Colombian special forces perform demonstration maneuvers for Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Manuel Santos, Oct. 3, 2007.

Colombia

A Political Economy of War to an Inclusive Peace

BY DAVID KILCULLEN & GREG MILLS

S uch progress has been made in Colombia that it is hard to remember that only 20 years ago, the country was renowned not for its practical people or its wonderful cities and rain-forests, but for its cocaine-fuelled murder rate. At the height of the drug war in the 1990s, Colombians suffered ten kidnappings a day, 75 political assassinations a week, and 36,000 murders a year (fifteen times the rate in the United States).[1] The military and police competed with an array of guerrillas, gangs, *narcos* and paramilitaries. Guerrillas had so isolated the largest cities that urban-dwellers traveling as little as five miles out of town risked kidnapping, or worse. Twenty-seven thousand two hundred thirteen people died in 1997-2001 alone.[2] Colombia entered the 21st century at risk of becoming a failed state. Since then, national leaders have turned the situation around, applying a well-designed strategy with growing public and international support. Kidnappings, murders and cocaine cultivation are down, government control has expanded, and the economy is recovering. Talks in Havana, Cuba, offer the hope of peace, even as fighting continues on the ground in key areas. But the situation is shakier than it seems—indeed the very success of Colombia's current campaign carries the risk of future conflict.

In this paper, which draws on fieldwork in Colombia between March 2009 and August 2014, we examine Colombia's turnaround, explore current issues, and offer insights for the future and for others facing similar challenges. We consider the conflict's political economy, by which we mean the dynamic social-political-economic system that frames people's choices within incentive structures created by two generations of war. Our key finding is that, with some significant exceptions, key commanders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known widely by their Spanish acronym, FARC) and others have become what we call "conflict entrepreneurs," seeking to perpetuate war for personal gain rather than to win (and thereby end) the conflict. Therefore, remarkable as it is, today's military progress won't be enough to end the war in a way that guarantees Colombia's peaceful future. We argue that a comprehensive conflict transformation is

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needed—one that moves Colombia from a political economy of violent exploitation, to one of inclusive, sustainable peace.

Background

From Spain's conquest in the 1500s, through resistance to colonialism in the 18th century, to the liberation wars of Simón Bolívar in 1812-19, the area that is now Colombia has seen near-continuous conflict. Colombia is the oldest democracy in Latin America, but has been at war for 150 of its 195 years of independence: there were nine civil wars and more than fifty insurrections in the nineteenth century alone. Colombians have learned to live with "democratic insecurity."

Historically, conflict arose between Liberals and Conservatives, political blocs that mirrored a stratified, segmented society of European oligarchs controlling factories and huge estates, excluded rural and urban poor, and marginalized Indian and Afro-Colombian minorities. Colombia's temperate, urbanized, populated, developed center contrasted with its tropical, rural, sparsely inhabited, neglected periphery. Structural inequality and lack of opportunity created fertile ground for revolutionaries seeking to overthrow the system, and those living outside the law.

Ironically, today's conflict arose from the pacification process after Colombia's bloodiest episode of social conflict, *La Violencia*, which left 300,000 dead between 1948-53. The murder of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a Liberal leader, unleashed savage violence among Liberal and Conservative militias, in a nationwide bloodletting Colombians still remember with horror. The conflict rapidly expanded beyond its original causes, and tore the social fabric apart. Although it derived, at least initially, from conflicts among Colombia's political elites in the cities, the violence fell most heavily on rural and small-town communities, where partisan violence among local groups was often sponsored by outside (principally urban, elite) actors. This pattern of violent clientelism ended only in 1953 when both parties, recognizing they were powerless to stop the violence they had unleashed, asked the military to step in to end the conflict. The period of martial law that followed was the Army's sole 20th century intervention in politics—and it resulted in a 1957 political settlement, brokered by the military, in which Liberals and Conservatives agreed to share power, alternating at the head of bipartisan National Front governments for the next 16 years.

This cosy reconciliation among elites—which, by definition, excluded the poor, rural, and indigenous workers and peasants who had been most heavily affected by the violence—ended *La Violencia* but created the conditions for future conflict. In particular, the deal excluded Communist armed movements, as well as more moderate Marxist groups, that had emerged outside the traditional Liberal-Conservative dichotomy as a result of the violence. The Communist Party refused to join the National Front reconciliation process; several Communist militias refused to disarm, instead establishing autonomous zones (which the central government called "independent republics") in defiance of Bogota.[3] Because these "republics"—and the armed groups controlling them—rejected the National Front arrangement, successive Colombian national unity governments (both Liberal- and Conservative-led) saw them as a threat, and a potential trigger for collapse of the entire 1957 peace deal and the return of massive violence.

Conflict indeed began to intensify after 1959, part of a region-wide rise in unrest after the Cuban Revolution—rural violence, for example, rose 30 percent in 1960-62.[4] From 1959, with help from U.S. special warfare teams and civil agencies, Colombia improved its counterinsurgency capabilities, developed Plan LAZO (a comprehensive Internal Defence strategy), and sought to suppress the independent republics.[5] Evidence in late 1963 that Colombian guerrillas had received weapons and training from Cuba underlined the regional dynamic, and prompted government action against the "independent republics."

In May 1964, the Armed Forces attacked the "Marquetalia Republic" led by Manuel Marulanda Velez. The assault pushed Marulanda's guerrillas into the neighbouring "Republic of Rio Chiquito" where in July 1964 a confederation of guerrilla groups formed the Southern Bloc. "Declaring themselves 'victims of the policy of fire and sword proclaimed and carried out by the oligarchic usurpers of power,' the new coalition called for 'armed revolutionary struggle to win power'"[6] and renamed itself the FARC *(Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia)* two years later. Also opposing the government were the rural ELN *(Ejercito de Liberación Nacional)* the Maoist Chinese-oriented EPL *(Ejercito Popular de Liberacion)* and a decade later, the urban M-19 *(Movimiento 19 de Abril)*. The Army, in turn, received support—sometimes helpful, often unwanted or embarrassing—from right-wing paramilitaries that had formed to defend communities (and wealthy landowners) threatened by the guerrillas.

M-19 demobilized in 1990 and transformed itself into a parliamentary political party, but FARC and ELN opted to continue the struggle, alongside EPL. FARC quickly turned to criminal activity to fund its struggle. As the distinguished Colombia analyst David Spencer points out, "FARC never received the external support it wanted. Fidel Castro hated Communist Party organizations and the Soviets only provided political and moral support. FARC was always self-supporting and discovered drugs in the early 1980s. [FARC leaders] always intended it to be a temporary means of financing to fill the gap until external support could be found, but the amount of money eventually seduced them so that by the early 1990s they were totally in."

With the collapse of Communism in the early 1990s, the prospect of external support receded even further, and narcotics became a key source of finance, along with kidnapping and extortion. Drugs brought in an estimated $3.5 billion annually by 2005, or 45 percent of FARC's funding. The paramilitaries, likewise, received three-quarters of their income from drug cartels, to which they hired out their services.

This created a huge overlap between guerrillas and gangsters in Colombia. FARC has indeed evolved into a criminal-insurgent hybrid: the system it spreads to areas under its control creates its own exploitative and violent political economy, where Marxism provides a veneer for racketeering built on drugs, illegal mining, extortion, robbery and kidnapping. Colombia's insurgency has merged with criminality while FARC leaders (among others) have emerged as conflict entrepreneurs—they have discovered the value of crime as an enabler for their pursuit of raw political power.

Ideologically-motivated insurgents fight for objectives extrinsic to conflict; they stop fighting when those objectives are achieved. States operate the same way: as Colombia's Defence Minister, Juan Carlos Pinzon points

out, "governments don't fight wars just to fight—they fight to build a better reality for their people."[7] By contrast, conflict entrepreneurs fight to perpetuate a conflict, since its existence creates wealth, power and status for them: their goals are intrinsic to conflict. When their stated political objectives cease to help maintain a profitable conflict, conflict entrepreneurs simply change the objectives and continue the conflict. FARC, like the militarized criminal groups (*bandas criminales*, BACRIM) that emerged from the paramilitaries, is a classic example of this war-as-racketeering phenomenon, but it is not the only one. Many African conflicts, in particular—including clan warfare in Somalia, conflicts in Sudan and the Congo, and the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda and the Central African Republic—show a similar pattern.

Graffiti portrait of Pablo Escobar.

Likewise, the Haqqani network in Pakistan, Mexico's Zetas, and several Libyan militia groups can be considered conflict entrepreneurs.

Defeat into Victory?

By 1996 Colombia was losing the battle against this criminal-insurgent complex. Drug cartels—Pablo Escobar in Medellín, and the rival Cali cartel—had subverted Colombia's democracy and brought violence to its cities. In the countryside, paramilitaries had united into the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) and branched out into drugs, extortion and extrajudicial killing. FARC had escalated from a guerrilla war to a War of Movement phase in its modified People's War strategy, achieving a string of major victories between April 1996 and December 1999. Main force FARC columns, operating openly in large formations, proved capable of defeating battalion-sized Army units and seizing and holding territory.[8]

By the end of the 20th century, on the Army's admission, the guerrillas controlled territory stretching "from Ecuador to Venezuela, had built themselves considerable infrastructure in the southeast around Caquetá and Meta, and not only had Bogotá surrounded, but had deployed guerrillas into its outskirts. Road transport between the major cities was very difficult, if not impossible."[9] FARC's victories—and its expansion, which for the first time directly threatened Colombia's major cities—were a wake-up call for Colombians. Many had previously seen the guerrillas (to the extent they thought about them at all) as a nuisance, a problem for *campesinos* but no threat to business-as-usual in Colombia's sophisticated centre. Suddenly the threat

seemed real, prompting a national mobilization.

Elected in 1998, President Andrés Pastrana initially pursued peace talks, creating a demilitarised zone centred on San Vicente del Caguan, including a "peace camp" at Las Pozos. But he broke off talks in February 2002 after the guerrillas showed no willingness to abandon the armed struggle, continued the fight outside the demilitarised zone, exploited the peace talks to gain breathing space, and used their Caguan enclave (demilitarized only by Colombian forces—FARC maintained a strong armed presence) to massively expand cocaine production and attack Colombia's cities.

Colombian military leaders realized that something had to change, and began developing plans to break the deadlock. These eventually resulted in a major FARC defeat at Mitu, which signalled the government's new resolve and marked the beginning of Colombia's remarkable turnaround. Pastrana had earlier formulated *Plan Colombia*, a $10.6 billion effort formally known as the "Colombia Strategic Development Initiative," which "was a determining factor in the return of government control to wide areas of the country."[10] Partly U.S. funded, and launched in 2000, Plan Colombia was initially focused primarily on the drug war, but gained impetus after the 2001 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks, which freed Washington to expand cooperation beyond counter-narcotics into anti-terrorism. Encouraged by this boost, though largely relying on their own capability (Plan Colombia accounted for no more than five percent of the effort, which was driven by Colombians themselves) the military turned the tide, a process that hastened after the election of President Alvaro Uribe in August 2002.

Uribe took the fight to both guerrillas and paramilitaries, personally driving the effort, turning the guerrillas' strategy—the "combination of all forms of struggle" that treated armed action, agitation and propaganda, economic action and political negotiation simply as facets of a unified struggle—against them through his concept of "democratic security." Under Uribe, and a series of talented and capable Defence Ministers, Colombia went from widespread insecurity to expanding normality. Military recruiting surged—the Armed Forces grew from just under 205,000 in 2002 to 288,000 by 2013, and the National Police from 110,000 to 178,000 in 2013. More importantly, the number of professionals (as opposed to two-year conscripts) almost quadrupled from 22,000 in 2002 to 87,000 by 2010. The defence budget rose from three percent of GDP to over four percent during the 2000s, partly financed through a 1.3 percent "Wealth Tax" on businesses and well-off Colombians.

Colombia's military rose in quality as well as quantity. New equipment—Blackhawk helicopters, Super Tucano counterinsurgency aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, precision guided weapons, and the latest communication and surveillance technology—paralleled the creation of a special operations command and increased investment in training. While the military and police bore the initial burden, follow-up efforts were led by the *Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral* (CCAI), a reconstruction and stabilization organization created by, and reporting directly to, the Presidency. As in earlier periods, low-profile U.S. assistance helped—but the talent, energy and leadership that drove success were all Colombian.

Uribe tackled the nexus between the insurgency, paramilitaries and drugs through efforts to demobilize AUC, which succeeded in 2006, prompting a dramatic drop in criminal violence. As David Spencer argues, much of this violence "was also being perpetrated by FARC. The initial success of Democratic Security was in generating a huge drop in crime from all sources, merely by the government occupying and patrolling all of the municipalities." By protecting communities that had previously seen little or no state presence, Uribe removed the main rationale for the paramilitaries. He also promoted demobilization and reintegration of guerrillas, infrastructure improvement and popular dialogue throughout the countryside.

The effect was dramatic. Homicides halved from 28,837 (70 per 100,000) in 2002 to 16,127 (35 per 100,000) in 2011; kidnappings plummeted by 90 percent from 2,882 to 305; and car theft more than halved from 17,303 to 10,269.[11] The drop in kidnappings, in particular, brought a sense of relief and progress to Colombians. Security improvements helped the economy develop, creating a virtuous cycle of governance, growth and stability. Foreign direct investment rose to $19 billion by 2012, enabling further spending on security. Economic growth averaged five percent during the ten years from 2002, enabling fresh investment in infrastructure, and funding the expanding and professionalizing military and police.

Uribe led a hands-on approach to popular dialogue, holding televised *consejos comunitarios* (Community Councils) each weekend across the country, where he and his entire cabinet travelled to small towns and city districts. This created a public forum that was both local and national, in which community members could pose questions, and raise concerns, directly with the President and his ministers. It also began to include in the national dialogue the marginalized communities that had been co-opted or intimidated by guerrillas. Uribe visited most of Colombia's thousand-plus municipalities and 32 departments in his eight years—many more than once—creating not just positive public relations, but a feedback loop that helped his administration fine-tune its policy through an active action-learning cycle.

Uribe's "democratic security" programme was extended by his successor, President Juan Manuel Santos—one of Uribe's last defence ministers—whose *Sword of Honour* campaign aimed to degrade FARC while consolidating control in 140 contested municipalities. *Sword of Honour*, developed in late 2011 using Operational Design principles by a hand-picked team that included some of the most gifted and battle-experienced officers in Colombia, called for increased pressure on FARC, quick impact projects in contested districts (from water reticulation, sewers, bridges and roads, to community sports centers) and the creation of nine Joint Task Forces to take the fight to FARC bases. The current iteration of the plan (Sword of Honour III) includes 12 Joint Task Forces intended to penetrate FARC strongholds, while territorial brigades and police secure contested areas, and civil agencies bring governance and development to normalizing districts.

As discussed below—and as inevitably happens in war—things have not worked out quite as planned. Still, there has been a steady increase in reintegration, with 1,350 guerrillas demobilised in 2013, and 24,856 since 2002. A further 6,000 FARC have been killed in Army raids, Joint Task Force deep-penetration

operations, or precision strikes by the Air Force. But the insurgents, under tremendous pressure, have not stood still. General Juan Pablo Rodriguez, by 2014 Chief of the Armed Forces, admits that, "FARC is not stupid. They adapt and change, and every day is more difficult for us." This can be seen in the most recent FARC numbers of approximately 8500 full-time personnel and 10,000 part-time members as of September 2013, suggesting that despite all the pressure it was under, the organization had still managed to recruit, replace losses, and continue to operate.

Since 2010, the Colombian government has effectively used its operations Sword of Honour and Green Heart to steadily affect terrorist and criminal groups, their violent methods and financial means. In terms of fighting structures, by 2014, the FARC had about 6,900 fighters (a 25% reduction), the ELN 1,495 and BACRIM 3,400, showing the smallest size in at least 15 years. Fifty-five FARC leaders, 17 from the ELN and 42 from the BACRIM have also been killed or captured through targeted operations.

Colombian government data showed that 90 percent of municipalities did not register any terrorist attacks in 2014; 95 percent experienced no subversive actions; 82 percent of the population did not report presence of active terrorist structures or criminal gangs; and 94 percent of the country had no recorded cases of kidnapping. As of 2014, only 6 percent of the Colombian population was directly or indirectly affected by terrorist actions.

With respect to FARC's financial and material means, the Armed Forces have also achieved notable success. The reduction of coca crops to 48,000 hectares and the seizure of 1.6 out of every three kilograms of cocaine potentially produced, as well as the fall of

kidnapping by 97 percent, represent strategic blows against FARC's funding. Regarding materiel, the Armed Forces have seized 248.1 tons of explosives and 18,583 explosive devices, and destroyed 69,411 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) since 2010.

That said, as it loses territorial control, FARC has been forced to drop back a stage in its strategy, abandoning the War of Movement, returning to guerrilla operations in the countryside and urban terrorism. Instead of frontal attacks on cities and military bases, FARC hides among the population, using People's Militia—urban underground cells—to snipe at soldiers, intimidate communities and extort businesses, employing IEDs to deny access to base areas.

President Santos restarted peace talks, announcing in his August 2010 inaugural address that the "door to peace is not closed." This led to exploratory talks with the rebels in February 2012, which produced a six-point agenda for formal negotiations that began in Havana in November 2012 and continue today. Santos made it clear that unlike previous talks, this time military operations will continue until a deal is reached. The government is also addressing the social basis of the conflict, through the 2011 Land Restitution and Victims' Law—to redress human rights violations by all sides—and social programs including Acción Social and a new Department of Social Prosperity.

Current Issues

From this brief historical sketch it should be clear that despite a turnaround so dramatic that some call it "The Colombian Miracle," Colombia still faces a robust insurgency.[13] Current issues include sustainability, the

civil-military gap, village governance and security, and the FARC-criminal nexus.

The dilemma of sustainability

Colombia needs a sustained effort—lasting 15-20 years—to consolidate its gains, but these could be undone overnight if talks fail, or if peace allows FARC (supported by less than five percent of Colombians) to bounce back. More fundamentally, Colombia's government seeks to end the conflict on favorable terms—whereas FARC, as conflict entrepreneurs, seek to preserve the conflict. They regard peace talks as just one more phase in an ongoing struggle that serves their business interests as much as their political goals.

For the military, after hard-won battlefield success, huge expansion, and a massive growth in public support and prestige, there is a different dilemma. Military commanders understand they must sustain a local security presence, and remain involved in governance and economics, for the foreseeable future, so that civilian agencies can work with the population to extend governance, improve services, and reduce the structural inequality and exclusion that provoked the insurgency. This will take enormous political commitment over a long time—historical benchmarks suggest that post-conflict stabilization may last twice as long as the conflict that preceded it.[14]

Such a commitment, however—on top of the massive growth in budget, manpower, and prestige of the past decade—brings personal and institutional incentives that carry the risk that the military, too, may become stakeholders in a political economy of war, with institutional interests in preserving a state of conflict. This risk may be worth taking—without presence in contested areas, it is hard to see how the conflict can end—but it is still a risk.

The civil-military gap

Simultaneously, civilians need to step more actively into the space created by the military, lest soldiers be left holding an empty bag—or, worse, become tempted to usurp civil authority in order to get the job done.

As designed *Sword of Honour* envisaged civilian agencies assuming administrative functions, and Police taking over cleared areas, freeing troops to maneuver against FARC bases. Under *Green Heart*, the Police companion plan to *Sword of Honour*, police were to assume responsibility for cleared ("green") areas, freeing the military for maneuver in contested ("amber") and FARC base ("red") zones. In practice, populations rejected the Police, while civilians proved unable to fulfil their role in a timely and effective manner. The military was forced to step into the gap, leaving troops pinned down in administrative, security and integral action roles, rather than doing what only soldiers can do—keeping the enemy under pressure to set conditions for successful peace talks. As one analyst puts it, "we're not killing FARC fast enough to put enough pressure on them to achieve a peace settlement, because we're soaking up the Army doing things that are really the job of civilians."[15]

Thus, while military progress is impressive, civilian performance is lagging, creating a gap guerrillas can exploit. Unless the government creates a permanent presence at village level to replace the FARC system that has dominated communities for so long, destroying today's guerrillas will only create a vacuum to be filled by successive generations of insurgents and criminals. This is a fundamental challenge: military progress without civil governance either leaves the military pinned

down, protecting every bridge, schoolhouse and office; or it makes the population vulnerable to guerrillas once the military leaves.

Village governance and security

As one commander of a territorial brigade pointed out, the Army doesn't in fact maintain a permanent presence at village level—troops establish bases at municipio (equivalent of a U.S. county) level, or in departmental capitals, then send out patrols that visit villages only periodically, and stay only briefly. They never sleep in villages (to avoid violating civilian property rights by sleeping in schools or private houses, a practice the Army banned several years ago) but retire to patrol bases at night.

When soldiers arrive, guerrillas retreat to the hills or nearby jungle. They leave a network of informers—underground cells the Army calls RATs ("terrorist support networks", *redes de apoyo al terrorismo*)—to watch the village while they're gone. As soon as the soldiers leave, the guerrillas return. Villagers who interact with soldiers know that as soon as the sun goes down, or at most in a few days, the guerrillas will hold them to account for whatever they do or say.

Civil government has no permanent presence at village level either: the mayor of each *municipio* (which may include 200 villages) represents the lowest level of formal administration. Most mayors remain in their offices in district capitals, rarely visiting villages. Instead, they liaise with village-level Community Action Committees, (*Juntas de Acción Comunal*, JACs), informal bodies with no status under the constitution. Most governance at village level is done by JACs, and where FARC has a permanent presence, the guerrillas influence membership in the JAC so that, in the words of one soldier, "the neighborhood is the guerrilla front."[16]

This dynamic—fragmented or absent civil governance and episodic military presence, combined with permanent local presence of

Kogi children in a rural village in Colombia.

the guerrillas—creates a "double brain drain." Government supporters are systematically culled as the military's episodic visits expose them, but then leave them unprotected. Meanwhile, villagers see FARC as the legitimate system, and those with talent and ambition disappear into the movement. Money, brains and jobs—in that order—flee contested areas, and once gone are extremely difficult to get back.

FARC-Criminal Nexus

FARC-BACRIM collaboration exemplifies the strange bedfellows that emerge in a political economy of war, when conflict entrepreneurs see opportunities to perpetuate the violence from which they benefit. Most paramilitaries demobilized under the 2006 agreement but by then, some had become little more than bandits, and these evolved into BACRIM (bandas criminals). Having given up their political agenda—it was now all just business—BACRIM were willing to collaborate with anyone (including FARC) who could advance their goals of plunder and profit. For its part, FARC saw an opportunity to spread government efforts more thinly by establishing temporary alliances of convenience with criminal groups, and to use proxies to protect its cocaine economy, and to hide within criminal networks. This makes sense: as a conflict entrepreneur, if your interests are commercial rather than political, why pose as an insurgent and risk being killed by a Special Forces raid or a 500-pound laser-guided bomb? You can make more money, and have a more comfortable life as a criminal, protected by civil rights and criminal law, merely risking arrest in a country with no death penalty.

Dealing with this kind of ingrained violent criminality demands more than police: a viable justice system must include courts, corrections and effective formal and informal legal institutions. But delays in the court system, and overcrowding of jails, mean that some detainees end up serving their sentences in holding cells in police stations. Judges shy away from custodial sentences for all but the most extreme crimes, realizing there is no room in the correctional system—hence many violent offenders, even notorious BACRIM and guerrilla members, are quickly released.

This frustrates police and military officers, who see known criminals and insurgents walking free, able to retaliate against witnesses. Over the long term, such impunity—for people whom the community and law enforcement are convinced are guilty—can prompt people to take the law into their own hands and (in extreme cases) result in extra-judicial killings, as has happened in the past in Colombia, as in many countries. But change is hard to imagine without a structural shift in the incentives that make people conflict entrepreneurs—in other words, without transformation from a political economy of crime and conflict, to one of sustainable and inclusive prosperity and peace. This is a daunting challenge, but it is the fundamental task of peace building: after generations of conflict, it should be no surprise that making peace should be difficult or require a wholesale transformation.

Insights

Colombia is at a complex inflection point. The insurgency is far from spent: many guerrillas remain in the field, and even many demobilized fighters remain committed to revolutionary ideologies, and might vote for FARC or hard-left candidates if FARC were to create a political party. Peace offers FARC, within its

"combination of all forms of struggle," the opportunity to trade a tenuous military position for a stronger political one through negotiation. It may seek to manipulate grievances, mobilize populations and capture the state through the ballot box, a "revolutionary judo" move like Bolivarian revolutionaries elsewhere. Moreover, peace offers FARC racketeers the option to drop their political agenda and (like AUC) become BACRIM.

This is not the place for detailed policy prescriptions, which are, in any case, a matter for Colombians. Nevertheless, this analysis suggests several insights for the future, and for others experiencing similar challenges. We can divide these into political, military and economic insights.

Political Insights

Politically the irony is that the military's very success may undermine support for its ongoing efforts to maintain a stabilizing security presence in contested areas. As we have seen, national mobilization happened because the guerrillas began to threaten Colombia's cities. As the military rolled FARC back, the threat perception in Colombia's urban core (where the vast majority of Colombian voters live) dropped—but so in turn did the public sense of urgency. People want the war to be over, and now that FARC seems less threatening, other concerns predominate. This combination of war fatigue and shifting concerns on the part of urban Colombians helps the guerrillas.

Government's key challenge is to sustain political support without (on the one hand) letting voters slip back into apathy, or (on the other) putting Colombia on a perpetual war footing. What is needed is a genuine social transformation—one that transforms the terms of the conflict by creating a more inclusive society for excluded and marginalized populations that are FARC's principal constituency. This in turn requires recognition that FARC and BACRIM are conflict entrepreneurs seeking to perpetuate violence for personal gain, so that extension of government presence and rule of law to the very local level of society is critical.

Related to this, given the failure of civilian agencies to deliver the governance and reconstruction effects envisioned in *Sword of Honour*, political leaders need to recognize that the critical counterinsurgency element today is not the military effort, but rather the ability of these civilian agencies to backfill that effort. Local civil governance—and the willingness of civil agencies to support a comprehensive national plan—demands political leadership. Since civil agencies don't work for the Defense Minister, such leadership can only come from the Presidency. This suggests that a balance is needed between pursuing peace talks themselves, versus extending civilian governance so as to free the military to generate enough pressure on FARC to ensure a favorable outcome for those talks.

A third political insight is the recognition that—as in *La Violencia*—the peace settlement from one conflict can create the seeds of another. In that previous case, exclusion of some Colombians from the National Front led to "independent republics," and suppressing these republics created today's insurgency. A future peace settlement that lets conflict entrepreneurs unfairly control territory or government institutions could lead to a "soft takeover" by groups that have been defeated militarily and whom very few Colombians support. But equally, excluding such actors from politics could set the conditions for another insurgency, and denying them

economic opportunity could increase criminality, as insurgents rebrand themselves in the manner of BACRIM. Finally, a settlement that penalizes military or police for actions during the conflict, while giving blanket amnesty to guerrillas, may create a constituency against political integration—as soldiers worry whether some future government may punish them or their families for acts that were legal and seen as necessary at the time.

Military Insights

A key military insight is the need to redouble efforts to secure the at-risk rural population—people willing to work with the government, but living in FARC-dominated areas. These people are the seed-corn of future rural stability, and must be protected at all costs. Periodic raiding or patrol visits expose them to retaliation as soon as soldiers move on. This in turn systematically culls community leaders in contested areas. The only solution is permanent presence—troops must live, permanently, among the people at village level, creating a safe enough environment that local communities feel confident to identify RATs and insurgent networks, and reversing the brain drain by helping JACs, community leaders, and talented local people regain control of their own villages.

By lifting the pall of fear off rural communities, the loss of money, brains and jobs can begin to be reversed. Village outposts, supported by district quick-reaction forces and embedded police and administrative officials, can create a framework for radical improvement. Until civil agencies and police backfill the military, there will be insufficient troops to secure all contested districts—until then, there will be a need to prioritize key districts and redirect effort away from tasks that are

properly those of civilians, toward a single-minded focus on population security at the local level.

This effort (primarily the role of Territorial Brigades) needs to be complemented by an effort to fully unleash the Joint Task Forces, accompanied by Special Forces and supported by air and maritime power, to radically increase pressure on remaining FARC strongholds and on BACRIM. The goal is not to kill or capture every last guerrilla, but to convince FARC negotiators that they are in a closing window of opportunity to achieve peace before their forces in the field are destroyed. In the crudest terms, the military needs to seize control of the guerrillas' loss rate—driving that rate upward, until a sufficiently high rate of kills, captures and surrenders is achieved that FARC leaders understand their best option is a negotiated peace. At the same time, intensive targeting of BACRIM can help convince insurgents that criminality offers no sanctuary.

It may seem premature to consider demobilization and restructuring—what we might call a "peace dividend"—while peace is still in doubt. But structures like a national guard that lets demobilized veterans serve part-time in their home villages, a rural constabulary (under regular police commanders and responsive to local civil authority), or a reconstruction corps that provides employment and training to ex-soldiers and enables infrastructure development, are worth considering now. These create a pathway to peace that soldiers can understand, and prevent demobilized personnel from the Colombian Armed Forces being drawn into criminality or destabilizing political activity.

Economic Insights

Economically, one insight is the danger of

the military becoming enmeshed in the local economy and crowding out the private sector. There's no doubt that security improvements have helped the economy develop. Pro-market policies helped Colombia reduce poverty by 38.4 percent (from 49.7 percent in 2002 to 30.6 percent in 2013) and cut unemployment by 46 percent (from 15.6 percent in 2002 to under little over eight percent in 2013). Reducing public debt to below three percent of GDP, and an export-led growth strategy, facilitated economic recovery, with Colombia's economy achieving sustained growth (6.4 percent in the first trimester of 2014). Direct Investment has been growing over the last years (30.4 percent of GDP in the first months of 2014) and there are higher tax revenues that

have accompanied the economic growth. Together with improvements in security, this established a positive cycle.

But change is not only about financial figures and riches. According to public figures, public health care coverage expanded from less than 25 million people in 2002 to 45 million at the end of 2013, and "basic and medium" education coverage from 7.8 million to 8.7 million students in 2013. This has required improving the aspect of counterinsurgency that most campaigns struggle with—connecting improvements in security with sustainable employment creation, especially in rural areas. The government has a role in wealth creation, by assisting with necessary physical infrastructure to help create markets, and with farming inputs. But governments must walk a fine line

Luis Perez

Slum housing in Colombia

between rewarding success while preventing outright failure. Job creation is key, because it will help dissipate much of the sense of grievance that has historically fuelled conflict.

Another insight is that more thought is needed on how the military can include the private sector, to expedite small, local development projects that directly benefit local economies, facilitate private business and encourage private investment. A number of ideas might be explored: embedding civilians, from NGOs or the private sector, with military units in a sort of Colombian Pioneer Corps, or exploring mechanisms for public-private partnership beyond simply engaging with chambers of commerce or extant investors. It is precisely the investors who are not already present that one wants to attract; first by knowing what opportunities they are interested in, and second by understanding and facilitating their requirements. Efforts to promote and protect investments in employment-generating businesses are key to reversing the money/brains/jobs drain from local communities, and here Colombia might lead a change in global thinking, and offer a new model to be emulated.

Conclusion

Fifty years ago in Vietnam, John Paul Vann said that "security may be ten percent of the problem, or it may be ninety percent, but whichever it is, it is the *first* ten percent or the *first* ninety percent…Without security, nothing else we do will last."[17] Colombia has achieved an amazing turnaround in security that offers lessons for others facing similar challenges, and has put the country within striking distance of peace for the first time since Vann deployed to Vietnam way back in 1963.

But if this paper shows anything, it is that Colombia today is entering a new phase of struggle, a political war in which fresh challenges will emerge. Should a peace settlement be achieved, there's every likelihood FARC will continue its efforts under another guise. Military force will diminish in importance, effectiveness and relevance: you cannot apply lethal force against unarmed protestors or cadres operating in civilian clothes in the cities. Colombia will need new approaches that respect human rights, but can prevent a takeover as in Venezuela or Bolivia, by conflict entrepreneurs who simply adapt to new conditions. Ultimately, a more inclusive society, an economy that helps marginalized and excluded populations share in economic opportunity, the extension of rule of law and civil governance to every level of society, and economic policies that bring money, jobs and talent back to the areas that have suffered most heavily, are critical steps in conflict transformation. This will be extremely difficult—perhaps even harder than the military struggle—yet it will be utterly essential if Colombians are to achieve peace with victory. PRISM

NOTES

[1] See Steven Dudley, *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p.2.

[2] Information supplied by the Police Intelligence Division, Bogota, 10 December 2010.

[3] These "Independent Republics" included Agriari, Viota, Tequendama, Sumapaz, El Pato, Guayabero, Suroeste del Tolima, Rio Chiquito, 26 de Septiembre, and Marquetalia.

[4] See Dennis M. Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: US Counter-insurgency

Efforts in Colombia 1959-1965" in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Winter 1995), pp. 304-327.

[5]   *ibid.*

[6]   *ibid.*

[7]   In conversation with a delegation of African leaders visiting Bogota, 19th June, 2014.

[8]   At Puerres in the department of Norino on 5 April 1996 resulting in 31 government troops killed; Las Delicias in Putumayo on 30 August 1996 with 31 killed and 60 wounded; La Carpa in Guaviare on 6 September 1996 with 23 dead; Patascoy in Guaviare on 21 December 1997 with 22 killed and 18 wounded; El Billar in Caqueá on 5 May 1998 with 63 dead and 43 wounded; Miroflores in Guaviare on 3 August 1998 with 9 dead and 22 wounded; Mitú in Vaupes on 1 November 1998 with 37 dead and 61 wounded; and Jurado in the department of Chocó on 12 December 1999 with 24 government troops killed.

[9]   Discussion, Bogota, 9 December 2010.

[10]   Oscar Naranjo, 'Colombia Shows the Value of Cooperation', *New York Times*, 17 April 2013.

[11]   *Ministerio de Defensa Nacional Colombia*.

[12]   See Milburn Line, 'Trying to End Colombia's Battle With FARC', *Foreign Affairs*, 27 March 2012.

[13]   See for example Peter J. Moons, *The Colombian Miracle: How the Government of Colombia Beat Back an Insurgency and Saved the Nation*, 2013.

[14]   Insurgencies can last 15-30 years, while reconstruction often takes far longer. For example, the Malayan Emergency began in June 1948 and the insurgents were effectively neutralized by 1959. However, it took another 30 years—until 1989—for Communist Party leaders to surrender. During that time the Royal Malaysian Armed Forces (with assistance from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) maintained an internal security role, while the government undertook a national development plan to address the grievances that had driven the insurgency. Likewise, a U.S. Defense Science Board summer study in 2003 found that stabilization and reconstruction operations undertaken by the United States since the end of the Cold War lasted, on average, ten years.

[15]   Discussion with a Colombian strategic analyst, Tolemaida, August 2014.

[16]   Interview at forward operating base with troops of JTF Nudo de Paramillo, 12th June 2014.

[17]   Quoted in Neil Sheehan (2009), *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, Kindle Edition, Locations 1206-1207.

Photos