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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



## THESIS

**PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA:  
OBJECTIVES AND  
STRATEGIES OF THE MAIN ACTORS**

by

Juan C. Gomez

March 2001

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Jeanne Giraldo

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<p><b>ABSTRACT</b> (<i>maximum 200 words</i>) Colombia is enduring an internal conflict with almost forty years of history. Guerrillas and self-defense organizations are threatening one of the oldest democracies in Latin America just as the country is starting to recover from one of the deepest economic depressions since its independence. The Colombian government, with both civilian and international support, is trying to halt, or at least to reduce the level of violence. However, the enormous military and economic strength of the guerrillas and illegal self-defense groups is clearly delaying the resolution of this conflict.</p> <p>This thesis analyzes the origins of the conflict in Colombia and shows how mistaken government policies and changes in the drug trade have contributed to the escalation of the conflict in the 1990s. It then seeks to explain the prospects for peace in Colombia by analyzing the objectives and strategies of the actors involved in the conflict. It concludes that the FARC guerrilla and self-defense groups seem to be interested in conflict perpetuation. On the other hand, the state security forces and all domestic and international actors clearly favor peace. To a lesser degree, even the ELN may seek peace, because they have been coerced and debilitated. The final chapter assesses the likelihood for success of Colombia's current strategy and makes policy recommendations. It concludes that the government's peace strategy and its unrelenting battle against narco-trafficking may increase the violence in the short run, but it should weaken the guerrillas and the self-defense organizations economic and military strength in the long run.</p>				
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**PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA: OBJECTIVES AND  
STRATEGIES OF THE MAIN ACTORS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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**MASTER OF ARTS IN  
INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS**

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## ABSTRACT

Colombia is enduring an internal conflict with almost forty years of history. Guerrillas and self-defense organizations are threatening one of the oldest democracies in Latin America just as the country is starting to recover from one of the deepest economic depressions since its independence. The Colombian government, with both civilian and international support, is trying to halt, or at least to reduce the level of violence. However, the enormous military and economic strength of the guerrillas and illegal self-defense groups is clearly delaying the resolution of this conflict.

This thesis analyzes the origins of the conflict in Colombia and shows how mistaken government policies and changes in the drug trade have contributed to the escalation of the conflict in the 1990s. It then seeks to explain the prospects for peace in Colombia by analyzing the objectives and strategies of the actors involved in the conflict. It concludes that the FARC guerrilla and self-defense groups seem to be interested in conflict perpetuation. On the other hand, the state security forces and all domestic and international actors clearly favor peace. To a lesser degree, even the ELN may seek peace, because they have been coerced and debilitated.

The final chapter assesses the likelihood for success of Colombia's current strategy and makes policy recommendations. It concludes that the government's peace strategy and its unrelenting battle against narcotrafficking may increase the violence in the short run, but it should weaken the guerrillas and the self-defense organizations economic and military strength in the long run.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colombia is the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere. This thesis analyzes the prospects for peace in Colombia by exploring the objectives and strategies of the main actors to either resolve the conflict or perpetuate it. The level of violence in Colombia during the last decade has been the worst since *La Violencia* (1948-1957) when more than 250,000 Colombians were killed. Three primary actors have promoted this increase of violence and have continually expanded the conflict from its origins in the countryside to the populated urban areas of the middle and even the upper class. These three groups are comprised of guerrillas, illegal self-defense groups and organized crime. In addition, the three democratic governments that have led the country during the last ten years have failed in their attempts to stop this frantic war.

The internal conflict affects the political and economic stability of the country, and some experts fear that this conflict could threaten the entire region, expanding beyond the borders of Colombia. Identifying the objectives and strategies of the actors responsible for increasing this chain of violence is vitally important if one hopes to find peaceful alternatives and to propose some ideas that contribute to an eventual solution. In addition, this thesis discusses the objectives and strategies of those domestic and foreign non-violent actors who influence the evolution of the conflict.

Pastrana's government has initiated a peace process with the FARC guerrillas, and after two years of delays he has finally begun negotiations with the ELN. Will there be

peace? Or is Colombia a “war system” in which all the involved actors benefit from a continuation of the conflict as some claim?

The most important conclusion that this thesis offers is that the FARC and the AUC are not ready for peace but instead, these two organizations are actually seeking to perpetuate the conflict due to their increasing economic and military strength, which is directly related to their participation in narcotrafficking. Meanwhile, the ELN is ready for peace negotiation only because they have suffered several crucial military defeats in the last few years.

This political violence and the accompanying human rights abuses impede Colombia’s democratic consolidation and economic progress. If Colombia cannot reach a cease-fire and engage all the actors in negotiations, human rights violations will increase. In addition, deep-rooted polarization among Colombians will make the situation worse. The Colombian internal conflict could eventually burst into a civil war.

The Colombian government, its security forces, and its civil society must stop the escalating violence by all legal means. The government must continue searching for a negotiated peace with the guerrillas. To have success, political, economic and technical supports from the international community are crucial. Clearly, the illegal armed actors are increasing in number and in military capabilities due to their participation in the drug business. The E.U as well as the U.S must continue contributing to the peace process and to its programs that can provide alternatives to coca cultivation. While the US aid supplies the “big stick” in the government’s coca eradication efforts, the social aid provided by the EU provides the “carrot” for peasants to shift production to alternative crops.

Parallel to the peace process and strengthening the security forces by improving its technological and professional capabilities, the government must resolve the political, social and economic problems plaguing the country for years, problems which previously had justified the guerrilla revolution that began in the 1950s. The roots of the Colombian internal conflict demand structural changes in many areas, including education, justice, environment, health and employment. Such changes can take years, even decades or generations, to produce positive results, but such changes must be implemented at some point or the nation will continue to deteriorate. Fortunately, the conditions that can lead to this transformation have never seemed more auspicious than they do presently.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. PROBLEM

Colombia is the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>1</sup> Every twenty minutes a Colombian is killed, every six hours there is an act of terrorism, and almost every three and a half hours, a Colombian citizen is kidnapped. More than half of the world's kidnappings take place in Colombia, according to the British Medical Journal,<sup>2</sup> last year (2000) 3,706 people were kidnapped.<sup>3</sup> This number was 16 percent higher than 1999. A great number of civilians are forced out of their homes by threats and political violence. Violence displaced 308,000 people in 1998, a 20 percent increase over the previous year. According to the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement, a non-governmental organization, since 1985 Colombia's internal conflict has displaced about 1.5 million people from their homes. Since the late 1980s four presidential candidates, 3,500 political activists, 200 judges and investigators, 151 journalists, 1,200 police officers and more than 300,000 ordinary citizens have been murdered.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marcella, Gabriel and Donal Schulz: "Colombian's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads" Strategic Studies Institute. US Army War College March 9, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See the CNN in-depth specials "War without End" CNN 12 September 2000, Internet edition [http: www.cnn.com/SPECIALS /2000/colombia/story/reports/]accessed 23 February 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Caracol; "*Diez secuestros diarios se realizan en Colombia.*" Caracol Radio Bogotá Colombia February 21, 2001. Vía Internet [http: //www.caracol. com.co/titular.asp?ID=42570] accessed 23 February 2001.

<sup>4</sup> See the CNN in - depth specials "War without End" CNN 12 September 2000, Internet edition, [http: www.cnn.com/specials/0008/colombia.issues/crime.html] accessed 23 February 2001.

The level of violence in Colombian during the last decade is the worst since *La Violencia* (1948-1957) when more than 250,000 Colombians were killed.<sup>5</sup> Three actors have contributed to the increase in violence and the degradation of the internal conflict: guerrillas, illegal self-defense groups and organized crime. Meanwhile the three democratic governments that the country has had during the last ten years have failed in their attempts to stop this frantic war.<sup>6</sup>

The leftist guerrilla who emerged in the mid-1960s, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), claim they are fighting for socialist ideals.<sup>7</sup> The illegal self-defense groups are supported and financed by wealthy landowners who created these organizations as private armies to protect themselves from the guerrillas. The illegal self-defense groups have grown in number and popularity in response to the state's inability to fulfill its constitutional obligation to protect its citizens and to maintain the monopoly of force.

Contributing to this escalation of violence and affecting the country's political, social and economic instability, illegal drug trafficking feeds both of the actors involved in the conflict. Most of the money financing the guerrilla and self-defense fight against the Colombian population and the state apparatus comes from the drug business. Despite the Colombian government's effort to reduce the devastating impact of the drug business

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<sup>5</sup> Colombian History, "Introduction" August, 02 2000, Internet edition [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/c/s.dll/query/D?cstdy:8:./temp/~frd\_x1W::] accessed 18 February 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Cesar Gaviria Trujillo (1990-1994). Ernesto Samper Pizano (1994-1998). Andres Pastrana Arango (1998- the present: Pastrana was elected for a four-year presidential term which ends in October, 2002)

<sup>7</sup> See the CNN in-depth specials "War without End." CNN 12 September 2000, Internet edition, [http://www.cnn.com/inactive/specials/0008/colombia.key/surehot.html] accessed 23 February 2001.

on Colombia's development, the results have been discouraging. Coca cultivation grew by 20 percent in 1999, according to the U.S. State Department's report. This increase has been constant. From 1995 to 1996, it grew 36 percent. In 1997, the increase was 18 percent, and in 1998, it was 28 percent. With the reduction in coca cultivation in Bolivia and Peru, Colombia today has the largest coca cultivation in the world, according to the State Department and Drug Enforcement Agency reports.<sup>8</sup> The profits from this illegal business are invested in the conflict against the government, which has no benefit to the nation's economy or its citizens.

This spiral of violence, the fears of legitimate investors who will not risk their capital in this troubled country, the state's inability to defeat the violence, the lack of justice, corruption and unemployment have brought the country to the brink of an abyss. The Colombian economy is experiencing one of the worst depressions since its independence from Spain. The political, social and economic stability of one of the oldest democracy in Latin America is clearly threatened.

Pastrana's government has initiated a peace process with the FARC guerrilla and after two years of hesitations has begun negotiations with the ELN. Will there be peace? Or is Colombia a "war system" in which all the involved actors benefit from a continuation of the conflict as some claim? Is a civil war inevitable before the nation finds political, social and economic solutions to its turmoil? The intention of this thesis is

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<sup>8</sup> See the CNN in-depth specials "War without End" CNN 12 September 2000, Internet edition, [[http: www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/colombia.noframes /story/essays /garces/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/colombia.noframes /story/essays /garces/index.html)] accessed 23 February 2001.

to analyze the armed and unarmed actors involved in the Colombian conflict and determine if the conditions for a peace agreement exist.

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

The violence and internal conflicts affecting Colombian democracy also affects the political and economic stability of the country. Today, Colombia is just beginning to free itself from the worst economic stagnation in its history. Analyzing the objectives and the strategies of the armed actors is vitally important if one hopes to find peaceful alternatives and to propose some ideas that contribute to an eventual solution. Also important is analyzing the role of the non-violent actors in this situation, and how they can help resolve the Colombian internal conflict. The political violence and human right abuses involving all the actors impede democratic consolidation and economic progress. If Colombia cannot reach a cease-fire and engage all the actors in negotiations, the human rights violations will increase.

Finding an alternative to the conflict and its human rights abuses is vastly challenging. The Colombian government, its security forces, and its civil society must stop the escalating violence by all legal means. The government must continue searching for a negotiated peace with the guerrillas. To have success, political, economic and technical support from the international community are crucial. This makes the analysis of those external actors highly important. Even though these non-violent actors are not militarily involved in the confrontation, they have a preponderant role in its development, degradation or in its eventual resolution.

## C. ARGUMENT

The reduction of human rights violations would begin a new era of social reconciliation, democratic consolidation and economic growth for Colombians. Such a process will not be easy. It will require the participation and the compromise of many actors. The actors this thesis analyzes and evaluates are classified in two groups: armed actors and non-violent actors. The group of armed actors consists of the guerrillas and the self-defense groups and the state's military and police forces. The state's military and police participation in the conflict is legitimate. This distinction is important because when comparing this second group of armed actors to the other two actors, one must recall that the military and police are legally defending the constitution and Colombian law.

The second group is composed of the non-violent actors, both domestic and international. The domestic non-violent actors are the Colombian government and the civil society. The international non-violent actors are Colombia's neighbors, the European Union, the United States, and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The armed actors as well as the non-violent actors will be analyzed on a number of dimensions. First, the objectives of each group (their political, social and economic goals) and the strategies for attaining these goals will be identified. Then, the analysis examines whether the goals and strategies of these actors increase the prospects for peace or, to the contrary, contribute to the perpetuation of the "war system."

This thesis begins with a brief history of Colombian violence from the late 1940s, when the revolutionary groups were born and explains why the violence has escalated in

the 1990s. The third chapter will present the illegal armed actors involved in the internal conflict: the Colombia Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the National Liberation army (ELN), and the Colombian United Self-defense group (AUC). This chapter, as mentioned above, also examines the political and economic interests and strategies of these groups in order to determine their strengths and weaknesses, and the conditions under which they might seriously negotiate peace. Chapter IV will discuss the role of the legal armed actors. Chapter V will present six domestic and international non-violent actors who occupy highly important roles in either perpetuating or in resolving the conflict. These actors are: the Colombian government, the Colombian civil society, the Colombia's neighbors, the United States, the European Union, and the non-governmental organizations.

The last chapter will present the conclusions of this research. The author will identify which actors in the Colombian conflict are interested in continuing the conflict, which would support the theory of the “war system,” and which support peace. This chapter also presents recommendations to the Colombian government as well as to the armed and non-violent actors who are engaged in this prolonged confrontation.

## II. COLOMBIA'S HISTORY OF VIOLENCE SINCE 1950

Colombia, which is one of the oldest democracies in Latin America, has also experienced a continual period of conflict that makes it one of the most violent societies in the world. This chapter will trace the origins and evolution of the main actors in the internal political conflict—the various guerrilla groups and the self-defense forces. It will then show how the increased involvement of these groups in the drug trade and the misguided policies of the Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994) and Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) administrations led to an escalation of the conflict in the 1990s. It will end with a brief discussion of the efforts of the current administration to respond to the increased violence.

### A. GUERRILLAS

The violent phenomenon of Colombia's modern history began with the assassination of the Liberal left leader, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, on April 9, 1948, which set off a massive riot known as "El Bogotazo." The ensuing civil war was waged between the two main political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives. This violent period (1948-1953) brought about more than 200,000 murders (a toll only surpassed on the continent by the Mexican Revolution and the US Civil War) and many more citizens were forcibly displaced.<sup>9</sup> In 1953, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, head of the armed forces, led a coup to oust President Laureano Gómez and curtail the violence. The coup was originally planned to lead to democratic elections, but Rojas Pinilla remained in power for five

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<sup>9</sup>Anonymous; "An Overview of Recent Colombian History." Vía Internet [<http://www.igc.org/colhrnet/timeline.htm>] accessed 10 January 2001.

years. In 1958, the “National Front” was created by an agreement signed between the Liberals and Conservatives. This agreement established a policy to alternate control of political power every four years. The agreement was maintained until 1974.

The largest guerrilla group in Colombia, the FARC, was formed in 1964 during the National Front period, but this group traces its roots back to the peasant struggles against landowners in the 1930s and the struggle between Liberals and Conservatives.

At the beginning of the thirties, the agricultural workers who put into effect the Communist slogan of “the revolutionary taking of the land” by occupying the large estates and establishing agricultural settlements on public lands in several departments, employed self-defense to protect their conquests... Self-defense organizations, such as the “Guardia Roja,” the “Correo Rojo,” the peasant leagues, and the Litigation Commissions effectively combined three fronts of struggle: defense against aggression, using arms if necessary; solidarity; and the search for “legal” solutions. <sup>10</sup>

These self-defense organizations emerged in the rural areas along with the Communist party. In 1949, “resistance committees,” composed of Liberals and Communists, were formed in opposition to the Conservative party government. Although this rebel organization ceased to function during the process of pacification undertaken by general Rojas Pinilla in 1953, peasants from the zone affected by the landowners and military pressure had reorganized by 1964. They called for agrarian reform and two years later, at the second national conference, the FARC came into being.

In 1965, a second guerrilla group emerged inspired by the Cuban-style *foco* theory, that individual groups of professional revolutionaries could create conditions ripe for a revolution. This led to the formation of the ELN, which went through various

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<sup>10</sup> Pierre Gilhodes: “*El Ejercito Colombiano Analiza la Violencia.*” A report presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> international symposium on the violence in Colombia (Bogotá 1984), p. 305.



structuring and restructuring processes during the 1960s and 1970s. Camilo Torres, a radical priest, joined the movement in 1965 but was killed in his first combat action and became a martyr. Unlike the FARC with its peasant roots, the ELN's origins were more in the urban middle class and were inspired by international examples, particularly Cuba. In 1966 a third, guerrilla group, inspired by Maoist theories and named The Popular Liberation Army (EPL), was established.

A second generation of revolutionary groups emerged in the 1970s, the most prominent of which was the April 19 Movement (M-19). The M-19 roamed the cities as a Robin-Hood group and became very popular for promoting reform and democratization. M-19 demanded amnesty, a cease-fire, and a national dialogue. In 1980, the M-19 takeover of the Dominican Republic embassy, where numerous ambassadors, including the United States ambassador to Colombia, were kidnapped and later released after fierce negotiations with Colombia's government, brought this organization international recognition, and they were thereafter considered a strong guerrilla group.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the governments faced an escalation of violence from both guerrilla and self-defense groups. This led the governments of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) and Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994) to call for peace processes to negotiate with the guerrillas. The peace process experience was partially successful with two of the four guerrilla groups, the M-19 and EPL, laying down their arms by the late 1980s. A few of the guerrilla leaders after the peace accords began a political career while some others were assimilated into society, but many other guerilla leaders returned to the mountains to join other guerrillas or self-defense organizations. However, the government was unable to gain passage in congress of the

reforms agreed upon in the negotiations. When the FARC guerrillas' attempted to participate simultaneously in the political arena and in the armed struggle, the extreme right violently suppressed the guerrillas' attempts. This hindered the attainment of a peace agreement between the government and the FARC.

Betancur's government negotiated a cease-fire with the M-19, FARC, and the EPL. The ELN and other small insurgent groups refused the offer. Amnesty was granted for political prisoners, including many guerrilla leaders. In March of 1984, the FARC signed a peace accord with the government's National Peace Commission at the FARC's jungle headquarters in La Uribe. The main body of the FARC fighters renounced the armed struggle, but the self-defense movement mobilized against the FARC's participation in politics and the cease-fire broke down. Betancur also began actions against drug traffickers, who at this time were just appearing as violent actors capable of threatening the state.

In 1988, the Unión Patriótica (UP), the political wing of the FARC, decried the assassination of its members and supporters. Right-wing death squads murdered the UP presidential candidate, Jaime Pardo Leal, and from 1984 to the early 1990s, over 3,000 UP members and 150 elected officials were assassinated.<sup>11</sup> Political representatives of the M-19 and the EPL were murdered as well. The FARC used the murders as an excuse to

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<sup>11</sup> Anonym; "An Overview of Recent Colombian History," Via Internet [http://www.igc.org/colhrnet/timeline.htm] accessed 01 February 2001.

resume its military campaign against the government's armed forces and to engage in the kidnapping of government officials.<sup>12</sup>

In 1988, Liberal President Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) initiated a new peace process.<sup>13</sup> The initiative required the guerrillas to dismantle their military apparatus, to hand in weapons, and to re-integrate themselves into society. The M-19, because of its political differences with other rebel organizations and the worldwide collapse of socialism, broke away from other guerrilla movements. It agreed to a cease-fire and formed a political party, the Democratic Alliance M-19. The M-19 political leader Carlos Pizarro ran for presidential elections and was murdered in the attempt. He was the second of three candidates killed during this presidential election, the other two being Jaime Pardo Leal and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, both from the U.P.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the EPL joined the M 19 in demobilizing and became part of Colombian's legal political life. In contrast, the FARC and the ELN continued to fight. The government's call in 1991 for all groups to participate in a Constituent Assembly to write a new Constitution opened the political opportunity for the leaders of the demobilized guerrilla groups. However, the FARC and ELN's military and economic strength, and the lack of a coherent government policy to convince them to join the democratic alternative led the FARC and the ELN to reject the government's offer.

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Bergquist: "Colombian Violence." in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary History in Historical Perspective*, edited by Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Penaranda, Gonzalo Sanchez, Wilmington, DE, Scholarly Resource Inc. 1992, pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Mauricio Garcia: "Veinte Años de Procesos de Paz en Colombia; búsqueda de lecciones para el presente." *L'Ordinaire Latino Americain*, N°179, Janvier-Mars 2.000, IPEALT/Université de Toulouse - Le Mirail, pp. 5-23.

FARC members focused on invigorating their domestic resources of income in order to compensate for the loss of external support that came with the end of the Cold War. They practiced extortion, bank robbery and kidnapping, while becoming increasingly involved in providing protection to illegal drug operations.<sup>14</sup> The ELN was also able to increase their domestic sources of income by taxing oil companies and later on by taxing narcotraffickers. This issue will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

## **B. THE ILLEGAL SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS**

The official origin of the self-defense groups dates from 1965 to 1968, when the Colombian government passed and then enacted legislation (Decree 3398 of 1968)<sup>15</sup> allowing the military to arm civilians in order to counter guerrilla warfare. This project of private armies was used as an important state tool to substitute for the lack of military presence in those isolated areas of the country where the state never reached. Unfortunately, in Colombia the state lost control of these groups. This lack of state control and the guerrillas' excesses led these self-defense groups to become criminal organizations.

In the early 1980s, some landowners and narcotraffickers copied the "private army" experiment, which the government had implemented in the 1960s. In 1981, the M-19 guerrilla group kidnapped and demanded ransom for Martha Nieves Ochoa, who was

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<sup>14</sup> Jane's Internal Affairs; "Colombia." Jane's Information. Group 1999. Via Internet [[http://fore.thomson.com/janes/psrecord.h...1e4a4&NS\\_template\\_dir=&NS\\_initial\\_frm=1](http://fore.thomson.com/janes/psrecord.h...1e4a4&NS_template_dir=&NS_initial_frm=1)] accessed 10 January 2001.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank: "*Violence in Colombia: Building a Sustainable Peace and Social Capital.*" Washington D.C. 2000, p. 36

a family member of the Ochoa drug trafficking organization. This criminal clan was one of the most powerful Medellin Cartels. A month later, with Ochoa still kidnapped, her family called a meeting in Medellin to discuss the situation. Because of this meeting, the cartel created a professional hit squad to target kidnappers. A few months later, another group like this emerged in Puerto Boyaca, an important transshipment point on the Magdalena River. Some important persons from this region, including representatives from the Texas Petroleum Company, Puerto Boyaca cattle ranchers, and politicians who were tired of the guerrillas' harassment, created an illegal armed organization to defend their interests and prevent guerrilla attacks and extortions. The two groups would soon join and evolve into an illegal anti-subversive organization called "*Muerte a Secuestradores*" (Death to Kidnappers).

In addition to narcotraffickers, the owners of emerald mines also sponsored paramilitary groups. The privatization of lucrative emerald mines in Boyaca, a department near Bogotá, brought the "Emerald Mafia" to the region to control the business. With the withdrawal of the state came private armed groups or militias that controlled the mines and worked for their respective emerald mafias.

Around the same time, another paramilitary organization, the peasant "*Autodefensas Unidas de Cordoba y Uraba*" (Self-Defense Units of Cordoba and Uraba or ACCU) emerged in northern Colombia. Two brothers named Fidel and Carlos Castaño formed, financed, and directed the ACCU. Castaño's father was kidnapped, tortured, and assassinated by the FARC in 1981, motivating their hatred of the guerrilla.

Vengeance was not the only motive behind the growth of the ACCU, however the ACCU other self-defense groups were formed by drug traffickers, who had invested their

profits in land. To avenge their father's death, the Castaño brothers established an armed group with an explicit anti-guerrilla agenda.

The self-defense forces became the best tool for rural owners to defend their property from the guerrilla. The total amount of land acquired by the drug traffickers is difficult to assess, but estimates range from 7.5 to 11 million acres—some 10% of Colombia's most fertile lands. During the late 1980s and early 1990, the cartels invested \$4 billion in the country. Of this total, 45% went into land, especially cattle ranches; 20% into commerce; 15% into construction; 10% into the service sector; and 10% into recreation businesses. Parallel to this land concentration in the hands of a few, the self-defense forces grew and fortified in number and weaponry.<sup>16</sup>

Self-defense organizations also grew and gained popular support in the 1980s in response to the peace negotiations of the Betancur and Barco administrations. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, self-defense groups undermined the government's intentions for reconciliation and sabotaged the peace process by assassinating guerrillas who tried to participate.

### **C. ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE IN THE 1990S**

The conflict escalated in the 1990s because the increasing involvement of the guerrillas and self-defense forces in the drug trade allowed them to fortify themselves militarily. In addition, misguided government policies, particularly under Samper, led to the increased strength of the guerrillas and their decision to launch a national offensive.

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<sup>16</sup> Camacho Alvaro: "Public and Private Dimensions of Urban Violence in Colombia." *In Violence in Colombia; the Contemporary Crisis in History Perspective*. A Scholarly Resources Inc, imprint Wilmington, Delaware, p. 231.

The self-defense groups responded to this military offensive by increasing their numbers, their weapons and their economic strength.

Cesar Gaviria's presidency (1990-1994) started with the drafting of a new constitution. Representatives from many sectors of society, including many M-19 and EPL ex-guerrilla members who had signed peace agreements with the previous government, participated in the revision of the constitution. Despite the positive beginning to the decade, the unintended consequences of the government's economic policies and of the counter-narcotic strategies of Colombia and her neighbors led to the strengthening of the remaining guerrilla groups during the 1990s.

One of the most important features of Gaviria's administration was the opening of markets. This favored the macro economy of the country, but negatively affected those who were not prepared to compete with a huge and developed foreign economy. The positive effect of the macroeconomic growth was felt in the urban areas, but the peasants and the small enterprises were victims of the international products that swamped the country and almost destroyed the micro economy of rural Colombia. This fact increased the gap between the rich and poor. The growth in poverty and unemployment in the countryside increased the number of peasants open to the option of growing coca for a living and created a pool of recruits for guerrilla and paramilitary groups.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, governments in Peru and Bolivia were carrying out an intensified campaign against coca growing within their borders. Their success led to the displacement of coca cultivation from those countries to Colombia. In the last half of

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<sup>17</sup> Colombian Human Rights Network: "An Overview of Recent Colombian History." Internet edition [<http://www.igc.apc.org/colhrnet/index.htm>] accessed 10 February 2001.

1990s, Peru's coca cultivation has dropped by 12 percent and Bolivia's by 21 percent, meanwhile Colombia's has grown by 67 percent according to the Colombian Minister of Defense.<sup>18</sup> Colombian peasants, with little choice and suffering from the government's neo-liberal economic policies, turned to coca production in record numbers.

Also, during the 1990s, the Colombian government was implementing counter drug policies. It created a military and police group called "*Bloque de Busqueda*" with the unique purpose of pursuing and capturing the main drug cartel leaders. This task ended with the capture of the Rodriguez and Ochoa brothers and death of Pablo Escobar and Rodriguez Gacha. This government success created an opening in the drug trafficking business and guerrillas and self-defense forces stepped in to fill the void. Gaviria's government ignored this danger and little or nothing was done to address the situation. Guerrilla, self-defense and narco-trafficking organizations grew. The drug activity gave the guerrilla and self-defense groups more economic support and a social base, constituted by those peasants who found in coca cultivation the possibility to subsist.

Government neglect of the guerrilla and paramilitary problem continued under Gaviria's successor, Ernesto Samper (1994-1998). Within a week of his election, Samper was accused of financing his presidential campaign with U.S. \$5 million from the drug cartels. This issue made Samper's government and the country itself targets of critics from everywhere. Samper denied the accusation of drug money in his campaign and tried

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<sup>18</sup> Claudia Rocio Vasquez: "*El Informe Clinton*," Editorial El Tiempo, Colombian newspaper Wednesday 30 August 2000. Internet edition [[http://www.eltiempo.com/30-08-2000/prip\\_5.html](http://www.eltiempo.com/30-08-2000/prip_5.html)] accessed 10 January 2001.



successfully to sustain his administration through all the presidential term. Although Samper was able to survive the four years of his term, his crisis-ridden administration was disastrous for Colombia, as guerrillas and paramilitaries grew in strength and the economy plunged into its first recession in seventy years.<sup>19</sup>

During Samper's presidential term, the guerrilla grew militarily. Their decision to launch a national offensive in 1997 was very much linked to the crisis of the Samper government, which they considered illegitimate and corrupt and therefore vulnerable to attack. The FARC showed its military strength in more than three different massive attacks, defeating the Colombian army, causing many casualties and taking many prisoners. The FARC rejected the possibility of holding dialogues with Samper's government, using the president's involvement in the drug money scandal as an excuse. On the other hand, the ELN tried to approach the government through German mediation, but unfortunate circumstances, including the death of its main leader, the priest Manuel Perez, aborted this effort.<sup>20</sup>

During Samper's term, illegal self-defense groups showed two independent lines of action. On the one hand, these armies-for-hire, which were associated with businessmen and cattle ranchers, infiltrated the legal security cooperatives (Convivir) established by the Samper government. On the other hand, Carlos Castaño and his

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<sup>19</sup> Colombian Human Rights Network: "An Overview of Recent Colombian History." Internet edition [<http://www.igc.apc.org/colhrnet/index.htm>] accessed 10 February 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Rangel Alfredo; "*Parasites and Depredators: Guerrillas and Insurrection Economy of Colombia.*" *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring 2000. 53, no 2 The Trustees of Columbia University in the city of New York, p. 585.

associates formed a national organization that tried to gain recognition for the self-defense groups as legitimate political actors.<sup>21</sup>

Samper's creation of "Convivir" was perceived by many as an excellent instrument against the guerrilla criminal action. This fact was proved in the Uraba region where the two FARC fronts that controlled the area were decimated and forced to withdraw. At the same time, this anti-subversive success brought many denunciations from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the international community, which demanded the government restrict the Convivir operations due to their abuses against the population. The Convivir excesses and the state's inability to control the groups led them to being declared illegal by the government in 1998. This shift in the self-defense policy obligated the state security forces to assume a very different attitude and posture toward the Convivir groups. What had been a successful ally of the government in the fight against subversion from this moment became the government's enemy.

The illegal self-defense organizations were also affected by the disappearance of Convivir. These legal groups had provided some political status for the self-defense groups. The integration of the self-defense organizations under one vast national structure, the AUC, was part of a plan by Carlos Castaño to gain political recognition for these groups. The AUC has contributed to violence by launching an offensive against the guerrillas and against those civilians whom they believe are guerrilla supporters or sympathizers.

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<sup>21</sup> Camacho Alvaro: "Public and Private Dimensions of Urban Violence in Colombia." *In Violence in Colombia; the Contemporary Crisis in History Perspective*. A Scholarly Resources Inc, imprint Wilmington, Delaware, pp. 70-80.

The Samper government's political discredit led the country to its worst political and economic moment in history. The United States de-certification of Colombia because of Samper's link to the cartels, the general climate of a crisis surrounding the Samper government, and the massive government spending carried out by Samper to stay in office all contributed to Colombia's economic depression in 1999-2000. Just as in prior governments, the countryside and its social problems were ignored, so the coca cultivation and the lack of the state's presence continued without any government concern. The corruption, the governmental chaos, the narco-trafficking and the escalating violence, and Samper's selfish determination to remain in power made this the most questionable government of Colombia's modern history. In sum, Samper's presidency was more concerned about political survival than solving the narco-trafficking and violence problems. Neither peace nor economic improvements were considered issues in the 1994-1998 period.

#### **D. THE CURRENT PEACE PROCESS**

In 1997 there appeared a new hope when more than 10 million Colombians—over a quarter of the entire country's population—demonstrated in the streets for peace and went to the polls and through a democratic referendum rejected violence and criminality. This moment could be considered the awakening of Colombian civil society, which until that time had ignored or rejected participation in any massive movement against violence. In addition, Andres Pastrana's victory in the 1998 presidential elections demonstrated the people's desire for a peaceful resolution to the conflict at the time. Although all the leading candidates campaigned on a peace platform, Pastrana's meeting with the FARC leader Manuel Marulanda before the second round of the presidential

elections led people to believe that Pastrana was the candidate most capable of actually achieving peace. The Colombians' hope for peace made Pastrana triumphant in the presidential elections.

As soon as Pastrana reached the presidency of Colombia in 1998, he started to discuss the installation of a negotiation table with the FARC guerrilla. Pastrana's first move as a president was to cede an area of 42,000 square kilometers (the size of Switzerland) to the FARC. On January 7, 1999, president Pastrana declared this area of rain forest in southern Colombia a "demilitarized zone" (DMZ) in an attempt to bring the FARC to the peace table.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile the ELN pressured the government with terrorist attacks against the population and the country's economic infrastructure in an attempt to gain a similar concession. During the first two years of the Pastrana government, the ELN carried out massive kidnappings of middle and upper class people. In April 1999, the ELN hijacked a domestic Avianca airline flying between Bucaramanga and Bogotá; thirty-five people were kidnapped for ransom. One-month later one hundred and eight people were kidnapped for ransom at La Maria church in Cali. In the year 2000, they repeated this massive action and kidnapped more than fifty people who were having lunch on Sunday in a tourist area close to Cali.

The ELN's terrorism, the president's desire for peace, and the public's support for the peace project have led to talks about a DMZ for the ELN. Pastrana's government

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<sup>22</sup> Gabriel Marcella and Donald Schulz; *Colombia's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads*. U.S. Army War College March 5, 1999, p. 35.

agreed to cede a portion of land in northern Colombian after several meetings in the country and abroad (Venezuela, Switzerland and Cuba). However, this territory of about 5,000 square kilometers has not been ceded yet due to opposition from the peasants and the self-defense groups in the region.<sup>23</sup>

Parallel to this peace government strategy, Pastrana developed a plan to fight coca production in order to deprive guerrillas and self-defense groups of their funding from the drug trade and to improve relations with the U.S. The United States began providing aid to Colombia in order to finance the war against drug production. The U.S. in 1998 granted Colombia \$289 million in counter-narcotic funds, making Colombia the third-largest recipient of U.S. aid right behind Israel and Egypt. In 2000, the U.S. Congress authorized an aid packet of \$1.3 billion for three years to combat narco-trafficking.

Despite the government's good intentions to reach peace and to reduce narco-trafficking, the results have not been positive. The coca cultivation and the drug business, which are the most dangerous factors feeding the conflict, continue growing. In 1999, Colombia was the first cocaine producer in Latin America with 520 tons, followed by Peru with 175 and Bolivia with 70.<sup>24</sup> Violence has increased as the guerrillas, intent on gaining strength at the negotiation table, continue with their criminal activities. Moreover, the self-defense phenomenon has grown in a geometric way.

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<sup>23</sup> CNN: "War Without End." CNN Special Program in Colombia. CNN Internet Homepage available by Internet [<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/Colombia.noframes/story/essays/clark/>] accessed 10 January 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Report: "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 1999." Department of State Washington D.C. March 2000.

In spite of Pastrana's efforts and willingness for peace, the peace negotiations have made little progress. As a result of this failure in the peace negotiations, the human rights violations in the country have increased. The number of murders and kidnappings during his presidency has increased dramatically. Parallel to the rise in guerrilla activities, the self-defense groups' atrocities have also worsened the country's situation. Almost 90% of the human rights violations in Colombia are directly related to the internal conflict. In the last six years, kidnappings have increased by 200%, with guerrilla groups responsible for 88% of the total. During the last five years, 3,903 people died because of the political conflict.<sup>25</sup> In 1995 massacres (defined as the killing of four or more persons at a time) numbered 128, and during 1999, this number was 551. The bloodcurdling records from the year 2000, guerrilla as well as self-defense groups committed 1,253 massacres.<sup>26</sup> In sum, despite the intention of peace negotiation, violence has increased under Pastrana.

How can this continuing violence and lack of progress in the peace process be explained? What are the prospects for peace in the near future? This study seeks to answer these questions by examining the interests and strategies of all the key actors involved in the conflict. The next chapter examines the objectives and strategies of the illegal armed actors involved in Colombia's conflict and their impact on the peace

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<sup>25</sup>Editorial; "No es un Plan Guerrerista." *Revista Semana* June. 2000 Internet Edition [<http://www.semana.com/SearchDir2/931/actualidad/zzzrj5qef5c.asp>] accessed 10 January 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Report: *Security Forces and Human Rights in Colombia*. Republic of Colombia Ministry of National Defense, March 2000.

process. Clearly, the perpetuation or the resolution of the conflict resides primarily with these illegal armed actors.

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### III. ILLEGAL ARMED ACTORS

The FARC, ELN and AUC are the main illegal armed actors inciting the violent conflict in Colombia. The conflict has produced tremendous damage to the Colombian political, social and economic structure. The human rights abuses committed by the illegal armed actors are escalating rampantly without cessation. Colombia's guerrillas and self-defense groups, despite the violence and destruction they have brought to the nation, are obstinate in continuing with this pointless war. According to Nazih Richani and Gabriel Marcella, experts in the Colombian internal conflict, the economic and military strength of the guerrillas and self-defense groups; coupled with the state's weakness, encourages a continuation of what the scholars label the "war system."<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to what they profess, the FARC, ELN and AUC have their own selfish political and economic objectives in mind and care little for the population. Particularly in the FARC and AUC cases, the continual pursuit of their selfish objectives reveals they have little real interest in peace. In the ELN case, its growing military and economic weakness is making it ready for peace. The ELN has suffered great losses at the hands of the state security forces, the FARC, and the AUC. All of this has forced the ELN to the stage of negotiations.

This chapter will examine the objectives and strategies of the three most violent and significant illegal armed actors in Colombia's internal conflict to determine whether

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<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Marcella and Donald Schulz, *Colombia's Three Wars: U.S Strategy at the Crossroads*, (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1999), 12, 13 and Richani Nazih; "The Political Economy of Violence: The War System in Colombia" *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Summer 1996, pp. 37-82.

they seek peace or continued violence. It will also evaluate the impact of their behavior on the conflict and the prospects for peace.

## **A. REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC)**

### **1. Objectives**

The FARC's primary goal is to secure national power using all the political and military means available. For this purpose, they have been using military and political expansion in rural areas, which the state has abandoned. Their objective is to gain control of territory as a key to controlling the population. To fulfill these objectives, the FARC uses the Clausewitzian principle: "War is the continuation of politics by other means." FARC's political goals have been undermined by the state security forces' offensive, by the self-defense groups' campaigns, and by their own lack of a coherent political strategy.<sup>28</sup>

The FARC claims that their revolutionary confrontation is a legitimate response against the state to defend the rights of the poor. Among other issues, the FARC denounces the unequal distribution of land and the lack of political opportunities for minorities, and advocates tolerance for new political parties other than the Conservative and the Liberal elite. Perhaps their most legitimate argument revolves around the unequal distribution of wealth.

In short, these are the main factors that explain FARC's armed participation in Colombia's political arena. The following section shows how the FARC's activities have affected the likelihood of reaching its objectives.

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<sup>28</sup> Pizarro, Eduardo: "Revolutionary Guerrilla Group in Colombia." *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Prospective. A Scholarly Resources Inc.* Imprint Wilmington, Delaware 1992, pp. 169-193.

## 2. Strategies

FARC's inability to take over and control the country has led them to their current strategy, which is to maintain control over those regions abandoned by the state. This has allowed the FARC to maintain and increase its political and military supremacy in the Colombian countryside. During the last decade, the FARC guerrillas have exercised significant influence over 50 percent of the 1,071 Colombia's municipalities.<sup>29</sup>

One of their strategies is a recruiting combatant from the poor to fight the state security forces. This strategy has often been applied against the will of these people. The FARC claims that it is fighting to bring social justice to the poor, but normally the impoverished are its primary victims. Recently members of the FARC have started attacking the middle class, which is considered by some experts in Colombian as a monumental mistake because the middle class could play a decisive role in pushing for peace negotiation and, to some extent, in supporting the FARC politically.<sup>30</sup>

FARC's second strategy is linked to the finances of its revolutionary organization. The FARC has two primary sources of income: one is in the illegal sector, such as trafficking in drugs, and the second is in the legal foreign and domestic economy sector. According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, the FARC's illegal businesses, which are the main source of financing, generate U.S. \$700 million annually.<sup>31</sup> Among other crimes

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ospina, William; "Negociar... es el reto" Editorial *El Tiempo*, Internet edition January 30, 2001 [[http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/30-01-2001/prip\\_0.html](http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/30-01-2001/prip_0.html)] accessed 30 January 2001.

<sup>31</sup> CNN; "War without End." CNN Homepage special report. Via Internet [<http://www.cnn.com/special/2000/Colombia.noframes/story/essays/clark/>] accessed 10 January 2001.

and revenues, the FARC earned an estimated \$360 million through drug trafficking. In addition, kidnapping accounts for eight percent of its revenues and extortion accounts for 36 percent of its total income.<sup>32</sup> These are the most common crimes that sustain the guerrilla movement.

The FARC has ties and links to many sectors of Colombia's economy and also abroad. It is estimated that FARC's expenses are only 16 percent of its income, a fact that allows them to invest almost 84 percent of their revenues in legitimate ways. Some of these investments are in communications, transportation, land, cattle and the textile industry. One example is the investment of \$35 million in 1999 in *Celumovile*, one of the largest cellular phone companies in Colombia.<sup>33</sup> Sadly, through such legal and profitable enterprises, FARC also supported their violent illegal activities.

The FARC is involved with several international crime organizations. Recently, the Colombian Intelligence Service has demonstrated ties between this organization and the Russian mob, with which they exchange arms for drugs. One kilogram of cocaine in Colombia costs U.S \$1,600 and the same kilogram shipped to Russia has an estimated value of \$90,000. This single example shows the enormous profits of such illegal ventures. Much of this money is earmarked for weapons, especially AK47 rifles, which could cost between \$100 and \$200 dollars each. <sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Rangel, Alfredo; "*Parasites and Depredators: Guerrillas and Insurrection Economy of Colombia.*" *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring 2000. 53, no 2 The Trustees of Columbia University in the city of New York, p. 585.

<sup>33</sup> See Rangel, p. 586.

<sup>34</sup> Colombian Report Available at [<http://www.colombiareport.org/anchor71668>] accessed on 14 January 2001.

The increased revenue enabled the FARC to improve its military capability vastly by modernizing its weaponry and improving the guerrilla fighter's standard of living. In addition to all these profits, the FARC has been able to offer social and economic services "in the areas of credit, education, health, justice, registry, public works, and ecological and cultural programs," to benefit the citizens who live in the places where the FARC executes control.<sup>35</sup>

The state's inability to provide the basic needs for its citizens or to curtail drug-trafficking, and the guerrillas' economic strength and its ability to intimidate have made this organization a criminal monster capable of destabilizing Colombia's democracy.

### **3. Impact**

Interestingly, from the international perspective, the FARC's movement often casts a positive impression. Many people see the FARC's battle against the weakened state as a natural, and legitimate reaction of the oppressed population against the elites that have dominated the country for the last five decades. Some European and Latin American countries as well as some academic and social sectors in the U.S view the FARC as warriors pursuing a romantic and socialist ideology. The FARC's request for land reform, political opportunity for the minorities, and its protest against inequality among Colombians has the respect of many people in the international arena. This reaction has given the FARC's revolutionary ideology a tacit foreign and domestic political legitimacy.

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<sup>35</sup> Larry, Rohter, "Ever Present Violence Creates a Nation of Fear," *The New York Times*, 21 April 2000, Internet edition, [<http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/Americas/042100colombia-drugs.4.html>] accessed 03 January 2001.

The indubitable support for the FARC by some European nations, Venezuela, and Cuba, has allowed the FARC to assume a hardline posture when they negotiate with the government. This tacit recognition has also allowed FARC's participation in many forums in Europe and America in which they have espoused their ideas and justified their cause. Recently in 2000, representatives from the Colombian government accompanied some of the FARC leaders to several countries in Europe where they denounced the Colombian government. This situation demonstrates FARC's clout as a political actor.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, the Colombian population truly believes that the FARC guerrillas and the high unemployment are the biggest problems that the country faces today. The FARC commander in a recent Gallup poll received a disapproval rating of 84% while the organization itself received a disapproval rating of 90%. The same poll rated the Catholic Church as the most popular organization; the Colombian military forces and the police were in second place.<sup>37</sup> In spite of this lack of acceptance, FARC still has the support from those peasants who survive on coca cultivation. Those Colombians who are isolated from the government have found the guerrillas the only group concerned about their situation and poverty.<sup>38</sup>

Some of FARC's activities reveal that they are highly organized politically. For example the FARC has ambassadors stationed in a number of foreign countries, like

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<sup>36</sup> Editorial; "El Plan Colombia Abarca la Atencion en Europa y Estados Unidos." *Revista Semana* Bogotá, Colombia February 22, 2000 Vía Internet [<http://semana.terra.com.co/SearchDir2/929/noticiasdeldia/zzz3jyhhz4c.asp>] accessed 20 January 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Caracol Colombia website; "Jefe de las Farc el mas Impopular, según sondeo de Industriales." Vía Internet [<http://www.caracol.com.co/titular.asp?ID=39943>] Accessed 10 January 2001.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Mexico and Brazil. On the other hand, they fail to achieve political support from the population or the media. For example, after two years of negotiations with the media there is not one positive sign to indicate that they have curried any additional political favor through media influence. To the contrary, several of FARC's threats against some journalists have seriously hurt them.<sup>39</sup>

Another fact seriously weakening the FARC's political advantages and its popularity with the public is the contradiction between their claim that they are fighting for the rights of the poor and oppressed, and their launching the cruelest terrorist attacks against the poor. More often than not, the victims of FARC's attacks are poor people in isolated municipalities.<sup>40</sup>

#### **4. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future**

The FARC during the last decade, especially during Pastrana's presidential term, has reached their most important level of political recognition by being granted a place at the negotiating table. This recognition, as well as the international support that is accompanying the peace process, is the most important and valuable political card that the FARC's has today. Never before has the FARC negotiating position been stronger. If the FARC is interested in a peace process and in converting itself into a legitimate political alternative for the country, this is the best moment to move in that direction. To do this, the FARC must end the war in the mountains. Then it must use their existing

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<sup>39</sup> Rangel, Alfredo, "*Las Fuerzas Militares y el Proceso de Paz en Colombia*" The Latin American Program. Working Paper Series 247. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523, p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Rangel Alfredo, "*Las Fuerzas Militares y el Proceso de Paz en Colombia*" The Latin American Program. Working Paper Series 247. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523, p. 41.

political party, the *Bolivariano Movement*, and demand a security guarantee from the government to act as a legitimate third political party. In doing so, they would avoid being engaged in another dirty war with the extreme right. Both the FARC and the government must compromise and resolve the conflict. Of course, for this concept to be accepted as valid, the guerrillas must abandon their attempts to play the dual roles of political advocates and violent revolutionaries. In any case, the FARC's illegal and legal businesses enabled the guerrillas to strengthen themselves militarily and socially. On the military side, the guerrilla invested 16% of their money to modernize their weapons, in troop salaries, and in raising the operatives' standards of living. Socially, guerrilla authority consolidated and expanded without interruption in regions which the government either abandoned or ignored. To a large degree, they have supplanted the state's authority in these regions. All in all, the FARC's economic and military strength allowed them to reach recognition and limited power in some Colombia's regions. This economic strength, its local political power, and military capabilities seem to be reason enough for FARC to perpetuate the conflict.

## **B. NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN)**

### **1. Objectives**

The ELN's initial revolutionary aim was to take regional political power by the use of force. However, the ELN has not been able to get past the simple survival phase. Its second stage objective, as planned from the beginning, was to create an equilibrium with the military to control the areas where they operate. Its inability to defeat the government and to change the political system has led them to give up their primary goal, and now the ELN is trying to survive at a regional and local level. Mainly the ELN has



opted for local power in those rich areas that show economic advantages and where they can produce a political impact with their actions.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. Strategies

The ELN's economic strategy seems to be dual: the first is directed to produce revenues and finance the war, and the second, to hit and destroy the state's macro economic apparatus. The profits coming from the first one produce its income and feed the war. The sources of profits can be divided in two periods; one, before its involvement in drugs and the other when the ELN entered the drug business. Before the ELN's involvement in drug trafficking, they financed their revolutionary activity with the money received as a product of extorting of the multinational oil companies. The ELN gets sixty percent of its total income from the oil companies that operate in the north of Colombia. Kidnapping and cattle theft represent 28 and 4 percent respectively.<sup>42</sup> The support that the ELN has received from Europe has decreased drastically since the early 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

The ELN was once in the drug business of poppy cultivation on the borders of Colombia and Venezuela. With their profits, the ELN, like the FARC, invested in legitimate Colombian businesses. Both organizations capitalized on coal and charcoal mining. This represented an annual \$20 million income for each organization. They have

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<sup>41</sup> Pardo, Rafael; *De Primera Mano, Colombia 1986-1994; Entre conflictos y esperanzas*, Bogotá; Grupo Editorial Norma, 1996, p. 497.

<sup>42</sup> Rangel, Alfredo; *Parasites and Depredators, Guerrillas and Insurrection Economy of Colombia*. Journal of International Affairs, Spring 2000. 53, no 2 The Trustees of Columbia University in the city of New York, p. 584

<sup>43</sup> Garcia Pena Daniel; *The National Liberation Army (ELN) Creates a Different Peace Process*. NACLA Report of the Americas; New York; Sep/Oct 2000. Vía Internet <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?TS=979682103&Did=000000062812361&Mtd=1&Fmt=4&...1/16/01> accessed 05 February 2001.

holdings in economic sectors as varied as hotels, cooperatives, workshops, drugstores, taxis, buses, ferries, and others. The transportation business provided them not only with income but also with the intelligence information that alerted them to state security movements and to the locations of designated targets.<sup>44</sup>

The second ELN strategy is aimed at the oil industry, the national electric system and the ecosystem of the country. The terrorist attacks against the oil infrastructure between 1986 and November 2000 rose to 1,111, with more than 700 terrorist attacks launched against the "Cano Limon-Coveñas" pipeline. This terrorist attacks spilled 2.3 million barrels of oil. The cost of the clean up was US \$40 million. This amount of money represents almost fifty percent of the current annual oil production.

The ELN has also created another strategy called the "war tax." This money is collected from multilateral corporations, large landowners, and cattle ranchers. These "taxes" added to the money earned in the legal and illegal market have made Colombia's guerrillas one of the most profitable enterprises in the country, and one of the most independent guerrillas worldwide. In spite of this economic success, during the last three years, the ELN has suffered military defeats mostly by the AUC. These losses have diminished their economic power and brought the ELN to the brink of a crisis.

### **3. Impact**

The ELN's crimes harm all levels of the public and the general economy of the country in numerous ways, and this in turn undermines the ELN's claims of fighting for the public's interests. For example, the massive kidnappings perpetrated by the ELN in

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<sup>44</sup> Richani, Nazih; *The Political Economy of Violence: The War System in Colombia*. Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs; Beverly Hills; Summer 1997, pp. 3-4. Available Internet [proquest database]

1999 and 2000 increased the public's concern about the conflict and impelled the civil society to demand peace. Likewise, such crimes devastated the ELN's political support both within the country and abroad, from where the ELN received its largest support. In addition, Colombia has lost more than \$130 million dollars owing to oil wasted and spilled in attacks on the oil industry's infrastructure. The ecological damage caused by this oil and the costs of the environmental decontamination are estimated to be ten times higher than the actual cost of the oil itself. According to the Colombian Minister of Mines and Energy, Carlos Caballero Argaez, the amount of oil spilled in Colombia is eight times greater than the oil spilled in the worst environmental oil disaster in history, the Exxon-Valdes.<sup>45</sup> These environmental issues are only some of the ELN crimes that have contributed to the weakening of the Colombian economy, and in turn to the deteriorating reputation of the ELN. Even though such environmental crimes do not generate revenue for the ELN, such crimes deserve special attention here because of their economic and environmental consequences, and because the ELN loses credibility in the public's eye when they harm the environment.

#### **4. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future**

The ELN's declining economic situation and popular support (when compared to the FARC and AUC) have led them to the threshold of negotiating for peace. The ELN recognizes that now is a favorable moment because:

- The ELN's political ideologies have gained some foreign recognition and sympathy;

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<sup>45</sup> Uricoechea, Fernando; " Guerrillas Ludditas" *El Tiempo*, January 12, 2001, Internet edition [[http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/12-01-2001/judi\\_2.html](http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/12-01-2001/judi_2.html)] accessed 05 February 2001.

- Its terrorist attacks against the population and the oil and electrical industry have intimidated and outraged many people;
- Its actions in central and highly populated zones have turned the public against them;
- Pastrana is willing to achieve peace with the guerrillas at whatever price.<sup>46</sup>

The ELN's military deterioration and its political mistakes, coupled with pressure from the self-defense forces, have left this organization in a very weakened position. For the ELN to remain politically alive it should and must sincerely enter the peace process. Through the peace negotiations, the ELN could still influence some political and economic changes and receive a general amnesty. In this sense, one could say that the ELN guerilla has never been more ready for peace.

## **C. UNITED SELF-DEFENSE OF COLOMBIA (AUC)**

### **1. Objectives**

The groups' that belong to the AUC were born as a desperate response to criminal guerrilla attacks against private businesses and landowners. Initially, the intentions of the self-defense groups were never to supplant the democratic political system or to take political or social power. This intention, however, changed rapidly as their military and economic apparatus grew in tandem with the guerrillas' strength, and then, amazingly, outpaced them. Presently, the AUC groups covet and seek political recognition and power.

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<sup>46</sup> Larry, Rohter; *"Containing Colombia's Troubles."* *The New York Times*, January 15, 2001 [proquest database] accessed 01 February 2001.

The AUC's primary objective is to defend the private economic interests of civil society from the guerrillas. Yet more ambitious political and economic interests have surfaced and are strongly supported by some Colombians in both the upper and in the middle class. Presently, the AUC, in an attempt to justify its cause, has argued that it supplants the national government as a provider of law and order. However, through the years, it has only revealed its inability to protect lives or property.

Originally, the AUC's objective was never to overthrow or even to confront the state but merely to fill a void that the state's weaknesses created. However, a new AUC objective surprised the world in the 1990's when they assumed a posture similar to the guerrillas' and demonstrated an interest in gaining political recognition. This shift in philosophy and intentions was due to a change in its composition. Although seemingly paradoxical, the self-defense organizations began absorbing combatants and political leaders from the EPL (Popular Army of Liberation)<sup>47</sup> and from some other leftist organizations. Now with this leftist influence among their ranks along with their military, social, and economic growth, they are seeking political legitimacy and recognition.

## **2. Strategies**

The self-defense groups of Colombia have three means of securing revenues for their cause. They tax small businesses and multinational corporations whose operations

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<sup>47</sup> The EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación) is a guerrilla group operating in Colombia since the beginning of the 1960s. They signed peace agreements in the late 1980s, during Virgilio Barco's presidency. After this process, the EPL (Esperanza Paz y Libertad) appeared as a political actor, but some decedents joined other violent groups like the AUC and some others are still fighting today as EPL guerrillas, but with little military and political strength.

fall within their territorial control. They collect contributions from large landowners, cattle ranchers and businessmen, who support their efforts and ideals. In addition, like as the FARC and ELN, they traffic in illegal drugs. This fact was proved when in 1999 the government discovered one of the country's largest cocaine-processing complexes near Puerto Boyaca, a key self-defense stronghold. According to the Colombian police, this field was managed by the self-defenses groups. The facility extended over almost four square miles and could produce eight tons of cocaine per month. According to police estimates, the plant cost about \$5 million to build and, before it was destroyed, it employed more than 100 workers. <sup>48</sup>

Clearly, the AUC is another organization involved in processing, packaging and marketing cocaine and other drugs. The AUC controls the strategic corridor from the cocaine-producing region of Santander to Panama, allowing drugs and contraband to cross the Panamanian border easily. They have opposed the ELN in this important region for years and all the facts indicate that the ELN is losing.

Such drug trafficking is thought to be only the tip of an iceberg. There is evidence that many other self-defense groups run similar drug manufacturing complexes. In fact, Carlos Castaño revealed on television in February 2000 that cocaine profits from Catatumbo in North Santander alone financed almost 80% of the expenses to support his private army. The AUC's economic strength and its sweeping territorial influence were gained at the expense of the ELN.

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<sup>48</sup> William, M LeoGrande; Kenneth E Sharpe; "Two Wars or One? Drugs, Guerrillas and Colombia's New Violence." *World Policy Journal*; New York; Fall 2000 [Proquest database] accessed 05 February 2001.

Evidently, the self-defense groups, as well as the guerrillas (FARC and ELN) are involved in the drug industry. Starting with coca cultivation, then its production, and finally its processing and shipping, all the violent actors mentioned above profit from this business. What distinguish one organization from the others in the drug business are merely the extent of the land area they influence and the size of the organization itself.

### **3. Impact**

These self-defense forces are recognized as powerful actors in the Colombian conflict. Through intimidation and violent crimes, particularly during the Samper presidency, these groups have forced the international community, including the U. S. to demand an end to the violence. Under this pressure, the Colombian Minister of Defense launched a massive public campaign with a \$5 million dollar reward for the apprehension of the leaders of these groups in January 1997.<sup>49</sup> Immediately more than 75 livestock ranchers from Cordoba sent a letter to the Minister of Defense criticizing the government's decision and announcing their support for the self-defense cause.<sup>50</sup> In one of the first television appearances as the AUC leader, Carlos Castaño expressed no real political intention, but justified the existence of the self-defense groups as necessary to combat the guerrillas' violence against citizens. He considered himself and the AUC legitimate actors due to the state's inability to defend the Colombian citizens and their

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<sup>49</sup> Romero, Mauricio; *"El Proceso de Paz en Colombia y la Política Exterior de los Estados Unidos. Autonomía Militar, Paramilitares y Autodefensas en Colombia: Es Posible una Salida Democrática al Conflicto Armado?"* Documento de Trabajo No.247 The Latin American Program, Working Paper Series, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523 June, 2000. P.73.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-76.

property. He said, "The self defense cause is the offspring of the guerrillas. As soon as the guerrillas disappear, we will have no reason to exist."<sup>51</sup>

Today the level of involvement of the self-defense groups in the conflict and the magnitude of violence make Castaño's statement very improbable. Unwilling to relinquish any power, the AUC, through force and intimidation, will continue targeting and oppressing those citizens whom they call "parasubversivos" ("guerrilla sympathizers") to acquire political status, and they will continue to use the existence of the guerrillas to justify their own existence.

The military strength and popular support that the self-defense forces possess today is ironically legitimizing and increasing their political possibilities. Some experts believe that if the government is negotiating with the ELN and FARC guerrillas, the self-defense groups also deserve to be included. Six to eight thousand strongly armed men, with vast economic strength and public support cannot be ignored. In two public interviews on Colombian television in 2000, Carlos Castaño declared his leadership of the self-defense forces and pledged his commitment to and his respect for, the peace process between the government and the guerrillas. He further said he was prepared to negotiate with the government as soon as it summoned him.

#### **4. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future**

The reality is that the self-defense militias in Colombia are growing faster than the FARC and much faster than the ELN, which in fact is decreasing. Clearly, such growth could only result from enormous economic resources. The illegal drugs generate

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<sup>51</sup> This was a comment made by Carlos Castaño in a radio interview on Caracol Radio Colombia, January 1995.



an estimated 70 percent of the AUC's income. These profits have allowed them to increase their numbers, their weapons and their military capability. The Minister of Defense, Fernando Ramirez, recently in an interview, expressed his concern with the innumerable critics who alleged that the national military forces have ties with the self-defense organizations. The minister, defending the state military institution, denounced the "hypocrites" within the civil society who economically support (estimated to be 30 percent of the citizens) the self-defense forces, but then cynically criticize the armed forces for failing to annihilate these self-defense forces. He argued that while the national military forces are engaged in a deadly battle against all the illegal violent actors that an important sector of civil society was fueling and escalating the conflict by economically supporting the self-defense groups.<sup>52</sup>

The guerrillas use the concept "the terrorism of state" to argue that self-defense groups have become an extension of the national military. The guerrillas have used this accusation as an excuse for stalling the peace process by refusing to negotiate until the government makes a serious attempt to defeat the AUC.

The guerrillas must reevaluate this concept for two reasons. First, the accusation is false, for the military has no formal connection to the AUC, and secondly, the government cannot suddenly stop the criminal actions of the AUC. Given the weakened condition of the state, it is unreasonable for the FARC to expect that the state can stop AUC's activities when it cannot even stop the guerrillas' growth. It seems very improbable that an eventual peace accord with the FARC and the ELN guerrillas will

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<sup>52</sup>Editorial: "Gremios financiarían incremento del pie de fuerza." *El Tiempo*. November 11, 2000  
Vía Internet [http://www.terra.com.co/actualidad/nacional/16-11-2000/nota8837.html] accessed 10  
December 2000.

mean the AUC will end their military struggle and surrender their arms. Yet, it is also true that the criminal brutality used by the self-defense groups against the guerrillas and their sympathizers gives the government little reason to recognize the AUC groups as legitimate political actors. Ironically, the AUC's best chance of achieving political recognition rests upon the fact that the guerrillas' barbaric methods make the AUC almost acceptable in comparison.<sup>53</sup>

The state's inability to defeat the AUC and the organization's economic strength make the AUC an important violent actor, which the government must take seriously. If the guerrillas and the Colombian government are seriously interested in resolving the conflict and creating a peaceful environment for Colombian democracy in which the state provides its citizens basic rights, the self-defense organizations cannot be ignored until the last moment. Incidentally, one must remember that the crimes of the self-defense groups cannot be considered political crimes, for they are not rebelling against the state, but against society. Therefore, these are common crimes and should not be excused or forgiven through a process of amnesty. This legal impediment and the FARC's refusal to allow the government to consider such as amnesty are two of the greatest obstacles in summoning the AUC to a peace process.

## **D. CONCLUSIONS**

### **1. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia**

After analyzing the FARC's objectives and strategies, it is clear that the FARC is not seriously interested in peace negotiations. The limited local power to oppose them,

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<sup>53</sup> Antonio, Caballero: "Las Caras de Castaño," Revista Semana March 3, 2000 Internet Edition [<http://semana.terra.com.co/SearchDir2/931/actualidad/zzzrf36qe5c.asp>]

their military strength, and almost forty years of struggle against the state have become the FARC's livelihood and lifestyle. Their "war" mentality is an engrained feature of their character and their existence. Likewise, the FARC's economic strength achieved through trafficking illegal drugs has perpetuated the conflict. This insane status quo can only be altered by using force to weaken the FARC militarily and by curtailing their drug trafficking, which would reduce their financial resources.

## **2. National Liberation Army**

The ELN guerrilla organization has revealed an interest in peace, so now the government must overcome the impasses that have impeded the installation of a national peace convention. With the ELN militarily and economically weakened by the self-defense forces, the state security forces, and pressure from FARC, this guerrilla organization is now primed for peace. The ELN's remnant terrorist capability and its national and international political recognition and support have contributed to the interest of the Colombian government in negotiating.

## **3. United Self-Defense of Colombia**

The AUC is growing dangerously militarily and economically. This fact encourages the organization to escalate the conflict, to engage in violence and eschew peace. However, if the FARC guerrillas increase in number and in violent attacks, one can be sure that the AUC will also increase. The AUC will continue to react with revengeful violence until the guerrillas vanish, or until the state finds a legal and political means of incorporating them into the peace negotiations. Unquestioningly, the self-defense forces would prefer to remain illegal armed actors rather than surrender their arms and accept legal punishment for their crimes.

Chapter IV will study the objectives and strategies that the state security forces must employ in order to confront the internal conflict. This chapter also explores whether they are contributing to peace or if they are perpetuating the violence.

## **IV. LEGAL ARMED ACTORS**

The state security forces, or legally armed actors, play a crucial role in shaping Colombian present and future security environment. Today, these legally armed actors are enduring one of the most difficult moments in Colombian history. This conflict has engaged them in a very complex role for which they have had to establish new objectives in order to achieve Colombian peace. This chapter examines the objectives, strategies, impacts and the prospects of these actors to achieve peace or to prolong the Colombian conflict.

### **A. COLOMBIA'S STATE SECURITY FORCES**

#### **1. Objectives**

As established in the Colombian constitution, the main objective of the state security forces is preserving the sovereignty of the country from external and internal threats. Secondly, as a result of the internal conflict, these security forces are assigned the duty of defending the existing political system now under siege by the illegal armed forces. Third, the security forces must defend the lives and property of Colombia's citizens who have been victims of a forty-year civil conflict.

Today the principal objective of the national security forces is to solve the armed conflict peacefully. Achieving such a peace would end the suffering of the Colombian population. This situation mandates two primary tasks for the state security forces. First, the military has to obey the civil authorities empowered by the democratic institutions and to seek a political and peaceful solution to the armed conflict. Their second

responsibility mandates that the military forces must guarantee the citizens' safety and protect the national political, social and economic institutions.

To achieve these ends, the state security forces are in the process of modernizing their military capabilities. For this purpose, the state security forces have received economic support from the Colombian government and from the United States. This economic support helps to weaken the illegally armed actors by reducing their criminal capabilities. At the same time, reducing the violence perpetrated by these illegal groups helps the nation to recover economically, which in turn strengthens the national military and police institutions.

## **2. Strategies**

Presently, the military forces have assumed a more active role in the present peace process than previously. This active role is one of their most important strategies. In particular, the military is concerned with three issues: first, to oversee the demilitarized zone ceded to the guerrillas; second, to defend the population against the illegally armed actors in the rest of the country; and third, to assume an active role in the peace negotiations. For the first time in Colombian history, a primary concern on the national agenda is the task of military reform.

This reform was mandatory in order to battle the increasing strength of the FARC guerillas and the AUC. The military had no choice but to modernize and adapt to the unique task of confronting the growing hazard of the guerrillas and the self-defense militias' attacks. Unfortunately, the FARC has been increasing its number of men and

weapons, making the current scenario quite different from ten years ago. Economic backing has also renewed their morale and financed their military.

Simultaneously, the military reforms were also necessary because the AUC was targeting the central bases of the guerrillas' operations. Interestingly, the last stalemate in the peace negotiation ensued when the FARC accused the self-defense groups of being an "appendix " of the state. According to the guerrillas' perspective, the self-defense groups are a mechanism of the military forces to engage the guerrillas in a dirty war. Whether such accusations are true or false, the truth is that the combined forces of the AUC and the FARC are weakening the nation as a whole, and the military's previous strategies were inadequate. In addition, such accusations cast aspersions on the military's image. For these reasons, reform was essential.<sup>54</sup>

Modernizing the national military forces will also help to correct some critical deficiencies in military tactics and operations. The most important of these problems lies in mobility, intelligence, communication and training. Other weaknesses exist in justice and recruitment, but these have already improved with the modernization effort of the present presidential administration (1998-2002). For example, the military forces are now more capable of bringing to justice those who violate the law. They also now transfer cases of violations of human rights abuses to the civil justice system.

In the recruitment, process the army has made tremendous improvements. For instance, in December of 2000, the first group of 10,000 professional soldiers (of a

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<sup>54</sup> Pombo, Roberto "Cual fuego?" *Revista Cambio*. November 21, 2000 vía Internet [http://www.cambio.com.co/web/interior.php?idp=1&ids=13&ida=20] accessed 10 December 2000

projected 40,000) graduated from the recently created school for professional soldiers. This modernization strategy unquestionably increases the military capability. Never before has the Colombian military had that level of trained manpower. The new policies for professional soldiers include many benefits like health service for the soldiers' families, education, and pension after twenty years of military service, which the military never offered before

The Colombian military is receiving aid from the U.S. to fight narcotrafficking and this aid is having positive effects. This aid has created a new strategy: the sharing of information about the guerrillas' movements. Before March 1999, Colombia shared this information only with the police. Today the information is transmitted and used in real time, which contributes to the success of the Colombian military.

In 2000 and 2001, the Colombian army heavily attacked the guerrillas in the regions of Casanare, Meta, and Hato Corozal. During these attacks, the military discovered and destroyed a road between the demilitarized zone and Bogotá. This region was considered a strategic point for the FARC because it was a central communications point from south to north and from east to west.<sup>55</sup> The battles between the guerrillas and the Colombian military during the last two years have shifted in favor of the military forces. During the previous four years, the guerrillas had the advantage.

Pastrana's government has implemented some measures to improve the military forces' combat capability and its image. These measures have diminished the negative

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<sup>55</sup> Editoria: "Los teatros de Guerra" *Revista Semana* October 7, 2000 Via Internet [<http://semana.terra.com.co/SearchDir2/962/actualidad/zzzzj1351ec.asp>] accessed 10 December 2000



image the military suffered in the past. Much of the criticism involved the military justice system, the *'fuero militar.'*"<sup>56</sup> Such reforms have not been easy for the military to accept, particularly the army, which received the bulk of the former criticism, perhaps because it was the primary sector that was involved in the war. The judicial branch and the civil society have denounced many human right violations by the army, as well as other irregularities. Three hundred and eighty-eight officers from the military forces were dismissed in the year 2000 for human rights abuses. Five army generals had to step down owing to accusations of abusing human rights during the last two years. Even though the accusations have discredited the military institution to some degree, the military forces and the high command have accepted the government's decisions in these cases.

### **3. Impact**

Colombia's political situation of the late 1990s revived the dialogues for peace, even though the cost was extremely high. The new military high command, without any objection, complied to the government's decision to clear more than forty-two thousand square kilometers (an area the size of Switzerland) in the south of Colombia. Despite the military acceptance of the decision, there has been much confusion over its implementation.

One example of the confusion involved the rules between the military forces and the government for clearing the demilitarized area. Some government delegates confounded the process with complex mandates, which produced several

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<sup>56</sup> Romero, Mauricio "Autonomia Militar, Paramilitarismo y Autodefensas en Colombia: Es posible una salida democrática al conflicto armado" The Latin American Program. Working Paper Series 247. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523, p. 63.

misinterpretations. This situation in turn led to the negotiation sessions being postponed. Basically, in response, the military refused to evacuate the main military battalion “cazadores” located in San Vicente del Caguan. The military argued that the battalion presence would not affect the negotiation process. After many meetings, the impasse was overcome, but only when the president ordered the military to evacuate. This issue fractured the relations between the senior commissioner for the peace process and the high military command.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the problems and the differences, it is important to emphasize the obedient position that the military forces have assumed during the long peace process. Even with the continuing guerrilla's abuses in the demilitarized zone, and even with the total absence of international verification of the demilitarized zone, the military forces have remained calm and have supported the government without any strong opposition.

Contrary to the prior peace processes, the current talks are being held in the midst of a great military confrontation, and this confrontation has worsened during the negotiations. The guerrillas' plans are to take advantage of the peace negotiations to bolster their military strength and at the same time to improve their position at the negotiation table. Many incidents have demonstrated this guerrilla strategy. The most remarkable example was when 10,000 AK-47 rifles were shipped from Jordan to the FARC guerrillas, a transaction in which, the Fujimori's government in Peru was

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<sup>57</sup> Rangel, Alfredo; “*Las Fuerzas Militares y el Proceso de Paz en Colombia*” The Latin American Program. Working Paper Series 247. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523, p. 41.

involved. A second example was the capture in Mexico of one of the FARC leaders, who was attempting to exchange drugs for weapons and other war materials.<sup>58</sup>

Faced with this dark panorama, the Colombian military forces have no other option than to confront the threat that these illegally armed organizations represent to Colombia. The course of the peace negotiation depends on the state's military strength. If the military forces have the ability to pressure the guerrillas and the self-defense groups militarily, this will compel them to negotiate seriously. Therefore, increasing the state's ability to suppress the illegal forces will show the guerrillas that they cannot achieve a military victory or defeat the state. Thus, they would understand that the only viable alternative is to negotiate for peace. At the same time, the army has to show the self-defense groups that the military cannot be threatened without the violators being punished. Furthermore, the military must show the self-defense groups that they can no longer continue to exist militarily. Before a political solution is possible, the self-defense groups must be weakened. Otherwise, they will never agree to a cease-fire, and the absence of a cease-fire will make a political solution improbable.

The military forces have started to recover from the guerrillas' prior victories. During the last two years, many guerrillas have been killed. These FARC military defeats could change the dynamics of the Colombian conflict. In the ELN case, the situation is quite similar. This organization has been decimated not only by the military forces but also by the self-defense forces and the FARC, which attacked over a territory dispute in the northeast of Colombia.

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<sup>58</sup> Editorial: Arms Shipment Strains Jordan-Peru Relations. *Arabic News* Via Internet [<http://www.arabia.com/article/0%2C1690%2CNews|27838%2C00.html>] accessed 27 August 2000.

#### 4. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future

Analyzing these military issues is important because eventually these issues will influence the peace negotiations. The guerrillas know very well, and the state has started to understand, one of the oldest lessons regarding war, “It is impossible to reach anything on the negotiation table that one did not win in the battlefield.”<sup>59</sup>

Until recently, the guerrillas were controlling the conditions of the military confrontation; this also allowed them to control the political negotiations with the state. Indeed, if the state and its military forces are capable of reversing this subordinate role in favor of the state by taking the upper hand in the conflict, as they are now capable of doing, the peace process can assume new dynamics. If the military forces can diminish the guerrillas' military and economic strength, factors that allow the guerrillas to play cat and mouse with the government at the negotiation table, they will be forced to negotiate in less favorable conditions and in a more serious manner. The FARC guerrilla is still far from being defeated militarily, but the national military forces have shown that the guerrillas are not invincible.

These military successes against the guerrilla generate political repercussions because they prove that the negotiation process does not mean that the state must abandon their efforts to seek out and eliminate the enemy.

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<sup>59</sup> Rangel, Alfredo; “*Las Fuerzas Militares y el Proceso de Paz en Colombia*” The Latin American Program. Working Paper Series 247. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523, p. 45.

Obviously, the guerrillas will keep fighting to take power and to defeat the army until the day of a peace accord.<sup>60</sup> The complete annihilation of the FARC is likely impossible, but the state is capable of waging a war with the limited objective of merely improving its leverage at the negotiation table. The state has to limit the guerrilla expansion, reduce its firepower, and recover control of strategic zones (as the state has already done in the recovery of the Sumapaz Bleak plain).<sup>61</sup> In sum, the military must convince the guerrillas that a military victory is impossible for them.

Colombia's state security forces are committed to Pastrana's peace process. The military forces have to continue contributing to the state, using their legitimate, ethical, and efficient capabilities to induce the state's adversaries to negotiate for peace.

The following lists some of the military's recent accomplishments, which prove their loyalty and commitment to the peace process and their efficiency in the battle zones:

1. The number of casualties in the self-defense organizations was 106 percent higher in 2000 than in 1999. In the guerrillas' case, the increase was 31 percent.
2. The number of casualties in the state security forces in 2000 (192) was 40 percent less than 1999 (270).

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<sup>60</sup> Rangel, Alfredo; *“Las Fuerzas Militares y el Proceso de Paz en Colombia”* The Latin American Program. Working Paper Series 247. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523, p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> Editoria; “Los teatros de Guerra” *Revista Semana* October 7, 2000 Vía Internet [<http://semana.terra.com.co/SearchDir2/962/actualidad/zzzzj1351ec.asp>] accessed 10 December 2000.

3. The number of illegal-armed actors captured in 2000 (18,682) was 20 percent higher than 1999 (15,495).
4. The number of captured narcotraffickers in 2000 (14,427) was 34 percent higher than 1999 (10,762).
5. The cocaine confiscated in 2000 (37.9 tons) was three times higher than 1999 (13.0).
6. The people rescued by the state security forces in 2000 were 36 percent (375) higher than in 1999 (275). Also in 1999, casualties among kidnapers grew from 43 to 62 (44%) and arrests increased from 935 to 1,137 (21%).<sup>62</sup>

Simultaneously, the military forces have to be prepared to assume the institutional cost of the political negotiations. Due to the military reforms that were included in the agenda between the state and the FARC's,<sup>63</sup> the peace process will mean the state security forces will suffer substantial reductions in size and in budget. One of the first consequences after a peace agreement with the guerrillas will be a reduction in military expenditures. Even with this obvious outcome, the military forces have maintained their willingness for peace. The "war system" accusation as labeled by Nazih Richani has no

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<sup>62</sup> National Minister of Defense: "*Resultados Operacionales Fuerza Publica en Colombia; Enero a Junio 1999 y 2000.*" Bogotá Colombia August 2000.

<sup>63</sup> Rangel, Alfredo, "Las Fuerzas Militares y el Proceso de Paz en Colombia" The Latin American Program. Working Paper Series 247. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC 20523, pp. 38-40

validity regarding the state security forces. The facts show that the military forces are committed to resolving the conflict and establishing democracy in the nation.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

Colombia's state security forces are committed to peace and the best contribution to the government's peace process is fulfilling their constitutional obligations. The state security forces have to regain control and centralize military power in the hands of the legitimate and legal armed services by targeting attempts to subvert the order. This contribution will help to reduce violence in the country and at the same time will provide an opportunity for economic growth. At the same time, the state security forces must continue to support the government in its peace attempt. On the other hand, the armed forces have to be prepared for the changes that an eventual peace process will bring to the institution, such as a reduction in budget, and even the eventual incorporation of some former guerrilla member within the military and police institutions.

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## **V. OTHER ACTORS**

Many non-violent actors have an interest in Colombia's internal conflict. They can be divided into two categories, domestic actors and international actors. Most of them are not involved in the military confrontation itself, but despite this fact, they play a significant role in the evolution of the conflict.

The main domestic actors are the Colombian government and Colombian civil society. They have had great responsibility in the origins in the development and the dynamic of the conflict. Experts in Colombia's violence and in conflict resolution have noted that the conflict has roots in Colombian history and, as such; it should be solved by Colombians, using Colombia's own formulas.

Besides the Colombian domestic actors, some international and multilateral actors are playing an important role either in solving the conflict or in perpetuating it. Among the most important international actors are Colombia's neighboring countries, the United States, the European Union and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This chapter will analyze the objectives and strategies of these domestic and international actors. It will also describe the impact they have had on the development of the conflict and analyze how they might contribute to its peaceful resolution.

### **A. DOMESTIC ACTORS**

The Colombian government and its civil society are the most important actors in finding a solution to the internal conflict that is growing dramatically more violent. The government and civil society actions are very important for the conflict resolution or for

its perpetuation. Thus, let us look at the domestic actors whose role is vitally important to solve Colombia's internal conflict.

## **1. Colombia's Government**

The frantic conflict that has affected Colombian history through the second part of the twentieth-century has its roots in many political, social and economic problems resulting from government mistakes. Politicians have been partially responsible for the increase in violence and at the same time, they have the possibility of correcting these mistakes and creating the conditions to solve the conflict.

### *a. Objectives*

The three governments that Colombia had during the 1990s and the early 2000s experienced greatly different aspects of the conflict. Gaviria (1990-1994) faced relatively little revolutionary activity, but the war against narcotrafficking increased. Gaviria's primary objective was to improve the country's economics rather than address the social problems. Samper's objective (1994-1998) was to sustain his government rather than find a solution to the internal conflict. Neither peace nor economic improvement were considered important issues in his presidential term. (See chapter II for a more detailed discussion of the Gaviria and Samper administration.) Pastrana's government (1998-2002) was elected due to his commitment to peace. Pastrana's government made a successful peace process his primary goal.

### *b. Strategies*

With peace in mind, Pastrana designed his strategies as a government program directed to conflict resolution and to improve the political, social and economic situation of the country. It was impossible for Pastrana's government to stop immediately

the effects of the economic recession that began in Samper's government. Nevertheless, the peace process started, and brought a positive change to Colombian international relations, leading to increased political and economic support.

Diplomacy for peace is the cornerstone of Pastrana's government. This strategy seeks an international commitment to help resolve Colombia's internal conflict. Pastrana's strategy for peace considers narcotrafficking as the engine that feeds the conflict. The war against drugs and the search for a political solution to the armed conflict are the cornerstone of his strategy.

Pastrana's government designed a plan to fortify the state institutions and to improve Colombia's economic conditions. It has four points, where the U.S. and the international community play a substantial role in almost all of its parts. The most important points of the diplomatic strategy for peace are:

1. *Economic and Social Recuperation.* Colombia faced the worst economic recession of the twenty-century during the 1990s. The Pastrana's aim is to promote economic recovery and to create the employment necessary to reach social stability.

2. *Strategy against Narcotrafficking.* During the last five years, the illicit cultivation has doubled, increasing from 57,449 hectares in 1994 to 110,500 in 1999. Pastrana's aim is to stop the expansion and to reduce the narcotics industry by 50 percent during the next five years.

3. *Institutional Strengthening and Social Development.* Deepening democracy and promoting social development are an indispensable conditions for peace. For this purpose, the plan concentrates on assigning public resources to, and encouraging private investment in, the environment and social areas.

4. *Armed Conflict Resolution*. Negotiating a political solution to the conflict is the core of the plan. The totality of the Colombian plan hopes to achieve accords with the guerrillas and to promote the sustainability of those agreements. <sup>64</sup>

Pastrana's government has incorporated the U.S. as one of the main actors in its peace strategy for three reasons. The first is the close economic ties between the two countries. The second is that the U.S. is the leading consumer of Colombia's illegal drug export.<sup>65</sup> Seventy percent of the cocaine shipped from Colombia is for U.S. consumption. Naturally, such huge amounts of illegal drugs would concern any nation, but the consumption of this drug has caused 100,000 deaths in the U.S. alone in the last decade. There are 13.9 million drug users and 3.6 million of those users are addicts. Pastrana's third reason for seeking U.S. involvement is that he realizes the U.S. is concerned with expanding democracy and economic markets worldwide, and Colombia is one of the most challenging environments in which to achieve this. <sup>66</sup>

*c. Impact*

When the peace process started, the country's foreign relations improved and political and international economic support increased. Pastrana's government at the beginning of the twenty-first century is overcoming the economic recession. Even with

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<sup>64</sup> Editorial: "Que es el Plan Colombia?" *El Tiempo*. Wednesday August 30, 2000 Via Internet [http://www.eltiempo.com/30-08-2000/ulti\_5.html] accessed 10 December 2000.

<sup>65</sup> Beltran Pablo: "Los Secretos Mejor Guardados." *Revista Semana*, Colombia October 30, 2000 Via Internet [http://www.semana.com./965/ZZZ9LZUNUEC.asp] accessed 10 December 2000.

<sup>66</sup> Blumenthal, Hans R; *"Diplomacia para la Paz de Colombia: Estructura, Logros y Desafios."* Documento de trabajo No 247. El Proceso de Paz en Colombia y la Politica Exterior de los Estados Unidos. The Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Washington, DC 20523 June 2000, p. 17.

these positive signs for the government, the guerrillas have increased their criminal activities to gain strength at the negotiation table. The self-defense phenomenon has also grown geometrically and the ELN has tried to secure the political status that the FARC has.

The political support won by Colombia's guerrillas through many years of political diplomacy is now in danger because of their atrocities against innocent citizens. This should be considered a political success for Pastrana. Pastrana's administration through all political means has tried to convince the guerrillas that the best way to achieve their goals is politically. His government has demonstrated its willingness to compromise and conceded to many of the guerrillas' demands. However, the guerrillas have shunned every offer, and this has reduced their political credibility. Formerly staunch guerrilla supporters and sympathizers are now questioning the true political intentions of the guerrillas.

*d. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future*

At this point, even though the violence has increased during Pastrana's presidential term and it has been one of the most violent periods of the last fifty years, it is also true that peace opportunities for the country have never been closer. The government's commitment to peace, the political parties' consensus, the support for the government, the strong international support, and the public's concern over the illegal armed actors is such that the state's position vis-à-vis illegal armed actors is likely to get stronger.

## **2. Colombia's Civil Society**

The people of Colombia are concerned about the violence that has been increasing in parallel with the conflict. Besides the guerrillas and narcotraffickers, the self-defense groups have grown geometrically during the last decade and their participation in massacres and forced displacement have provoked enormous social concern.

Thus, civil society plays an important role in the Colombian conflict. The following analyzes the objectives and strategies of civil society, as well as the impact that the public's concern has in either augmenting the conflict or bringing about its resolution.

### ***a. Objectives***

The main objective of Colombia's civil society is to reach peace. Ten million votes for a peace referendum in 1997, by more than 50 percent of the Colombians eligible to vote, are proof enough of this general clamor. Even though the conflict is the result of political, social and economic issues that were legitimate fifty years ago, the revolutionary fight today is worse than the problem that the guerrillas wanted to overcome. Three main issues have increased the public's concern and their interest for peace:

1. The number of victims as a result of the conflict,
2. The family, social, and political deterioration of the country
3. The economic consequences that brought the country to a recession and a 20.3 percent rate of unemployment, the highest in Latin America.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Sabas Pretel, de la Vega; Trabajo, Crecimiento y Desarrollo Economico." *Revista Semana* March 7, 2001 Via Internet [[http://semana.terra.com.co/Search\\_Dir2/936/noticiasdeldia/zzz2436rx6c.asp](http://semana.terra.com.co/Search_Dir2/936/noticiasdeldia/zzz2436rx6c.asp)] accessed 10 March 2001.

***b. Strategies***

The civil society seems to share the government's idea of strengthening the state against the illegal armed actors. Many sectors in Colombian society consider that by attacking the narco-trafficking problem and cutting the illegal and criminal mechanisms of financing the illegal actors, one can stop or at least reduce the violence. If the state can reduce or stop narco-trafficking, kidnapping and extortion, the main economic support of the guerrillas and self-defense groups will be eliminated. Indubitably, this fact will debilitate the guerrillas and force them to sign a peace accord.

Likewise, civil society is pressuring the illegal armed actors and forcing them to reduce their barbaric methods. The public's outrage against the violence that the guerrillas and self-defense groups perpetrate naturally weakens the political image of these groups and the validity of their cause. If the civil society rejected and refused to support the guerrillas or self-defense groups in any way, this would indeed be their greatest contribution to peace.

***c. Impact***

Approximately 76 percent of Colombia's almost 40 million inhabitants live in urban areas. The 40-year old conflict had affected only the countryside until recently. Peasants, poor people, the military and police, those who live in these isolated areas, have been the people most affected by the conflict. The massive urban population began suffering violence only from the late 1980s and early 1990s. The narco-trafficking phenomenon, the increase in guerrillas with military and criminal capability and the growth of the self-defense groups started affecting the middle and upper classes. Therefore, the public's concern has been growing as the armed conflict escalated.

In the late 1990s, however, Colombia's civil society began to show a much greater interest in the conflict. The basic explanation for this is that the armed conflict has escalated, and it is now involving people and businesses that had never before been touched. The persons affected by the conflict today also come from the high and middle classes, and not only from the lowest class, or from the security forces of the state. The state's war against the drug cartel, the escalation of the self-defense group's activities and a shift in guerrilla strength and strategies has caused this change.<sup>68</sup>

With the money earned from the drug business, the guerrilla found the possibility to grow in number, military strength and in areas of social influence. This growth prodded them to be more aggressive and to perpetuate attacks outside their traditional areas of influence in the countryside. Massive terrorist attacks against citizens in urban areas, and some important triumphs against the Colombian Army, which caused the deaths of more than 100 soldiers and the kidnapping of more than 400, changed the public's general perception of harmless guerrillas. This military demonstration from the guerrillas increased kidnappings and extortions of the middle class and the state's inability to counter the attacks partially explain civil society's concern with the conflict.<sup>69</sup>

Some scholars, for example, Gabriel Marcella and Nazih Richani, argue that even though the Colombian civil society is mobilizing against the violence, society still lacks a commitment to confront the Colombian problem. These scholars believe that

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<sup>68</sup> See Gabriel Marcella, pp. 2-4.

<sup>69</sup> Alejo, Vargas Velasquez: "La Insurgencia en Colombia y el Proceso de Paz." Documento de trabajo No 247. El Proceso de Paz en Colombia y la Política Exterior de los Estados Unidos. The Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Washington, DC 20523 June 2000, p. 81.



until all sectors of Colombian society understand and share the burden of war, stopping or reducing the oldest Western Hemisphere conflict seems impossible.<sup>70</sup>

One example illustrating this social apathy is the compulsory military service. The Colombian army and police who are assigned to these dangerous areas consist of men and women who have the lowest levels of education and social status. Remarkably, not one of the 35,000 soldiers with a high school education is engaged in conflict operations. Instead, they serve in those units that are not engaged in the conflict itself. Therefore, the more educated soldiers only protect the military units, receive basic training and perform administrative tasks. Interestingly, this law was imposed not by the military, but by urban citizens who did not want their children involved in the Colombian confrontation. The Congress created and approved this recruitment law to appease these citizens. The Colombians who did not finish high school are generally from the countryside where there are not enough schools or are from urban areas and cannot afford private schools. As Marcella says, “Peasants soldiers fight against peasants guerrillas while the middle and upper classes are spared the nastiness of war.”<sup>71</sup>

Today, not only the 24 percent of the Colombians who live in the countryside are involved in the conflict. Almost all Colombians, in one way or in another, are victims of the conflict and are interested in a prompt and peaceful resolution.

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<sup>70</sup> Rachini, Nazih; *The Political Economy of Violence: The War-System in Colombia.* Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs; Beverly Hills; summer 1997. Via Internet [Proquest database] and Gabriel Marcella and Donald Schulz; *Colombia's Three Wars; U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads.* U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, March 5, 1999, pp. 10-40.

<sup>71</sup> See Gabriel Marcella, p. 32.

*d. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future*

The international community has come to Colombia's assistance in trying to solve the conflict. These domestic and foreign concerns play a significant and decisive role in finding solutions to reduce the violence. The financial aid and support received from other nations to solve the internal conflict are very important and welcomed, but the structural solution to the problems has to be designed, built and executed by Colombians.

The public outrage against the violence has brought about a social upheaval. The citizens' condemnation of violence and the opposition to pay kidnappers and extortionists reduces the efficacy of the violent acts by illegal actors. In the past, such passivity had proven to be a grave mistake, for these criminals had held the nation hostage. Now the situation seems to be different and the public's contributions are diminishing the conflict.<sup>72</sup>

The success or the failure of the peace process that the government is facing today depends in great measure on the support that civil society gives it. The pressure and support that an organized civil society could apply might eventually end the conflict or convert it into a civil war. If anything can change the attitude of the Colombian violent actors, it is the pressure of civil society.

**B. INTERNATIONAL ACTORS**

Globalization has transformed human rights abuses, environmental damage, drug trafficking and international crime from domestic problems to international concerns.

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<sup>72</sup> Bernal, Ana Teresa; *"La Sociedad Civil y el Proceso de Paz en Colombia."* Latin American Program Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Documento de Trabajo No. 22 Washington, DC June 2000, p. 12.

Colombia is being affected by problems in these four areas. These problems concern the world at large, so they have become an international issue.

The international actors who are particularly concerned about Colombia and who are playing an important role in the peace process are Colombia's neighboring countries, the United States, the European Union, and international non-governmental organizations. Therefore, this section will examine the objectives and strategies these international actors regarding the Colombian conflict and their impact on its evolution and resolution.

## **1. Colombia's Neighboring Countries**

Colombia is situated in the geo-strategic northwest part of South America and is surrounded by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and five countries, (Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador). Except for the Colombia-Peru conflict in the early 1930s and some border skirmishes with Venezuela and Nicaragua, the relationship between Colombia and its neighbors has been very cordial.

### ***a. Objectives***

Colombia's neighbors want to prevent its violence from overflowing into the Andean region. Colombia's internal conflict, the narcotrafficking, and the economic depression of the late 1990s are situations that affect the entire region, and this fact justifies the neighbors' concerns about Colombia's conflict. The general objectives regarding the Colombian conflict are regional peace, regional economic development, and the prevention of the spread of narcotrafficking across Colombia's borders.

**b. Strategies**

Colombia's neighboring countries have no integrated strategy to prevent Colombia's problems from influencing their countries. They also have no strategy to help Colombia resolve the conflict. Colombia's neighbors do have a limited strategy of opposing Colombia's plan to eliminate coca cultivation. These countries rightly fear that if Colombia is successful in curtailing the production that the drug- trafficking organizations will merely move into their countries. This is a reality as long as there is an increasing demand for illegal drugs around the world. All these nations are preoccupied only with the Colombian violence and the overflowing effects of Plan Colombian. Venezuela, Panama, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru have increased their military presence on the Colombian borders to prevent the coca and guerrillas from spreading across their borders.<sup>73</sup>

**c. Impact**

During the last years, the neighboring countries (some more than others) are suffering the consequences of the escalation of violence. Like the Colombian border areas, the neighboring countries' frontiers are areas generally abandoned by the central government. This situation is reflected in the political, economic, and social problems that affect Colombia's poor neighboring regions. The lack of a government presence in these isolated areas has allowed problems to brew in these regions. The problem is not new and affects all the countries in the region without exception. Smuggling,

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<sup>73</sup> Rueda, Maria Isabel; "La Soledad de Colombia; No solo Colombia es un problema para la region, sino la region es un problema para Colombia" *Revista Semana*. Internet edition, January 22, 2001 [<http://semana.terra.com.co/977/ZZZPUMDT61C.asp>] accessed 10 February 2000

narcotrafficking, kidnapping, extortion, forced displacement, and political violence are daily issues that disturb the relationship between Colombia and its neighbors.

The differences and discrepancies between the Venezuelan and Colombian governments around the conflict are affecting the economy of both countries. After the United States, Venezuela is Colombia's most important commercial partner and vice versa. The political tension generated by the Colombian conflict has led the Venezuelan government to adopt some economic measures that have affected the truck drivers who because of security measures must transfer cargo at the border between the two countries. This law raised transportation costs and delayed shipments, and reduced the volume of cargo exchanged between the countries. It is hurting the economy of both countries.<sup>74</sup>

The Colombian plan to eradicate coca has started to produce results and that is affecting not only the coca business in Colombia, but abroad, and that means the neighboring countries. Of the total 65,000 hectares of cocaine planted in the Putumayo. (Southern Colombia region) more than 20,000 have been killed with herbicide, 10,000 are being destroyed and 10,000 more will be destroyed soon.<sup>75</sup>

This issue has generated the second largest concern: the shifting of drug production to neighboring countries. If the policy of eradication and drug destruction succeeds in Colombia and the level of consumption continues in the U.S. and Europe, the production will continue anywhere with or without government suppression. Destroying

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<sup>74</sup> Corina, Rodriguez Pons: "Disminuyó en 52% comercio por carreteras a Colombia." *El Universal* August 8, 2000 Internet Edition [<http://noticias.eluniversal.com/2000/08/08/08213AA.shtml>] accessed 10 December 2000.

<sup>75</sup> Rueda, Maria Isabel; "La Soledad de Colombia; No solo Colombia es un problema para la region, sino la region es un problema para Colombia" *Revista Semana*. Internet edition, January 22, 2001 [<http://semana.terra.com.co/977/ZZZPUMDT61C.asp>] accessed 22 January 2001.

the supply of crops and illegal drugs means little if there is no serious and effective campaign to reduce the demand for drugs. At best, if the demand remains strong, the production of the crops would only transfer to another country. A good example of this was the effects of coca eradication in Peru and Bolivia, which ended with the illegal business moving to Colombia.<sup>76</sup>

*d. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future*

The escalation of guerrilla, narcotrafficking, and self-defense groups violence in border areas uncontrolled by the state represents an enormous threat to Colombia's neighbors who are already experiencing a spillover of the violence. The guerrillas are recruiting foreign peasants in their files and are indoctrinating them to fight against the government. The guerrillas and insurgents are an undeniable problem on the Colombian borders. Similarly, the self-defense organizations are also recruiting men and perpetrating violence in these areas in the name of defending private property from guerrilla attacks. Colombia's neighbors are preoccupied with these issues, and their concern is real and apparent. In Ecuador, for instance, FARE (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias del Ecuador or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Ecuador) recently kidnapped six foreign engineers. In Venezuela in less than two months 26 cattle ranchers were kidnapped by the guerrilla movement *Bolivariano 2000 and Dignity* for Venezuela.

Border violence and increased narcotrafficking and guerrillas' activity cannot be blamed solely on the Colombian government. The failure of Colombia's

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<sup>76</sup> Patrice, M. Jones: "Colombia Drug-Fighting Plan Likely to Draw Fire at 1<sup>st</sup> Regional Summit." *Chicago Tribune* August 31, 2000 Via Internet [<http://chicagotribune.com/news/printedition/article/0%2C2669%2CSAV-0008310167%2CFF.html>] accessed 10 December 2000.

neighbors to control illegal activities has contributed to the conflict in Colombia. For example, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia are selling chemical products to the illegal drug industry. An organization of 160 foreigners from these countries who were involved in this illegal business was decimated. In addition, an Ecuadorian criminal organization was discovered in Panama trying to launder money, taking advantage of the recent conversion to dollars of the Ecuadorian economy in February 2001. These examples show how the illegal market and the money earned by the drug business and the guerrillas' criminal activity are invading the region not just Colombia.<sup>77</sup>

Many of the weapons that feed the Colombian internal conflict are shipped from Venezuela, Paraguay and Brazil. Criminal activity on the borders is very easy to perpetrate because of the features of the forest and the lack of state security. This environment has facilitated the guerrillas' criminal activity and the FARC has found it can supply its army with weapons that it easily buys on the black market by exchanging drugs for arms. A recent study done by the Brazilian Congress in December 2000, and endorsed by the British magazine *Jane's*, says that organized crime in Brazil is supporting the FARC with arms. The weapons, including rifles, automatic arms, pistols and land-air missiles are being smuggled by airplanes on the border between the two countries.<sup>78</sup>

It is clear Colombia is not the only source of problems in the region. The region is also a danger to Colombia. The existence of other elements that feed the Colombian conflict comes from the neighboring countries. The countries that surround

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Colombia, rather than criticizing the Colombian policy against the guerrillas and narcotrafficking, should control their frontiers and pursue the criminals that are taking advantage of the Colombian conflict. Colombia's neighbors must solve the problems they have on their borders, and they must cooperate against international crime. Their neutrality and political support is paramount for peace in the Andean region.

## **2. The European Union**

In spite of the distance and differences in culture, language and development that separate Colombia from Europe, the relationship has always been exceptional. In fact, Europe has links with both the Colombian government and with the guerrillas. Even since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the guerrillas have continued to receive part of their political and financial support for the revolution from Europe.

### *a. Objective*

The European countries' objective seems to be to help Colombia and the guerrillas solve the conflict. This interest has been strongly manifested through the political support Colombia received during the last decade as a result of the internal conflict. This political support comes from the fifteen countries that form the European Union. The EU showed its support by inviting the parties involved in the conflict to analyze all the peaceful alternatives for its resolution. The European countries are crucial for the Colombian government during the peace negotiations.

The European Union is also concerned with the social issue of the victims of the conflict. Thus, Europe is focusing its aid on modernizing and reinforcing state

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 2.



structures. The EU considers social issues extremely important. In fact, they consider this issue the leading reason for the conflict. For these European countries, the guerrillas exist because the state failed to provide for the safety and welfare of its people.<sup>79</sup>

***b. Strategies***

The European Union is expected to contribute economically to the social element of the Colombian plan. This has been called the “soft” part of Colombia’s strategy, while most of the US aid has funded the military or “hard” component of the Colombian plan. However, the EU has accepted the guerrilla movement as a natural response from the population against the state. The EU understands the guerrilla military action as a logical, social response against the abuses and mistakes committed by the political class that has led the country during the last fifty years.

Jan Egeland, who represents the United Nations in Colombia's peace process, has requested the European Union's politic and economic assistance several times. He knows the relevance of Europe’s participation in Colombia’s conflict resolution. He hopes Europe will support and assist the country in campaigns against human rights abuses and forced displacement and will bring humanitarian aid to the war victims.

With respect to coca cultivation, the European Union intends to assist the country in developing alternatives in the countryside, giving the peasants the possibility of finding new forms of employment other than coca cultivation. With this effort, the

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<sup>79</sup> Editorial; "Tregua de 100 días; piden apoyo de la Union Europea." *El Tiempo* Internet edition September 11, 2000. Via internet [<http://www.terra.com.co/actualidad/nacional/09-11-2000/nota8059.html>] accessed 15 January 2001.

European Union is trying to solve the social problems of many peasants who have found in the coca cultivation the only means of survival. This social aid will help the peasants avoid engaging in criminal activity in the guerrillas or self-defense organizations.<sup>80</sup>

After a meeting held in Bogotá in January 2001, the European Union, through the "Table of Contributors,"<sup>81</sup> said that their contribution to the Colombian government efforts of pacification would exceed U.S. \$300 million. This amount is \$700 million short of the amount they were supposed to provide for social programs. However, more than the significance of the budget approved from Europe to Colombia, the presence of the E.U in this peace effort has a profound political meaning.<sup>82</sup>

*c. Impact*

Even though European assistance has contributed to the Colombian government and to the peace process, the organization that has benefited the most is the guerrillas. The political recognition, the importance and relevance that the Colombian conflict has recently received, and the government's peace efforts have given the Colombian guerrillas a political status that they never had before. This may change in the future, however. The brutal behavior of the FARC in the demilitarized zone has deteriorated the positive image that many Europeans had of the guerrillas. The Europeans

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<sup>80</sup> Editorial; "Pastrana ira a Europa; ONU pide a Union Europea aumentar asistencia a Colombia." Internet edition. January 16, 2001. Via Internet [[<http://www.terra.com.co/actualidad/nacional16-01-2001/nota17690.html>] accessed 16 January 2001.

<sup>81</sup> Organization created by 15 countries from the European Union to analyze and support the Colombian Peace Process.

<sup>82</sup> Editorial; "Espaldarazo Europeo; El compromiso de la Union Europea es un aporte clave para impulsar el proceso de paz." *El Tiempo* Internet edition [[http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/27-10-2000/reda\\_0.html](http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/27-10-2000/reda_0.html)] accessed 16 January 2001.

have witnessed the guerrillas' atrocities and human rights violations that clearly contradict their revolutionary ideology. The guerillas' brutality against innocent peasants and their refusal to negotiate seriously are now affecting the guerrilla's political image. Those countries and friends that years ago supported unquestioningly the revolutionary cause, today are criticizing the methods and mechanism the subversives use to combat the state.<sup>83</sup>

Even though the Europeans accept and support the revolutionary cause because of the structural problems that have harmed the country for the last fifty years, the European Union does not support the guerrillas' violence and terrorism no their involvement in the drug business.<sup>84</sup>

*d. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future*

In sum, the EU's participation in resolving the Colombian conflict is and will be decisive. Europe is emphasizing the social aspects of the conflict resolution, and this will favor the impoverished Colombians in the lower classes. On the other hand, the political and economic support that the guerrillas are expecting from Europe will be lost, for they will be expected to make many major concessions and commitments, especially in the human rights and narcotrafficking. The seriousness of the EU's presence in the conflict resolution demands a clear and credible commitment from the Colombian government, but also from the guerrillas. The EU has requested serious demonstrations of

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<sup>83</sup> Mowlam, Mo and Battle John; "U.K. Government; Mowlan and Battle—We Must Continue to Press for Peace in Colombia." M2 Presswire; Coventry; September 7, 2000 Internet Proquest Document [[http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?TS=980184768&Did=000000059\\_701094&Mtd=1&Fm\\_t=3&...1/22/01](http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?TS=980184768&Did=000000059_701094&Mtd=1&Fm_t=3&...1/22/01)] accessed 16 January 2001.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

peace from the guerrillas several times. Sooner or latter the guerrillas must accept these commitments. This fact is likely to lead to peace and social justice.

### **3. The United States**

With the end of the military threats of the Cold War, the U.S. national security concern has shifted to a more complex position. The new U.S. and global agenda stresses issues like democracy, free trade, international crime, human rights, narcotrafficking, and environment protection. These issues make Colombia a country that deserves U.S. attention.<sup>85</sup> Based on this U.S national security concern, this section examines the U.S. objectives, strategies, and the impact of the U.S' participation on the conflict.

#### ***a. Objectives***

There are three issues and objectives that the U.S. has in Colombia. First, the U.S wants to combat international crime, which involves drug trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering and terrorism. Second, the U.S wants to protect human rights, since Colombia is the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere. Third, the U.S wants to protect U.S economic interests in Colombia, which is the fifth largest Latin American market and a major consumer of U.S goods. Forty-seven percent of Colombia imports come from the U.S. and forty-one percent of Colombia exports go to the U.S.<sup>86</sup> A "Free Trade Area of the Americas" will be established in 2005, according to the Miami and Santiago Summits of 1994 and 1998. Similarly, the President's 1998 National

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<sup>85</sup> Gabriel, Marcella and Donal Schulz; *"Colombia's Three Wars; U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads."* U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, March 5, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> Pablo, Beltran: "Los secretos major guardados." *Revista Semana* October 30, 2000. Via Internet [<http://www.semana.com./965/ZZZ9LZUNUEC.asp>] accessed 16 January 2001.

Security Strategy stresses the community interests and shared values between the U.S. and the countries of the Western Hemisphere (except for Cuba).<sup>87</sup> Economically Colombia is important to the U.S., with 80 percent of the U.S Fortune 500 companies doing business in Colombia. It is also the fifth largest supplier of foreign oil. More than million Colombians live in the U.S. and around 35,000 Americans live in Colombia. These facts, the interest in expanding democracy, and the size and the geo-strategic importance of Colombia justify the United States' interest in Colombia.

Finally, although Colombia is not a military threat for the U.S, Colombia's problems are affecting the Andean region. Therefore, U.S concern is understandable. The weakness of Colombia as a nation threatens all the countries in the region. Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico are suffering the consequences of drug trafficking and the internal conflict. Clearly one of the most substantial objectives of the U.S. National Security Strategy, which is the strengthening of democracy, is in danger because of the Colombia's internal conflict and its narco-trafficking issue.

***b. Strategies***

The U.S. policy in drug trafficking, as well as its interest in democratic expansion, led to the U.S support of Colombia during the last decade. This support has varied from excellent and positive support during Cesar Gaviria's presidency between 1990-1994 to a virtual nightmare for Colombia's economy and politics during Samper's government. Washington and Colombia reestablished good relations and cooperation during Pastrana's term. Pastrana's government designed a plan to solve the internal

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<sup>87</sup> See Gabriel Marcella, Donald Shulz; "*Colombia's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads.*" U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, March 5, 1999, p.5.

conflict, to extract the country from the economic recession after Samper's term and to use the drug problem to gain the U.S. support.

Pastrana's government received an aid package of US \$ 1.3 billion to be used in the fight against narcotrafficking. This economic aid and political support received from Washington has been a key element in the fight against drugs. The strategy to fight narcotrafficking by military means has contributed to the fight against the guerrillas who are involved in the drug business. Now that links between the guerrillas and narcotrafficking have been established, a conflict resolution without attacking the illegal industry that feeds the violent apparatus seems impossible. Without reducing the guerrilla's military strength, it is also difficult to engage them in a serious peace process. Targeting drugs makes it possible to weaken the guerrilla's finances and thus encourage peace.

*c. Impact*

U.S involvement in Colombia has had an impact on the way a number of actors view the conflict. Some argue that the guerrillas' involvement in the drug business has allowed the U.S military to employ the tactics used in low intensity conflict strategies against communism. Coletta Youngers says, ..."For SOUTHCOM, the drug war quickly became a rationale for a strong U.S. military presence in the region as well as its meal ticket-at a time when defense budgets and troop levels elsewhere in the world were higher than those for Latin America on the Pentagon's agenda. As former SOUTHCOM Commander, General Maxwell Thurman, once declared, the drug war is 'the only war we've got.' With strong political backing from Washington, SOUTHCOM quickly began

winning internal Pentagon battles over allocation of resources and priorities.”<sup>88</sup> This analysis about the U.S military interest in Colombia's war has some relation with the "war system" approach presented by Nazih Richani in where the actors evolved in the Colombian war have a specific interest in the perpetuation of the war. The difference in this case is the fact that the actor is a foreigner. It is unquestionable that the Colombian war against drugs could be presented as a real threat for the U.S. interests and in this way the military expenditures are absolutely justified.

What results unquestionable is the impact that the drug business has on Colombia's internal conflict because the guerrillas and self-defense groups participation in its profits. The Colombian government clamoring to Washington as well as its favorable response is due to the massive demand from the U.S. for the cocaine produced and shipped from Colombia. To some extent, the U.S. feels a responsibility to help this country, which is fighting a battle to preserve its democracy and defeat this dangerous threat.

For other sectors, the U.S. contribution to Colombia is seen as military intervention rather than a contribution to solving of the conflict. Members of the European Union have shied away from providing much aid to plan Colombia, which was conceived by the Colombian government, because it is seen as a primarily military plan masterminded indeed by the U.S. In addition, U.S participation is not accepted by the guerrillas, which see the U.S as an imperialistic power with no other intention than to expand its power throughout the world, manipulating the self-determination of countries.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

*d. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future*

The U.S. military package will help the Colombian government reduce many hectares of coca cultivation. This will also reduce the guerrillas and self-defense groups' income, which in turn, would lead them to take the peace process seriously. The economic weakness owing to the decline in narco-trafficking profits and the military decimation of their forces could impel the illegal armed actors to begin a serious peace negotiation. However, this process of coca eradication will require a little more time and is likely to increase environmental damage and the level of violence in the short run. Neither the guerrillas nor the self-defense groups will concede to the state, their enemy, and all the economic and military power they have won during many years of military struggle.

In the medium run, however, U.S. economic and military support, combined with the social initiative of manual and alternative eradication presented by the NGOs, the E.U and the guerrillas, is best solution to the narco-trafficking problem in Colombia. This coca eradication not only will solve the narco-trafficking problem but also will contribute to the conflict resolution. This thesis argues that Colombia's government has to pressure the illegal armed actors for peace and has to combat narco-trafficking. Using the U.S. military aid for this purpose seems to be a good tool.

**4. Non-governmental Organizations**

Non-governmental organizations, which are involved in humanitarian relief, know very well the devastating effects that any conflict brings to citizenry. Violence itself produces fear in the population, leading to displacement, starvation and disease. Any



country in which war is an issue has to face problems in agricultural production, recessions, macroeconomic deterioration, and lack of domestic and foreign investment. Economic deterioration, and increases in poverty and violence result. The issues and problems that a country with an internal conflict as Colombia is facing today justify the appearance and the work of NGO organizations.

*a. Objective*

With this view and understanding of NGOs and their activities, the presence and work of hundreds of these organizations in Colombia is completely justified. NGOs attempt to deliver relief to the victims of the conflict without looking at the group to which the victims belong. The primary objective of these organizations is to assist those persons who are in the middle of the conflict without any political, economic and social interest other than preserving their lives. The lack of a state presence, the guerrilla's imposition of "law" with terror and violence against the peasants, and the self-defense groups intention to supplant the state by killing or displacing all those who in their view are guerrilla members or suppliers, make the NGOs participation an essential tool to reduce citizens suffering.

The appearance of NGOs in violent conflicts is not new. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of internal conflicts all over the world. As a result, NGOs have increased their relief activities during the last decade in countries with internal conflicts: "While there may be a divergence of opinion on the fundamental causes of conflict in the post-Cold War world, it is clear that the nature of conflict has changed, shifting from confrontations between states to struggles for power and

dominance within states...”<sup>89</sup> Colombia has been one of these cases in which the internal conflict has caught the attention of many NGOs who are working on different fronts and trying to bring some relief to the victims all over the country.

*b. Strategies*

The NGOs have made their role in defending the population from the state excesses and abuses very clear. The state security forces in Colombia have shown their regard and appreciation for the NGOs, which they consider a partial actor. Human rights are considered a state responsibility by international law, so the NGOs blame the state for all the political victims that the conflict produces. This concept has been difficult for the armed forces to understand. It is still unclear to many why NGOs deplore, demand and criticize vehemently any state crime, but do not react the same way when the guerrillas are responsible for similar crimes. This NGO partiality in not criticizing guerrilla atrocities can make the NGOs look like guerrilla allies. Recently, however, international human rights groups have begun to criticize violations of human rights by guerrillas.

In 1999, general Fernando Tapias, chief commander of the Colombian military forces, narrowed the distance between the NGOs and the armed forces. Since January 1999, four times a year, the NGOs and the state security forces meet to discuss topics of interest to both sides. This reduced the tension within the military forces and has helped NGOs to understand the role that the security forces are playing in the conflict and their commitment to human rights. This NGO and state security forces’ strategy has

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<sup>89</sup> Mary, B Anderson: Humanitarian NGOs in Conflict Intervention. Cited by Chester A Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson with Pamela Aall; U.S. Institute of Peace Press Washington D.C. P. 343.

helped both institutions, and at the same time, has permitted the population receive NGO aid with fewer restrictions.

*c. Impact*

The impact of the NGOs' presence in Colombia during this period of violence is seen as a positive phenomenon that reduces and in many cases prevents the atrocities of this frantic conflict. The Red Cross, the United Nations, Human Right Watch, Amnesty International, and Green Peace are international NGOs who work with CINEP, MINGA, Comision Colombiana de Juristas, Cruz Roja Colombiana and many other NGOs from Colombia to support the population and to pressure the government to fulfill the state functions in defense of the victims. Even with the NGO's presence, action and support, Colombia is considered today the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere. Thirty-five thousand Colombians have been murdered in the last ten years because of the political violence; more than 1,500,000 people have had to abandon their property; the number of people kidnapped in the year 2000 exceeded 3,000, breaking the record of 2,000 the year before. All these crimes have happened in Colombia despite the NGO's human rights protection.

Without the NGOs' presence in Colombia, the violence would be even worse than it is today. The NGO's presence in many communities in the middle of the conflict have allowed them to save many lives, avert the displacement of many people and create "Peace Communities" in more than twenty municipalities in Colombia's countryside where no combatants' including the state, are permitted. Any military confrontation is excluded in these areas. Congressman Camilo Gonzalez, who is a NGO leader and former M-19 guerrilla, designed this concept. All "Peace Community" accords

have been signed by community leaders, the civil authority, and the violent actors independently and have the support of the central government.

The NGOs support the state security forces in many areas. The International Red Cross, for example, has helped in human rights training and has instructed more than 100,000 military and police officers. This has been helpful in improving their behavior. The incidence in human rights violations by the state security forces have dropped from 54 percent in 1993 to 2.7 percent in 1998 and less than 2.0 percent in the year 2000.<sup>90</sup>

One of the greatest challenges that the NGOs have regarding Colombia's violence is that the illegal armed actors are responsible for more than 98 percent of human rights abuses. Guerrillas, self-defense groups and organized crime are escalating the war, and the state has the obligation to face the problem. In this environment all the pressure and effort made by the NGO network in Colombia has little effect.<sup>91</sup> The NGO's presence in Colombia, even though it has not achieved the goal of reducing violence, at least has created a new and increasing concern for the war atrocities from the international community.

The NGOs' role has been very important in the peace process. They have supported and given relief to the victims. They have also assisted the government in searching for solutions and have created many arenas domestically and internationally to discuss alternatives for conflict resolution. Even though this has not reduced the violence,

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<sup>90</sup> Gabriel, Marcella and Donal Schulz; "Colombia's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads." U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, March 5, 1999. p. 10, information complemented in 2000 with information gathered by the Colombian Ministry of Defense.

<sup>91</sup> Colombia Ministry of Defense; "Human Rights in Colombia." Official Report Bogotá, 2000.

at least it has awakened the interest of many countries and regions all over the world who now are seriously concerned about the Colombian conflict and its resolution.

*d. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future*

The NGOs are fulfilling their mandate. The peace process in Colombia needs the NGOs' presence and assistance. These organizations know the culture and have relationships with many people in the countryside and in those areas affected by the conflict. They understand the link between crisis management and long-term sustainable development. They have the experience in operations comprising a continuum of relief efforts, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and sustainable development from abroad. In short, the work of the NGOs makes an important contribution to the efforts of many nations and multilateral organizations to deal with conflicts in the post-Cold War era, and Colombia is not exception. In this sense, the NGOs' contribution to the peace process is valuable.

The NGO's intervention in Colombia is also pressuring the legal and illegal armed actors to fulfill the minimal rules of military confrontation. This pressure forces the armed actors to respect the unarmed population.

**C. CONCLUSION**

**1. Domestic Actors**

*a. Colombian Government*

Previous Colombian governments have been largely responsible for the existence of the current conflict. Pastrana's government is dealing with the conflict by launching a dual strategy that intends to solve the problem politically and at the same time intends to face the enemy forcefully. The result has been a political approach to the guerrillas on one hand, and on the other hand, an increase in violence.

***b. Colombian Civil Society***

Civil society's concern about the conflict is growing in parallel to the violence. This is pressuring the illegal armed actors to end their criminality. The success or the failure of the peace process depends in great measures on public support. The pressure and support that an organized civil society could apply to the process could eventually lead the country to end the conflict or, on the contrary, to convert it into a civil war. If anything can change the attitudes of Colombia's violent toward peace, it is the pressure from civil society.

**2. International Actors**

***a. Colombia's Neighboring Countries***

Colombia's neighbors are being affected by its internal conflict and narco-trafficking. Colombia is also being affected by the criminality that comes from its neighbors in response. Therefore, the best contribution that Colombia's neighbors could make to the peace process is to develop an effective state presence on the border, not only by the use of force but by assisting the communities in those regions. This state presence will prevent the guerrillas, self-defense groups, and narco-traffickers from spilling over the borders.

***b. The European Union***

The E.U participation is and will be definitive in the Colombian conflict resolution. The seriousness of the E.U presence in the conflict resolution demands a clear and credible commitment from the Colombian government for peace but also the same from the guerrillas.

*c. The United States*

The U.S. intervention in Colombia as an international actor providing economy and military aid will help the Colombian government destroy many hectares of coca. This would also reduce the guerrilla and self-defense groups' income and lead to a serious peace process. The U.S. government's opposition to participating in Pastrana's peace process with the FARC suggests that the only U.S. contribution to the peace process will be weakening the illegally armed actors by undermining their profits from the drug business.<sup>92</sup>

*d. Non-Governmental Organizations*

Finally the NGOs' intervention in Colombia is instrumental and this pressures the legal and illegal armed actors to fulfill the minimal legal rules of military confrontation. The NGOs force the armed actors to reduce the abuses of the unarmed population, which is positive in and of it.

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<sup>92</sup> Sergio, Gomez Maseri: "Alianza 'Narcoinsurgente' es el Obstaculo: EU." *El Tiempo* March 3, 2001 Via Internet [ [http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/01-03-2001/prip\\_0.html](http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/01-03-2001/prip_0.html)]accessed 03 March 2001.

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## **VI. CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents the major findings of this research and evaluates the prospects for peace in Colombia. It is based on the objectives and strategies of the armed and non-violent actors involved in the conflict and assesses whether the actors are interested in peace. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations for promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

### **A. ARMED ACTORS**

This thesis has led the author to the conclusion that the FARC and AUC are not ready for peace, but instead, these two organizations are seeking to perpetuate the conflict due to their economic interest and military strength. The FARC has to be weakened militarily and economically before it takes the peace process seriously. The AUC must also be weakened militarily and economically, and the government should consider starting separate negotiations with this group. The ELN has been weakened mostly by the self-defense groups' military action against them, although the state security forces and the FARC have also helped in this process. The ELN's lack of military and economic strength has made the organization ready to enter peace negotiations.

The state security forces have shown its improvement in operative and intelligence capabilities during the last three years by modernizing the organization, acquiring new technology, and by dismissing those who in one sense or another harm the institution's reputation. This military improvement has delayed the FARC's military goals and have diminished their military and economic capabilities. Even though there are positive signs in the fight against the illegal armed actors, there is much to do to force

them to take the peace process seriously. The AUC, rather than decreasing in military and economic capability, is growing and the state security forces have to find the military manner to weaken it. The state security forces inability to do so is affecting the institution's legitimacy.

## **B. NON-VIOLENT ACTORS**

Domestically over the last ten years, the misguided policies of the Gaviria and Samper governments greatly aggravated the internal conflict. Gaviria's focus on neo-liberal economic reforms improved the country's macro economic situation, but negatively affected the agricultural sector, encouraging the growth of guerrillas and the narco-trafficking. Samper's government was characterized by a fight for political survival in the aftermath of pre-inaugural revelations of narco-trafficking contributions to his presidential campaign. This prevented Samper from following any effective negotiation strategies with the guerrilla. During this period, the guerrillas and the self-defense groups became strongly involved in narco-trafficking and grew economically and militarily.

Pastrana's government peace efforts are right in the sense that he has initiated the possibility of peace with the two largest guerrilla organizations and has invited civil society and the international community to participate in the process. The government policy of peace negotiation with civil society and the international community participation, and the war against narco-trafficking seems to be a good strategy that could eventually force the armed actors to negotiate.

Colombian civil society, in particular middle and upper classes have just started to feel the political, social and economic impact of Colombia's internal conflict during the last decade. The 10 million Colombian votes for peace in 1997 and the public

demonstrations against violence are proof that the Colombians really want peace. Civil society is concerned over the conflict, the political pressure against the illegal armed actors' crimes, and its commitment to the government's peace attempts are the civil society's best contribution for peace.

The international actors comprise the second group of non-violent actors; without international assistance, it will be very difficult to reach peace. There are two areas in which the international actors could help Colombia: first, in the negotiation process, and second, by giving economic assistance to the Colombian government to support its strategy and efforts.

The European Union is one of the most important mediators between the government and the guerrillas so its participation is vital to the peace process. Colombia's neighbors and the United States do not play a very important role in the negotiation itself, but as part of the international community, they can support the Colombian government's efforts for peace as facilitators or observers. Colombia's neighbors can best contribute to the peace process in Colombia by controlling their frontiers, strengthening the state presence in the border regions not only militarily but also through social, educational and health programs to favor the population that live in these isolated areas.

Economic assistance from the U.S. would help the Colombian government eradicate many hectares of coca, reduce the guerrillas and self-defense groups' income, and force the guerrillas to negotiate seriously. Although in the short run U.S. aid will likely cause the level of conflict to increase, in the long run it will contribute to peace. The European Union's economic assistance, although less than expected, can contribute

to the government plan of alleviating the country's political, social and economic problems.

The presence of non-governmental organizations in Colombia during this period of violence is a positive phenomenon that has reduced the human rights violations and in many cases has prevented further atrocities in this devastating conflict. The NGOs' "peace communities" have contributed much to those areas in the midst of the confrontation that have no other interest than to live without any involvement in the armed conflict.

### **C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on this analysis of the development of the Colombian conflict during the last years, these are some recommendations that in the author's view should be implemented to encourage a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Colombia

The government has to continue to work unflinchingly for a negotiated peace with the guerrillas. Political, economic and technical support from the international community is crucial. The EU as well as the U.S. must continue aiding the peace process and its programs of alternative crop cultivation. While US aid supplies the economic and technical-military support in the government coca eradication, the E.U should continue to provide the social aid so the peasants can shift their agricultural production to alternative crops.

The state security forces must continue fortifying themselves professionally. The state security forces must continue improving their military and intelligence capabilities in order to weaken the military and economic capabilities of the illegal armed actors. Militarily success against the illegal armed actors will help the government's peace

attempts by forcing its opponents to negotiate. In addition, state security forces must serve the peace process by accepting the government's decisions. This means maintaining military subordination to civilian rule, even as it is strengthened, and increasing the level of cooperation between the military and government.

The state security forces must demonstrate that there is no relationship between the AUC criminal organization and the state through their positive actions against the self-defense groups. Strengthening the state military against the AUC will contribute to increasing the legitimacy of the state and will reduce the guerrillas' excuses for rejecting the peace negotiations. Corresponding to this military action against the AUC, the Colombian government has to find the legal alternative to negotiate a cease-fire with the self-defense groups, even with the guerrillas' opposition to this political solution.

The government has to find the means of resolving the political, social and economic problems that the country has had for years, for these issues justified the guerrillas' emergence fifty years ago. The roots of the Colombian internal conflict demand structural changes in education, justice, environment, health and employment. These sweeping national changes can require generations to produce positive results, but these reforms must be implemented at some point. At no other time in Colombian history has the time been more appropriate for such a reformation than right now. Continuing pressure from civil society, and not just the guerrillas, is necessary to create the political will for such changes.

Implementing these recommendations to stop the conflict, eradicating coca production, and establishing an effective set of political, social and economic programs

can bring sustained growth to Colombia. If Colombia is capable of reducing violence and narcotrafficking, the Colombian society and its economy will flourish under a new political environment.

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