reform, Conflict Resolution, Asset Forfeiture, FARC, Paramilitaries, Reverse Land Reform, South Vietnam, El Salvador, ANUC, Pacification			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 131	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL	

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

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LAND REFORM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN COLOMBIA

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Lieutenant, United States Navy
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

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ABSTRACT

One of the leading arguments explaining the current rural conflict in Colombia is that it stems from deeply rooted peasant grievances over lack of land. As is true in much of Latin America, Colombia has one of the highest levels of inequality of landownership in the world. Yet in over four decades worth of land titling effort, INCORA, Colombia's national land reform agency, has been unable to change the overall high concentration of landownership. This thesis examines to what effect, if any, a redistributive land reform policy implemented amid the ongoing rural conflict would have on its resolution.

While social scientists have developed a multitude of theoretical explanations of "why peasants rebel," little attention has been given to how land reform implemented during intra-state conflict is to resolve peasant insurgencies. Devoid of a theoretical framework, policymakers have looked towards two well-known cases of land reform in South Vietnam and El Salvador to base much of their decision making on the merits of land reform in the Colombian case. Yet this thesis finds that these two cases do not provide sufficient evidence to suggest a similar failure of land reform in the Colombian case. Furthermore, this thesis confirms that there is a strong historical nexus between land and conflict in Colombia, and since the mid-1990s, the intensification of the rural conflict resulted from: (1) the phenomena of "reverse land reform" where narco-traffickers purchased vast sums of land attempting to launder illicit drug profits; (2) an increase in rural income inequality; and (3) a significant shift from illicit coca cultivation in Bolivia and Peru to Colombia.

Ultimately, this thesis finds that as a "stand alone" policy, redistributive land reform will not only be a difficult agenda item for Colombia's president to find political support for, but its very implementation will be violently contested by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and narco-traffickers. This thesis concludes by offering potential alternative approaches or "paths" that make redistributive land reform feasible in Colombia, with special emphasis on a rural pacification, asset forfeiture, and post-conflict requirements.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	DEFINING THE "COLOMBIAN QUESTION"	1
B.	PLAN COLOMBIA AND THE EXPANSION OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY.....	1
C.	THESIS PURPOSE	5
D.	RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	7
E.	METHODOLOGY	7
F.	CHAPTER ORGANIZATION.....	8
II.	LAND REFORM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION.....	13
A.	LAND REFORM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AN OVERVIEW.....	13
B.	THEORIES OF PEASANT REVOLT: AN OVERVIEW.....	15
1.	Land Inequality and Rural Violence.....	16
2.	Is There a Certain "Type" of Peasant That is Most Likely to Rebel?.....	17
3.	Aggregate-Psychological Approaches: Getting into the Mind of the Peasant.....	19
4.	Rational Actor Explanations.....	20
5.	Wickham-Crowley's Multi-variant Theory of Peasant Support...21	
C.	SOUTH VIETNAM: "TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE"	22
1.	The Land Tenure Issue in South Vietnam.....	23
2.	The Unique Aspect of Competing Land Reform	24
3.	Land Reform Fails Under Diem (1955-1961)	24
4.	"Land to the Tiller": South Vietnam's Last Gasp at Land Reform	27
D.	THE CASE OF EL SALVADOR	29
1.	The Land Tenure Problem in El Salvador	29
2.	Land Reform and the 1932 Peasant Rebellion	30
3.	The Mobilization of El Salvador's Peasants	31
4.	The Radicalization of El Salvador's Peasant Movement	32
5.	Land Reform and Conflict 1980: The Reformers Fail	33
E.	CONCLUSION	34
III.	THE NEXUS BETWEEN LAND AND CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA	39
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	39
B.	COLONIZATION AND THE LIBERAL AGRARIAN REFORM MOVEMENT (1870 – 1948)	40
C.	THE EARLY HISTORY OF FARC, AND THE "RISE AND FALL" OF THE NATIONAL PEASANT ASSOCIATION ANUC (1966 – 1980)	47
D.	THE ESCALATION OF THE RURAL VIOLENCE (1982 – 2002)	55
1.	A Failed "Cease Fire" and FARC's Embrace of Coca	55
2.	The Conflict's "Center of Gravity," By the Numbers.....	58

E.	MAKING THE CONNECTION: INEQUALITY, REVERSE LAND REFORM, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL VIOLENCE	61
1.	Poverty Lessens but Inequality Rises (1978 -1999).....	61
2.	The Scope of the "Reverse Land Reform" Problem	66
F.	CONCLUSION	71
IV.	THE FEASIBILITY OF LAND REFORM IN COLOMBIA	73
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	73
B.	DEFINING LAND REFORM	73
C.	THE POLITICAL FEASIBILITY OF LAND REFORM IN COLOMBIA	76
1.	The President as Reformer in Colombia	77
2.	Could Emergency Powers of Decree Be Used for Expropriative Land Reform?	77
3.	Congress as an Obstacle to Land Reform	78
4.	The Power of <i>Gremios</i>.....	79
D.	FARC AND LAND REFORM.....	85
E.	THE PARAMILITARIES AND LAND REFORM.....	88
F.	ASSET FORFEITURE: "A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY?"	90
G.	CONCLUSION	92
V.	CONCLUSION	93
A.	THE FUTURE OF LAND REFORM IN COLOMBIA: FIVE APPROACHES.....	95
1.	Maintaining the Status Quo: “The Do Nothing” Approach	95
2.	Security First, Socio-economic Reforms Second: The “Do a Little” Approach	96
3.	Land Reform and Rural Pacification: The “Do a Lot” Approach	97
4.	Merging Asset Forfeiture with Pacification: Variation on a Theme Approach.....	100
5.	“Pay Me Now or Pay Me Later,” Post-Conflict Land Reform Requirements in Colombia.....	101
B.	FINAL THOUGHTS	102
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	105
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	115

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Battle for Colombia.....	10
Figure 2: Coca and Poppy Cultivation Regions of Colombia (2001-2002).....	11
Figure 3: Colombia, Peru, Bolivia Coca cultivation (1991 –2000)	57
Figure 4: Colombia: Deaths due to Socio-Political Violence (1988 - 2002).....	58
Figure 5: Colombia: Coca cultivation in hectares, 1994 - 2002	59
Figure 6: Comparison of Inequality in Colombia in international context.....	64
Figure 7: Colombia: Distribution of Land Holdings, 1960 – 1997.....	65
Figure 8: Colombia, Concentration of Land Ownership, 1960 –1997	65
Figure 9: Colombia, Land Purchased by Narco-traffickers	67
Figure 10: Colombia, FARC Military Actions (1995 - 1997)	68
Figure 11: Contested territory between guerrillas and paramilitaries.....	69
Figure 12: Location and Occurrence of Massacres (2000).....	70

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Jeffrey Paige's Theory of Peasant Class Conflict.....	19
Table 2.	Poverty Indicators, National, Urban, and Rural Colombia 1978-99.....	63
Table 3.	Income inequality indicators: National, urban, and rural Colombia, 1978 - 1999.....	64
Table 4.	Land Use in Colombia, 1985 - 1999.....	81
Table 5.	INCORA , Cost of Operations vs. Investment, 1986 - 2000	84

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was here at the Naval Postgraduate School that I discovered voyages were not the exclusive realm of sea going vessels. The research and writing conducted for this thesis took me down many paths of discovery that all exponentially expanded my understanding and knowledge of why intra-state conflicts are fought, and the difficulties involved in their resolution. As this voyage was not without its own difficulties, I am indebted to many others for its completion.

I would first like to express my most sincere appreciation to Professor Harold Trinkunas and Professor Jeanne Giraldo, who graciously agreed to commit their own valuable time and effort, to what I believe ultimately became a most worthwhile and rewarding educational experience.

I would also like to thank the numerous other distinguished faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School's Department of National Security Affairs, whose own personal efforts greatly enriched my understanding of not only Latin America, but beyond.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my wife Patty, my son Dominick, and numerous other family and friends. I thank you all.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. DEFINING THE "COLOMBIAN QUESTION"

Any scholarly study of Colombia quickly finds that this is a country of many paradoxes. How can a country which is Latin America's oldest "democracy" be also the world's largest producer and exporter of cocaine, have the world's highest murder and kidnap rates, and be continually at war with the longest surviving insurgency groups in Latin America? These paradoxes compose the "Colombian Question." It is a question with neither easy solutions nor any apparent quick ending.

Since the 1980s, the United States has perceived resolution of the first part of the "Colombian Question" as a crucial aspect in winning the U.S. domestic "War on Drugs." The socio-economic linkages between the United States and the Colombian illegal narcotics industry are enormous. Almost ninety percent of all cocaine and forty percent of heroin smuggled illegally into the United States originate in Colombia.¹ Furthermore, estimates of the cost of illegal drugs on U.S. society are \$160 billion annually.² Consequently, over the past twenty years U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia has narrowly focused on counter-narcotics and the drug war. By reducing the "Colombian Question" to one of "drugs and guns," U.S. policy has overlooked many of the country's socio-economic problems that arguably are at the core of Colombia's internal strife.

B. PLAN COLOMBIA AND THE EXPANSION OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

In August 2002 U.S. legislators authorized portions of the \$1.3 billion *Plan Colombia* aid to be used for both counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism efforts. This represents a *significant change* in U.S.-Colombia foreign policy. Current Colombia President Alvaro Uribe, who was elected on a "law and order" platform, has distanced his administration from the failed peace process of the previous Pastrana administration, by declaring an all out war on not only the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia Army

¹ U.S. President. "National Drug Control Strategy," The White House (Feb. 2003) [Electronic version], available from <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/strategy2003.pdf> (accessed 5 Mar 2003).

²Ibid.

(FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), but also the country's numerous paramilitary groups.³ Furthermore, the U.S. State Department officially classifies the 18,000 strong FARC, the 3,500 - 5,000 strong ELN, and the 12,000 man paramilitary group, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs).⁴ This has allowed an expansion of U.S. policy from counter-drugs to counter-terrorism in Colombia. In light of the U.S. "global war on terrorism" (GWOT), this latter effort is becoming an increasingly important factor in shaping current U.S.-Colombia foreign policy.

Further evidence of the expansion of U.S.-Colombian policy is seen by the Bush Administration's 2004 budget request for an additional \$147 million to train Colombia's military to protect the vulnerable Cano Limon-Covenas oil pipeline in the northeastern province of Arauca. This 500-mile, 100,000-barrel a day pipeline, jointly operated by the state oil company Ecopetrol, and U.S. owned Occidental Petroleum, is a frequent target of both the ELN and FARC.⁵ The expansion of U.S. policy from counter-narcotics to counter-terrorism represents a potential 'crossing-over' point in America's involvement, where U.S. civilians and personnel are perceived as belligerents in the eyes of Colombia's FTOs.⁶

³ Both human rights organizations and U.S. legislators have been critical of the existence of the relationship between the paramilitaries and the Colombian military. Some Colombians have even gone so far to refer to the paramilitaries as the "Sixth Division." The phrase originates out of the common belief that the "paras" are so ingrained into the Colombian Army's strategic, command, logistical and intelligence infrastructures, that they make up the Army's Sixth Division (Colombian Army is officially organized into five divisions). However, since President Uribe's election to office, he has done much to sever this perception by declaring both the guerrillas and paramilitaries as terrorist organizations, and prosecuting both organizations as such. See Human Rights Watch. "The Six Division: Military and Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia." [Electronic version] (Human Rights Watch: New York, September 2001) available from <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/colombia/6theng.pdf> (accessed 10 Jan 2003).

⁴ Sweig, Julia E. "What Kind of War for Colombia?" *Foreign Affairs* (Sept/Oct 2002), available from http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/fa/fa_septoct02j.html, (accessed 01 Jan 2003).

⁵ Dauenhauer, Katrin. "Politics-U.S.: Increase Sought for Pipeline Protection Program." *Global Information Network* (July 02, 2003) www.proquest.umi.com [30 Sep 03]. The pipeline continues to be a "strategic target" for the ELN. Since 1986 the guerillas have attacked the pipeline 700 times. From an environmental assessment, these attacks have resulted in oil spills of 2.2 million barrels.

⁶ Villelabeitia, Ibon. "Colombian Rebels Say Americans "Prisoners of War." *The Washington Post*, 25 February 2003,[Home page on-line] www.washingtonpost.com (accessed on 1 Mar 2003). On 13 February 2003, FARC-EP captured three U.S. contractors conducting narcotics aerial surveillance after their plane crashed in southern Colombia. FARC-EP claims that these three U.S. citizens are now "prisoners of war" and will only be released in a larger prisoner exchange with the Colombian government.

An analysis of U.S. support of *Plan Colombia* shows U.S. policy is 'banking' heavily on the use of military aid to strengthen the Colombian State. From 1997-2003 the United States supported approximately \$2.92 billion in aid to Colombia.⁷ Of this only 17% or approximately \$4.96 million went towards aid for judicial reform, alternative crop development, human rights projects, and relief to displaced persons.⁸ The disparity between *Plan Colombia's* military versus socio-economic aid stems from the plan's failure to gain widespread international support, specifically from the European Union (EU).⁹

The overwhelming perception from both Europe and the United Nations is that the only long-term solution to Colombia's conflict is through significant socio-economic reforms. In January 2001 the European Parliament announced it would support the peace process in Colombia, but not *Plan Colombia* due to: (1) the plan's failure to address the economic and social aspect of the Colombian conflict; (2) the perceived belief that defoliants used in illicit crop eradication was not only harmful to the environment, but was partially responsible for causing the forced displacement of thousands of peasants; (3) the perception that the Colombian government was not doing enough to combat paramilitary groups; (4) the plan's heavy emphasis on the use of military force as a solution for lasting peace; and (5) the plan did not address a "genuine agrarian reform" to bring about a fundamental change in the unequal "concentration of land."¹⁰ The overwhelming consensus from the EU's member states was that they were not going to pay the bill of a war, "they did not perpetuate, did not expand, and did not make

⁷ Isacson, Adam and Ingrid Vaicius. "The 'War on Drugs' meets the 'War on Terror.'" *International Policy Report* 6, (Feb 2002) [Electronic version], <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/0302ipr.pdf> (accessed 20 Feb 2003).

⁸ Ibid

⁹ President Pastrana originally proposed *Plan Colombia* to the United States in April 2000. As presented *Plan Colombia's* original intent required a financial price tag of \$7.5 billion. Of that amount, \$4 billion would come from Colombia, whereas the additional \$3.5 billion was to come from the international community, namely the United States and the European Union. See European Union. External Relation. "Colombia: An international commitment to peace." (April 30, 2001) [Home page on-line]; available from http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/patten/speech_01_192.htm (accessed on 04 Oct 2003).

¹⁰ European Union. External Relation. "European Parliament Resolution on *Plan Colombia* and Support for the Peace Process in Colombia." (02 February 2001) [Home page on-line]; available from http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/colombia/doc/ep01_02_01.htm (accessed on 11 Mar 2003).

worse.”¹¹ Ultimately, on April 30, 2001, EU External Commissioner Chris Patten announced a \$330 million European aid package for Colombia, most of which was to go directly to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) vice the government of Colombia. Of this amount only a mere \$140 million would come from the EU, with the remaining amount financed by the Spanish government.¹² The announcement was a significant blow to former-President Pastrana’s original vision of *Plan Colombia* and the former Clinton administration that “sold” *Plan Colombia* to Congress with the critical assumption that U.S. support of the plan was just one part of a comprehensive international effort in Colombia.

In light of the limited international support for *Plan Colombia*, what has evolved is an official U.S.-Colombia foreign policy that aims to: (1) strengthen Colombia’s democratic institutions; (2) promote respect for human rights and the rule of law; (3) intensify counter-narcotics efforts; (4) foster socio-economic development; (5) address immediate humanitarian needs; and (6) end the threats to democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism.¹³ However, the counter-drug mission and the newer counter-terrorism mission receive the bulk of U.S. efforts both financially and militarily. Whether characterizing Colombia’s armed non-state actors as FTOs, insurgents, or ‘narco-terrorist’, the underlying strategy that dates from the Clinton administration is to: (1) cut off the FTOs financial resources derived from coca through eradication and interdiction; and (2) provide the state with military assistance and training to gain the

¹¹ Roy, 21.

¹² “Colombia: An international commitment to peace.” (European Union External Relations: Brussels, 30 Apr 2001), www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/patten/speech_01_192.htm [01Jun 03].

¹³ Simons, Paul E. “U.S. Narcotics Control Initiatives in Colombia.” U.S. State Department, <http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/rm/21203pf.htm>

‘upper-hand’ by defeating the FTOs (namely FARC-EP and the ELN) on the battlefield.¹⁴ This strategy acknowledges what many Colombian officials and military leaders have long been advocating that without first addressing Colombia’s internal security threats any gains against coca cultivation and narcotrafficking will be negligible.

However, this strategy has not come without its critics. In June 2003, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) concluded that in the three years following the initiation of U.S. support for *Plan Colombia*, the U.S. Departments of State and Defense, “*Have still not developed estimates of future program cost, identified a proposed end state, or determined how they plan to achieve it.*”¹⁵ This gives rise to a fundamental question of U.S. policy in Colombia, “Is current U.S. policy defective in that it fails to also address more deeply rooted socio-economic reforms whose resolution may be just as essential as a possible military solution to the conflict?”

C. THESIS PURPOSE

One of the leading arguments explaining the current rural conflict in Colombia is that it stems from deeply rooted peasant grievances over lack of land tenure. Like much of Latin America, Colombia has one of the highest levels of inequality of landownership in the world. Current estimates of the extremely high concentration of landownership in Colombia state that approximately 3% of all landowners own almost 70% of all arable land.¹⁶ Yet in over four decades worth of land titling efforts, Colombia’s national land reform agency, INCORA, was unable to change the overall inequality in landownership.

¹⁴ United States. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control. *Colombia: Counterinsurgency vs. Counter-narcotics*. 108th Congress: Washington, D.C. (Sep. 21, 1999) <http://drugcaucus.senate.gov/colombia99wilhelm.html> [09 Sep 03]. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) defines a narco-terrorist organization as, “An organized group that is complicit in the activities of drug trafficking in order to further, or fund, premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets with the intention to influence (that is, influence a government or group of people).” Clearly by this definition Colombia’s three largest non-state armed actors meet this criteria. Source: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. “Drugs and Terrorism a New Perspective.” DEA Drug Intelligence Brief (September 2002) [Report on-line] available from <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/intel/02039/02039.html> (accessed on 1 Nov 2003).

¹⁵ U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO). “Drug Control Specific Measures and Long-term Cost for U.S. Programs in Colombia have not been developed.” (June 2003) [Electronic version] available from www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-783 (accessed on 25 Jul 2003).

¹⁶ The Global IDP Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council. Available from <<http://www.db.idpproject.org/sites/IdpprojectDb/idpSurvey.nsf>> (accessed on 08 Dec 2002).

This thesis examines to what effect, if any, a redistributive land reform policy implemented amid the ongoing rural conflict would have on its resolution.

While institutional and administrative failures within INCORA played a role in the overall inadequacy of land reform policy in Colombia, previous failed attempts at land reform have traditionally suffered from: (1) lack of political will among Colombia's presidents; (2) a legislative branch that remains highly 'clientilistic' and difficult for president's to build policy consensus; (3) effective anti-land reform lobbying by agriculture producer groups; and (4) the lack of nationally organized peasant groups to exert political pressure on the government (with the exception of the national peasant organization, *Asociacion Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* or ANUC, during the late 1970s).

The historical inability of the state to resolve the land issue in Colombia was greatly exacerbated by developments during the 1980s and 1990s. During the 1980s, much of Colombia's rural land was purchased in vast amounts (an estimated one million hectares) by narco-traffickers who were using land to launder illegal drug money.¹⁷ Remarkably, this phenomenon of "reverse-land reform" exceeded the amount of land redistributed to Colombia's landless peasants in 25 years of land reform efforts by INCORA, the state land reform agency.¹⁸ Furthermore, failed market reforms during the early 1990s had the unintended effect of undermining Colombia's agricultural sector and dramatically increasing both rural inequality of income and inequality of landownership.¹⁹

The spark that escalated the rural violence in the 1990s came after a dramatic shift of coca cultivation in Colombia following successful eradication and interdiction efforts in neighboring Bolivia and Peru. With little or no state presence in much of rural Colombia, a deadly "turf war" ensued between guerrillas, paramilitaries, and narco-

¹⁷ "Colombia Survey: The Curse of the Vigilantes." *The Economist*, Vol 359, Issue 8219 (21 April 2001) available from <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb> (accessed on 15 Feb 2003).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Colombia: Selected Issues and Statistical Appendix." IMF Country Report No. 01/68 (30 April 2001)[Electronic copy] available from <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2001/cr0168.pdf> (accessed on 3 Apr 2003).

traffickers over coca fields and the peasants who worked in its cultivation or production (Figure 1). The lack of rural insecurity also forced many peasants to leave their lands, becoming one of the over two million internally displaced persons (IDP) in Colombia since 1985.²⁰ This adds to the already poor Colombian quality of life in which 8.3 million Colombians live in absolute poverty.²¹

D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As stated, this thesis strives to determine to what affect land reform would have on resolution of the Colombia's rural conflict. In order to answer this central question of the thesis, other sub-research questions will be:

1. According to the leading theoretical explanations for why peasants revolt, what role can land reform play in resolving rural-based insurgencies?
2. What does the experience of other countries teach about the feasibility of carrying out land reform during intra-state conflict?
3. What are the historical roots of Colombia's rural conflict? How did this conflict change after the "coca boom" of the 1980s and the subsequent "coca explosion" of the mid-1990s?
4. What is the feasibility of implementing a redistributive land reform in Colombia amid the current political conditions? What actors would oppose or support a redistributive land reform policy? And how does expropriate land reform via asset forfeiture change these actor's policy preferences?

E. METHODOLOGY

This thesis will rely on both primary and secondary source material. Primary source material includes both U.S. and Colombia government documents, which discuss land reform, foreign aid, the insurgent threat, and narco-trafficking. Secondary sources will provide both the leading scholarship on peasant revolution and rebellion, and will provide the historical backdrop to land conflict in Colombia and in other historical cases.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ World Food Program. "Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation Colombia 6139.00: Assistance to Persons displaced by Violence in Colombia." (World Food Bank: Rome, 22 Oct 1999), 1.

In order to establish a theoretical framework for the feasibility of land reform during conflict, a case study methodology will be used to analyze land reform cases in South Vietnam and El Salvador. Finally, land reform's feasibility in the current Colombian conflict will draw upon a political economy methodology and analyze the policy preferences of the pertinent actors amid their own institutional settings.

F. CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

Chapter II presents the leading relevant theoretical literature that concentrates on the underlying causes of peasant revolt or mobilization. While the "land reform hypothesis" is prevalent in the literature, other competing and contradictory approaches may have equal validity in the Colombian case. As no one theory addresses the pivotal research question of land reform's implementation amid conflict, Chapter II examines the important and historical cases of land reform in South Vietnam and El Salvador. This chapter argues that although land reform failed to win the political will of the peasants in these two cases, their conclusions do not predict that redistributive land reform in Colombia will have the same effect.

Chapter III provides a historical analysis of land and conflict in Colombia. This chapter examines the prevailing argument that today's rural conflict is "deeply rooted." This chapter analyzes land and conflict in Colombia over three distinct evolutionary phases beginning in the late 19th century and ending in the contemporary conflict. This chapter also gives specific attention to three variables that may have had particular significance in increasing rural violence beginning in the mid-1990s: the phenomena of "reverse land reform;" inequality in landownership; and inequality of income.

Chapter IV examines the feasibility of a redistributive land reform policy under the current political and economic conditions in Colombia. Concentrating on the role of Colombia's president, congress, agricultural interest groups, guerrillas, and paramilitaries, this chapter shows that those who would oppose land reform in Colombia significantly outweigh those who would support it. Yet this chapter also examines Colombia's recent asset forfeiture laws, which may provide the only realistic opportunity for redistributive land reform in Colombia.

Building on the previous chapter's findings that a redistributive land reform would most likely lead to an increase in rural violence, Chapter V provides several different approaches that address the specific challenges to redistributive land reform in Colombia.

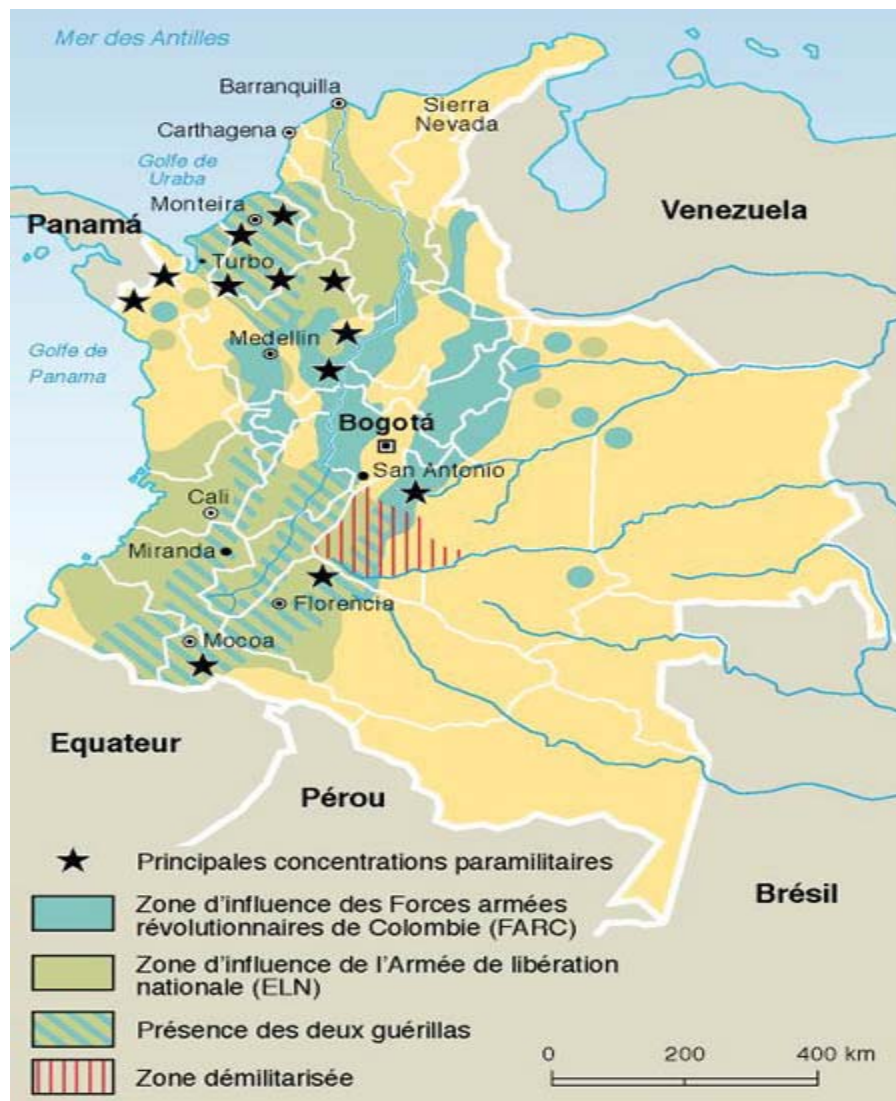


Figure 1: The Battle for Colombia²²

²² This map depicts the former 17,000 square mile demilitarized zone created by former President Pastrana on November 6, 1998, as an act of goodwill in opening negotiations between the government and FARC-EP. President Pastrana was strongly criticized within Colombia for the zones creation, as many believed that it merely created a 'safe-haven' for FARC-EP to operate, train, and replenish their forces. Ultimately, as peace negotiations broke down, a frustrated President Pastrana ordered the military to retake the zone on January 9, 2002. Map by Philippe Rekacewicz, "Guerrillas and paramilitary forces in Colombia." *Le Monde* (January 2000) <http://mondediplo.com/maps/colombiamdv49> [15 Oct 2003].

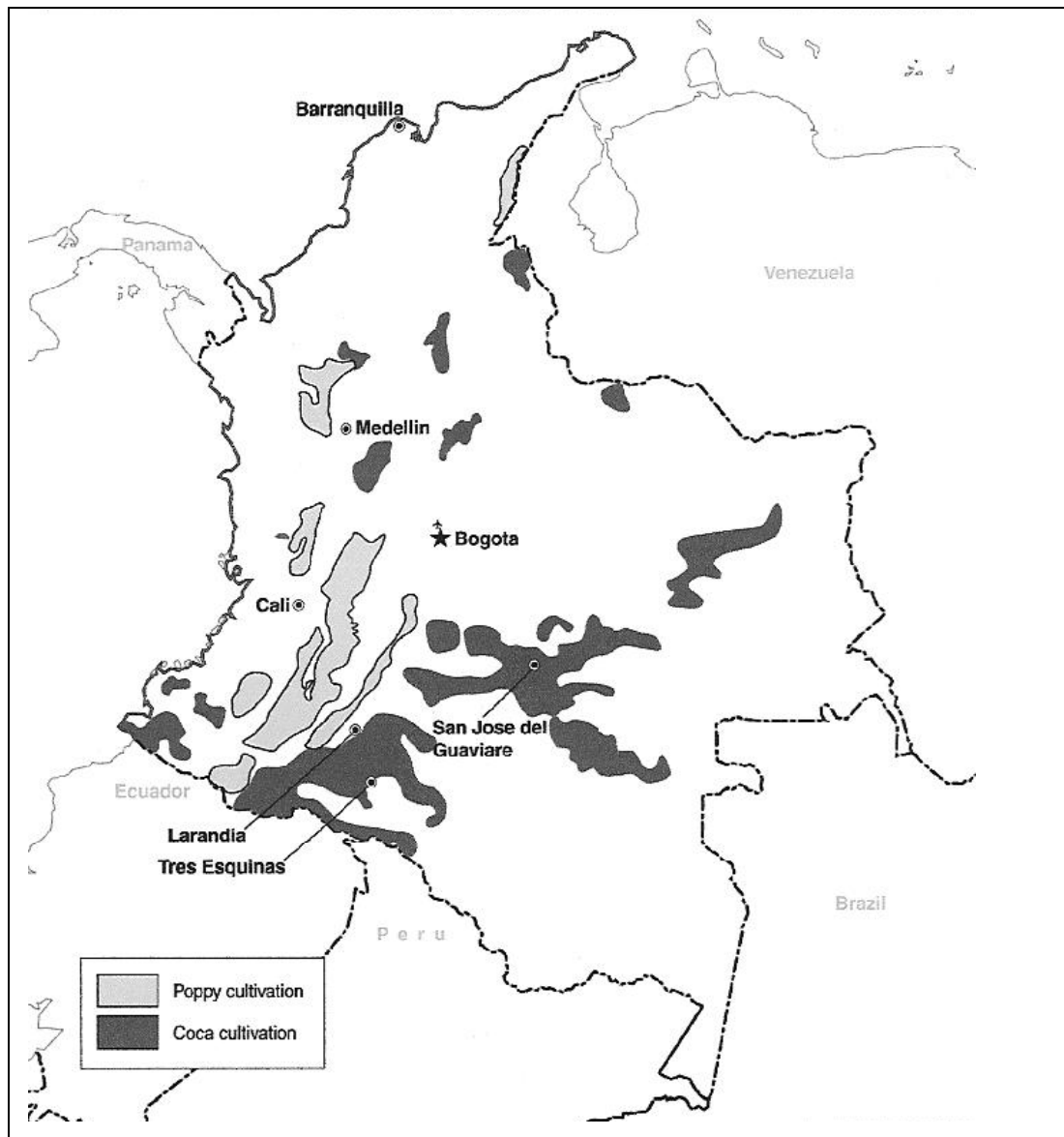


Figure 2: Coca and Poppy Cultivation Regions of Colombia (2001-2002)

Source: "Drug Control Specific Measures and Long-term Cost for U.S. Programs in Colombia have not been developed." Government Accounting Office: Washington, D.C., (June 2003), [electronic version] www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-783 (accessed on 25 Jul 2003).

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II. LAND REFORM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*The role of the countryside is variable: it is either the source of stability or the source of revolution. For the political system, opposition within the city is disturbing but not lethal. Opposition within the countryside, however, is fatal. He who controls the countryside controls the country.*¹

—Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968)

A. LAND REFORM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AN OVERVIEW

This thesis ultimately seeks to determine what role if any a significant and wide-reaching land reform policy will have in resolving Colombia's persistent rural conflict. Those who propose land reform as a “prescription” for rural insurgency argue, “The greater the maldistribution of land, the greater the probability of mass-based political insurgency.”² The “land reform hypothesis” further stipulates that until land reform is adequately implemented, insurgency will persist and perhaps even lead to the overthrow of the state.³ In the aftermath of the Second World War, no other nation embraced and advocated the merits of land reform more than the United States. In the broader national security strategy of “containment,” U.S. policymakers frequently used land reform as a foreign policy instrument to counter the potential Communist exploitation and mobilization of “peasant discontent,” particularly in East Asia.⁴ Consequently, the United States would become the leading force behind land reform in post-war Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The subsequent “success story” of the modernization and eventual democratization of these three countries has been attributed to these initial land reform policies.

While land reform became the policy *de jour* in East Asia, it was not so eagerly embraced by the United States for Latin America, at least initially. In 1954, the

¹ Huntington, Samuel P. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1968), 292.

² Muller, Edward N. and Mitchell A. Seligson. “Inequality and Insurgency.” [Electronic version] *American Political Science Review*, 81.2, (June 1987), 425.

³ Goodwin, Jeff. *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2001), 229.

⁴ Louis J. Walinsky, ed. *The Selected Papers of Wolf Ladejinsky: Agrarian Reform as Unfinished Business*. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977), 287.

Eisenhower administration covertly supported the overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, who had earned the opposition of both Guatemala's powerful landed oligarchy and the U.S. owned United Fruit Company, by implementing an aggressive land reform policy. However, the successful Cuban revolution of 1958 would cause the United States to reevaluate land reform's applicability for Latin America. Consequently, land reform would become a cornerstone of the United States led Latin American development plan called the *Alliance for Progress* (1961-1968).

Halfway around the globe U.S. involvement in South Vietnam brought in a new era of U.S. foreign policy and land reform. In this case, U.S. policymakers advocated land reform not to *prevent* intra-state conflict but to *resolve* intra-state conflict. While the Vietnamese conflict was largely perceived as a traditional "East-West" struggle, many, including successive U.S. presidents, also saw much of the conflict's origins in Vietnam's significant socio-economic underdevelopment and inequality. Consequently, U.S. policymakers, albeit indecisively at times, would turn to land reform as an important element in South Vietnam's rural pacification strategy. Unfortunately, by the time land reform did finally reach a measure of success late in the war (1970-73), the conflict's outcome had become a *fait accompli*.

Less than a decade later, faced with an escalating Communist supported insurgency in El Salvador, the United States would once again unsuccessfully advocate land reform as a means of conflict resolution. Based on these less than stellar results in both South Vietnam and El Salvador, some scholars have refuted the land reform hypothesis stating, "One is hard pressed to cite any instance in which agrarian reform implemented amid an ongoing civil war has effectively dissipated that conflict."⁵ Although this conclusion, which is based largely on the two above cases, cannot be presented as a land reform theory per se, it does present a significant obstacle for those proposing land reform as a means of conflict resolution in Colombia.

The first part of this chapter presents an overview of the leading social science theories that have tried to answer the pivotal question of why peasants rebel or revolt

⁵ Mason, T. David. "Take two acres and call me in the Morning": Is Land Reform a Prescription for Peasant Unrest?" [Electronic version] *The Journal of Politics*, 60.1 (Feb., 1998), 199.

specifically concentrating on theories of peasant discontent and theories of inequality, which may have particular relevance in the Colombian case. Implicit or explicit in these theories is the belief that land reform is important for preventing rural-based guerrilla conflict. The second part of this chapter analyzes the two cases of land reform that provide many with strong evidence that land reform will not work in countries where conflict is already underway: South Vietnam (1958-1961, 1970-1973) and El Salvador (1980-1991). As this chapter illustrates, in the South Vietnamese case once the country's elites were willing to concede to a truly redistributive land reform policy late in the war, it was "too little, too late" to make any difference in the war's outcome. In the Salvadoran case, not only was land reform policy fatally flawed in that it did not address the critical landless peasant issue, but also an increase in security force and state-sponsored repression (i.e. death squads) undermined any positive effects of land reform driving many peasants into the insurgency movement. Finally, this chapter's conclusion argues that the two commonly cited cases of South Vietnam and El Salvador do not provide enough evidence to disprove the applicability of the "land reform hypothesis" in the Colombian case.

B. THEORIES OF PEASANT REVOLT: AN OVERVIEW

Until the mid-1960s there was little emphasis in social-science scholarship dedicated towards understanding the phenomenon of peasant revolt or rebellion. Yet the undeniably large number of peasant based revolutionary movements in the Cold War era, especially U.S. involvement against a rural based insurgency in South Vietnam, provided the impetus for an entire generation of scholars to attempt to explain the fundamental question of what makes peasants revolt. Out of this scholarship, theories of insurgency or rural violence have tended to focus on the following three items: (1) what kinds of grievances (e.g., inequality of landownership, inequality of income, "crisis of subsistence") are significant enough to motivate peasants to engage in collective action? (2) Under what conditions do peasants have the resources (e.g., material, leadership) to engage in collective action? And (3) when does collective action take a violent form? Yet as this section illustrates, while there are numerous theoretical explanations to provide explanation for peasant revolt or mobilization, the reality of rural conflict is difficult to explain as a single phenomena. In the final part of this section, I discuss Timothy Wickham-Crowley's excellent theory of "peasant support" which is a multi-

variable approach. In the Colombian case, it is exactly this “peasant support” which I will argue in Chapter III that forms the pivotal “center of gravity” in the rural conflict.

1. Land Inequality and Rural Violence

The belief that inequality in a society can lead to political violence is well established in political theory as evidenced by Aristotle’s writings in *A Treatise on Government*:

That cause which of all others most universally inclines men to desire to bring about a change in government is that which I have already mentioned; for those who aim at equality will be ever ready for sedition, if they see those whom they esteem their equals possess more than they do.⁶

Yet applying the inequality hypothesis to inequality of land as a source of political violence has proven to be more challenging than Aristotle's original thesis. In an attempt to validate the relationship between inequality of land and political instability within a democratic framework, Bruce Russett (1964) argued:

The *combination* of inequality *and* a high rate of tenancy would cause instability. While neither by itself would necessarily lead to violence or frequent change of government, the combination almost inevitably would...it is highly unlikely that a nation with a grossly unequal pattern of distribution of a major source of wealth, like agricultural land will have a consistently democratic government.⁷

In his conclusions, Russett found that only 3 of 23 states with unequal land distribution (based on their Gini Co-efficient) were considered “stable democracies.”⁸ The remaining countries, including Colombia, were found to be “unstable” democracies.

As the number of rural based insurgencies intensified in much of the third world, specifically South Vietnam, many, including Samuel Huntington in his pivotal work

⁶ Aristotle. *A Treatise on Government*: Book V, Ch. II. trans. and ed. William Ellis (J.M. Dent and Sons: New York, 1912) [On-line version] available from <http://aristotle.thefreelibrary.com/A-Treatise-on-Government/0-1> (accessed on 25 Nov 2003).

⁷ Russett, Bruce M. “Inequality and Instability: The relation of land tenure to politics.” [Electronic version] *World Politics*, 16.3, (Apr., 1964), 453.

⁸ Ibid.

Political Order in Changing Societies (1968), attempted to put the inequality of land argument into the context of revolution “from below.” In his version of the “land reform hypothesis,” Huntington states:

Where the conditions of land-ownership are equitable and provide a viable living for the peasant, revolution is unlikely. Where they are inequitable...revolution is inevitable, unless the government takes prompt measures to remedy these conditions.⁹

Edward Muller and Mitchell Seligson (1987) modified Huntington’s “land reform hypothesis” by proposing that land inequality would not make revolution “inevitable” per se, but rather greatly increased a state’s “vulnerability” to revolution “from below.”¹⁰ In their study of 85 states, they concluded, “Agrarian inequality is relevant only to the extent that it is associated with inequality in the nationwide distribution of income...land reform without income redistribution is probably at best merely a temporary palliative.”¹¹ More recently, Moore, Lindstrom, and O’Regan (1996) added to the debate by arguing that neither inequality in landownership, nor income has any relationship in determining political violence, as over time inequality is a stable and almost fixed factor compared to the fluid levels of political violence.¹² While there is clearly no consensus on the land inequality hypothesis, others have taken different approaches and have placed the peasant, not land at the center of the argument.

2. Is There a Certain "Type" of Peasant That is Most Likely to Rebel?

In *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (1969) Eric Wolf proposes that peasant revolts are defensive in nature, and emerge where peasants choose to preserve "traditional lifestyles" against the forces of modernization.¹³ Central to his argument is his concept of “tactical control.” Only a peasantry that is "in possession of some *tactical control*

⁹ Huntington, 375.

¹⁰ Muller and Seligson, 425.

¹¹ Muller and Seligson, 443.

¹² Moore, Will H., Ronnie Lindstrom, and Valerie O’Regan. “Land Reform, Political Violence and the Economic Inequality-Political Conflict Nexus: A Longitudinal Analysis.” *International Interactions*, Vol. 21, 1996. In T. David Mason. “Take Two Acres And Call Me In The Morning”: Is Land Reform A Prescription For Peasant Unrest? [Electronic version] *The Journal of Politics*, 60.1, (Feb., 1998), 200.

¹³ Goldstone, Jack A. ed. *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*. (Harcourt Brace College Publishers: Fort Worth, 1994), 58.

over its own resources, can provide a secure basis for ongoing political leverage."¹⁴ Wolf argues that "poor peasants" or "landless peasants" are without tactical control and are unlikely candidates to revolt without the existence of "some external power to challenge the power that constrains them."¹⁵ Similarly, "rich peasants" are not likely to revolt due to their relationship with "power holders outside the village."¹⁶ Only two groups have sufficient "internal leverage to enter sustained rebellion": the landowning "middle peasantry;" and those peasants living in the "peripheral."¹⁷ Although "peripheral peasants" may not have sufficient land even for subsistence, other activities such as "smuggling" can "supplement land in sufficient quantity to grant the peasantry some latitude of movement."¹⁸ Those *colonos* or landless peasants living in the remote frontier regions of Colombia removed from government authority would seem to partially support Wolf's hypothesis.

While Eric Wolf's theory of peasant revolt argued the "landless peasant" was unlikely to mobilize except under specific conditions, Jeffrey Paige's research, most notably on the insurgency in South Vietnam, led him to just the opposite conclusions. In *Agrarian Revolution* (1975), Paige presents a model of peasant revolt that concentrates on the political mobility of *non-cultivators* (landlords) and *cultivators* (peasants). Paige argues that peasant revolt can be predicted by two variables: (1) source of income (land and capital for non-cultivators/land and wages for cultivators); and (2) agricultural organization (commercial hacienda, sharecropping/migratory labor, small holding, and plantation) [see Figure 1].¹⁹

Based on this framework, Paige argues that when cultivators derive their income from land, there is a greater "resistance to revolutionary political movements."²⁰ This

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Goldstone, 59.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Paige, Jeffery M. *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World*. (The Free Press: New York, 1975), 11.

²⁰ Paige, 26.

would support part of Huntington's hypothesis that small-landowning peasants are the most conservative and hence the most loyal to the state. In contrast, Paige hypothesizes that when peasants derive their income from wages, thus tying themselves to market forces, they are more prone to accept risk and become revolutionary."²¹ For Paige, these wage earning or revolutionary peasants, are either *sharecroppers* or *migratory laborers*.²² In the South Vietnamese case, Paige concluded that it was no coincidence that the heart of the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) resistance was found in the high intensity sharecropping regions of the Mekong Delta.

Table 1. Jeffrey Paige's Theory of Peasant Class Conflict

		CULTIVATORS	
		LAND	WAGES
NONCULTIVATORS	WAGES	COMMERCIAL HACIENDA No overt conflict (or Agrarian revolts)	SHARECROPPING OR MIGRATORY LABOR Revolution (Socialist or Nationalist)
	CAPITAL	SMALL HOLDING Reformist Commodity movements	PLANTATION Reformist labor movements

Source: Skocpol, Theda. *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (1994), 217.

3. Aggregate-Psychological Approaches: Getting into the Mind of the Peasant

While the above approaches concentrated on land inequality and rural class conflict, an equally compelling theory explaining peasant revolt is Ted Robert Gurr's work, *Why Men Rebel* (1970). Gurr's basic premise is his theory of "relative deprivation," which he defines as a person's perception of a "gap between what they have and what they think they should have." Gurr concluded that once individuals believed

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kimmel, 139.

relative deprivation existed, they would collectively act against the state or regime that they hold responsible for depriving them of a public good. Gurr's model of Relative Deprivation (RD) emphasizes that the "critical point" of a revolution occurs "when expectations have risen, owing to some limited reform process, after a prolonged period of intense deprivation but then expectations are crushed."²³ The ensuing civil strife can range from a magnitude of turmoil (high RD within the masses + low RD among the elites), conspiracy (high RD among elites + low RD among the masses), and lastly internal war (high RD in both the elites and the masses).²⁴ Aggregate psychological theorists such as Gurr have not been without their critics. Theda Skocpol argues that these types of approaches, which focus on the behavior of the individual, do not adequately account for "revolutions, coups, rebellions, even riots" that are collective and organized mobilizations.²⁵ Even more critical is Michael Kimmel who sees this approaches downfall in the "state is not seen as a guarantor of social order...in this model the state is struggled over when it fails to deliver the goods; it is not struggled *with* over the foundations of political legitimacy."²⁶

4. Rational Actor Explanations

The notion that peasant revolutions are caused by modernization, class conflict, and free market forces, conflicts sharply with rational-actor explanations. Rational-actor theorist, most notably Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action* (1971) and Samuel Popkin's *Rational Peasant* (1979), argue that peasants revolt or mobilize over "public goods."²⁷ Consequently, peasants are able to "free-ride" regardless if they support or join the protest, revolt, or rebellion.²⁸ In contrast, those peasants who choose to rebel the "cost" can be either financial or their own lives for "public benefits" that are best

²³ Goldstone, 22.

²⁴ Kimmel, 79.

²⁵ Skocpol, 103.

²⁶ Kimmel, Michael S. *Revolution: A Sociological Interpretation*. (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1990), 81.

²⁷ Lichbach, Mark I. "What makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary?: Dilemma, Paradox, and Irony in Peasant Collective Action." [Electronic version] *World Politics*, Vol. 46, Issue 3 (April 1994), 386.

²⁸ Ibid.

uncertain.²⁹ One rational actor theorist has termed this the “rebel’s dilemma” where “unless [the] collective action problem is somehow overcome, rational peasants will never rebel—even though all peasants stand to gain by rebellion.”³⁰ However, historically rational peasants have shown to: (1) cooperate even when it is not in their best interest; and (2) will not cooperate when they should.³¹ From the rational actor perspective, these occurrences are best explained by the theory of “selective incentives,” which are “private goods or side payments that are available to peasants who participate in collective dissent.”³² Ultimately, rational actor theorists conclude that peasants will mobilize and overcome the collective action problem by selective incentives motivations and the belief of self-benefit.

5. Wickham-Crowley’s Multi-variant Theory of Peasant Support

Attempting to make some of sense out of the many competing, contradictory, and sometimes complementary theoretical approaches, Timothy Wickham-Crowley endeavored to present a more comprehensive theory of peasant support for rural insurgencies. Analyzing ten cases of Latin American peasant insurgencies since 1956, Wickham-Crowley applied four variables in each case to determine the regional level of peasant support: (1) *agrarian structure*, specifically the presence of sharecroppers or squatters; (2) agrarian disruption, *or* disruption of the “moral economy” or subsistence economy of peasants; (3) rebellious cultures, based on the correlation between historical areas of peasant rebellion as probable supporters of future guerrilla movements; and (4) peasant linkage, which attempts to incorporate how various institutional influences (i.e., family, religion, politics, and education) either “channeled the guerillas and peasants toward or away from one another.”³³ Applying these variables Wickham-Crowley concluded that regional peasant support of guerrilla movements would occur under the following conditions:

²⁹ Lichbach, 387.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Lichbach, 418.

³² Lichbach, 389.

³³ Wickham-Crowley, Timothy. *Guerillas and Revolution in Latin America: A comparative study of insurgents and regimes since 1956*. (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1992), 252.

- (1) The combination of sharecropping or squatting as the predominant agrarian structure + the existence of agrarian disruption (subsistence) + “preexisting linkages joining the guerrillas to the peasantry” = strong peasant support for insurgency.
- (2) The combination of the above agrarian structures + a historically rebellious peasant culture = strong peasant support for insurgency.
- (3) The combination of a rebellious peasantry + favorable peasant linkages = strong peasant support for insurgency.³⁴

As I will examine later in Chapter III, the first combination of variables may provide a sound theoretical explanation of peasant support in the Colombian case.

Yet as remarkable as even Wickham-Crowley’s theory of peasant support is, few if any of the theories discussed address the more complicated question of whether land reform can help resolve a rural insurgency that is relatively well entrenched. In practice, countries trying to carry out land reform in the midst of conflict have met with limited success. These experiences, rather than social science theories about the role of landlessness in motivating revolt, have held the most sway with contemporary policy makers contemplating the usefulness of land reform. The following section reviews two of the most influential cases for US policymakers in which land reform was unsuccessfully attempted as a method of conflict resolution: South Vietnam and El Salvador.

C. SOUTH VIETNAM: "TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE"

A quick review of the vast literature on the United States involvement and eventual withdrawal from South Vietnam leaves little doubt the South Vietnamese peasant was a pivotal actor in deciding the outcome of the war. Ultimately, the Republic of South Vietnam collapsed in 1975, because among other things, including a determined and well-supplied North Vietnamese Army, it failed to win the political support of its rural peasantry. It would seem logical that the rural nature of South Vietnam's insurgency, coupled with the country’s extreme inequality in land tenure, especially in the highly contested Mekong Delta region, would lead one to believe that land reform was a prominent part of South Vietnamese and U.S. strategy. Yet remarkably, land reform was

³⁴ Wickham-Crowley, 309.

not held in high regard by the South Vietnamese government despite pleas from successive U.S. administrations much later in the conflict.

1. The Land Tenure Issue in South Vietnam

Following the defeat of French colonial forces at the epic Battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 7, 1954, the United Nations led Geneva Accords abruptly separated French Indo-China into the independent states of North and South Vietnam. Consequently, when President Diem took power in 1955, he inherited an infant republic that was agrarian and faced an established and entrenched rural insurgency in the form of the Vietminh, the predecessors of the Viet Cong.³⁵ The land tenure issue in South Vietnam had largely been created by the former French colonial administration. Beginning in 1867, the French had commercialized what was then Cochin China from a subsistence economy to a net exporter in rice. Through an ambitious plan of canal construction, the largely non-producing swamps of the Mekong Delta region expanded rice cultivation from less than 400,000 hectares to 2 million hectares of rice.³⁶ This had the effect of making Vietnam, up to the Second World War, one of the world's largest exporters of rice (along with Thailand and Burma).³⁷ This however had come at some substantial cost to the Vietnamese peasant where the landowning class of French colonials and Vietnamese elites typically demanded peasants pay forty to sixty percent of their theoretical rice yield to the landowners.

Land tenure structures in central South Vietnam were characterized by small landholdings of 5-10 hectares. However, in the more arable providences of the Mekong Delta region it was not uncommon to find land holdings of several thousand hectares.³⁸ In 1955, it was estimated that in the southern region of South Vietnam, of the 2.3 million hectares under cultivation, 2.5 percent of the landowners owned approximately one-half of

³⁵ Kolko, Gabriel. *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*. (Patheon Books: New York, 1985), 92. 1-628 Kolko writes that prior to the Geneva Accords, the Viet Minh controlled an estimated 60 to 90 percent of what became South Vietnam. See also Walinsky, 299.

³⁶ Walinsky, 300.

³⁷ Paige, 282.

³⁸ Ibid.

the cultivated land.³⁹ Furthermore, almost 80 percent of the land in the southern provinces was "cultivated by peasants who owned virtually no land whatever."⁴⁰ This legacy of tenant farming and landlessness would continue in the Mekong Delta region well into the late 1960's making the Delta one of the five areas with the highest percentage of landlessness in the world in 1967, and more importantly to the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments, the "center" of Viet Cong resistance in South Vietnam.⁴¹

2. The Unique Aspect of Competing Land Reform

The South Vietnamese case presents the unique situation of competing land reforms between the government of South Vietnam and the Vietminh and subsequent Viet Cong (NLF). Following the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, the Vietminh had attempted to broaden their support in the South by implementing radical land reform policies for the peasantry.⁴² The Vietminh also used land as a means of survivor benefits for the families of those who were casualties in the insurgency against the French.⁴³ Underlying the whole land reform process by the Vietminh was the notion that if the French won, any gains by the peasants in land tenure would be forfeited. Throughout the war, the Viet Cong would use land and more importantly land tenure as an essential source of recruitment. Gabriel Kolko writes in *Anatomy of a War* (1985), "land presented the NLF with a powerful weapon for mobilizing support as needed, and preference went to those who aided the Revolution."⁴⁴ This stood in stark comparison to the mandatory draft by the South Vietnamese government where there was little benefit or incentive for those who fought against the insurgents.

3. Land Reform Fails Under Diem (1955-1961)

Faced with an insurgency-led competing land reform policy, and an overall lack of rural security, President Ngo Dinh Diem's failed to present the South Vietnamese peasantry with a competitive land reform policy in the immediate years following the French defeat.

³⁹ Walinsky, 301.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Prosterman, 753.

⁴² Prosterman, 754.

⁴³ Maranto and Tuchman, 254.

⁴⁴ Kolko, 130.

This was despite vigorous demands by the Kennedy administration for Diem to implement land reform, a plea that was being met with some success in Latin America under the *Alliance for Progress*. Diem initially resisted U.S. attempts to implement a land reform policy not only because he wanted to prevent being labeled a U.S. puppet, but also to ensure that the fragile ties of those loyal to his regime would remain.⁴⁵ This last element is extremely important for understanding Diem's reluctance to implement a land reform policy.

What many fail to remember is that the political climate of post-French colonialism in South Vietnam was more complex than merely Diem's regime versus a Communist insurgency. Within South Vietnam Diem was forced to challenge other armed non-state actors, most notably: the *Binh Xuyen*, a secretive bandit organization with nationalist roots that dominated politics and illicit activities in Saigon; the *Cao Dai* religious sect, whose 1.5 to 2 million faithful followed a religion mixed of Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism; and the *Hoa Hao*, another religious sect that controlled a majority of the Mekong Delta region.⁴⁶ Using "bribery, persuasion, and finally force," Diem eliminated the Binh Xuyen and Hoa Hao sect, while entering into an "uneasy alliance" with the Cao Dai sect.⁴⁷ To capitalize on these moves, Diem's administration survived on nepotism and what he would term "personalism."⁴⁸ This "personalism" was extended to all facets of Diem's administration including the military. It would even escalate to extremes in his creation of the *Personalist Labor Revolutionary Party* (Can Lao Nhan Vi Cach Mang Dang), which was essentially a national organization of informants.

The United States was sensitive to Diem's protection of South Vietnam's sovereignty and did not insist on land reform in fear of "fatally weakening " the Diem

⁴⁵ Hunt, Richard A. *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*. (Westview Press: Boulder, 1995), 14.

⁴⁶ *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, The Senator Gravel Edition, Vol. I. (Beacon Press: Boston, 1971.), 295.

⁴⁷ *The Pentagon Papers*, 298. Gabriel Kolko also writes in *Anatomy of a War*, that under Diem's attempt to consolidate his power, 40,000 political prisoners were imprisoned by 1958, with another 12,000 killed from 1955-1957 (89).

⁴⁸ *The Pentagon Papers*, 299.

government.⁴⁹ Yet with U.S. persistence and funding, Diem did concede to implement "limited" land reform laws in 1955 that: (1) resettled peasants on uncultivated land; (2) expropriated land holdings in excess of 100 hectares (247 acres) with redistribution to tenant farmers; (3) reestablished tenant-land lord relations. However, South Vietnam's first land reform effort was doomed to failure because it distanced peasants who under the new laws were forced to pay rents of 15 -25% to landlords, whereas under the Vietminh plan had paid little to nothing. Diem's land reform also alienated the peasants because of a system of corruption and favoritism that benefited, "Northerners, refugees, and Catholics," who received 244,000 of the 650,000 hectares Diem had confiscated.⁵⁰ The French colonial lands Diem had expropriated remained "undistributed" by the South Vietnamese.⁵¹ Furthermore, in villages where returning landlords could not remove Viet Minh influence, landlords paid normally 30% of their profits to government and military officials to remove the Viet Minh.⁵²

Other factors that hindered Diem's land reform were the general apathy and poor administration from the program's leaders and administrators. As an example, the South Vietnamese government had attempted in 1956 to utilize the *Confederation of Vietnamese Labor* that was organizing tenant farmers and supporting the government's land reform policy.⁵³ Simultaneously, the Diem government organized a *Farmers' Association* that was tied to "province officials and with landowners."⁵⁴ As an interest group, the *Farmers Association* was directly opposed to Vietnamese peasant groups, and by 1961 had strongly co-opted police and military forces to capitulate the peasant unions by forced imprisonment of its leaders.⁵⁵ At the end of 1961, Diem's land reform effort ended with only "one out of 10 tenant families" having received any benefits.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *The Pentagon Papers*, 309

⁵¹ Kolko, 94.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *The Pentagon Papers*, 310.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Prosterman, 755.

4. "Land to the Tiller": South Vietnam's Last Gasp at Land Reform

It is quite paradoxical that while the United States was strongly advocating and funding land reform in Latin America as part of the *Alliance for Progress*, during this same period, 1962 to 1965, the United States provided no land reform assistance to South Vietnam. One possible explanation is that although successive U.S. administrations were well aware of the land tenure problem, their main focus was on stabilizing the Diem regime through increased military aid and security. It is also possible to speculate that efforts to get President Diem to implement U.S. advocated reforms, both in the military forces and socio-economically, were fruitless. This argument is supported by President Kennedy's November 1963 decision to support a "regime change" that resulted in the South Vietnamese military coup and assassination of President Diem. A decision that many in the U.S. administration felt was necessary but would later come to regret. The prospects for U.S. supported land reform in South Vietnam appeared no better during the 1966 through 1967 period as U.S. troop commitments to South Vietnam intensified and land reform appeared far removed from the White House policy agenda.

Following the virtual drought of U.S. assistance for land reform in South Vietnam, the U.S. once again began to campaign the South Vietnamese government to implement land reform beginning in 1967. In 1967, the U.S. led Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) was at the forefront of the counter-insurgency strategy that would come to be known as "pacification." For CORDS, one of the cornerstones of their pacification efforts was to press the Vietnamese government towards land reform. This was heavily resisted once again by the South Vietnamese government despite President Johnson's personal support of the policy.⁵⁷ Furthermore, CORDS and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) disagreed on the scope of land reform policy. USAID did not want to see land reform expropriations in Viet Cong held territory or territory that had been "recaptured from the Communist."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Hunt, 105.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

What made the "Land to the Tiller" program so promising when it was implemented in March 1970 was that the initiative came from the Thieu regime itself. At his inauguration, President Thieu declared "agrarian reform as second only to security."⁵⁹ Under Thieu's "land to the tiller" program, the peasant paid nothing for expropriated land, whereas the government compensated the landowner for land transferred. This last point had been the crucial "sticking point" that had led to the downfall of Diem's program, where landowners vehemently objected to expropriation. Thieu's land reform policy differed greatly from Diem's in that not only did it pass through both the Lower House and South Vietnamese Senate, but it also reduced the upper limit of transferred land from 100 hectares to 15 hectares, making in essence a small owner class of farmers. In the Mekong Delta, this was even more dramatic where land ownership was set at no more than three hectares.⁶⁰

The purpose of the land to the tiller program was to give the average South Vietnamese peasant "both a political and economic stake in South Vietnam's future."⁶¹ It was also the first genuine attempt for the South Vietnamese government to offer a formidable challenge to a decade of Viet Cong land reform. Unlike land reform under Diem, land to the tiller gave full land ownership to peasants who tilled their land regardless of "political allegiance or even lack of a legal claim." While Thieu concentrated his land reform efforts in the Mekong Delta, Thieu's Annam or central Vietnam land reform efforts were much more conservative, as he was well aware of the agricultural elite's opposition to land reform in Central Vietnam. Consequently, Thieu knew land reform would have more success in the Mekong Delta where already the Viet Cong had redistributed much land, and where lack of security had made land owners "eager to sell out."⁶² Nevertheless, despite any successes that Thieu's land reform had in redistributing land, the United States withdrawal was nearing completion, and in the final analysis the efforts of land reform

⁵⁹ Salter, 728.

⁶⁰ Salter, 732.

⁶¹ Hunt, 263.

⁶² Kolko, 390.

could do little to bring about security against what was largely becoming a war against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), vice against the black, pajama clad South Vietnamese peasantry.

D. THE CASE OF EL SALVADOR

The Salvadoran civil war (1979-1991) remains one of the darker periods of late twentieth century history in the western hemisphere. El Salvador's civil war became marked by three armed actors: a repressive regime and military, paramilitary "death squads," and an urban and rural insurgency group, *Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional* (FMLN). More importantly, the war cost the lives of 75,000 Salvadorans and displaced one million people.⁶³

One of the most puzzling questions of the Salvadoran civil war was why did the land reform policies implemented in 1980, which have been characterized as the "most extensive non-socialist reform ever undertaken in Latin America," fail to resolve the rural conflict, and instead engulfed the country into a broader more violent war? When scholars look back upon the preconditions or causes of the Salvadoran civil war (1981-1991) they are divided into two groups: those who believe the misdistribution of land was a fundamental cause of insurrection (Prosterman, Riedinger, and Temple 1981); and those who believe it was factors such as inequality of income that led to the violence (Muller and Seligson 1987). One thing that is for sure, even if land inequality was not a "pre-condition" of the civil war, the failed implementation of land reform in 1981 certainly inflamed the armed actors.

1. The Land Tenure Problem in El Salvador

As in much of Latin America, the land inequality issue in El Salvador had deep historical roots. During the 20th century, the peasant rebellion of 1932 had cost an estimated 7,000 – 30,000 lives, the majority of whom were peasants.⁶⁴ During the 1960's the "green revolution" (e.g., fertilizers, mechanization, and pesticides) left large portions of

⁶³ Lopez, Humberto. "The Economic and Social Costs of Armed Conflict in El Salvador." The World Bank, *Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, Dissemination Note* (January 2003, No. 8)

⁶⁴ Prosterman, Roy L., Jeffrey M. Riedinger and Mary N. Temple. "Land Reform and the El Salvador Crisis. [Electronic version] *International Security*, 6.1, (Summer, 1981), 60.

rural labor unemployed. Further compounding the labor issue was that the “rise of cotton and sugar” had also meant the “conversion of extensive cattle and grain haciendas...and thus entailed a large-scale expulsion of peasants previously allowed to occupy estate lands.”⁶⁵ All of this had the effect that between 1961 to 1975, the percentage of Salvadoran farm families that were landless, increased from 12 to 41 percent.⁶⁶ In 1980, just prior to a major escalation in the internal conflict, El Salvador’s 1.8 million landless peasants composed almost 38 percent of El Salvador’s entire population.⁶⁷

2. Land Reform and the 1932 Peasant Rebellion

Land reform in El Salvador has a history of being met with swift violence from the landed oligarchy. In 1931, President Arturo Araujo won the national election with land reform as one of his platform items. When he failed to “deliver the goods,” rural strikes and protest followed as well as a coup d’état by General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez in December 1931. In response to the coup, the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), which had been both “ignored and repressed” by the government prior to the coup, now attempted to make their move onto the national stage and called for a peasant insurrection in January 1932. However, the government quickly acted against the plotters who were led by Farabundo Marti, putting down the revolt in three days. To further emphasize their belief in the status quo, the government executed 25,000 peasants and workers, many of whom had not even participated in the rebellion.⁶⁸ Michael McClintock notes that this event, later termed the *matanza* (killing), spurred successive decades in which the Salvadoran elites entrusted the military to govern for reasons of internal security.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Kinkaid, A. Douglas. “Peasants into Rebels: Community and Class in Rural El Salvador.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29.3, (July 1987), 481.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Prosterman and others, 60.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Kinkaid concluded that the rebellion of 1932 failed to entice a popular movement due to the classic “collective action” problem, in that the peasants were not ready to “risk all in an open insurrection.”

⁶⁹ McClintock, Michael. *The American Connection: Vol 1. State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador*. (Zed Books: London, 1985), 99.

Marking the beginning of over five decades in which “the Salvadoran upper class ruled the economy, the military ruled the polity.”⁷⁰

3. The Mobilization of El Salvador's Peasants

In the decade prior to the 1980 land reform, peasant movements in El Salvador were segmented into three groups: (1) the Christian Peasant Federation (FECCAS), which was supported by the Catholic Church, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Latin American Social Christian organization; (2) the Salvadoran Communal Union (UCS), whose organization was begun by the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), a U.S. supported anti-communist movement; and (3) the National Democratic Organization (ORDEN), which was the armed peasant extension of large landowners and the internal security forces.⁷¹

Of the three, FECCAS would come to be perceived as the greatest threat to security forces and the landed elite. FECCAS had formed out of the Christian Base Communities established by the Catholic Church. Using the doctrine of “liberation theology,” progressive segments of the Church wanted to instill in the poor and peasants a sense of collective vice individual action.⁷² Out of this, FECCAS became a leftist peasant organization, which many times were in contradiction to what the official Church hierarchy was trying to accomplish. By the mid-1970’s FECCAS had joined with the Farmworkers’ Union (UTC) to form the Farmworkers’ Federation (FTC) with an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 members.⁷³ As the conflict intensified in the late 1970s, these Catholic leftist peasant groups would form a core of revolutionary rural insurrection.

The second largest peasant organization, *Salvadoran Communal Union* (UCS), had its origins in the *Alliance for Progress*. Supported by the United States through USAID via AIFLD, the Catholic Church, and the Christian Democratic Party, UCS was

⁷⁰ Wickham-Crowley, Timothy P. *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956*. (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1992),

⁷¹ Kinkaid, 485.

⁷² Kinkaid, 483.

⁷³ Kinkaid, 485.

not an organization of tenant or landless peasants, but rather rural smallholding peasants.⁷⁴ AIFLD through the mid-1960s and late 1970's provided UCS with agriculture assistance in technical training and most importantly credit. The organization had grown to 50,000 members by 1975 and increasingly demanded improvements in wages and landlord tenant contracts, putting UCS into direct conflict with large landowners.⁷⁵

As both the UCS and FTC began to exert political pressure on the state for reforms, those who supported upholding the status quo formed a counter peasant movement called ORDEN. As the name suggest, ORDEN was to enforce the status quo through an organization of informants and paramilitary units. ORDEN's ranks came mainly from National Guardsman who once finished with their obligatory service, returned to their villages to work in many cases covertly for ORDEN. In essence, the organization, which was led by the country's elites, became a protection racket, guaranteeing its members jobs, credit, and government positions for joining the movement and repressing any reformist movements. Wickham-Crowley also notes that "occasionally" it was the granting of land to ORDEN members that provided the material end of gaining their loyalty.⁷⁶

4. The Radicalization of El Salvador's Peasant Movement

Peasant calls for land reform were met with predictive staunch resistance from the land owning elite and segments of the Salvadoran officers' corp. While the "collective military regime" system that ruled El Salvador from the 1950's to 1979 had allowed the military to govern, it was not without the underlying assumption that the Salvadoran economic elite always held an economic veto. This had been the case when land reform was proposed in 1975. Here the Molina government (1975-1976) had made promises of land reform, yet did not follow through with them due to rejection by the elites.

⁷⁴ McClintock, 156.

⁷⁵ Kinkaid, 485.

⁷⁶ Wickham-Crowley, 260.

The increasing oppression from El Salvador's military regime by 1976 had created the conditions by which peasant groups such as FECCAS and UTC were able to combine their efforts to mobilize peasants on a national level. Both of these groups joined the larger leftist Revolutionary Popular Bloc (BPR), which was composed of urban laborers, students, and the urban poor, to conduct strikes, land invasions, and mass urban protest.⁷⁷ By 1980, the BPR was composed of almost 80,000 members, and directly supported the armed guerillas of the FMLN and the political arm of the insurgency, Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR).

While FECCAS and the UTC had joined the larger FMLN and FDR, the 100,000 strong UCS would come to play an important but short-lived role in the 1980 land reform implemented by the reformist civilian-military junta that ousted the Romero government in the 1979 coup. During this time UCS had the support of moderates in the Christian Democratic Party, the military reformist in the junta, and the United States. However, once land reform broke down under the political violence of the right, UCS splintered and much of its supporters moved towards the insurgents.

5. Land Reform and Conflict 1980: The Reformers Fail

When land reform did come to El Salvador in 1980 the reform was initiated by the reformist civilian-military junta. With mass demonstrations of over 100,000 people occurring in San Salvador, the junta knew if something dramatic was not done, widespread violence was to follow. With support from the Christian Democrats, the one political party that traditionally opposed the decades of military governance, "Phase I" of El Salvador's land reform was enacted. Phase I was a significant land reform in that 14 percent of El Salvador's total land area (289,000) was redistributed to 85,000 peasants.⁷⁸ The junta had envisioned three phases of land reform: (1) Phase I, the expropriation of "all farms over 500 hectares"; (2) Phase II, a further expropriation of farms 100-500 hectares in size; and (3) Phase III, a "land to the tiller" decree that gave peasants title to

⁷⁷ Kinkaid, 487.

⁷⁸ Seligson, Mitchell A. "Thirty Years of Transformation in the Agrarian Structure of El Salvador, 1961-1991." [Electronic version] *Latin American Research Review*, 30.3, (1995), 64.

the land they cultivated.⁷⁹ In the war's aftermath, many have cited that the great downfall of the 1980 land reform program was the simple fact that no phase of the program made, "provisions for the landless segment of the rural population."⁸⁰ That is the very segment of the rural population that many have theorized is the most likely to rebel.

Another reason that the junta's land reform program failed to resolve peasant grievances against the state was that as peasants attempted to claim the benefits of the new land reform, they were met with violence from right wing "death squads." The government's failure to control the indiscriminate killings by both the armed forces and paramilitaries created the conditions necessary for the guerillas to attempt to overthrow the government. T. David Mason writes that as both the Salvadoran military and paramilitary units began to attack villages indiscriminately, "Remaining neutral was no longer an option...one is compelled either to join the insurgents in search of protection or become a refugee."⁸¹ The rift caused by the junta's land reform laws would lead to an eventual removal of the "reformers" from government. In the subsequent years leading up to the peace accords, not only would Phase III never see implementation, but any gains made by Phase I and II land reforms would be legally revoked and lands returned to their pre-land reform owners.

E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what do the cases of South Vietnam and El Salvador teach us about the feasibility of land reform as a means of conflict resolution? More specifically, is it possible to carry out land reform in the midst of armed conflict? And are peasants willing to abandon the insurgents once they have already "thrown in their lot" with them? First turning to the South Vietnamese case, it is a common misperception that because the war ultimately ended in the collapse of South Vietnam that the "land to the tiller" program was a failure. By all accounts, the program succeeded in its main goal of redistributing large amounts of land. By April 1973, the Thieu government had "issued

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Mason, 226.

⁸¹ Mason, 220.

titles for 2.5 million acres and distributed about 75 percent of this land to new owners."⁸² Furthermore, in the period from 1970 to 1973, "land to the tiller" had reduced land tenancy from 60 to 10 percent.⁸³

On the other hand, as I have argued, the downfall of "land to the tiller" stemmed from the fact that it was "too little, too late." By the time President Thieu implemented his "land to the tiller" program, the war in the South had transformed from an *intra-state* conflict with the insurgents, to a more conventional *inter-state* war with the North Vietnamese Army. Coupled with the withdrawal of most U.S. forces by 1973, the prospects of avoiding defeat for the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) seemed remote. While "land to the tiller" was successful at redistributing land, what effect did it have on undermining peasant support for the insurgency? A 1972 USAID report based on field interviews and studies of the Mekong Delta region spoke favorably of this crucial political aspect of "Land to the Tiller:"

The Land to the Tiller Program is a splendid means to pacification...It is helping turn a once-disaffected, politically neutral mass of potential and sometimes actual revolutionaries into middle class farmers in support of the regime.⁸⁴

However, it is difficult to quantify just how effective "Land to the Tiller" was in reducing peasant recruitment and support. Roy Prosterman argues "Land to the Tiller" contributed to the reduction of Viet Cong recruitment from a pre-1969 average of 7,000 recruits a month, to a drop of 3,500 recruits a month by late 1969.⁸⁵ Yet there were other factors that may have contributed to the decline in Viet Cong recruitment. The Viet Cong infrastructure suffered significant losses during the Tet Offensive (1968), which continued under the controversial "Phoenix Program," a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese state-sanctioned campaign of kidnapping and assassination of key members

⁸² Hunt, 264.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Bush, Henry C., Gordon H. Messegee, and Roger V. Russell. *The Impact of the Land to the Tiller Program in the Mekong Delta*. (Washington, D.C.: Control Data Corporation, Dec., 1972), 88. In Richard Hunt's *Pacification*, 264.

⁸⁵ Prosterman, 757.

of the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI). Furthermore, by 1969 an estimated 70 percent of all enemy combatants in the South were soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army.⁸⁶

Moving ahead to the 1980 Salvadoran case, it is clear from the literature that U.S. policymakers working on U.S.-El Salvador policy believed South Vietnam's "Land to the Tiller" had been to a large degree successful. From a U.S. perspective, the 1980 U.S. supported land reforms in El Salvador, specifically Phase III, were almost a "carbon copy" of South Vietnam's "Land to the Tiller" program.⁸⁷ Yet as Michael McClintock notes, the Carter administration's insistence on the program contradicted sharply with the views of the Salvadoran elite:

Phase III presents the most confusing aspect of the reform program, and could prove especially troublesome for the U.S. because it was decreed without advance discussion, except in very limited government circles, and, we are told, it is considered by key Salvadoran officials as a misguided and U.S. imposed initiative.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, the implementation of Phase I did reach a measure of success in the large amount of land it redistributed to peasants.

Yet while this answers the feasibility question of land reform implemented amid conflict in the Salvadoran case, the equally important question of land reform's effectiveness in quelling rural insurgency had just the opposite intended effect in El Salvador. As previously mentioned, not only was the 1980 land reform program fatally flawed by not addressing the landless issue, but more importantly, both the "revolutionary left and the conservative right had an interest in seeing land reform fail, because its success would weaken their claims to peasant support."⁸⁹ With neither political support "from below" or "above," the reform minded ruling junta did not have

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ McClintock, 267.

⁸⁸ Simon, Lawrence R. and James C. Stephens, Jr. *El Salvador, Land Reform, 1980-81*. (OXFAN/America: Boston, 1982), 5. In Michael McClintock *The American Connection: Vol. 1 El Salvador*, 267.

⁸⁹ Mason, 227.

enough "political capital" to reap any positive results from their redistributive land reform policy. As Chapter IV discusses, this scenario may have important implications in the Colombian case.

A last element that deserves discussion is just how effective was the U.S. role in implementing land reform in the two cases. In the case of South Vietnam, the United States was unable to pressure the South Vietnamese government to implement land reform much sooner in the conflict. Part of this lies with the United States own difficulties in coming to terms with what the real nature of the war was. Yet another more powerful reason that also applies to the Salvadoran case was the fact that to the United States, both of these conflicts represented a much larger battle between the United States and the Soviet Union. Faced with this perception, the United States supported successive Vietnamese and Salvadoran regimes, which although many in the United States believed were inept, corrupt, and to say the least undemocratic, were nevertheless on the "frontlines" in the war against the Communist. In the "fight to the death" mentality of the Cold War, the United States conceded significant leverage for land reform's implementation, allowing both the South Vietnamese and Salvadoran regimes to continue the status quo without placing conditional requirements such as land reform on large sums of foreign aid. Arguably, a similar U.S. policy "mentality" exists in Colombia, as the country is now on the "frontline" of both the "war on drugs" and the GWOT.

In the final analysis, the cases of South Vietnam and El Salvador provide strong evidence that land reform *can be successfully implemented during conflict*. However, the more daunting issue of post-implementation and quelling peasant mobilization of rural insurgencies is not as clear. While there is some evidence to support land reforms role in undermining peasant support in the South Vietnamese case, the Salvadoran case demonstrates that land reform's very implementation can have the undesired affect of greatly increasing political violence. Here again this may be a realistic possibility of any redistributive land reform implemented under the current political conditions in Colombia.

The next chapter applies the framework developed in the first part of this chapter to the case of Colombia in order to examine more closely the causes of peasant resistance there. It considers the extent to which conflicts over land have generated rural violence historically and then focuses specifically on the role of land in the escalation of the current conflict in the mid to late 1990s. This analysis is essential for understanding whether or not land reform can contribute to the resolution of the current conflict in Colombia. Chapter IV then addresses questions about the feasibility of land reform amidst conflict raised by the second part of this chapter.

III. THE NEXUS BETWEEN LAND AND CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA

*Get off this estate. What for? Because it is mine. Where did you get it?
From my father. Where did he get it? From his father. And where did he
get it? He fought for it. Well, I'll fight you for it.*

—Carl Sandburg

A. INTRODUCTION

It is widely held by many Colombians and many within the international community that much of the current rural violence in Colombia is a symptom of a much deeper and historical conflict over land. A recent report by the NGO International Organization for Migration (IOM), whose “Strengthening of Democracy” initiative in Colombia is partially funded by USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), stated:

The armed conflict in Colombia is rooted in agrarian disputes emerging in the middle of the last century. It continues to center around the struggle to gain territorial advantages and free access to land.¹

Yet, do these “root causes” provide sufficient explanation for the current rural violence? This chapter examines the relationship between land and conflict in Colombia and its evolution over three distinct phases of conflict. The first part of this chapter starts with the colonization of Colombia’s internal frontiers beginning in the late 19th century and follows the land conflict through the period of *La Violencia* (1948 - 1958). The second part of this chapter examines the emergence of FARC in the mid-1960s and concludes with the rise and fall of Colombia’s national peasant organization, ANUC (*Asociacion Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos*) during the early 1970s. The final part of this chapter focuses on the “coca boom” that began in the 1980s and examines how the rural conflict escalated in the mid-1990s due to the process of “reverse land reform,” and increase in rural inequality of income and landownership.

¹ United States. Agency for International Development. “Strengthening Peace in Colombia: 7th Quarter Report January – March 2003, No. 514-A-00-01-00217-00,” 22, [Electronic version] available from http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDABY242.pdf (accessed on 25 Nov 2003).

B. COLONIZATION AND THE LIBERAL AGRARIAN REFORM MOVEMENT (1870 – 1948)

Colombia has long been and remains a country tied to its land. Not unlike other Latin American countries, the struggle between landowners and peasants was inherited by a legacy of Spanish colonialism and the *haciendas* or large estate system that ensued. During Spanish colonial rule much of modern-day Colombia were *terrenos baldíos* or public lands comprising a vast unsettled "internal frontier" that could be homesteaded.² The late 19th and early 20th century saw a large migration of Colombian peasants from the "highlands" into the vast public lands of Colombia's "middle altitudes and lowlands."³ This migration by *colonos* or "landless squatters" created an expansion into previously unpopulated areas, clearing the frontier for their own crops and village settlements.⁴ However, the clearing of the frontiers also brought large numbers of land entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs or speculators specifically sought to "monopolize" *colono* land because: (1) it was already cleared and tilled for large-scale hacienda style cultivation; and (2) peasants already settled on these lands provided a readily available source of cheap labor.⁵ The issue of labor was especially critical as poor communications and transportation at this stage of Colombia's economic development limited the existence of a "mobile pool of wage-earning laborers."⁶ Consequently, these land entrepreneurs, in their desire to secure an increasingly scarce source of labor began a process of "labor acquisition" claiming property rights over the *terrenos baldíos*.⁷

Although land legislation passed during the 1870s and 1880s gave *colonos* homesteading rights to lands they farmed, the associated surveying cost allowed the more

² In 1850 Italian geographer Agustín Codazzi estimated Colombia's *terrenos baldíos* comprised seventy-five percent Colombia's territory. See LeGrand, Catherine. *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1850-1936*. (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1986), 1.

³ Bergquist, Charles, Ricardo Penaranda, and Gonzalo Sanchez ed. *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*. (SR Books: Wilmington, Delaware, 1992), 33.

⁴ Bergquist, 34.

⁵ LaGrand, 38.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bergquist, 32.

wealthy middle and upper classes to claim ownership through legal or illegal means.⁸ Thus, the situation was created where land entrepreneurs with newly “acquired” legitimate or illegitimate land titles would force *colonos* to either to be evicted or sign labor contracts becoming “tenants of the haciendas.”⁹ The repercussions of this era of land entrepreneurship was the “monopolization of immense extensions of territory, much more than they possibly could put to use.”¹⁰

Prior to 1874 the “relative isolation, poverty, and illiteracy” of *colonos* resulted in very little resistance to either their eviction or cooption into tenant farmers by land entrepreneurs.¹¹ Yet in the period from 1874 to 1920, peasants, armed with pro-homesteading laws passed in 1874 and 1882, began to resist land entrepreneurs through petitions to the government in Bogotá; legal actions against land speculators; and at times resistance until forcefully evicted or arrested.¹² Land entrepreneurs were able to thwart the efforts of *colonos* and the pro-peasant land laws, “using administrative procedures, intimidation, and force.”¹³ The period of 1874 to 1930 would see over 450 large confrontations between these two groups.¹⁴ Although the government in Bogotá was aware of the increasing conflict between *colonos* and land entrepreneurs, it was unable to exert any real influence in support of pro-colono land laws beyond the capital. Rather it relied on local and municipal authorities to adjudicate these disputes. What would eventually bring the “agrarian problem” into the national spotlight was not the plight of the *colonos*, but Colombia's rapid move to industrialization during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In the midst of an international depression and a rising inflation rate, Colombia was becoming a net importer of food. Colombia's policymakers believed it imperative for the rural economy to increase agriculture production in order to provide low-cost

⁸ Bergquist, 35.

⁹ LeGrand, 40.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ LeGrand, 63.

¹² LeGrand, 67.

¹³ LeGrand, 83.

¹⁴ Richani, 13.

foodstuff for the emerging industrial workforce. This would enable manufacturers to keep wage costs down, freeing up capital for investment. Both Liberals and Conservatives agreed the inefficient *latifundias* were the source of the rural economy's stagnation. Returning to an earlier Liberal philosophy, policymakers shaped land policy to integrate "poor tenants, sharecroppers, and *colonos*" and initiate a rural middle class reinvigorating the rural economy.¹⁵

With the political will of the national government on the peasants' side, the period of 1928 through 1936 saw a second major wave of peasant colonization characterized by large uncoordinated squatter or land invasions of *latifundias*, cattle ranches, and banana plantations. Many of these second waves of *colonos* were unemployed urban workers and rural wageworkers that were jobless as a result of the Depression.¹⁶ Landowners found it increasingly difficult to evict *colonos*, not only because of the national government's support of the *colonos*, but also because leftist political parties (i.e. the Communist Party of Colombia-*Partido Comunista de Colombia* or PCC, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán's Revolutionary Leftist National Union-*Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria* or UNIR, and the National Agrarian party-*Partido Agrarista Nacional*-PAN), were effective in mobilizing the peasants. By 1936, the "*colono* problem" was perceived to be a legitimate threat by landowners and even those within government as a precursor to social revolution.¹⁷ Adding to the government's dilemma was the realization that the economic justification of supporting the *colonos* was not working. Instead of producing more food for urban workers, peasants in zones where land invasions were taking place were producing less than before.¹⁸

Two factors would decidedly swing national policy back to side of the landowners: (1) *colono* political influence at the national level weakened because of, "cooptation of the movement's political leaders...and the resurgence of the industrial working class as a power base for urban politicians," making peasant political support much less important; and (2) the emergence of powerful landowner interest groups who

¹⁵ LeGrand, 98.

¹⁶ LeGrand, 109.

¹⁷ LeGrand, 133.

¹⁸ LeGrand, 134.

were able to affect land policy at the national level. Under increasingly effective landowner pressure, Liberal President López Pumarejo enacted "Land Law 200" in 1936. Some believed Law 200 would help modernize Colombia's "chaotic" agrarian system and "synchronize" it with Colombia's emerging "capitalist development."¹⁹ Others have characterized the law as essentially a "landowner solution" to legitimize "large agrarian landholdings" in the face of growing peasant mobilization.²⁰

In the period following the passage of Law 200, "squatting" and land occupations by peasants would still occur but on a much smaller scale than during the previous decade. For many *hacendados*, the tenant issue was still unresolved by Law 200, causing many haciendas to turn to cattle ranching with its minimal labor requirements and "to avoid land claims by tenants and sharecroppers."²¹ Adding to this, Law 200 had done little to alleviate an increasingly inflationary economy that saw a major drop in agriculture production, falling wages, and a spiraling cost of living.²² In 1938, President Eduardo Santos, who although a member of the Liberal Party, represented a moderate faction, did nothing to further advance Lopez efforts at land reform and property rights. In 1942 when López was elected once again, the Liberal Party was fractionalized by the populist leftist leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, and by the urban working class represented by Santos. Adding to this division was a Conservative Party whose landed elite and industrialist supporters were continuing to seek *revancha* (revenge) for the "Law 200" reforms and felt increasingly threatened by the rising political strength of the urban labor unions.²³

With a fractionalized Liberal party, the Conservative Party was able to pass "Law 100" in 1944. Law 100 sought to solidify the balance of rural power back to the small

¹⁹ Richani, 18.

²⁰ Sanchez, Gonzalo and Donny Meertens. *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics: The Case of "La Violencia" in Colombia*. (University of Texas Press: Austin, 2001), 11.

²¹ Richani, 21.

²² Richani, 21. Richani states that part of the drop in agriculture production from 146,000 tons in 1942 to 68,000 tons in 1943 can be attributed to the "crisis in the hacienda system" where landlords shifted from labor intensive agriculture production to cattle ranching to avoid the increasing land claims by "tenants and sharecroppers."

²³ Richani, 20.

landowning elite, making it increasingly difficult if not impossible for *colonos* to claim property rights.²⁴ More significantly, Law 100:

Signified the culmination of the modern alliance between the government and the large landowners that began in 1936. The aim of dissolving the latifundia system by turning tenants and *colonos* into independent small holders had been completely abandoned.²⁵

The increasing friction between the country's two major political parties led to an unsuccessful Conservative coup attempt in 1944 and the eventual resignation of López in 1946. The election of Conservative candidate Mariano Ospina Pérez in 1946 began a new phase in political violence between the two parties.

The move of Conservatives against the growing mobilization of both peasants and urban workers reached a boiling point after the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948. The charismatic Gaitán had come to represent a popular reformist agenda of "economic redistribution and political participation" among the urban and peasant masses.²⁶ Although never proven, Liberals immediately believed that the Conservative oligarchy was responsible for Gaitán's death. The assassination of Gaitán, would set off a national Liberal uprising beginning with three days of violent looting and rioting in Bogotá (*El Bogotazo*), eventually spreading throughout the countryside.

In what has been characterized as one of the "greatest armed mobilization of peasants in the recent history of the western hemisphere," the "undeclared" civil war or *La Violencia* would move away from the cities becoming a war of peasant against peasant.²⁷ Areas of prior *colono* and landowner conflict, such as the departments of Tolima, Valle, Antioquia, and Caldas were especially heavily contested during *La Violencia*.²⁸ Casualties in Tolima alone numbered 35,294.²⁹ Overall, *La Violencia*

²⁴ Duff, 17.

²⁵ LeGrand, 162.

²⁶ Bergquist, 77.

²⁷ Walton, John. *Reluctant Rebels: Comparative studies of revolution and underdevelopment*. (Columbia University Press: New York, 1984), 74.

²⁸ Walton, 91.

²⁹ Ibid.

(1945-1958) would claim the lives of an estimated 200,000 Colombians.³⁰ In an answer to the Liberal uprisings, specifically in the countryside, the Conservative Party, with the support of the National Police, the armed forces, and the Catholic Church, began to arm peasants under their control.³¹ By 1950, *La Violencia* had fragmented the entire country into zones under Liberal, Conservative, or Communist guerrilla control.³² The violence in the rural countryside evolved into more than political party grievances as Sanchez and Meertens write in *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics* (2001):

Rural terror would have other visible consequences: the plunder of land and property whose owners had been killed or threatened into selling; the confiscation of harvests and livestock; the burning of houses, sugarcane crushers, and processing plants; the physical coercion of discontented rural workers, provoking massive migration to the cities, or removing peasants to areas controlled by the party with which they were affiliated. Ultimately, rural terror rearranged social classes in the countryside and relations of leadership and power in the different regions.³³

Within these zones, guerrilla groups began to exercise a "measure of independence" as shown by the guerrillas in the Llanos who began to plan their own agrarian reform.³⁴ Furthermore, in 1953, a *Movimiento Popular de Liberación Nacional* was formed attempting to unite all guerrilla groups behind a general land reform agenda.³⁵

The failure of the Conservative government to end the violence brought a "disillusioned army" to execute a military coup in June 1953, led by army chief of staff General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla.³⁶ As president, Rojas Pinilla enjoyed initial success in quelling the violence by offering a general amnesty for those directly involved in the *Violencia*. However, reoccurring hostilities in Tolima between Communist guerrillas

³⁰ Violence in Colombia: Building Sustainable Peace and Social Capital. (World Bank: Washington D.C., 2000), 20.

³¹ Bergquist, 87. Gonzalo Sanchez writes in his chapter, "The Violence: An Interpretative Synthesis," that the Catholic Church was a major force in legitimizing and supporting the efforts of the chulavitas (government terrorist) against the rural peasants during the Violence.

³² Galli, Rosemary. "Rural Development As Social Control: International Agencies and Class Struggle in the Colombian Countryside." *Latin American Perspectives* 5 (Autumn 1978), 75.

³³ Sanchez and Maartens, 17

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Walton, 96.

and the military, and Pinilla's desire to create a third party alliance between the military and populace, brought about a bi-partisan effort of Conservative and Liberal politicians to replace Pinilla with a five-man military junta in 1957.³⁷ This was agreed to with the understanding that the government would be turned over to civilian control.

The resulting coalition between Liberal and Conservative politicians led to the formation of the *Frente Nacional* or National Front in 1958. By "eliminating electoral competition", both parties agreed to successively alternate the presidency between Liberal and Conservative candidates for a period of fifteen years (1958-1974).³⁸ Furthermore, legislative representation as well as all ministerial positions would be equally shared. Inherent to the National Front was the prohibition of any third party forces. Although the joining of the Liberal and Conservative coalition brought some peace to the cities it did nothing to stop the violence in the countryside. While *La Violencia* had "officially" ended, the countryside became the site of a new wave of violence caused by the phenomenon of *bandolerismo* or political banditry.

The phenomenon of *bandolerismo* is interesting to note as it: (1) foreshadowed the rise of paramilitary groups in contemporary Colombia; and (2) brought about significant US backed Colombian counter-insurgency efforts against both the *bandoleros* and the smaller and isolated Communist and Liberal guerrilla groups. Originally, these "bandits" were Liberal peasants who gained voluntary support of large landowners and the Liberal peasantry as they viciously attacked rural elites and peasants from the Conservative Party. However, the *bandoleros* evolved into an army that specialized in paid protection. Operating mainly in the central coffee belt regions of northern Tolima, Valle del Cauca, and Viejo Caldas, they increasingly began to strong-arm coffee plantations with forced protection quotas.³⁹ Even more of a threat to the coffee landowners was the move by the *bandoleros* to control and determine coffee production in order to ensure their own economic welfare.⁴⁰ Resistance by the landowners led *bandoleros* to increasingly resort to tactics of extortion and kidnapping. In the eyes of

³⁷ Sánchez and Meertens, 20.

³⁸ Decker and Duran, 7.

³⁹ Bergquist, 121.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the Colombian government and outsiders (the United States), the criminal nature of the *bandoleros* was the greatest threat to an end of the violence in the countryside. Consequently, the United States used the *bandolero* threat as well as the more "potentially" threatening Communist guerrillas as justification for emergency covert aid to Colombia in late 1961.⁴¹

C. THE EARLY HISTORY OF FARC, AND THE "RISE AND FALL" OF THE NATIONAL PEASANT ASSOCIATION ANUC (1966 – 1980)

It was in one of these Liberal guerrilla groups in the department of Tolima that future FARC leader and founder, Manuel Marulanda Vélez (a.k.a. Tirofijo or Sure Shot) began honing his guerrilla skills. During *La Violencia* Liberal peasants with support of Communist activists, joined to create peasant self-defense groups in the large coffee growing regions of Sumapaz and Taquendama in the Tolima department.⁴² During the early phases of *La Violencia* these self-defense groups showed little capability or interest beyond their own defense from rival peasant groups as Safford and Palacios note in *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (2002):

They [self-defense organizations] were not given to sabotage or terrorism, nor to ambushes of the police or army. Nor did they defend themselves against the state. They protected peasant communities that obstinately cherished rivalries with other peasant communities that were also protected by clientilistic armed forces.⁴³

After the general amnesty offered by General Rojas Pinilla in 1953, many of the Liberal and Conservative guerrillas alike willingly laid down their arms and gave up their struggle. However, the Communists fighting in Tolima and Cundinamarca, and some Liberals including Marulanda, refused to give up their cause.⁴⁴ In 1955, Rojas Pinilla initiated a campaign specifically against these Communist guerrillas. The end effect was

⁴¹ Rempe, Dennis M. "The Past as Prologue: A History of US Counter-insurgency Policy in Colombia." (Strategic Studies Institute: US Army War College, Mar 2002), 16. www.carlisle.army.mil/sssi/pubs/2002/past/past.pdf This first aid package of \$1.5 million included helicopters, communications equipment, and small arms to support a US trained, Ranger styled, Colombian Army counter-insurgency units.

⁴² Sanchez and Meertens, 18. Sanchez and Meertens write that relationship between Liberal and Communist peasants was "sometimes conflictive," specifically in southern Tolima.

⁴³ Safford, Frank and Marco Palacios. *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), 355.

⁴⁴ Richani, 61.

the guerrillas were forced from their "highland" enclaves to the jungles in the Andean foothills.⁴⁵ It was in these jungles that Marulanda joined with Jacobo Arenas, a self-described "professional revolutionary," and began a community with its own "economic self-management and military self-defense," forming the "Independent Republic of Marquetalia" in 1961.⁴⁶

In 1962, U.S. military intelligence estimated that eleven "independent republics," aided by the PCC, were active with a total force of 1,600 to 2,000 men.⁴⁷ Although "relatively passive," the independent republics were challenging the state's legitimacy by slowly becoming "shadow governments...unresponsive to control from Bogotá."⁴⁸ Subsequently, with U.S. training and advisement, the Colombian government initiated an aggressive U.S. style counter-insurgency campaign called PLAN LAZO (1964 –1966) directed towards both the bandit and communist guerrilla problem. PLAN LAZO was a balanced counter-insurgency/rural pacification plan, incorporating both unconventional warfare tactics battle tested in South Vietnam and an important civic action and civic self-defense plan focused on winning popular support in contested areas.⁴⁹

It was out of PLAN LAZO operations that the Colombian government would conduct *Operación Marquetalia* on May 18, 1964 against the "Independent Republic of Marquetalia." The operation used a combined effort of heavy artillery, aerial bombardment, and 16,000 infantry in an effort to eliminate Marulanda's guerrilla republic.⁵⁰ However, prior to the operation, Marulanda had evacuated the women,

⁴⁵ Molano, Alfredo. "The Evolution of the FARC: A Guerilla Group's Long History." (*NACLA Report on the Americas*: New York, Sep/Oct 2000), www.proquest.umi.com [25 Oct 2002].

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Rempe, 17.

⁴⁸ Rempe, 27.

⁴⁹ Rempe, 19.

⁵⁰ It is interesting that the US has come full circle in regards to counter-insurgency in Colombia. During the US renewed Cold War against the Soviets during the Reagan administration, FARC stayed relatively quiet while other Latin American Communist or Socialist insurgencies met their destruction at the hands of US supported forces. Research completed for this thesis did not show if the decision to remain "low keyed" during this period was a conscious decision by Marulanda and FARC or rather a symptom of the poor "pre-coca boom" economic status of FARC and the *colonos*.

children, and elderly, leaving only 43 guerrillas to fight.⁵¹ The armed forces drove Marulanda into the mountains of the neighboring "Republic of Chiquito," forcing his forces "back to the first stage of mobile guerrilla warfare."⁵² Nevertheless, in the mountains of Cauca, on July 20, 1964, Marulanda with other guerrilla leaders from Tolima, Cauca, and Huila regions formed a unified organization called *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or FARC.

In the year immediately following FARC's founding, the guerrilla group operated as the "armed wing" (*brazo armado*) of the PCC conducting ambushes of government and police forces all the while trying to avoid their own capture or destruction by an increasingly effective government counter-insurgency campaign. In April 1967 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimated FARC strength at only 500 active forces with another 500 members in reserve, spread across traditional strongholds in Tolima and in the departments of Quindio, Cauca, Sandander, and Valle.⁵³ Yet by the early 1970s, FARC had grown substantially to 5,000 - 8,000 combatants and by the time of the "coca boom" of the 1980s FARC numbered 12,000 combatants.⁵⁴ What can account for FARC's growth prior to the "coca boom" of the 1980s when in the late 1960s the guerrilla group appeared to be on the brink of joining other "failed" Latin American revolutionary movements?

Most contemporary studies of FARC begin at Marquetalia and quickly "fast forward" to the "coca boom" of the 1980s.⁵⁵ Yet these types of analysis omit an

⁵¹ Molano, Alfredo. "The Evolution of the FARC: A Guerilla Group's Long History." (*NACLA Report on the Americas*: New York, Sep/Oct 2000), available from www.proquest.umi.com (accessed on 25 Oct 2002).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). "Status of Cuban supported guerrilla insurgency in Colombia. Memo." (7 April 1967). [Electronic version] available from <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/> (accessed on 10 May 2003).

⁵⁴ Bagley, Bruce M. "The State and the Peasantry in contemporary Colombia." *Latin American Issues*, Vol. 6, 1989. [e-journal] www.webpub.alleggheny.edu/group/LAS/LatinAmIssues/Articles/Vol6/LAI_vol_6.htm (accessed on 09 Nov 2003).

⁵⁵ The pivotal work on ANUC is Leon Zamosc's *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association* (1967-1981). (University of California: San Diego, 1986). Author Bruce Bagley also adds much to the literature in his examination of ANUC as cited in the previous footnote. Of the recent published studies used in this thesis, only Nazih Richani's *System's of Violence* (2002) addresses the nexus between the failure of ANUC and the rise of the guerrillas.

important period of Colombian history during the late 1960s and early 1970s that saw Colombia's peasants organize and mobilize on a national level on a scope that has yet to be repeated in modern Colombian history. Understanding the rise and fall of the *Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* or ANUC (1970 -1972) is crucial to understanding why in the following decades some Colombian peasants, namely landless and subsistence farmers not only sought FARC's protection but also turned to FARC believing that no other viable alternative for resolving the land tenure issue existed.

After *La Violencia* most of the "grass root" peasant associations that had been founded in the 1920s and 1930s had virtually disappeared.⁵⁶ During the immediate post-*Violencia* period, the Lleras administration created committees of Community Action or *Accion Comunal* (AC) under Law 14 of 1958. Largely conceived as the social side of the state's rural pacification efforts, the AC committees were essentially urban and rural "neighborhood associations" designed to unify community efforts towards civil construction and improvement projects.⁵⁷ Central to administration of the AC program were community *juntas* of elected officials who served as the bridge between the community's interest and the national government.⁵⁸ Politically, the *juntas* served an important role reestablishing the state's presence in those areas particularly decimated during *La Violencia*:

The partial collapse of state authority in many rural areas during the *Violencia* had left an organizational and power vacuum in many isolated rural communities. The *juntas* quickly surfaced as centers of partisan political activity. Combined with military actions against the remaining guerrilla bands and rural bandits, the AC program helped curtail the power

⁵⁶ Zamosc, 37. In 1965, Colombia's Ministry of Labor estimated that only 89 of 567 peasant league or syndicates were active. Almost half of these existed along the Atlantic Coast, which had seen minimal damage done by the civil war.

⁵⁷ Zamosc, 38. Prior to *La Violencia* and the breakdown of civil society, Colombia had a rich and meaningful relationship between religious, educational, and civic organizations. These organizations in many regions, were a unifying factor that attempted to raise the quality of life from the lowest to highest ranks of Colombian society. For an excellent historical analysis of the influence of these types of organizations in Colombia's society see Patricia Londono-Vega's *Religion, Culture, and Society in Colombia: Medellin and Antioquia, 1850-1930*. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002).

⁵⁸ Bagley, [e-journal].

of armed peasant groups while reestablishing effective state and party control in many rural areas by the mid-1960's.⁵⁹

The AC program posted impressive infrastructure results as "hundreds of bridges, roads, water and sewage systems and community centers were built" through the 1960s.⁶⁰

Yet by the mid-1960s, a growing frustration in some communities at the "favoritism and discontent" associated with the government's funding of AC programs, as well as the "slow pace of land reform" led to the radicalization of many rural communities.⁶¹ Forming AC federations to increase "their collective bargaining power," AC juntas combined to "direct challenges to local government officials and to the local power structure," and began to threaten the political stability of some rural regions.⁶² The radicalization of the AC juntas, the continued rural guerrilla threat, and a stagnant rural economy, were all pressing issues as newly elected Liberal President Carlos Lleras Restrepo took office in 1966. Lleras Restrepo's answer involved not only significant land reform but also state-led organization of the peasants via ANUC.

President Lleras Restrepo's decision to organize Colombia's peasants, which was almost unthinkable in Latin American elite circles, while also promising a redistributive land reform, has received mixed historical interpretations. Some have characterized President Lleras's administration as truly committed to significant socio-economic reforms. If Lleras were to challenge the status quo, this would require domestic pressure from the peasants to overcome resistance by the landowning elite.⁶³ Still others have criticized Lleras Restrepo's decision to create ANUC as more self-serving, as many believed that he intended to create a popular peasant base of support ensuring his reelection in 1974 once the National Front system officially ended.⁶⁴ This type of political strategy had been extremely successful in neighboring Venezuela during the early 1960s and the *Acción Democrática* (AD) presidency of Rómulo Betancourt. In the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Bagley, [e-journal].

⁶³ Zamosc, 50.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Venezuelan case, government land reform undermined peasant support of leftist guerrillas in 1962 and 1963.⁶⁵ Regardless of President Lleras's true intentions, in one move, by using his presidential power of decrees and avoiding Congressional obstacles, he had created a peasant organization that could be controlled by the state as a counterweight to the agricultural elites.

Throughout the Lleras administration, ANUC was "advertised" as an apolitical, non-state supported entity. Yet in reality, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact not only was the Ministry of Agriculture responsible for organizing the peasant *usuarios*, but it was also responsible for training its leaders, registering the peasants, providing funding, and creating the Division of Peasant Organization (DOC) within the ministry, whose leader was a committee chairman within ANUC.⁶⁶ Leon Zamosc in *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia* (1986) summarizes this "unique" relationship that developed between the state and ANUC:

ANUC's relationship with the state was one of complete dependence on both the formal and informal levels...in the strict sense, ANUC was not part of the state structure. Nevertheless, it had an undeniable semiofficial status. Coupled with the pattern of unilateral control, this semiofficial status defined ANUC as an extension of the state.⁶⁷

The results of the Ministry of Agriculture's efforts were impressive. By March 1968, 600,000 peasants were registered members of ANUC, and by October 1971, its membership had risen to almost one million.⁶⁸

One of the more remarkable accomplishments of ANUC was that early in its organizational stage it was able to incorporate both the small landowning peasant and the landless peasants. This was no easy feat as the traditional regionalization and geography of Colombia had always contributed to divisions between the two groups. By 1970, ANUC had a "national scope, heterogeneous class composition, authentic representation,

⁶⁵ Alexander, Robert J. *The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution: A Profile of the Regime of Rómulo Betancourt*. (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1964), 183.

⁶⁶ Zamosc, 59.

⁶⁷ Zamosc, 60.

⁶⁸ Zamosc, 57.

and institutional legitimating."⁶⁹ Yet the end of the Lleras administration created a real "potential" for crisis within ANUC. Although the state was now in the position to *control* ANUC, this control hinged upon the state's ability to "deliver the goods" of land reform.

The positive relationship the Lleras administration had created between the state and ANUC began to quickly deteriorate under the Conservative presidency of Misael Pastrana (1970-1974). Although President Pastrana had vowed to continue land reform during his campaign, by July 1971, Pastrana had imposed the "indefinite suspension" of all INCORA land distributions. The impetus for Pastrana's "counter-offensive" to turn back reforms created during his predecessor's administration had come from the landowning elite's growing opposition to ANUC, as the peasant group had become increasingly radicalized conducting large-scale land invasions beginning in 1971. Repeating an earlier period of landowner and peasant relations, agriculture interest groups such as *Sociedad de Agricultores de Colombia* (SAC) and *Federación Colombiana de Ganaderos* (FEDEGAN) began to campaign against both ANUC and *Instituto Nacional de Colonización y Reforma Agraria* (INCORA) characterizing them as ingrained with communist and socialist radical elements. President Pastrana's campaign of "counter-reform," officially began with the *Pact of Chicoral* in January 1971, in which the government, the Liberal and Conservative Parties, and the "private sector," agreed to "roll back" and minimize land reform and to continue to move forward with the government's support of "large-scale agricultural production."⁷⁰

Continued frustration with the state's stalled land reform efforts intensified ANUC's land invasions to over a thousand in 1972 and 1973 alone. In 1972, dissension within ANUC caused the organization to splinter into multiple groups including ANUC-Sincelejo, which was the largest and most radical with an estimated 300,000 active members.⁷¹ By this time, the Pastrana administration began to use the full force of the state to end the land invasions through harassment and jailing of the ANUC-Sincelejo

⁶⁹ Zamosc, 62.

⁷⁰ Zamosc, 98.

⁷¹ Bagley [e-journal].

leadership.⁷² This same period saw the emergence of *pajaros* or hired gunmen, “employed by local political bosses and landowners to intimidate or eliminate leaders of organizations like ANUC.”⁷³ The state's counter-land reform agenda did not improve for the peasants with Liberal candidate Alfonso López Michelsen's election in 1974. By 1975, ANUC was almost in a complete downward spiral. Additionally, by the mid-1970s, “new occupational alternatives” began to compete with peasant desires for land. These included: (1) a “bonanza” in sugar and coffee production with record prices from 1975 to 1978; (2) the boom of illicit marijuana cultivation in Colombia; and (3) the growth of seasonal labor opportunities in neighboring Venezuela.⁷⁴ Of these, the marijuana industry would have dramatic impact on ANUC's “grass-root” ideology as Leon Zamosc writes:

The fierce land conflicts suddenly ended and were replaced by a vertical alignment in which landowners, peasants, and officials shared a common interest in the underground economy...paving the way for attitudes and values that promoted *mafiosi* factional loyalties and relegated to the background class demands that had originally fed the fighting spirit of the grass-roots level.⁷⁵

However, not all peasants reaped the rewards of the “new occupational alternatives.” Despite significant growth in the rural economy in the early 1970s, the move to large-scale commercial agricultural production dramatically effected Colombia’s subsistent farmers turning millions of peasants into “seasonal migrants.”⁷⁶ Moreover, state repression during the Pastrana and Lopez administrations, paramilitary violence against peasant leadership, and the newer phenomenon of marijuana traffickers who began using “intimidation and assassination” to gain land for illicit cultivation, all contributed towards a growth in FARC as the group “offered to defend local peasant communities from outside violence.”⁷⁷ The end effect was that although the percentage

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Zamosc, 202.

⁷⁵ Zamosc, 139.

⁷⁶ Bagley [e-journal].

⁷⁷ Bagley, [e-journal]. The boom in Colombia's marijuana cultivation came as a result of effective counter-narcotics efforts in Mexico, who until 1974 was the largest supplier of marijuana to the United States. By 1976 almost two-thirds of the U.S. market for marijuana was being supplied by Colombia.

of landless peasants joining FARC was small, the end consequence was “a dramatic upsurge in guerrilla violence in the Colombian countryside.”⁷⁸

D. THE ESCALATION OF THE RURAL VIOLENCE (1982 – 2002)

1. A Failed "Cease Fire" and FARC's Embrace of Coca

The 1980s would prove to be pivotal years for FARC. The early 1980s can be best characterized by the Colombian government’s willingness to negotiate a peace with the guerrillas and their re-incorporation back into society. In 1982, in contrast to his predecessor Liberal “hard-liner” Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala (1978-1982), President Belisario Bentancur Cuartas initiated the state’s first major attempt to negotiate peace with FARC. Bentancur’s main tool for negotiation was Law 35 (1982), in which he promised all guerrillas amnesty, including those in prison.⁷⁹ Bentancur’s willingness to negotiate with FARC, and also the M-19, received harsh criticism from the military, leading agriculture producer groups, SAC and FEDEGAN, and from both the Liberal and Conservative parties. Nevertheless, on March 28, 1984, the government and FARC agreed to a “cease fire” in which both pledged not to take offensive action against one another.⁸⁰

This agreement was also politically an important event for FARC, as its leadership had been given recognition by the government as “political protagonist,” something that eluded them while they were believed to be just the “armed wing” of the PCC.⁸¹ FARC’s metamorphosis into the single most important political and armed actor on the left also came as a result of the subsequent and systematic destruction of the *Unión Patriótica Party* (UP). The government recognized national leftist UP party was FARC’s first official effort to enter into Colombia’s “mainstream political system.”⁸² Yet from 1984 to 1992 right-wing paramilitaries, funded largely by narco-traffickers, were responsible for the assassination of an estimated 3,000 UP members including two

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Bagley, [e-journal].

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Safford and Palacios, 357.

⁸² Crandall, 69.

UP Party presidents.⁸³ By 1986, FARC had largely abandoned the UP Party and the cease-fire agreement.⁸⁴ With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, the PCC lost much of its *raison d'être*, leaving the ever elusive FARC to fill the void. What would bring FARC back into armed action against the government and others was: (1) the “coca boom” of the mid-1980s; (2) the phenomenon of “reverse land reform;” and (3) the rise of paramilitary groups funded by narco-baron land entrepreneurs.

Prior to the 1980s, FARC held coca to be counter to their revolutionary ideology. This began to change during the “coca boom” of the early 1980s, when the *colonos* or subsistent farmers that lived in FARC controlled territory found it hard to resist growing a crop that needed no fertilizer or pesticides, and most importantly, provided five to ten percent more profit than any legitimate crop they could grow.⁸⁵ Thus from the FARC’s perspective, to turn their back on the peasants who were involved in the cultivation or processing of coca would be to give up not only territory to narco-traffickers, but also control over FARC's small but significant peasant base of power. To justify their acknowledgement of the coca trade within traditional Marxism, FARC argued “they were stubbornly fighting for farm wages higher than those the drug cartels were offering.”⁸⁶ Consequently FARC not only “began to promote and protect the coca crop themselves,” but also imposed a seven to ten percent tax or *gramaje* on the market price of each kilo of cocaine.⁸⁷

Three factors during the 1990s led to an increased involvement of the FARC in the drug trade. First, aggressive U.S. supported eradication and interdiction efforts in both Peru and Bolivia caused a significant drop in coca cultivation within these two countries, yet caused a virtual “bumper crop” of coca cultivation in Colombia (Figure 2). Up until the mid-1990s, Colombia only produced twenty-five percent of the coca base produced in the Andes. By the late 1990s, coca cultivation as well as the laboratories

⁸³ Otis, John. “Fighting Among Themselves.” *Houston Chronicle*, 03 August 2001, <http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/special/rebelheld/986658> [12 Nov 2003].

⁸⁴ Crandall, 69.

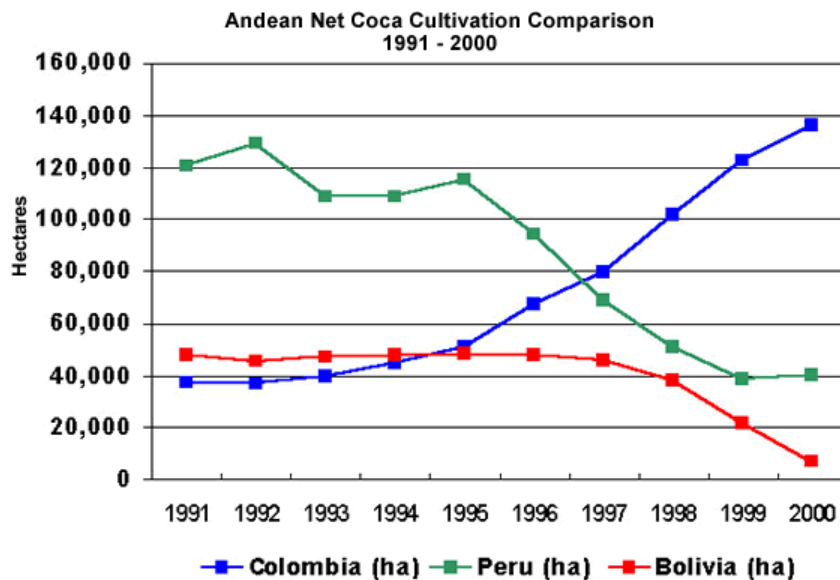
⁸⁵ Molano, “The evolution of the FARC: A guerrilla group's long history.” [Electronic version].

⁸⁶ Laqueur, Walter. *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999), 213.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

used to produce coca paste had largely shifted from Bolivia and Peru to Colombia, locating in the same remote areas where the guerrillas had operated for decades, namely in Putumayo, Guaviare, and Caqueta.⁸⁸ Second, beginning in 1991 the Colombian

Figure 3: Colombia, Peru, Bolivia Coca cultivation (1991 –2000)



Source: U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). *The Drug Trade in Colombia*. (DEA Intelligence Division, March 2002).

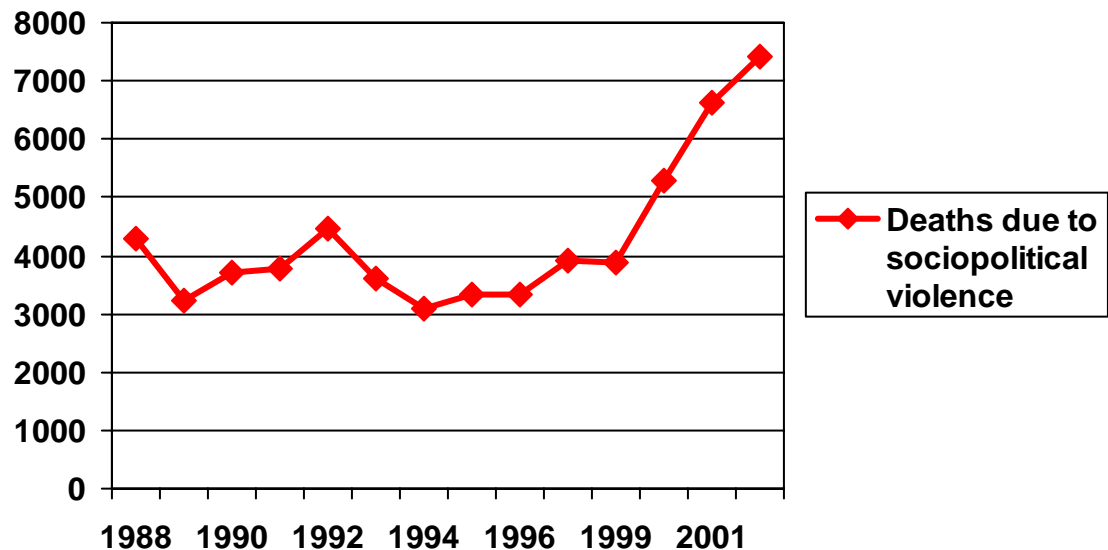
government began major market reforms called *la apertura*. Although intended to “reinvigorate the agricultural sector and promote private sector involvement” as well as create access to “export markets that had remained underdeveloped as a result of import-substituting policies (ISI),” other factors such as a drop in international agriculture commodities and a devastating drought in 1992, all led to an agricultural crisis between 1990 and 1994.⁸⁹ Third, a U.S. and Colombia “kingpin strategy” was successful in “bringing down” the leadership of the Medellín and Cali drug cartels. This had the

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of Justice. DEA. “The Drug Trade in Colombia.” Home page on-line. Intelligence Division, March 2002) available from <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/intel/02006/index.htm> (accessed on 10 Oct 2003). The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) notes that the close proximity of laboratories to coca fields is common sense, “Considering that approximately 1 metric ton of fresh coca leaf is required to produce 1 kilogram of cocaine base.”

⁸⁹ Brizzi, Adolfo, Natalia Gomez, and Matthew McMahon. “Agriculture and Rural Development.” In *Colombia the Economic Foundation of Peace*, ed. Marcelo M. Giugale et al. (World Bank: New York, 2003), 489.

effect of creating a “leadership and logistical” vacuum in which FARC and other decentralized organizations readily filled the void.⁹⁰ This factor, as well as the decline of the rural sector and the significant increase of illicit coca cultivation in Colombia would create the necessary conditions for a major escalation in the rural violence beginning in the late-1990s (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Colombia: Deaths due to Socio-Political Violence (1988 - 2002)



Source: Socio-political deaths include political homicide, forced disappearance, homicide of social marginals, and battle related deaths. 1988-2000 data taken from Comisión Colombiana de Juristas data in Pedro Valenzuela, "Reflections on recent interpretations of violence in Colombia." [Electronic version] In *Breeding Inequality-Reaping Violence: Exploring linkages and causality in Colombia and beyond*, ed. By Anders Rudqvist, (Collegium for Development Studies: Uppsala, Sweden, 2002) available from <http://www.kus.uu.se/poverty&violence/PovertyViolence.pdf> 2001-2002 data taken from Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, "Alerta Frente a las Cifras Gubernamentales Sobre Derechos Humanos en Colombia" (July 2003) <http://ciponline.org/colombia/030709ccj.htm>

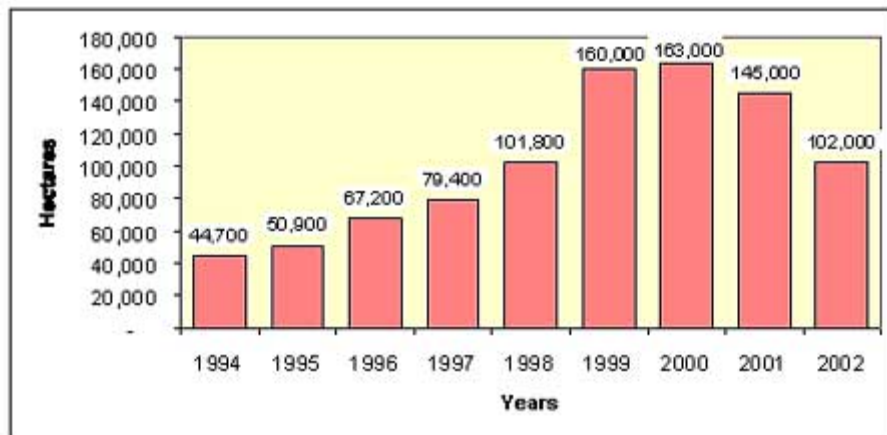
2. The Conflict's "Center of Gravity," By the Numbers

An overview of the plethora of literature written on the contemporary conflict would find that in regards to coca and poppy cultivation we have accurate data on the amount of land under illicit cultivation (Figure 3). What is not well known is just how many Colombians work directly in coca or poppy cultivation or production. In 1999, it was estimated that over 250,000 Colombian families worked with illicit coca and poppy

⁹⁰ Crandall, 83.

crops.⁹¹ Defining a median size household as 4.26 persons, this would put approximately 1.07 million Colombians working with the cultivation or processing of coca or poppy.⁹² Of a total rural population of 12.7 million, this “illicit” segment accounts for less than ten percent of the rural population. Furthermore, of the estimated 250,000 families, it is known that by March 2003, USAID alternative development projects in Colombia were benefiting some 22,800 families.⁹³ Historically, lack of security is one of the prime obstacles for effective alternative development programs, so we will further assume that these 22,800 families are in areas where a minimum of state security exist (i.e., are not controlled by guerillas or paramilitaries). This would place a possible 227,200 families or approximately 967,872 Colombians in FARC, ELN, or paramilitary controlled territory. From a Clausewitzian perspective, these 227,200 Colombian families should represent the *center of gravity* for policymakers endeavoring to resolve the rural conflict.

Figure 5: Colombia: Coca cultivation in hectares, 1994 - 2002



Source: United Nations. Office on Drugs and Crime. (17 March 2003).
http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press_release_2003-03-17_1.html .

⁹¹ Brizzi and others, 491.

⁹² Székely, Miguel and Marianne Hilgert. “What drives differences in inequality across countries? Working Paper No. 439.” [Electronic Version] Inter-American Development Bank: Washington, D.C., 2000), p. 37, available from <http://www.iadb.org/res/publications/pubfiles/pubWP-439.pdf> (accessed 15 November 2003).

⁹³ U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO). “Drug Control: Specific Performance Measures and Long-Term Cost for U.S. Progress in Colombia have not been developed.” [Electronic version] GAO Report, GAO-03-783 (June 2003) available from <http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-783> (accessed 10 October 2003).

Peasants living in these areas have essentially three options: (1) they can leave; (2) they can resist and possibly be killed; or (3) they can choose to join or at a minimum support the guerrillas or paramilitaries. Evidence supports that this first option is the option of choice as data demonstrates Colombia's "internally displaced population" (IDP) has risen dramatically from an estimated 27,000 internally displaced in 1985 to 341,925 internally displaced in 2001, bringing the total internally displaced population to 2.5 million.⁹⁴ A 2001 report showed 46 percent of the forced displacements were caused by paramilitaries, 12 percent by the FARC or ELN, and 19 percent by "other parties," although in 2002 there appears to be a significant rise of FARC initiated forced displacements.⁹⁵ The second option for peasants, which is to resist paramilitary or guerrilla forces, is often a death sentence as both groups have shown a willingness to murder innocent civilians.⁹⁶ The final option available to peasants is to join, support, or submit to guerrilla control, in other words mobilize. This option to mobilize may prove just as dangerous as option two, as by supporting FARC, peasants put themselves and families in harms way by either paramilitary or state forces. What are the possible explanations for this?

In the case of those peasants living and working under FARC control, one possible answer to understanding why peasants would potentially "risk everything" is explained by James Scott's theory of subsistence and peasant rebellion. Scott argued that the overriding "moral principle" of peasant societies is their "right to subsistence."⁹⁷ If peasants believe their right to subsistence is in danger, they will rebel and "take up arms less often to destroy elites than to compel them to meet their moral obligations."⁹⁸ The "subsistence theory" has shown to be important in explaining some Latin American

⁹⁴ Arboleda, Jairo and Elena Correa. "Forced Internal Displacement." In *Colombia the Economic Foundation of Peace*, ed. Marcelo M. Giugale et al. (World Bank: New York, 2003), 830.

⁹⁵ Arboleda and Correa, 829.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch. "Colombia: Terror From all sides." [Electronic Version] *HRW: America's Division*, (24 April 2002) available from <http://hrw.org/backgrounders/americas/colombia-table.pdf> (accessed on 5 November 2003). In 2001, Human Rights Watch reported 197 civilian deaths were responsible to FARC and 1,015 civilian murders were carried out by the AUC.

⁹⁷ Scott, James C. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1976), 6.

⁹⁸ Scott, 192.

cases of peasant revolt, specifically *Sendero Luminoso* or Shining Path in Peru. In the Peruvian case, Cynthia McClintock found that an increase in population size, land exhaustion, and ill-advised government agricultural policies, all contributed to a crisis in subsistence for Peru's highland peasants.⁹⁹ The regions where a "subsistence crisis" existed also correlated to strong *Sendero Luminoso* support, specifically in the Ayacucho area.¹⁰⁰ Yet in the Colombian case, while poverty and extreme poverty levels were extremely high during the 1970s, helping to possibly explain the rise of peasant support for FARC in the early 1980s, the evidence does not support a similar "subsistence crisis" experienced by Colombia's peasants during the 1990s. What may be more of a cause of peasant resistance or rebellion in Colombia is both the significant increase in inequality of income and land ownership since the mid-1990s.

E. MAKING THE CONNECTION: INEQUALITY, REVERSE LAND REFORM, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL VIOLENCE

1. Poverty Lessens but Inequality Rises (1978 -1999)

Over the past two decades, Colombia made significant strides in reducing both rural and urban poverty. Between 1978 and 1988, rural poverty dropped 14 percentage points and 20 percentage points for extreme rural poverty.¹⁰¹ During this same time period the \$2.00 (U.S.)/day poverty rate was reduced 50 percentage points.¹⁰² Even during the 1995 to 1999 period that saw a significant rise in rural violence, poverty levels, although still high, were rather stable (Table 2). Yet what did worsen during the 1995 to 1999 period was inequality in both rural income and the concentration of rural landownership. Recalling Muller and Seligson's (1987) hypothesis that "inequality in the distribution of income" is a better explanation of political violence and insurgency than inequality of landownership, they did however acknowledge that inequality in

⁹⁹ McClintock, 63.

¹⁰⁰ McClintock, 49.

¹⁰¹ World Bank. "Colombia Poverty Report: Vol. I." (World Bank: Washington, D.C, 2002), p. 11. [Electronic version] available from [http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/LAC/lacinfoclient.nsf/d29684951174975c85256735007fef12/cd4d7bab40aaedfe85256ba300696faa/\\$FILE/Chapter%205,%20References%20\(446KB\).pdf](http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/LAC/lacinfoclient.nsf/d29684951174975c85256735007fef12/cd4d7bab40aaedfe85256ba300696faa/$FILE/Chapter%205,%20References%20(446KB).pdf) (accessed on 13 Nov 2003). Poverty is based on the *poverty line*, which represents the "cutoff points separating the poor from the nonpoor." The *extreme poverty line*, which in this case is calculated by the Colombian Statistical Agency DANE, calculates "the minimum calorie and nutrient requirement of individuals of average age and sex" (p. 11).

¹⁰² Ibid.

landownership becomes an important variable in the presence of income inequality.¹⁰³ In the Colombian case, it appears the simultaneous increase in both of these variables has contributed to the rise in rural violence during the 1990s.

By the end of the 1970s, Colombia had experienced over two decades of a steady reduction in income inequality, and appeared to be a "model" example of the well-known "Kuznet's Curve."¹⁰⁴ Yet by the 1980s, reduction in income inequality levels in Colombia began to "plateau," leading to only modest decreases through 1988 to 1995 (Table 3).¹⁰⁵ By 1999, Colombia's level of income inequality was greater than 94 percent of the world's population, having "jumped almost 6 percentage points in its Gini coefficient, well above the previous high reached in 1988" (Figure 6).¹⁰⁶ Most significantly, table 3 shows that rural income inequality was *worse* in 1999 than 1978. Some of the contributing factors that drove the rural economy to this level of inequality were: (1) after effects of the failed *la apertura*; (2) an expansion of the world coffee market and a significant drop in international coffee prices; (3) lack of investor confidence in the agricultural sector due to continuing rural insecurity; (4) the continued misuse of arable land for cattle pasturing vice traditional crop cultivation; and (5) the continuing high concentration of land ownership.

¹⁰³ Muller, Edward N. and Mitchell A. Seligson. "Inequality and Insurgency." [Electronic version] *The American Political Science Review*, 81.2, (June 1987), 427.

¹⁰⁴ World Bank. "Colombia Poverty Report: Vol. I," 13. The "Kuznet's Curve" was based on studies of the United States, England, and Germany, which showed that in low income agrarian economies, growth in an economy would initially lead to an increase in income inequality, but would eventually result in a decrease in income inequality.

¹⁰⁵ World Bank. *Colombia Poverty Report*: Ch. 1, 12.

¹⁰⁶ World Bank. *Colombia Poverty Report*: Ch. 1, 17.

Table 2. Poverty Indicators, National, Urban, and Rural Colombia 1978-99

	1978	1988	1995	1999
<i>National</i>				
Poverty rate	80%	65%	60%	64%
Poverty Gap	46%	32%	29%	34%
FGT P(2) ²	32%	20%	17%	22%
Extreme poverty rate	45%	29%	21%	23%
US\$ 2 per day poverty ³	33%	19%	13%	16%
Mean income per capita ¹	112	183	216	210
<i>Urban</i>				
Poverty rate	70%	55%	48%	55%
Poverty Gap	35%	23%	19%	26%
FGT P(2) ²	21%	13%	10%	15%
Extreme poverty rate	27%	17%	10%	14%
US\$ 2 per day poverty ³	34%	5%	3%	5%
Mean income per capita ¹	157	235	295	277
<i>Rural</i>				
Poverty rate	94%	80%	79%	79%
Poverty Gap	61%	43%	40%	44%
FGT P(2) ²	44%	29%	25%	29%
Extreme poverty rate	68%	48%	37%	37%
US\$ 2 per day poverty ²	59%	38%	29%	30%
Income per capita ¹				
Median	37	63	68	65
Mean	52	90	95	102

1. Thousand 1999 pesos, based on monthly household income.

2. Foster-Greer-Thorbecke index.

3. Based on Purchasing Power Parity Convertors from *WDI* database.

Source: World Bank. 2002. *Colombia Poverty Report*: Ch. 1, p. 12.

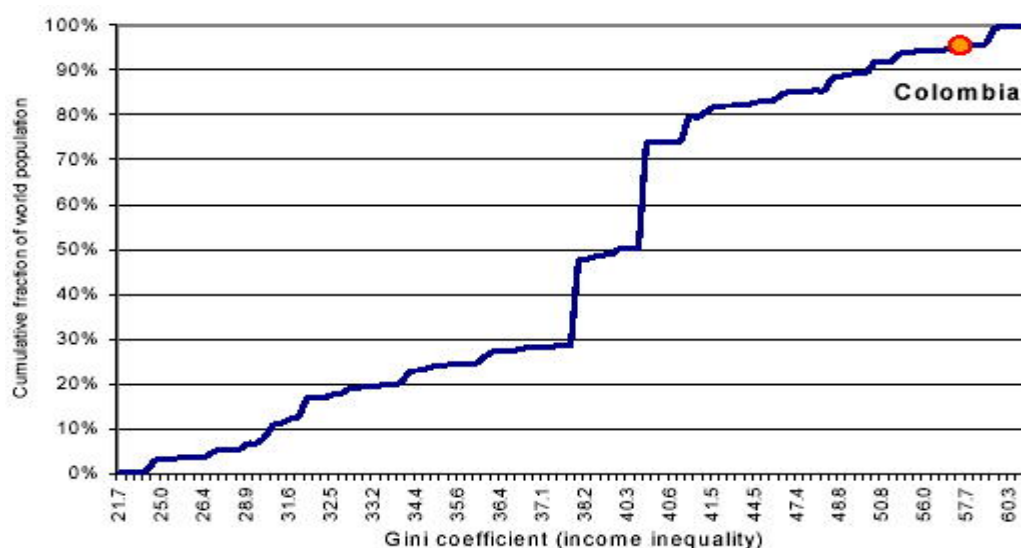
While income inequality contributed to the rural violence during the 1990s, an equally significant trend during this period was the increase of concentration of land ownership in Colombia. As figures 7 and 8 illustrate, the concentration of landownership in Colombia has progressively worsened since the 1960s. From 1960 to 1997, the percentage of small farms (less than 100 hectares) owned by the overwhelming percentage of total landowners stayed relatively the same. Yet this same period saw a dramatic decrease in medium sized land holdings and an increase in large land holdings. In 1960 5% of all landowners held 29.1% of the total land available. By 1997, 3% of all landowners owned an incredible 45% of the total amount of land available in Colombia. The main cause of the high level of inequality in landownership stems from the phenomenon of “reverse land reform.”

Table 3. Income inequality indicators: National, urban, and rural Colombia, 1978 - 1999

	1978	1988	1995	1999
National				
Gini	0.53	0.54	0.56	0.57
Entropy Measure E0	0.51	0.54	0.57	0.61
Entropy Measure E1	0.54	0.60	0.70	0.68
Entropy Measure E2	1.05	1.52	2.60	1.80
P90/P10	12.14	11.50	11.08	14.38
P75/P25	3.63	3.31	3.43	3.72
Share q5/Share q1	17.17	17.58	17.16	20.17
Inequality Urban-Rural Decomposition (Theil)				
Within	0.42	0.50	0.59	0.58
Between	0.12	0.10	0.11	0.09
Urban				
Gini	0.47	0.49	0.52	0.54
Theil index (Eo)	0.34	0.41	0.48	0.54
P90/P10	8.00	8.50	8.44	12.00
Rural				
Gini	0.45	0.47	0.45	0.50
Theil index (Eo)	0.36	0.40	0.36	0.46

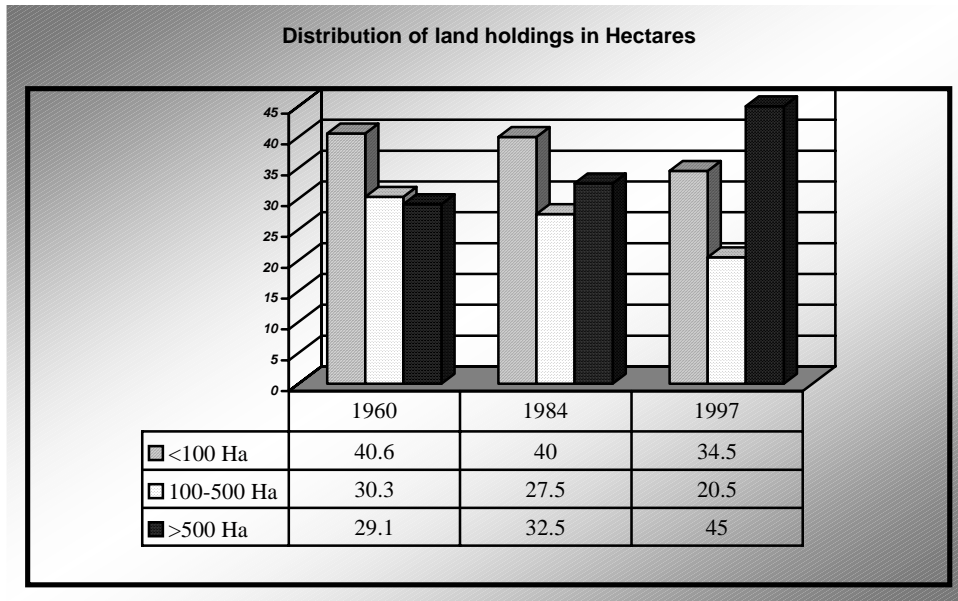
Source: World Bank. 2002. *Colombia Poverty Report*: Ch. 1, p. 14.

Figure 6: Comparison of Inequality in Colombia in international context



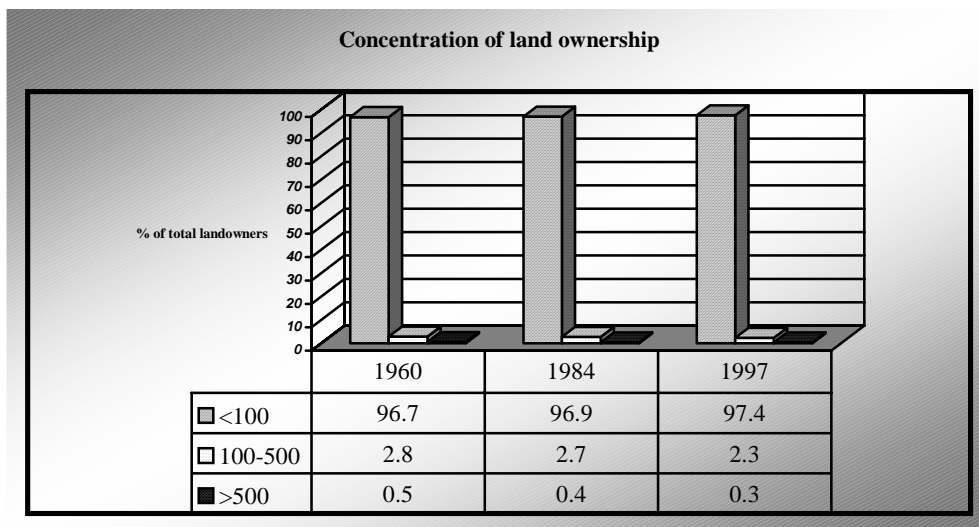
Source: World Bank. 2002. *Colombia Poverty Report*: Vol. I, 11.

Figure 7: Colombia: Distribution of Land Holdings, 1960 – 1997



Source: 1960 data taken from *Review of Colombia's agriculture and rural development strategy*. (World Bank Country Study 1996) 1984 and 1997 data taken from Isabel Lavadenz, and Klaus Deininger. "Land Policy," in Maarcelo M. Giugale, Olivier Lafourcade, and Connie Luff ed. *Colombia: The Economic Foundations of Peace* (World Bank, 2003).

Figure 8: Colombia, Concentration of Land Ownership, 1960 –1997



Source: 1960 data taken from *Review of Colombia's agriculture and rural development strategy*. (World Bank Country Study 1996) 1984 and 1997 data taken from Isabel Lavadenz, and Klaus Deininger. "Land Policy," in Maarcelo M. Giugale, Olivier Lafourcade, and Connie Luff ed. *Colombia: The Economic Foundations of Peace* (World Bank, 2003).

2. The Scope of the "Reverse Land Reform" Problem

Until only recently, the only reliable estimate of the scope of the "reverse land reform" problem was reported by the United Nations, which estimated narco-traffickers owned 4.4 million hectares with an estimated worth of 2.4 billion dollars.¹⁰⁷ In September 2003, these numbers were confirmed by Colombia's Comptroller General's Office which reported 48 percent of Colombia's most "productive land," is owned by narco-traffickers.¹⁰⁸ Figure 9 illustrates the prevalence of the "reverse land reform" problem, as a 1997 study found 399 municipalities were targets of narco-trafficker land purchases.¹⁰⁹ Yet the number of hectares actually owned by narco-traffickers may be even higher than the above estimates. Much of the land purchased by narco-traffickers was done so "legitimately" by using "offshore banks and other international financial institutions" creating an enormous problem for Colombia's already taxed judicial system to prove these land purchases were illegal.¹¹⁰

Based on substantial research conducted by Alejandro Reyes in 1997, there is significant correlation between land concentration (specifically that land purchased by narco-traffickers), FARC attacks, paramilitary attacks, and massacres. Figure 10 illustrates the location and rate of occurrence of FARC attacks from 1995 to 1997. Figure 11 shows both guerrilla and paramilitary activity, and most importantly shows where these two groups overlap in contested regions. Figure 12 is a 2001 map showing the occurrences and intensity of massacres and disappearances in Colombia. While not all of the rural violence occurs in areas of high land concentration, these maps clearly illustrate that the correlation between land and conflict is high in Colombia.

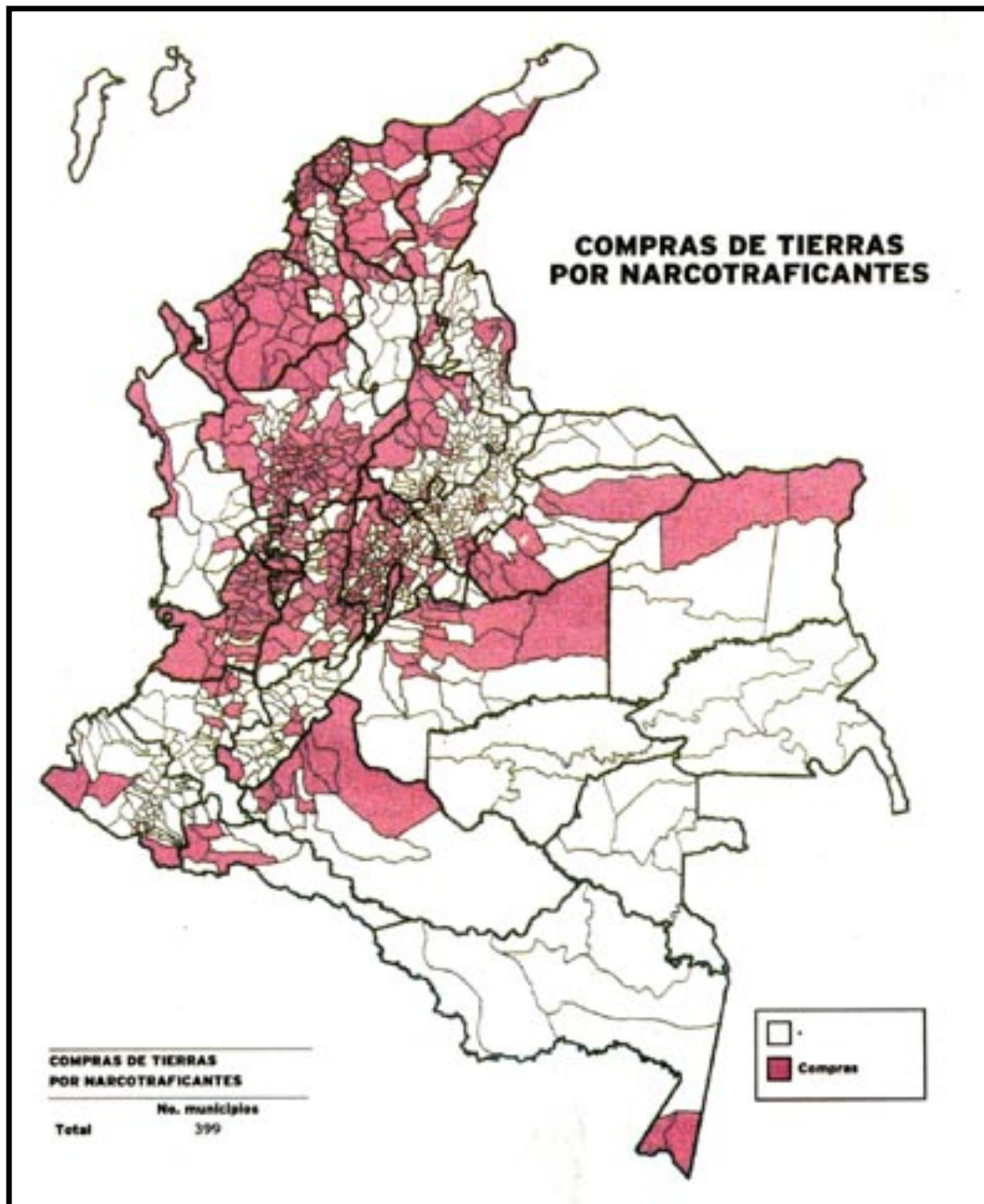
¹⁰⁷ Rocha, Ricardo. *The Colombian Economy after 25 years of drug trafficking*. (United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crimes, 2000). Available from <http://www.undcp.org/colombia/rocha.html> (accessed on 1 May 2003).

¹⁰⁸ *El Tiempo*. "Drug Traffickers said to control four million hectares in Colombia." (02 September 2003) [Electronic version] <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/> (accessed on 8 November 2003).

¹⁰⁹ Reyes, Alejandro. "Compras de tierras por narcotraficantes" in *Drogas Ilícitas en Colombia*, Editores PNUD, DNE y Ariel Ciencia Política. Santafé de Bogotá D.C., May, 1997. <http://www.disaster.info.desastres.net/desplazados/geografia/antinarcoticos.htm>

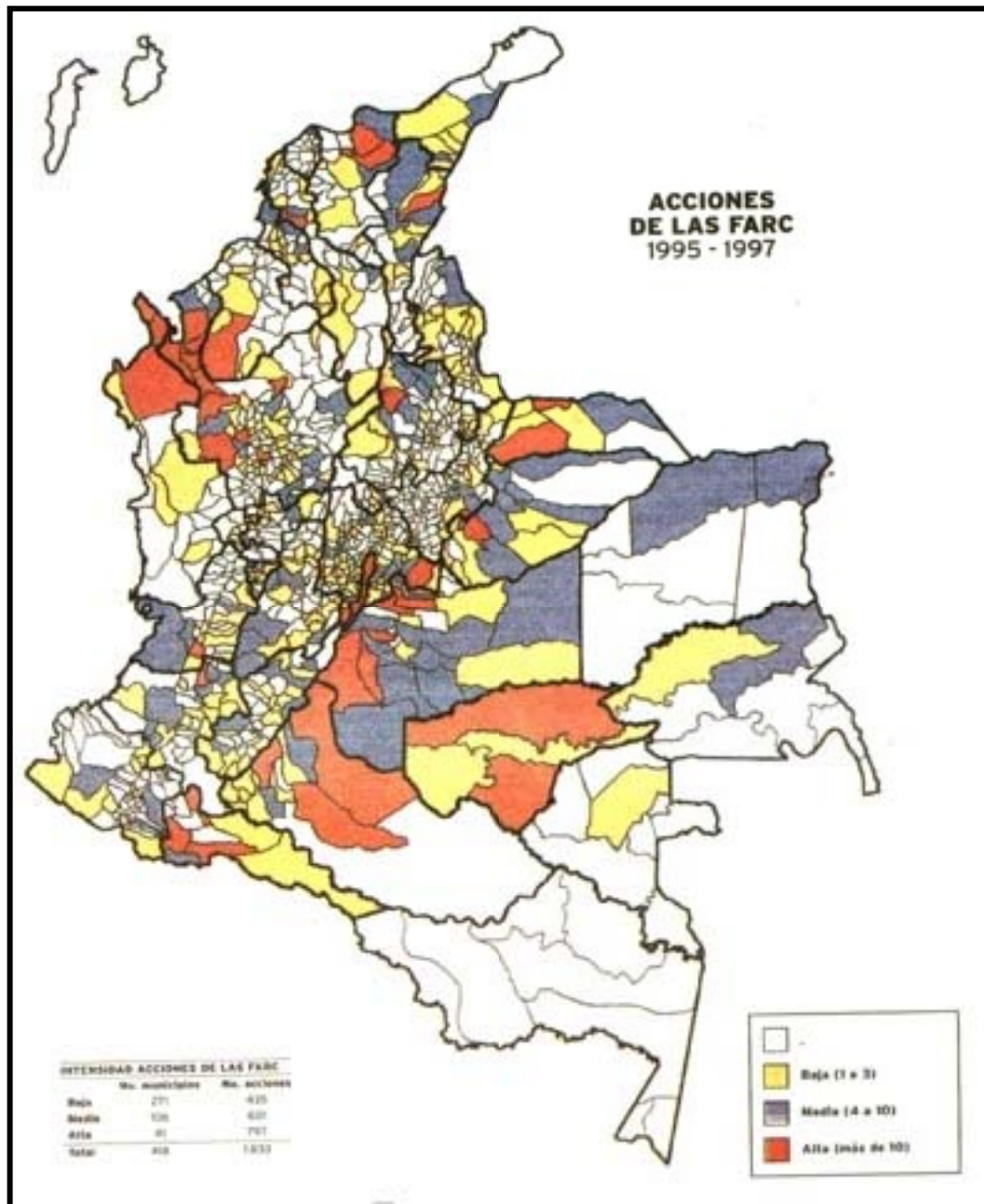
¹¹⁰ Rocha, Ricardo. *The Colombian Economy after 25 years of drug trafficking*. (United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crimes, 2000). <http://www.undcp.org/colombia/rocha.html> (accessed 01 May 03).

Figure 9: Colombia, Land Purchased by Narco-traffickers



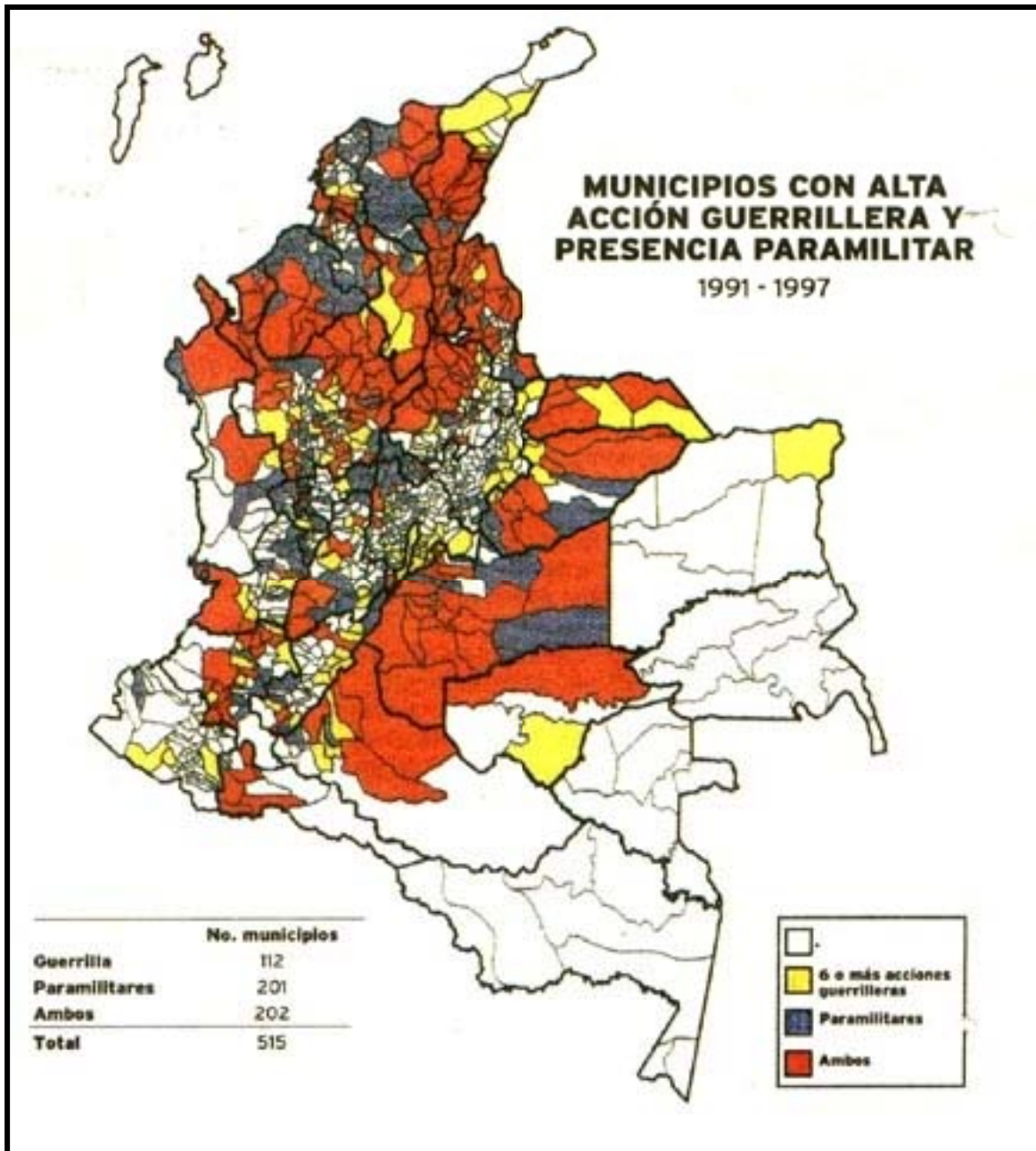
Source: Reyes, Alejandro. "Compras de tierras por narcotraficantes" in *Drogas Ilícitas en Colombia*, Editores PNUD, DNE y Ariel Ciencia Política. Santafé de Bogotá D.C., May, 1997. Summary of report available from <http://www.disaster.info.desastres.net/desplazados/geografia/antinarcoticos.htm> [accessed on 28 Nov 2003).

Figure 10: Colombia, FARC Military Actions (1995 - 1997)



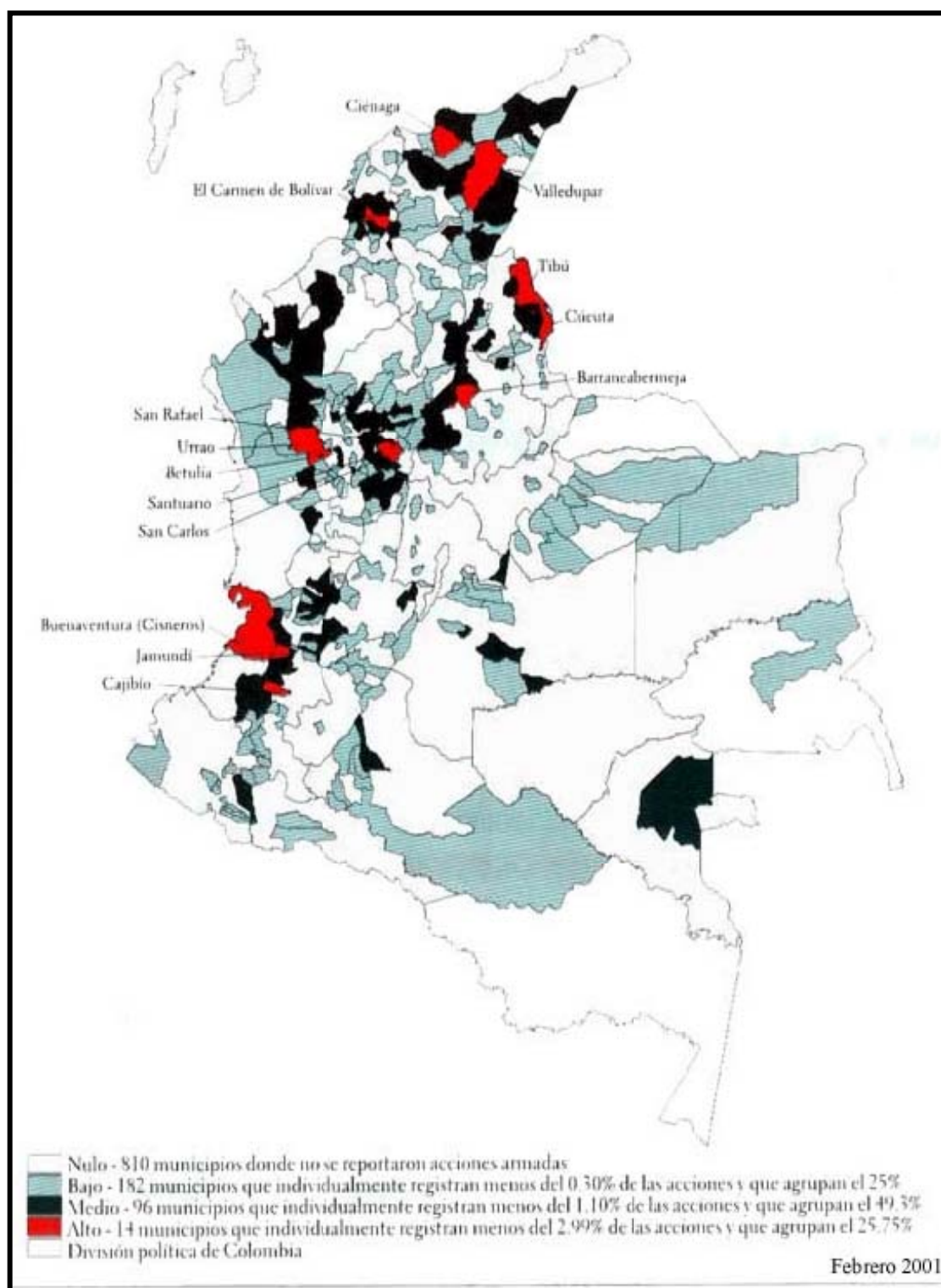
Source: Reyes, Alejandro. "Compras de tierras por narcotraficantes" in *Drogas Ilícitas en Colombia*, Editores PNUD, DNE y Ariel Ciencia Política. Santafé de Bogotá D.C., May, 1997. Summary of report available from <http://www.disaster.info.desastres.net/desplazados/geografia/oportunidad.htm> (accessed on 28 Nov 2003).

Figure 11: Contested territory between guerrillas and paramilitaries



Source: Reyes, Alejandro. "Compras de tierras por narcotraficantes" in *Drogas Ilícitas en Colombia*, Editores PNUD, DNE y Ariel Ciencia Política. Santafé de Bogotá D.C., May, 1997. Summary of report available from <http://www.disaster.info.desastres.net/desplazados/geografia/paramilitarismo.htm> (accessed on 28 Nov 2003).

Figure 12: Location and Occurrence of Massacres (2000)



Presidencia de la República de Colombia. Red de Solidaridad Social. "292 municipios donde se presentaron tomas y massacres informe 2000." Map available from <http://www.desaster.info.desastres.net/desplazados/informes/cifrasRSS/mapa4.jpg> (accessed on 20 Nov 2003).

F. CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the premise that conflict in rural Colombia has long been linked to disputes over land. The historical analysis of this chapter confirms that indeed land or rather lack of land tenure has historically been a source of conflict between landowners and peasants, specifically the landless peasant or *colono*. This chapter also shows that throughout the 20th century Colombia's peasants have had difficulty influencing national land policies. Even when Colombia's peasants were able to mobilize at a significant level and had the backing of the president, the more politically powerful agricultural elites were able to reverse or stymie favorable peasant land legislation. The important case of ANUC that receives little attention in contemporary scholarship drives home this point.

The final portion of this chapter concentrated on understanding the current wave of peasant resistance. This resistance does not necessarily mean armed resistance, but also resistance that includes the decision by peasants to grow illicit crops in guerrilla-held territories and support directly or indirectly FARC's armed activities. Concentrating on a potential 227,000 Colombian families that constitute the "center of gravity" in the rural conflict, there is evidence that two factors have greatly influenced Colombia's peasants' decision to resist beginning in the mid-1990s: (1) an increase in income inequality; and (2) the simultaneous increase in the inequality of land ownership. Social science theories of peasant revolution have shown that in many cases one of these factors has been sufficient alone to cause an increase in political violence or insurrection. In the Colombian case, the presence of both factors has contributed to the levels of violence seen since the mid to late-1990s. The next chapter will examine whether land reform is likely to contribute to the resolution of rural conflict and, if so, the political feasibility of such reform.

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IV. THE FEASIBILITY OF LAND REFORM IN COLOMBIA

I have never seen a country involved in an internal conflict in which the position of simply eliminating the "enemy" -- without making concessions, without in-depth political and social changes, without making real economic sacrifices - ever resolved their conflict...It [land reform] is among the main issues that might considerably influence political and social solutions and make this [Colombia] a better country. —UN, Acting Special Adviser on Colombia, James Lemoyne (September, 2003)

A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter examined the merits of the land reform hypothesis as applied to Colombia. The analysis showed that a historical based land conflict between large landowners and peasants has evolved to include insurgents and narco-traffickers. The previous chapter also illustrated that while it is unclear exactly how much of the current rural violence can be directly attributed to the conflict over land, two factors, inequality of landownership and inequality of rural income, appear to be important contributors to the rural conflict. This chapter focuses on the feasibility of land reform in Colombia today by addressing four central questions: (1) If land reform is to be a possible solution to the rural conflict, exactly what type of land reform is to be implemented? (2) What are the institutional obstacles that Colombia's president must overcome to implement land reform? (3) If land reform is to be implemented in Colombia, what actors have the most to lose and would oppose a redistributive land reform policy? And (4) what role does Colombia's asset forfeiture law have in implementing a legally based expropriative type of land reform?

B. DEFINING LAND REFORM

Many who advocate land reform as a possible solution to Colombia's rural conflict refer to land reform in almost "blanket-like" terms without first defining exactly what type of land reform policy they are advocating. As this section will show, how policy makers define land reform has significant ramifications in the policy implementation. In the Cold War era, land reform commonly was defined in terms of the "redistribution of property rights." Frequently, this meant the state's outright "confiscation" or "expropriation" of land and its subsequent "redistribution" to small

farmers, sharecroppers, or landless peasants. Huntington provides an even more succinct definition of this type of land reform, “Land reform means the forceful taking away of property from one group of people and giving it to another.”¹ However, land reform based on expropriation, specifically without compensation, is also the most controversial, and potentially the one type most likely to instigate political unrest “from above” or “from below” (e.g., Guatemala 1954, El Salvador 1980).

Today, many land reform experts acknowledge the political controversy and difficulties associated with “expropriation” based land reforms, and now propose more relaxed definitions that concentrate on “land access.” Roy Prosterman and Tim Hanstad (2003) recently defined land reform as, “Reforms that increase the ability of the rural poor and other socially excluded groups to gain access to land and to exercise effective control over the land.”² Prosterman and Hanstad’s definition of land reform may have particular pertinence in the Colombian case. Their definition allows for a wide-degree of variance in just how “land access” will be obtained. It does not advocate expropriative type of land reform, but on the other hand it does not rule out its usage when required. Their definition also recognizes a well-know fact in land reform case studies: the long-term success or failure of land reform depends upon the existence of a land reform infrastructure to support new land reform recipients. This can include: incorporating land reform into an overall rural development plan; training and technical assistance; access to markets; formalized property rights; and access to credit.³ Without this type of capital intensive supporting infrastructure, increasing agriculture production for new landowners is very difficult, and in the case of Peru (1968-1980), its absence became a source of peasant rebellion *after* the initial distribution of land by the government.

Just as defining land reform is crucial for the reformer, equally challenging is defining just what the political, social, or economic objectives of land reform policy will

¹ Huntington, 385.

² Prosterman, Roy L. and Tim Hanstad. “Land Reform in the 21st Century: New Challenges, New Responses.” *Rural Development Institute (RDI) Reports on Foreign Aid and Development*, No. 117, (Mar., 2003) Available [On-line] http://www.rdiland.org/PDF/PDF_Reports/RDI_117.pdf (Accessed 15 Nov 2003).

³ Deininger, Klaus. *Land policies for growth and poverty reduction*. (World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003). Available [On-line]. http://econ.worldbank.org/prt/land_policy/text-27809/ (Accessed 01 Sept 2003).

be. Throughout the Cold War era, states that chose land reform tended to do so for political and social reasons. This is confirmed in my analysis of both the South Vietnam and El Salvador cases where little importance was placed on “converting the landless into successful agricultural entrepreneurs.”⁴ Even in post-war Japan, which is arguably the most successful case of land reform in the 20th century, the focus was on redistribution and redefining social classes, not on modes of production.⁵ Yet from an economic perspective, political or social objective types of land reform can be fatally flawed, as Klaus Deininger writes:

Instead of aiming to increase productivity and reduce poverty, the main goal of many land reforms in the past has been to calm social unrest and allay political pressures by peasant organizations. Such reforms had often been initiated in response to political pressure rather than as part of a long-term rural development strategy. The resulting reform measures were generally designed ad hoc bore little relation to actual needs on the ground, and commitment to them faltered once social emergencies had subsided.⁶

By the mid-1980s expropriative types of land reform were quickly “falling from grace” among the world’s policymakers. The collapse of the Soviet Union radically removed the ideological motives that many had placed on land reform in larger strategies of counter-insurgency. Additionally, the United States, the premier advocate of land reform throughout many parts of the world, was in transition from defeating Communism to supporting democratization, human rights, and free-market reforms throughout the world.⁷ Lastly, developmental agencies, such as the World Bank, which in the past had

⁴ Deininger, “Making Negotiated Land Reform Work,” 9.

⁵ Kawagoe, Toshihiko. “Agricultural land reform in postwar Japan: Experiences and Issues.” *World Bank Policy Working Research Papers No. 2111* (May 1999), 36. Available [On-line]. <http://www.worldbank.org/html/dec/Publications/Workpapers/wps2000series/wps2111/wps2111.pdf> [Accessed 11 Oct 2003].

⁶ Deininger, Klaus. “Making Negotiated Land Reform Work: Initial experience from Colombia, Brazil, and South Africa.” *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2040* (Jan., 1999). Available [On-line]. <http://www.worldbank.org/html/dec/Publications/Workpapers/wps2000series/wps2040/wps2040.pdf> [Accessed 22 September 2003].

⁷ Herring, Ronald J. “Political Conditions for Agrarian Reform and Poverty Alleviation.” Paper presented at 2001 World Development Report on Poverty, Birmingham, England, 17 August 1999, 2. Available [On-line] <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/wdrpoverty/dfid/herring.pdf> (Accessed 11 Oct 2003).

recognized the developmental potential of land reform, by the 1980s, began advocating “market solutions” for reducing poverty, in contrast to redistribution.⁸

Yet by the mid-1990s, it was becoming apparent that structural adjustments or neo-liberal reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s had little positive effect on inequality in developing countries. Consequently, economists have now recognized that in many countries (e.g. Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, and South Africa list alphabetically) poor access to “land markets” plays a significant role in exacerbating rural poverty and inequality. Today, agencies such as the World Bank now advocate what has been called “negotiated land reform.” This type of land reform:

Relies on voluntary land transfers based on negotiation between buyers and sellers, where the government’s role is restricted to establishing the necessary framework and making available a land purchase grant to eligible beneficiaries.⁹

However results from pilot programs in Brazil, Colombia, and South Africa, showed that “negotiated” transfers of land have still ultimately been hampered by the lack of the aforementioned infrastructure necessary to support new landowner productivity. Regardless of what type of land reform policy is implemented an effective infrastructure is crucial for long-term viability.

C. THE POLITICAL FEASIBILITY OF LAND REFORM IN COLOMBIA

As the previous chapter illustrated, land reform, specifically redistributive land reform, is a difficult policy item not only to initiate in Colombia, but just as difficult to implement. This section concentrates on the political feasibility of redistributive land reform in Colombia by examining four central actors: the Colombian president; the Colombian congress; agricultural producer interest groups; and the Colombian land reform agency INCORA. This section will show: (1) Colombia’s political institutions are not favorable for Colombia’s president to gain support for redistributive land reform; (2) agricultural producers, specifically the livestock industry have a vested interest in opposing a redistributive land reform policy; (3) even if the president was able to gain a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Deininger, Klaus. “Making Negotiated Land Reform Work,” 3.

consensus for a redistributive policy, its implementation would be likely hindered by the bureaucracy and poor administration of INCORA.

1. The President as Reformer in Colombia

It is not an understatement that any “expropriative” type of land reform historically has and will continue to be a difficult policy item for Colombia’s presidents to implement. For any reform to happen in Colombia, not only does the president have to have “political will” to take on such a policy, but the president must, as Huntington (1968) notes, have the “political talent” to make land reform a reality.¹⁰ Even with these two qualities, Colombia’s presidents who attempt to implement an expropriative land reform agenda, must be able to overcome: (1) a highly “clientilistic” legislature; and (2) well organized agricultural producer groups or *gremios*. These two groups have traditionally opposed expropriative types of land reform in Colombia. Recalling the presidency of Lleras Restrepo, it was these very factors that led him to organize ANUC, fully aware that without significant social pressure “from below,” land reform policy would be extremely difficult to implement. With the possibilities of a reemergence of ANUC on the scale of the early 1970s unlikely, what institutional options are available for presidents choosing the difficult path of expropriative land reform?

2. Could Emergency Powers of Decree Be Used for Expropriative Land Reform?

From a distance Colombia appears to have a strong system of “presidentialism.” Some have even characterized Colombia’s presidents as a virtual “demigod.”¹¹ Prior to the creation of the 1991 Constitution, Colombia’s presidents were able to bypass Congressional “roadblocks” through their unique powers of presidential decrees. The ability to legislate by decree allowed presidents to essentially “establish a new status quo” each time they issued a decree.¹² Within the constitutional guidelines that existed prior to 1991, presidents could use their emergency powers to “suspend but not abolish existing laws and to emit decrees with the force of law,” all with the purpose of “restoring

¹⁰ Huntington, 345.

¹¹ Mainwaring, Scott and Matthew S. Shugart. *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*. (Cambridge University Press: 1997), 118.

¹² Shugart and Mainwaring, 44.

order."¹³ This was a powerful tool for Colombia's presidents as congress "could not rescind or modify (the decree), short of a constitutional amendment."¹⁴

The frequency with which Colombia's presidents used emergency powers of decree was significant. From 1958 to 1991, Colombian presidents declared the country under a "state of siege" 75 percent of the time.¹⁵ Throughout this period, Colombia's presidents used their emergency powers to "attack economic as well as political causes of public disorder," making this an effective means to overcome congressional "inefficiency and immobilism."¹⁶ What made the president's emergency powers even more potent was that subsequent to 1991, emergency decrees could legally last as long as the "state of siege" existed. Consequently, Colombia's presidents routinely would not lift the "state of siege" until legislators had made their decrees into law. Yet after the ratification of the 1991 Constitution, the president is now limited to only a 90 day period of a "state of siege," with a maximum of one 90 day extension upon Senate approval.¹⁷ Consequently, in light of the 1991 Constitution, any hopes of implementing long-term land reform via emergency decrees are not feasible for Colombia's presidents. When Colombia's presidents have found their reform policies halted in Congress, their only route has been to "rely on ad hoc deals with power brokers who demand patronage in exchange for supporting policies desired by the President."¹⁸

3. Congress as an Obstacle to Land Reform

If Colombia's presidents cannot turn to their limited decree power to implement expropriative land reform, what is the feasibility that policy implementation can come from within the legislature? Many scholars have characterized Colombia's legislature as being inherently "weak" due to its "clientilistic" nature. In this clientilistic party system, Colombia's legislators are more loyal to their individual constituents than to their own party's national leadership or to programmatic pledges (like land reform) made

¹³ Archer and Shugart, 126.

¹⁴ Archer and Shugart, 123.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Archer and Shugart, 127.

¹⁷ Archer and Shugart, 128.

¹⁸ Archer and Shugart, 111.

during campaigns. This has two important implications for reform policy: (1) Colombia's Congress is not "an important arena for the creation of national policy," and (2) it is very difficult for Colombia's presidents to gain a coalition to support a national reform when they are unable to depend on their own party's loyalty.¹⁹

4. The Power of *Gremios*

The power of interest or lobby groups in the United States and their ability to influence public policy, especially at the legislative level are well known. However, in the Colombian case, agricultural producer groups or *gremios*, have shown to be less influential in the actual policymaking process, and rather have exerted their influence to *impede* policy implementation that is not in their economic interest.²⁰ In the case of land reform, two *gremios*, the Farmers Association of Colombia (SAC) and the Federation of Cattle Ranchers (*Federación Colombiana de Ganaderos* or FEDEGAN) have traditionally sought to "derail" distributive types of land reform policy. Recall that in 1968 President Lleras Restrepo attempted to implement a redistributive land reform under Law I of 1968. The negative reaction by both SAC and FEDEGAN and the political pressure exerted on the successor Pastrana administration resulted in a stoppage of all INCORA redistributions in 1971, as well as the passage of new pro-landowner legislation. Indicative of this time period, Jonathan Hartlyn writes:

Numerous congressmen have had extensive ties with agricultural and livestock associations, and landed interests have more readily employed congressmen to apply political pressure on the executive branch than have other producer groups.²¹

Unlike U.S. interest groups, which concentrate on the legislature, Colombia's *gremios* direct the majority of their efforts towards the ministries and economic team within the presidential administration.²² This is owed to the aforementioned inadequacy of Colombia's legislature in making public policy. Consequently, the "maintenance of

¹⁹ Archer and Shugart, 132.

²⁰ Hartlyn, Jonathan. "Producer Associations, the Political Regime, and Policy Processes in Contemporary Colombia." [Electronic version] *Latin American Research Review* 20.3 (1985), 122.

²¹ Hartlyn, 123.

²² Thor Hagen, Jason. "Agrarian Interest in a Liberalizing Economy: Colombia's Law 101 of 1993." Paper presented at *Latin American Studies Association* meeting Guadalajara, Mexico, 17 April 1997, 10. Available from <http://136.142.158.105/LASA97/thorhagen.pdf> (Accessed on 21 September 2003).

personal allegiances” within the administration is extremely important for *gremios* wishing to influence policy in one way or another.²³

While much of the “lobbying” of SAC and FEDEGAN is related to micro and macro level economic policy, these groups have also showed a willingness to interject their influence into matters of domestic security. During attempts by the Bentancur administration to broker a negotiated settlement with FARC during the early 1980s, part of the reason that President Bentancur could not gain congressional support for his concessionary political reforms, even from his own Conservative Party, stemmed from SAC and FEDEGAN’s staunch opposition to President Bentancur’s “soft line” approach with the guerrillas.²⁴ As rural Colombia became increasingly violent following the breakdown of the 1984 “cease fire” accords, SAC and FEDEGAN became increasingly active participants in the conflict. Of these two groups, it has been FEDEGAN that has taken a “hard line” approach to the conflict, advocating and supporting a military solution, albeit at times, a paramilitary solution to the guerrilla problem. As I will discuss, although there were indications that FEDEGAN was amendable to redistributive land reform during the late 1990s, today all indications are that they oppose making land reform concessions with the guerrillas.

One reason the cattle industry became such a frequent target of FARC rent seeking activities was that the industry has such a disproportionate presence in the rural economy compared to more traditional crop farming. The preeminence of the cattle industry in rural Colombia came as a result of the process of *ganaderización*, or the conversion of arable cropland to grazing pastures for livestock. Beginning after the *Violencia* period, *ganaderización* contributed not only to rural unemployment, as cattle ranching requires minimal labor, but also deprived “the rural economy of its growth potential...preclud[ing] Colombia from realizing its comparative advantage in labor-intensive fruits and other high-value crops.”²⁵ As table 1 illustrates, from 1985 through 1999 saw a dramatic decrease in land utilized for traditional crop production, and an

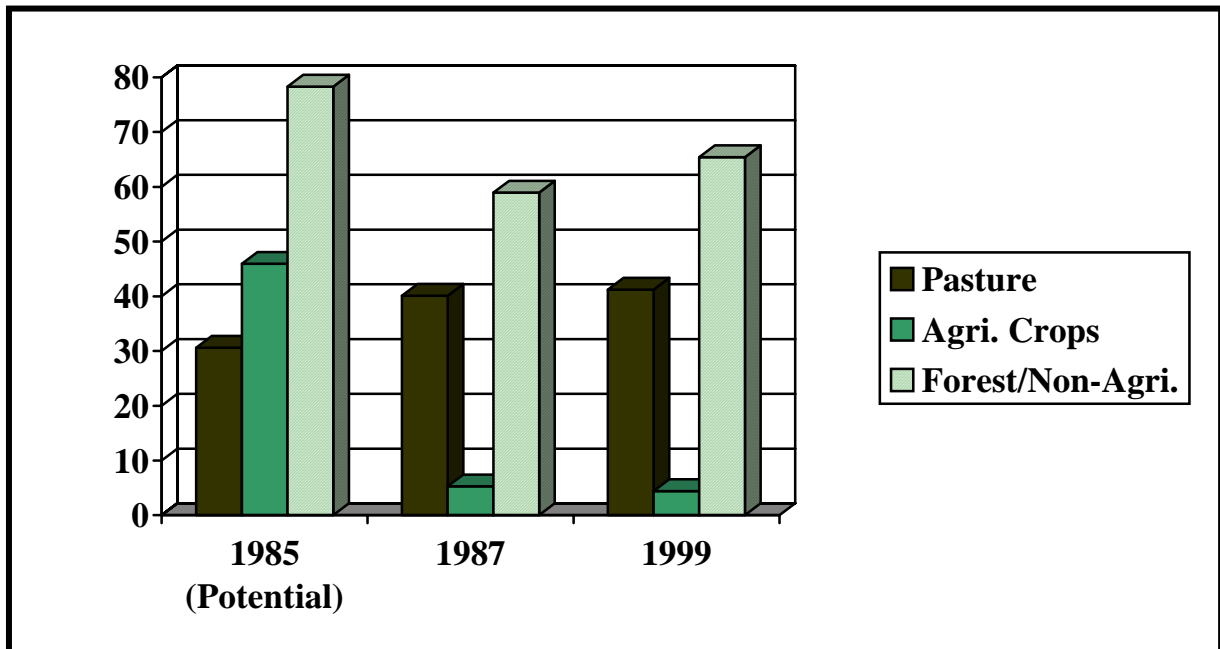
²³ Thor Hagen, 11.

²⁴ Bagley, [On-line version].

²⁵ Lavadenz and Deininger, 564.

equally significant rise in land used for cattle ranching. Contributing factors to this process have been not only reverse land reform, but also the fact that rural insecurity has caused many small farmers to abandon or sell their lands, and large agricultural producers to turn to the more cost effective cattle ranching as their primary mode of production.

Table 4. Land Use in Colombia, 1985 - 1999



Source: Lavadenz, and Klaus Deininger. "Land Policy," in Marcelo M. Giugale, Olivier Lafourcade, and Connie Luff ed. *Colombia: The Economic Foundations of Peace* (World Bank, 2003).

Keeping the *ganaderización* process in mind, we find that the cattle ranching interest that FEDEGAN represents are significant. With a membership base of 300,000 cattle ranchers, who own a combined 26 million hectares of land, Colombia's cattle ranchers have been on the "frontline" in Colombia's rural conflict. In 2002, based on FEDEGAN's own account, the rural violence cost FEDEGAN members the following:

- 353 cattle ranchers kidnapped
- Total cost of extortion \$62 million (COL)
- 77,600 head of cattle stolen

- Total cost of rural conflict on cattle industry \$388 million (COL)²⁶

Yet while FEDEGAN members have been frequent targets of guerrilla violence, many have noted that it has been Colombia's cattle ranchers who have also contributed to the perpetuation of the rural conflict.

Faced with an increasingly coercive guerrilla presence, which demanded "protection" taxes to prevent kidnappings and cattle theft, cattle ranchers aided by narco-traffickers turned landowners, began to support or even create their own paramilitary armies during the 1990s.²⁷ Using paramilitaries, some cattle ranchers also attempted to evict *colonos* and retake territory previously lost to the guerrillas.²⁸ Furthermore, as narco-traffickers joined the ranks of legitimate cattle ranchers after laundering their drug profits into land, Nazih Richani writes, "Local branches of FEDEGAN in the Middle Magdalena, Cesar, Bolivar, Santander, and Cordoba among others are penetrated heavily by narco-traffickers."²⁹ What makes the cattle industry even further resistant to a redistributive land reform policy is that following *la apertura*, the cattle industry believed that they "did not reap any economic benefit" from the market reforms.³⁰ Prior to *la apertura*, Colombia's livestock industry had been afforded special protection measures over traditional crop farming. The period from 1980 to 1992 saw both beef and milk "absorb 82% of the total support" the government afforded for a nine select agriculture commodities.³¹ Consequently, faced with an increasing guerrilla presence as well as economic losses incurred by *la apertura*, Colombia's livestock industry appears unwilling to commit to any land reform policy as a means of conflict resolution, as they believe they alone will disproportionately bear the cost of peace with the guerrillas.

²⁶ "Costo del Conflicto Enero a Junio de 2003." Federacion Colombiano de Ganaderos (FEDEGAN) Official Website (June 2003) <http://www.fedegan.org.co/Costo%20del%20Conflicto.ppt> [10 Sep 2003].

²⁷ Richani, Nazih. *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*. (State University of New York Press, 2002), 142.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Richani, 143.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

In 1997 as part of ongoing peace negotiations between the state and guerrillas, FEDEGAN members offered to hand over 10 percent of their land to peasants.³² Although the paramilitaries supported this initiative, FARC rejected the offer, as they were unwilling to concede that land reform was the only precondition for a negotiated peace.³³ After failed the failed peace process of the Pastrana administration, FEDEGAN has shown it is unwillingly to make similar land reform concessions. In September 2003, a letter from FEDEGAN to President Uribe expressed their support of a policy of a “program of demobilization and reintegration,” in which they vowed to integrate as many former guerrillas as possible into the labor force of the cattle industry.³⁴

While the path of land reform is certainly a difficult political agenda, of equal importance is actually implementing land reform policy. In Colombia the cold hard fact is that after 40 years of land reform, Colombia’s land reform agency INCORA was unable to significantly change Colombia’s inequality of landownership. Understanding how this happened, despite a huge investment by the state and external actors (i.e. the United States), is important if any future land reform is to be effectively implemented. INCORA (*Instituto Nacional de Colonización y Reforma Agraria*), Colombia’s official land reform agency, was until this year a prominent actor within Colombia’s land reform policy. Established in 1961, INCORA traditionally focused its efforts in the titling and distribution of Colombia’s vast, frontiers. In this regard, INCORA was able to post significant overall results with colonization responsible for 14 million hectares and 427,000 titles distributed.³⁵ However, in the area of land redistribution, INCORA has experienced less than stellar results with only 1.8 million hectares of land transferred. While not to discount INCORA’s significant colonization efforts, a large percentage of Colombia’s most arable croplands are already in the hands of Colombia’s large landowners.

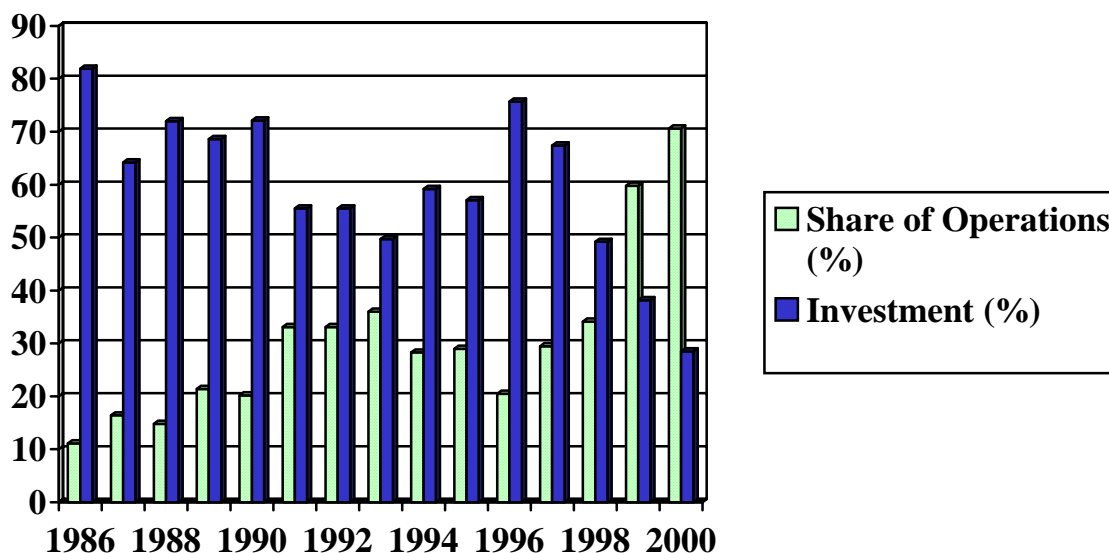
³² Ferrer, Yadira. “Landowners offer peasant 10 percent of their land.” *Inter Press Service*: New York, 11 Nov 1997, p. 1.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Propuesta Ganadera: hacia la reinserción productiva.” Federación Colombiano de Ganaderos (FEDEGAN) Home page on-line (June 2003). Available from http://www.fedegan.org.co/todo_notic.html (accessed on 10 Sep 2003).

³⁵ Lavadenz and Deininger, 574.

Table 5. INCORA , Cost of Operations vs. Investment, 1986 - 2000



Source: Lavadenz, and Klaus Deininger. "Land Policy," in Marcelo M. Giugale, Olivier Lafourcade, and Connie Luff ed. *Colombia: The Economic Foundations of Peace* (World Bank, 2003).

What has also plagued INCORA since its inception are poor administration and excessive operational costs. As table 9 illustrates, a large percentage of INCORA's annual budget has gone towards "financing a huge and relatively stable bureaucracy."³⁶ In the 1990s this translated to approximately 35 billion pesos or 20 to 30 percent of INCORA's total budget.³⁷ The World Bank notes that although budget cuts from 1999 to 2000 significantly lowered INCORA's budget, it did not result in staff reductions.³⁸ The skewed tendency of high operational costs has reduced the funds available for INCORA's preferred method of transferring land: the state's outright purchasing of land instead of expropriation.

In 1994 under Law 160/94, the government attempted to reduce some of the costs of land reform to the state by implementing a negotiated land reform, based on cost sharing. Although there were some positive results of the program, overall, land reform

³⁶Lavadenz and Deininger, 578.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

under Law 160 failed to live up to expectations. One of the tenets of Law 160 was for the new landowner to finance 30 percent of the land's value, requiring private sector and market involvement to help finance this cost. However, the large bureaucracy of INCORA had the effect of driving away private sector involvement as many working for INCORA viewed "decentralization" as a direct threat to his or her own employment.³⁹ More recently under Law 160/2001, a majority of land reform recipients, who were granted credit for 70 percent of land value, were found to be either in default of their loans or to have already abandoned their new lands.⁴⁰ All of these factors contributed to President Uribe's May 2003 decision, which was also advocated by the World Bank, to dissolve INCORA. Today, Colombia has no dedicated land reform agency; rather it has created the *National Institute of Rural Development* (INCODER), which continues to concentrate on land colonization instead of redistribution.⁴¹

D. FARC AND LAND REFORM

If land reform is to play a role in conflict resolution, one has to assume that FARC still has some land reform ideological motivations remaining and have not completely converted to narco-terrorism. Without a doubt FARC, whose ideology is based on Marxism and socialism, have since the 1980's become quite successful capitalists. In 1998 alone, estimates of the guerrilla's financial strategy of kidnappings, extortion, money laundering, coca taxation (*gramaje*), and other rent seeking created an income of \$1.5 million a day.⁴² Of this amount, FARC received almost 60% of its income from drug trafficking.⁴³ Yet the question remains, would land reform provide the impetus for FARC to lay down their arms? Will the lack of a government-enacted land reform lead to a repeat of the situation in Vietnam, in which insurgents were able to enlarge and solidify their peasant support by carrying out their own land reform in occupied lands?

³⁹ Lavadenz and Deininger, 575.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Weinberg, Bill. "Glyphosate and Paramilitary Terror in Colombia's Cimitarra Valley." (Sept 4, 2003) www.colombia.indymedia.org [9/18/2003].

⁴² Suarez, Alfredo R. "Parasites and Predators: Guerrillas and the Insurrection Economy of Colombia." *Journal of International Affairs* (Spring 2000, Vol. 53.2), 585.

⁴³ Ibid.

Many characterizations of FARC inevitably point to its “agrarian reform” minded political agenda. Yet while land reform may be an important from a ideological perspective for FARC, its role in bringing the guerrillas to the peace table is dubious. Recalling its Communist roots from the previous chapter, today FARC basis its ideology on what it has termed “Bolivarianism.” One former Samper administration official characterized FARC’s “Bolivarianism” as a “gaseous mixture of populism and anti-imperialism,” directed towards gaining middle-class support.⁴⁴ In a 2001 interview with *The Economist*, FARC secretary Alfonso Cano stated the organization’s institutional goal as: “Our struggle is to do away with the state as it now exists in Colombia, preferably by political means, but if they don’t let us then we have to carry on shooting.”⁴⁵ Yet even more telling about the inner-workings of FARC is one independent intelligence assessment:

While still professing Marxist-Leninist ideology...their political ideas are hazy at best, makeshift at worst. It is likely that this ideology is used mainly as a glue to hold the organization together and to indoctrinate new recruits, and does not play a significant part in the formation of FARC policy. It would however, be completely inaccurate to portray the group as nothing more than a drug cartel...the leaders of the FARC do not live in luxury and are not motivated by the desire to amass huge personal fortune. For them it is all about power.⁴⁶

While land reform is one item on FARC’s agenda, the group is unlikely to forsake the rest of their objectives in exchange for this concession at the peace table. There is also strong evidence to support that FARC clearly does not believe that any land reform concessions by the government will be honored. Part of the 1984 “cease fire” agreement between the government and FARC specifically stipulated, “The Peace Commission gives its assurance that the government has the firm intention to...support

⁴⁴ “Colombia Survey: Talk of Peace, Acts of War.” *The Economist* (April 21, 2001) Available from www.proquest.umi.com (accessed on 6 Mar 2003).

⁴⁵ “Colombia Survey: Talk of Peace, Acts of War.” *The Economist* (April 21, 2001) www.proquest.umi.com (accessed on 6 Mar 2003).

⁴⁶ “Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment: Colombia.” Jane’s (2002) available from <http://www4.janes.com> (accessed on 13 Feb 2003).

vigorously the implementation of an agrarian reform policy.”⁴⁷ In light of the breakdown of the “cease fire” accord and the subsequent dismantlement of the UP Party, FARC will be most unwilling to “lay down their arms” over land reform concessions without seeing results and commitment by the government and or international community.

An even equally puzzling paradox for FARC is why the guerrilla group has not broadened its political capital in the countryside by carrying out land reform in the territories they control. From a political economy vantage, FARC represents two groups of Colombia’s peasants: (1) *colonos* who have colonized the frontier regions of Colombia; and (2) the farmers and day laborers of coca cultivation.⁴⁸ Unlike the Viet Cong (National Liberation Front), who implemented a more cost-effective and appealing form of peasant land reform than the South Vietnamese government, FARC seems to be content surviving as an armed peasant protection organization. A large part of FARC’s inability to politically capitalize on the land reform issue is that as the previous chapter showed (Figure 9), the majority of territory where FARC is active is jointly contested by paramilitaries. Clearly, the decision to protect coca cultivation supercedes FARC desires to also protect any FARC supported land reform efforts. Consequently, from available evidence it appears that for FARC, land reform’s importance lies not during the conflict per se, but after their final victory over the government. In May 2000 the FARC released the following “decree 001” which presumably is to go into effect following “FARC’s assumption of power:”

1. Free land: The government of the FARC would freely grant land to the peasants who work it or who want to work it in accordance with the country's geographic regions.
2. Land confiscation: The guerrilla organization decrees that the properties of large landowners will be confiscated and equitably distributed among Colombians.

⁴⁷ Chernick, Marc W. “Negotiated Settlement to Armed Conflict: Lessons from the Colombian Peace Process.” [Electronic version] *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, 30.4, (Winter, 1988-89), 73.

⁴⁸ “Colombia Survey: Talk of Peace, Acts of War.” *The Economist* (April 21, 2001) Available from www.proquest.umi.com (accessed on 6 Mar 2003).

3. Economic units: The FARC will create the economic unit of the countryside, which will be used to work in accordance with the fertility and location of the piece of land with a minimum of 20 ha. Roads will be built to transport the crops from remote departments.
4. Writing off debts: The debts of the peasants with the State will be written off...[ellipsis as published] and the money earned from the production of their land will be reinvested.
5. Wealthy peasants: The government of the FARC will respect the property of the peasants who have worked their land all their lives.
6. Credit and aid: The FARC will grant payment facilities and supply seeds and work tools to peasants. Broad credit systems will be created. A scholarship system for technical studies by the children of peasants will be created.
7. Support prices: To maintain stable staple prices, the products of the family basket will have basic prices.
8. Land to the indigenous people: All of the land of the indigenous people will be respected and lost and exploited land will be returned to them.
9. Confiscation of foreigners' property: The land occupied by U.S. companies, whatever their activity, will be confiscated.⁴⁹

In conclusion, FARC's exponential rise as a significant armed threat to the Colombian state via its criminal association with the coca industry seems to have undermined much of its ideological identity. While land reform may play a role in FARC's recruitment and propaganda, a government redistributive land reform policy would most likely have the effect of undermining what popular support FARC does maintain, and in the long-term, provide legitimate crop cultivation. Without coca and the financial capital it represents, FARC would most likely return to obscurity in the mountains of Colombia.

E. THE PARAMILITARIES AND LAND REFORM

Recalling the case of El Salvador, one of the reasons land reform failed to make any difference in the rural conflict was the fact that paramilitary "death squads,"

⁴⁹ "Translation of FARC law 001: Land reform and confiscation of foreign property." Available from <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/2000/05/000519-col-osac1.htm> (accessed on 16 Nov 2003).

unleashed a reign of terror driving many peasants into the insurgency camp. In the Colombian case any future redistributive land reform policy is likely to experience a similar phenomenon unless the state provides rural security for new land recipients. The 10,000 strong United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia or AUC (some estimates are as high as 14,000) is a consolidation of many paramilitary groups that were previously legally permissible as “self-defense” groups. In the free-market environment of a security crisis, the AUC arose to fill a void in the countryside that the state could not provide. Now largely funded by their involvement in narcotrafficking and through other financing by “drug barons,” the AUC has been responsible for the worst human rights record of any armed actor in the Colombian conflict. Colombia’s paramilitary groups, of which the AUC is the country’s largest, have much to lose in the event redistributive land reform occurs. Like many of the actors who have a “stake” in any subsequent land reform policy, the rise of the paramilitary groups, specifically the (AUC), has grown exponentially with narco-trafficking. Not only are the paramilitaries highly involved in narco-trafficking, but they have also found land as the perfect instrument to launder drug profits.⁵⁰

Ideologically the AUC argue they are protecting the state against the guerrillas. In reality, they are protecting the interest of landowners, narcotraffickers, and themselves. In recent events, President Uribe and AUC leader Carlos Castaño reached a “tentative” agreement that would allow the AUC to disarm with the state's guarantee of a “general amnesty” for criminal and human rights abuses.⁵¹ Whether or not this occurs is still being debated not only in Colombia, but also in the United States where *Plan Colombia* aid is strongly tied to protecting human rights, and where top AUC leaders, including Castaño are wanted for drug trafficking charges. Indications that this agreement may become more than a “tentative” agreement to disarm is evidenced by the recent seizures of farms by the AUC’s rank and file soldiers attempting to secure future employment

⁵⁰ “Colombia: Negotiating with the paramilitaries.” *International Crisis Group: Latin American Report No. 5* (16 Sept 2003), <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2003/icg-col-16sep.pdf> [11 Nov 2003].

⁵¹ Caballero, Maria Cristina. “Peace at any price: Colombia seems ready to give amnesty to a paramilitary ‘monster’ if he’ll lay down his guns.” *Newsweek* (International ed.). (New York: Aug 11, 2003. p. 30), www.proquest.umi.com [28 Aug 2003].

when demobilization comes.⁵² Further evidence of a demobilization of the AUC comes from the November 26, 2003, disarmament of the 800-man strong Medellín based AUC faction called *Cacique Nutibara*.⁵³ Nevertheless, even if the AUC does disarm, there are other rogue paramilitary groups in Colombia that would emerge to oppose with violence the loss of land imposed by a redistributive land reform. For the groups that the paramilitaries represent, as well as the guerrillas, land is power.

F. ASSET FORFEITURE: "A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY?"

Up to this point in the chapter, I have shown that any attempt to implement a redistributive land reform will be not only extremely difficult for Colombia's president to implement within the current political system, but also will be opposed by interest groups and perhaps violently by some of the armed non-state actors. In light of this, key actors in Colombia and the United States have seized on Colombia's recently passed asset forfeiture law as one remaining potential "window of opportunity," which could have significant ramifications on both the "war on drugs" and the rural conflict. However, while asset forfeiture does represent a significant opportunity for breaking down the barriers of inequality caused by "reverse land reform," it is likely to instigate as much or more violence as a redistributive land reform policy. Asset forfeiture is an expropriative type of land reform, and as such challenges both political and socio-economic status quos. Although FARC would most likely support asset forfeiture as it attacks their primary adversary, it would be highly contested by the narco-bourgeoisie and the paramilitaries.

Signed into law by President Uribe on December 12, 2002, Law 785 has five main provisions: (1) the state can expropriate those assets that were obtained through illegal funds; (2) once these assets are in the custody of the state they can be designated for communal purposes (i.e. land reform); (3) citizens reporting "the existence of assets obtained illegally or that have been used to commit crimes...receive a reward amounting to 5 percent of the commercial value of the asset;" (4) the length of asset forfeiture

⁵² Wilson, Scott. "Cease-Fire Becomes Land Grab; Colombian Group Takes Farmland, Homes at Gunpoint." *The Washington Post* (Sept. 20, 2003, p. A25) www.proquest.umi.com (accessed on 1 Oct 2003).

⁵³ Forero, Juan. "800 in Colombia Lay Down Arms, Kindling Peace Hopes." [On-line version] *New York Times* (November 26, 2003,.) www.nytimes.com (accessed on 3 Dec. 2003).

proceedings is reduced from two years to four months; and (5) the National Drug Directorate is placed in charge of managing those assets seized.⁵⁴ In light of the over four million hectares worth an estimated \$2.4 billion purchased by narco-trafficking profits, the potential ramifications of Law 785 are enormous.

Shortly after the passage of LAW 785, many in Colombia saw this as the greatest route for far-reaching land reform:

The new law streamlining the process of expropriating illegally acquired assets, if applied decisively and equally, would allow for a rapid elimination of ownership rights where they never should have existed and would put into place a new and quick agrarian reform.⁵⁵

Yet in the almost year since its inception, Law 785 has proven difficult to implement. The Colombian National Drug Directorate (DNE) has found itself in a legal imbroglio as it has been overwhelmed with hundreds of legal notices attempting to prevent or delay confiscation. Furthermore, some have been critical of the DNE itself as Julia Swieg writes:

Several million hectares of fertile land, as well as hundreds of millions of dollars in other assets, are in the hands of the government, thanks to asset forfeiture laws... but Colombia's equivalent of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DNE), which is charged with managing and redistributing the assets, is beset by patronage and bureaucratic inertia. Land, cattle and other assets sit idle or rot away, benefiting neither the state nor, in the case of the land, the 2 million internally displaced Colombians who would benefit from land reform.⁵⁶

However, regardless of the obstacles that asset forfeiture in Colombia must overcome, it is much too early to discount the “potential” of Law 785. Clearly the United States strongly supports asset forfeiture as it is specifically addressed under the “strengthening of the judiciary” portion of *Plan Colombia*. In October 2003, appearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Assistant Secretary for

⁵⁴ “Colombia: Uribe Signs New Expropriation Law.” *El Espectador*: Bogota (03 Jan 2002)

⁵⁵ Camilo, Juan. “Tierras sin hombres y hombres sin tierra” *El Tiempo*: Bogota, (15 Jan 2003)

⁵⁶ Sweig, Julia E. “Elite sit on the sidelines as Colombia struggles.” *Los Angeles Times* (10 Aug 2003), p. M2.

International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Robert Charles gave insight to more positive indications of asset forfeiture in Colombia:

We have supported, through your assistance and in cooperation with the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice, numerous programs, many of which are implemented by the United States Department of Justice...to reform the country's criminal code, to improve money laundering and asset forfeiture regimes and to provide for witness protection in key cases. Already there has been a 25% increase in money-laundering prosecutions and a 42% increase in asset forfeiture cases.⁵⁷

G. CONCLUSION

Is land reform “dead” in Colombia? For land reform advocates in Colombia, the departure of INCORA in May 2003 certainly gave the impression that land reform was put on the “back burner” of President Uribe’s political agenda. Yet in reality INCORA’s dismissal may have been for more economic reasons than political. In December 2002, the World Bank recommended INCORA be eliminated or “thoroughly” restructured or decentralized.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, even if INCORA still existed as an independent land reform agency, the type of redistributive land reform that many advocate for conflict resolution was rarely part of INCORA or the state’s overall agenda.

This chapter also showed that although Law 785 passed in 2003 still represents the greatest realistic opportunity for a redistributive land reform in Colombia, it will face significant armed opposition. Additionally, perhaps the greatest difficulty for implementing Law 785 will be determining just what lands were bought with narco-dollars and which are legitimate. Lastly, land redistributed via asset forfeiture will still have to have a land reform infrastructure to support new land recipients, and as the failed case of INCORA showed this is a significant challenge. The next and final chapter provides policy recommendations into how and whether these challenges can be addressed.

⁵⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate. “Challenges for U.S. Policy Toward Colombia: Is Plan Colombia Working?” Testimony of Robert B. Charles, Asst. Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs before Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington: D.C., 29 Oct 2003) <http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/rm/25718.htm>

⁵⁸ Lavadenz and Deininger, 582.

V. CONCLUSION

We also understand that democracy is a journey, not a destination. Each nation here, including the United States, must work to make freedom succeed. Elections are the foundation of democracy, but nations need to build on this foundation with other building blocks, such as a strong judiciary, freedom to speak and write as you wish, efficient banking and social services, quality schools, secure ownership of land, the ability to start and own a business. We must strengthen this architecture of democracy for the benefit of all our people.

—President George W. Bush, Summit of the Americas (2001)¹

This thesis has endeavored to answer the pivotal question, “To what effect would a redistributed land reform policy have in resolution of Colombia’s rural conflict? And just as importantly, what is the feasibility of implementing such a policy amid conflict?”

Chapter II of this thesis examined the leading theoretical scholarship on the different explanations of what makes peasants revolt or mobilize. As this chapter showed, there is no consensus that any one theory, whether it concentrates on agrarian structures, inequality of income, inequality of landownership, or relative deprivation, adequately explains the phenomena. Wickham-Crowley’s theory of peasant support provides the best multi-variable approach to incorporating these different approaches into a more generalized applicable theory. However, in regards to land reform and conflict resolution, there is a void in the theoretical literature. Consequently, the two well-known cases of land reform implemented amid conflict, South Vietnam and El Salvador, provide much of the precedent and raise many of the current doubts as to whether land reform is even feasible in Colombia. Yet as Chapter II demonstrated, these two cases do not provide sufficient evidence that redistributive land reform in Colombia will not work.

In Chapter III, the “heart” of the land reform and conflict nexus was examined. This chapter found that as many have argued, there is indeed an enduring and historical legacy that forms the basis of much of today’s rural conflict in Colombia. It also found

¹ United States. The White House. “Remarks by President George W. Bush at Summit of the Americas Working Session-Quebec, Canada.” The White House: Washington, D.C, (21 April 2001) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/04/20010423-9.html>

that Colombia's peasants have largely been excluded from influencing national land policy, and the path to such change has been extremely difficult as evidenced by the failed case of ANUC in the early 1970s. Chapter III also found that the unresolved land tenure issue greatly intensified in the mid-1990s due to: the phenomena of "reverse-land reform;" a decline in the rural economy leading to subsequent increases in both inequality of rural income and landownership; and the second "coca boom" that resulted after effective counter-drug strategies in neighboring Peru and Bolivia. Underlying all of these factors is the recurring lack of state presence and hence lack of rural security.

Chapter IV concentrated on the feasibility of land reform taking into account not only the existing political institutions but also the policy preferences of FARC and the paramilitaries. This chapter found that for Colombia's president to initiate support for a redistributive land reform policy in the current political system is difficult. This is not only due to Colombia's political system, which has been long known to be "clientilistic," but also to well-entrenched agriculture interest groups or *gremios*, of who the national Cattle Federation FEDEGAN has the most to lose. Chapter IV also examined the predicted responses of FARC and the paramilitaries to land reform. It found that a redistributed land reform would likely be contested by FARC as it threatens its pivotal "coca growing" peasant base of support, which I deemed FARC's "center of gravity" in Chapter III. However, an "expropriative" land reform policy based on asset forfeiture laws would be better received by FARC as it attacks large landholders who present the greatest threat to FARC. Whether this would be enough for FARC to demobilize is yet not clear. Additionally this chapter found that regardless of a redistributive or expropriative type of land reform, its implementation would be contested by both the paramilitaries and narco-traffickers. At stake here is not only illicit drug cultivation but also a significant base of power in large land purchases.

Ultimately this thesis found that not only will Colombia's president find it extremely difficult to win political support for such a policy, but also as a "stand alone" policy, its very implementation will increase conflict not resolve it. Nevertheless, the century old land tenure issue in Colombia is unlikely to resolve itself and doing nothing does not bode well for rural Colombia.

A. THE FUTURE OF LAND REFORM IN COLOMBIA: FIVE APPROACHES

This section introduces five possible “paths” or approaches that land reform policy in Colombia could take in the near future. The first approach to the land issue is “to do nothing” and represents the reaffirming of the status quo in rural Colombia. The second approach, mimic the current U.S. national security strategy for Colombia, which places priority on the resolution of the security problem in Colombia before expansion of socio-economic development. The third approach represents a significant policy change from the first and second approach incorporating a redistributive land reform policy into a larger rural pacification strategy. The forth approach is a variation of the previous approach as it incorporates asset forfeiture into a pacification strategy. Lastly, the final approach looks at the inevitability of land reform in Colombia in light of post-conflict requirements.

1. Maintaining the Status Quo: “The Do Nothing” Approach

As Chapter III and Chapter IV demonstrated, land tenure policy in Colombia has changed little since the end of *La Violencia*. Furthermore, the same political actors that have traditionally opposed redistributive land reform policy are still deeply entrenched in Colombia’s political system. Additionally, since the “rise and fall” of ANUC during the early 1970s, Colombia’s peasants have been unable to politically mobilize on a national level to influence a more favorable redistributive land reform policy. Moreover, the lack of funding and reorganization of INCORA, has turned the land reform agency into a virtual defunct organization. For all of these reasons, land reform’s continued absence from the agenda of both the Colombia and U.S. government’s agenda is still the most likely predicted outcome.

From President Uribe’s perspective, what may also be driving the absence of land reform from his agenda is the realization that initiating any redistributive land reform policy will not be politically supported by those who helped get him elected. Already there are indications that any policy initiative that deviates from President Uribe’s “law and order” agenda will not succeed. In October 2003, the Uribe administration suffered its first major political defeat when a 14-point political and economic referendum (which

did not include land reform) was strongly rejected by voters.² Additionally, in the wake of the referendum's defeat, four of President Uribe's key cabinet members resigned.³ Consequently, redistributive land reform, which represents a much more controversial reform than the set of reforms recently rejected, would clearly not find popular support amid the current political conditions in Colombia.

2. Security First, Socio-economic Reforms Second: The "Do a Little" Approach

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, current U.S.-Colombia foreign policy has two purposes: (1) to reduce and eliminate illicit crop cultivation and trafficking in Colombia; and (2) to promote democracy and economic growth by strengthening Colombia's political, judicial, and military institutions. The underlying assumption of eradication and interdiction is that it also attacks the narco-terrorist primary source of revenue, thus reducing their ability to wage war against the state. Clearly U.S. financial support of *Plan Colombia* reflects a U.S.-Colombia policy that holds security as the primary concern in Colombia. Although *Plan Colombia* does include aid for alternative development programs and for assisting displaced persons, over 80 percent of U.S. assistance is "earmarked" for Colombia's police and military forces.

One strong argument that favors current U.S. policy in Colombia is that without first resolving the security issues in the country; socio-economic reforms such as land reform are not possible. This argument strongly supports my proposal that policy makers have discounted land reform's feasibility during conflict based on results in both South Vietnam and El Salvador. Nevertheless, the Bush administration's 2004 funding request for aid to Colombia continue to support a U.S. approach of "security first" in Colombia. Furthermore, in light of the larger U.S. efforts in the reconstruction of Iraq, resource intensive socio-economic reforms such as land reform, will find it difficult to compete with shrinking resources in Washington. In summary, the "do a little" approach

² BBC News. "Colombia's Uribe in cabinet crisis." [On-line version]; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/americas/3225941.stm>; Internet; (accessed 8 Nov. 2003).

³ Vaicius, Ingrid. "Recent Changes in the Uribe government." *Center for International Policy: Colombia Project* [On-line version] available from <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/111803uribecabinet.htm>; (accessed 1 Nov. 2003).

of the United States in Colombia will most likely continue until the foreseeable future when the security conditions in Colombia are more conducive to the U.S. to advocate a redistributive land reform policy and expand socio-economic development in Colombia.

3. Land Reform and Rural Pacification: The “Do a Lot” Approach

For Colombia, the requirement for a badly needed rural pacification plan may come sooner than later. On July 15, 2003, the government and the AUC signed the *Santa Fe de Ralito* (Córdoba) accord.⁴ In this accord, both parties agreed to begin a process of formal negotiations that stipulated the demobilization of the AUC by the end of December 2005, and the government’s pledge to “reinsert the paramilitaries into civilian life.”⁵ If the demobilization of the AUC’s does come to fruition, there is a dangerous possibility that without a state military presence, FARC will expand and consolidate previously disputed territory making the group even more difficult for the state to counter. Recalling Chapter III, while guerrillas and paramilitaries may control 40% of the countryside, much of this territory is disputed between the two parties. Consequently, Colombia must be prepared to rapidly and aggressively implement a rural pacification strategy prior to the AUC’s demobilization to not only deter other paramilitary groups from filling in the vacuum of the AUC, but also to prevent FARC from capitalizing on those peasant communities that were targets of paramilitary violence and hence may be more likely to support the guerrillas vice the state.

While the very mention of pacification may cause some U.S. policymakers to cringe recalling failed pacification efforts in South Vietnam, it is a viable counter-insurgency strategy in the Colombian case. Pacification applied to the Colombian case would mean Colombia’s military would provide rural security for both government and non-government agencies to implement needed socio-economic reforms (i.e., land reform), all working towards the common goal of ending the most enduring rural insurgency in all of Latin America. Based on the South Vietnamese case successful

⁴ International Crisis Group. “Colombia: Negotiating with the paramilitaries.” [Electronic version] *ICG Latin America Report No. 5* (16 Sep., 2003), 22, <http://www.crisisweb.org/home/getfile.cfm?id=973&type=pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

pacification hinges on the strong commitment of the state to socio-economic reforms, and an equally committed military to provide rural security.⁶

Already in Colombia there is strong evidence that supports this hypothesis as a 2002 USAID internal audit of ongoing alternative development programs stated:

The successful accomplishment of the CAD [Coca alternative development] program is hindered by security constraints...includ[ing] kidnappings, threats, detainments, thefts, and killings of USAID/Colombia partners and recipients. Because of the imminent dangers in rural areas of Colombia, non-Colombian staff cannot perform site visits without massive security precautions...In addition, security threats make it more difficult to find people willing to work with Chemonics [USAID contractor for CAD] because to do so is seen as a danger in and of itself.⁷

While alternative development is not land reform, they are similar processes, and the security issue facing alternative development serves as a good predictor of a similar outcome for land reform without security. Yet while pacification is a viable in Colombia, the Colombian president faces much difficulty in getting the military to commit to rural security.

Throughout this thesis there has been a strange absence of the Colombian military from the current land and conflict analysis. This is due in large part to the military's current counter-insurgency strategy of "containment" that has focused on: (1) "keeping the guerrillas out of the strategic economic areas and political centers;" and (2) capturing or eliminating the guerrilla leadership.⁸ Consequently, with much of the countryside devoid of a state-military presence, the paramilitaries and guerrillas have been fighting a "no-holds-barred turf war." The unwillingness of the military to engage the guerrillas and paramilitaries "head on," also stems from a restrictive U.S.-Colombia foreign aid policy, which although now incorporates counter-terrorism, has continued to make counter-narcotics, not counter-insurgency the number one U.S. national security priority

⁶ See Richard A. Hunt's, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (1995), the best comprehensive scholarship on this important aspect of the Vietnam War.

⁷ United States. Agency for International Development (USAID). "Audit of the USAID/Colombia-Financed Coca Alternative Development Program Under the Plan Colombia Supplemental Appropriation, No. 1-514-02-005-P)." [Electronic version] (USAID: San Salvador, 16 Jan. 2002), 4, <http://www.usaid.gov/oig/public/fy02rpts/1-514-02-005-p.pdf>.

⁸ Richani, 42.

in Colombia. U.S. legislators have purposely avoided supporting a U.S.-Colombia policy that bears any resemblance to the “quagmire” of South Vietnam or the “human rights” nightmare of El Salvador. While these indications may lead some to conclude that it will be difficult for Colombia’s military to commit to rural security, many forget that it was this same military that conducted a successful counter-insurgency and civic action strategy during the 1960s bringing peace to post-*Violencia* rural Colombia.⁹

Some may argue that in light of President Uribe’s June 2003 “Democratic Defense and Security Policy,” in which 15,000 peasants were recruited in a planned 20,000 strong peasant self-defense force, that the military is not required in pacification.¹⁰ Yet as was shown in South Vietnam, relying on a peasant based militia force is no substitute for professionally trained full-time military forces. In the South Vietnamese case, similar forces called “Regional and Popular Forces,” who were “lightly armed, poorly disciplined, and partially trained,” were routinely overrun by main force Viet Cong units.¹¹ Already there are indications that a similar fate could occur to Colombia’s peasant militias.¹²

Putting aside the difficulty of Colombia’s military to commit to rural security, it must also be acknowledged there are certain “trip wires” inherent in the military’s role in pacification. It is well recognized that during counter-insurgency operations indiscriminate government terror at the hands of the military most often favors increased peasant support for the insurgents (i.e., El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua).¹³ Furthermore, as T. David Mason found in the Salvadoran case, any gains made by the government in reforms, specifically land reform, evaporate after indiscriminate violence

⁹ Rempe, 30.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group. “Colombia: President Uribe’s Democratic Security Policy.” [Electronic version] *ICG Latin America Report No. 6* (13 Nov 2003), 4, http://www.crisisweb.org/library/documents/latin_america/06_colombia_uribe_dem_security.pdf See also, “Peasants Join Colombian Army.” BBC News (17 June 2003) [On-line version] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2995716.stm>.

¹¹ Hunt, 27. In 1969 South Vietnam’s regional/provincial forces numbered 470,000 (Hunt, 275).

¹² International Crisis Group. “Colombia: President Uribe’s Democratic Security Policy,” 4. This report notes that initially Colombia’s peasants were to “serve and protect” the same geographic area they live in. However, as it was well known in the communities, which peasants were serving in, they became easily recognizable for both FARC and the ELN.

¹³ Wickham-Crowley, Timothy. “Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1956-1970.” [Electronic version] *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32.2, (Apr., 1990), 235.

by “death squads” and security forces.¹⁴ It appears that Colombia’s military is very well aware of the “double-edged sword” the broadening of a counter-insurgency strategy represents as one “think tank” recently reported:

The security forces appear to be divided between “hawks” or “hardliners”, who are fully behind the president [Uribe] and seek quick and spectacular military results, and “soft-liners” or “traditionalist”, who are less aggressive and more conscious of the legal and strategic limits on the military.¹⁵

Yet it is exactly this healthy “checking force” represented by “soft liners” that what will be required to implement a balanced pacification strategy. Furthermore, much of the international community (i.e., Europe) that distanced itself from *Plan Colombia*’s heavy reliance on military force may be more receptive to supporting a balanced pacification strategy that utilizes the military for security to implement land reform and other socio-economic programs. Pacification represents a viable policy option for Colombia to close the “gap” that currently exists between Colombia and the international community.

4. Merging Asset Forfeiture with Pacification: Variation on a Theme Approach

Recalling Chapter IV, although expropriative land reform via asset forfeiture represents the most viable opportunity for providing sufficient land reform to Colombians and would likely be supported by FARC, it would be violently opposed by narco-trafficker landowners.¹⁶ However, Marc Chernick notes in *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America* (1999), one possible solution for working past this significant impasse:

Would the traffickers willingly give up such vast extensions of land without mounting resistance, even violent resistance? An argument can be

¹⁴ Mason, 227.

¹⁵ International Crisis Group. “Colombia: President Uribe’s Democratic Security Policy,” 10.

¹⁶ Ramon Lopez and Alberto Valdes found that to bring “the poorest 40 percent of [Colombia’s] farm households above the poverty line would require very large transfers of land, unless accompanied by other policy instrument to increase income,” thus confirming the requirement of large land expropriations by asset forfeiture. Lopez, Ramon, and Alberto Valdes. “Determinants of Rural Poverty in Colombia.” In Ramon Lopez and Alberto Valdez, eds., *Rural Poverty in Latin America*. (St. Martin’s Press: New York, 2000) cited in *Colombia: The Economic Foundation of Peace* (2003), 491.

made that they would be willing to surrender such land peacefully in the context of a defined path that leads to their incorporation into society.¹⁷

The critical assumption of this argument is that Colombia's judicial system can not only identify those land purchased through narco-trafficking, but also enforce asset forfeiture laws and prosecute accordingly, essentially "plea bargaining" these cases. However, as was shown with similar negotiations with the Medellín drug cartel, most notably drug lord Pablo Escobar, making concessions to narco-traffickers can significantly undermine the legitimacy of the judiciary.

A more legitimate option that would find more support within the United States and international community is for the Colombian government to outright expropriate proven narco-landholdings, and redistribute the land as part of a larger pacification strategy covered in the previous scenario. Again this option is to not only help strengthen Colombia's judiciary and "rule of law," but would also be more favorable in finding financial support abroad. As Chapter IV illustrated, successful land reform requires an associated infrastructure that is very resource intensive. Yet if done correctly can support agricultural production that is viable in the global markets. The leading drawback to this approach is that its implementation could *significantly worsen conditions* before they get better as it would be highly contested by narco-traffickers and the paramilitaries.

5. "Pay Me Now or Pay Me Later," Post-Conflict Land Reform Requirements in Colombia

Within the past decade it has become increasingly clear that resolution of land issues play a significant role in post-conflict recovery. Based on post-conflict cases in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, and Uganda, Klaus Deininger found resolution of pre-existing land tenure issues is essential for providing a "livelihood for demobilized combatants and displaced populations."¹⁸ In the Nicaraguan case, within less than a year of the 1991 peace accords, an estimated 22,835 troops (both former-contras and former Sandinista soldiers) had remobilized as many had returned home to

¹⁷ Chernick, Marc. "Negotiating Peace amid Multiple Forms of Violence: The Protracted Search for a Settlement to the Armed Conflicts in Colombia," in *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America*, ed. Cynthia J. Arnson. (Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Washington, D.C., 1999), 196.

¹⁸ Deininger, *Land Policies*, 159.

find no “land, resources, or training.”¹⁹ Consequently, the continuing unresolved land issues in post-conflict Nicaragua greatly affected its economic recovery well into the late 1990s.²⁰

Certainly in the Colombian case where there is an estimated 30,000 guerrilla and paramilitary combatants, and an estimated 2.5 million internally displaced people (IDP), of whom over half previously held titles to land, the conditions are ripe for a similar situation when a peace settlement does come.²¹ The reality of post-conflict requirements is that land and conflict in Colombia are inevitably bound to one another, and their resolution forms a critical part of a lasting peace. As this thesis has shown, coming to terms with this paradox is a difficult proposition for Colombia, as land is power in Colombia, and Colombians have shown that land itself is worth killing and dying for.

B. FINAL THOUGHTS

It has not been the purpose of this thesis to question the morality of a redistributive land reform policy in Colombia. Rather it attempted to look deeper at what many hold as one possible solution to the Colombian conflict. It is ironic that land reform, once a pillar of U.S. foreign policy, has all but disappeared from the American vocabulary. In the aftermath of the Cold War the very mention of land reform immediately brings forth a negative reaction in what Prosterman and Hanstad phrased “being what the bad elements want.”²² Yet perhaps we in the United States have forgotten much of our own history of land reform (i.e., the Homestead Act) during the late 19th and early 20th century that had long-lasting and profound effects in shaping the “American Experience.” As the United States emerges into the uncertainty of the 21st century, “democracy and freedom” have returned to become the driving forces of U.S.

¹⁹ Spalding, Rose J. “From low-intensity war to low-intensity peace: The Nicaraguan peace process,” 43. In *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America*, ed. Cynthia J. Arnson. Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Washington, D.C., 1999.

²⁰ Deininger, *Land Policies*, 160.

²¹ Arboleda, Jairo and Elena Correa. “Forced Internal Displacement,” in Giugale, Marcelo M., Olivier Lafourcade, and Connie Luff editors. *Colombia the Economic Foundation of Peace*, World Bank: New York, 2003.

²² Prosterman and Hanstad, 8.

foreign policy. Consequently, as President George W. Bush indicated in his opening remarks at the Summit of the Americas (2001), the right to secure landownership remains a building block of democracy. As U.S. policymakers continue to shape an evolving U.S.-Colombia foreign policy, the United States as well as Colombia must come to terms with the relationship between landownership and democratization. Recalling the words of Thomas Jefferson, himself a large landowner:

*Whenever there is in any country uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right... It is not too soon to provide by every possible means that as few as possible shall be without a little portion of land. The small landholders are the most precious part of a state.*²³

²³ Jefferson, Thomas. "The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Papers 8:682." [On-line version] in "Thomas Jefferson on Politics and Government," University of Virginia Library <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeffbibl.htm#source>

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