

Welcome to the Jungle

Counterinsurgency Lessons from Colombia



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A team of West Point faculty and cadets spent two weeks in July 2018 touring urban centers, jungle terrain, and battlefields of Colombia, interviewing witnesses, participants, academics, activists, and victims on both sides of the country's long-running insurgency, while conducting firsthand research in and around four locales: Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, and Santa Marta. This report is based on extensive fieldwork by the following cadets from the United States Military Academy: Amanda Horsey, Gabriel Truman, Andrew Kitzhaber, Koi Kizzie, and Morgan Aiken. The authors would like to thank Steve Ferenzi, Ana Maria Angel, Abbey Steele, Toby Muse, Douglas Farah, Phil Klay, Captain (retired) Omar Cortez, Jeremy McDermott, Ana Arjona, Juan Carlos Pinzón, Benjamin Lessing, Luke Taylor, the staff of Ideas de la Paz and Madras de Soacha, Andres Jara, the Colombian Reintegration Agency, and senior members of the Colombian military and police, for their assistance and generous time in sharing their viewpoints with our team. From West Point, the authors would like to than Doreen Pasieka and Scott Woodbrey for the logistical and administrative support. The authors would also like to thank Alex Deep and Enzo Nussio for their helpful comments. A final thanks goes to the generosity of Ed and Libby Harshfield and Vincent Viola.

Executive Summary

The case of Colombia offers not a shining success story but a cautionary tale of how the US military can assist a foreign military and a weak government in fighting a counterinsurgency to bring about peace. A signed peace agreement does not mean that all is instantly well: attacks continue, as the January 2019 terrorist attack against the police academy in Bogotá highlights, and cocaine continues to emanate from Colombia at record levels. A recent order by the Colombian army to double the number of criminals and guerrillas they kill caused a swirl of controversy among both its rank and file as well as human rights groups, given the armed forces' past track record of targeting civilians to reach quotas.¹ The order was promptly rescinded.² Still, the conditions in Colombia are significantly improved from what they were a decade ago.

This report examines three military aspects of the war—the controversial role of Plan Colombia; the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process; and the presence of narcotrafficking and organized crime—and how each contributed to or posed challenges for the peace process. The purpose of the report is to understand how countries resolve wars through negotiated settlements; how the militaries, like our own, can contribute meaningfully to the success of such settlements; and finally, how the US military can apply the lessons of Colombia to similar war contexts, such as Afghanistan.

While the Colombia model of counterinsurgency may not be generalizable to all conflicts, it does provide military planners with several valuable lessons. These findings are listed below.

• External interventions like Plan Colombia are implements to peace but are not by themselves sufficient. The plan worked as a counterinsurgency strategy but was less effective as a counternarcotics one, which was its original design, given that the drug trade in Colombia continues to flourish. Plan Colombia, and its implementation, also provides important lessons about how the United States uses its special operations forces. Again, there was initial failure under Plan Colombia when the framework was one of counternarcotics. But institutional learning, combined with a change in the post-9/11 international environment and threat perception, resulted in a change to a legal framework focused on counterterrorism, which saw

¹ Nicholas Casey, "Colombia's Army New Kill Orders Send Chills Down Ranks," New York Times, May 18, 2019.

² Nicholas Casey, "Colombia's Army Changes Pledge to Carry Out Killings," New York Times, May 21, 2019.

a successful strategy that expanded beyond tactical victories and began to build state capacity and legitimacy.

- Negotiated settlements to end civil wars require local ownership by the national government and military. Deals perceived as externally brokered will lack legitimacy among the populace. Plan Colombia's success at creating the conditions to bring the parties to the table is owed to the fact that it was primarily Colombian-led.
- When it comes to carrots and sticks, both are fundamental to lasting peace in negotiated settlements. In the case of Colombia, the government has launched its nationwide "Victory Plan," involving some eighty thousand soldiers and police officers to occupy newly vacated Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) strongholds. Its military carried out a series of targeted strikes and cross-border raids against key FARC leaders, which paved the way for successful peace talks. Yet coercion alone is not enough to achieve peace—there must be carrots for rank-and-file insurgents to be persuaded to disarm and rejoin society.
- To this end, DDR poses one of the central challenges to successful war termination. To prevent a recidivism to violence, ex-fighters must be given proper training, opportunities, health care, psychological testing, and jobs to make it worth their while. But they also must feel secure, especially in and around the camps where many of them are rehabilitated. Attention must also be paid to erasing the societal stigma these ex-guerrillas face and to provide them adequate security.
- Drugs help fuel and fund conflicts like Colombia's. Coca and narcotics can turn an ideologically motivated rebel fighter into a profit-driven kingpin, which then can introduce different and sometimes perverse incentives for civil war termination. To combat the organized crime and drug trade requires an integrated approach between the ministries of defense and interior. On one hand, to combat this kind of crime requires patience, diligence, and detective work by national police. On the other, to coerce insurgents to the negotiating table requires the threat or use of military force brought to bear to make the costs of continuing to fight greater than suing for peace.
- Artificial quotas to capture or kill militants are an ineffective form of counterinsurgency or maintaining peace, as they create undue pressure on senior

military leadership, create conditions that lend themselves to suspicious killings and cover-ups, and can lead to fracturing within the military and strained civil-military tensions.

After more than eighteen years of war in Afghanistan, there are increasingly calls for the government of Afghanistan to broker peace with the Taliban. While there are some that argue it would be unwise to reconcile with the Taliban, at least with its leadership at the present time,³ it seems likely that this war will not be won by decisive military victory by either side. And while it may last for many more years or even decades, the case of Colombia provides some useful lessons. Below are the major findings of this report relating to trying to reach a successful and sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

- **Bargain from a favorable position.** Increased pressure against the FARC, to include the killing of several FARC leaders helped bring the FARC to the negotiating table and provided the government the upper hand. A sustained and effective offensive should proceed (and possibly continue during) negotiations.
- Negotiate behind closed doors. Media releases nearly derailed Colombia's peace process. Premature releases of negotiations with the Taliban are likely to do the same. That is not a call to reduce transparency or to sideline government watchdogs like an independent media but an acknowledgement that a peace process requires patience, room for maneuver behind closed doors, and difficult choices and compromises, which if released to the public, can embarrass negotiators or worse, derail the process, and lead to a backslide to violence.
- **Don't put it to a popular vote.** Civil wars are difficult enough to end without putting it to a popular vote; a public referendum rejecting the peace agreement nearly derailed the peace process. One negotiator we spoke to likened a peace process to a fine work of art: no artist would show their audience an unfinished painting.
- **Bigger is not necessarily better.** By all accounts, Plan Colombia was critical to ending the war, yet the investment was relatively modest, totaling some \$10 billion over a decade, a fraction of what was spent in Afghanistan. While the investment and missions are clearly

³ See for example, Ashley J. Tellis, *Reconciling with the Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy in Afghanistan* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009); and Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Negotiations and Reconciliation with the Taliban: The Key Policy Issues and Dilemmas," Brookings, January 28, 2010, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/negotiations-and-reconciliation-with-the-taliban-key-policy-issues-and-dilemmas/, accessed January 10, 2019.

different, the important lesson that can be learned from Colombia is that the United States did not try to do too much—Plan Colombia was based on a small advisory footprint and providing limited military aid that the nation was capable of sustaining. Likewise, in Afghanistan US efforts should be based on supporting Afghan programs that are sustainable.

- Be prepared to shift from counterinsurgency to counternarcotics. While the violence in Colombia may be at its lowest level in years, the disbanding of the FARC has not resulted in a corresponding decrease in coca production. In fact, quite the opposite has occurred, with coca production now at an all-time high.⁴ Even though drug trafficking and insurgencies often correlate, counterinsurgency and counternarcotics do not always reinforce one another.
- **Reintegration is extremely difficult.** While jobs training and attempts to find employment are challenging in Colombia, they are even more challenging in an underdeveloped nation like Afghanistan.
- International peacekeepers will likely be required. While the likelihood of a sustainable peace in Colombia continues to trend favorably without international peacekeepers, it would be dangerous to assume that they would not be needed in Afghanistan. In other conflicts, warring parties almost always returned to war unless a third party stepped in to enforce the treaty.

⁴ Nicholas Casey, "Colombia's Coca Acreage for Cocaine Production at All-Time High," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/americas/cocaine-colombia.html.



Map of Colombia⁵

⁵ "Political Map of Colombia," Nations Online, accessed January 29, 2019, https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/colombia_map.htm.

Introduction

Few civil wars or insurgencies end peacefully, a grim finding in the annals of civil war research.⁶ A recent exception to this pattern, however, is Colombia, whose government signed a peace accord in 2016 with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel leaders after decades of fighting. Entire generations of young Colombians that grew up knowing nothing but war and violence now have the hope of sustained peace. Yet a lasting peace is far from certain, given that many of the remaining rebels have been pushed to the coastal regions or border areas like Tumaco, a coastal city near the border with Ecuador, or Choco, the department bordering Panama. Some former combatants continue to sustain themselves via booming coca plantations, illicit gold mines, extortion, and contraband. Still, the war against the FARC, which lasted over fifty years, appears to be over, and some semblance of normalcy has returned to Colombia, as tourists and investors pour in. Yet a bomb that ripped through a police academy on the outskirts of Bogotá, killing dozens in January 2019, is a stark reminder that the violence still has not ended.⁷ Also, insurgent groups, like the National Liberation Army (ELN), and narcotraffickers remain; though neither commands the personnel or control of territory that the FARC did at its peak.

While Colombia is far from perfect when it comes to counterinsurgency, given the corruption, poor human rights record, and inequality that still threaten to destabilize the country, it nevertheless provides a template to learn important lessons. Why, after so many years of fighting and failed peace efforts, did some of the insurgents decide to strike a bargain? What were the necessary preconditions for such a peace agreement? What are the challenges to its implementation? How does a military disarm and demobilize fighters and reintegrate them back into society? What role did the United States play, given its support to the Colombian regime? Finally, what lessons can the US military take away from the case of Colombia, when it comes to successful civil war termination and counterinsurgency?

⁶ See Monica Duffy Toft, "Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory?" *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 7-36; James D. Fearon, "Why do Some Civil Wars Last so much Longer than Others?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 275-301; Roy Licklider, "The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars, 1945–1993," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 3 (1995): 681-690; and T. David Mason and Patrick J. Fett, "How Civil Wars End: A Rational Choice Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 4 (1996): 546-568. For reasons of grammatical simplicity, this report will use the phrases "civil war" and "insurgency" interchangeably, realizing there are important conceptual differences. On those, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (2010): 415-429.

⁷ "Bogotá blast: Deadly car bomb kills 20 in Colombian capital," BBC News, January 18, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46904683, accessed January 21, 2019.

This report will examine three military aspects of the war—the controversial role of Plan Colombia; the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process; and the presence of narcotrafficking and organized crime—and how each contributed to or posed challenges for the peace process. The purpose of the report is to understand how countries resolve wars through negotiated settlements, how the militaries, like our own, can contribute meaningfully to the success of such settlements, and finally how the US military can apply the lessons of Colombia to similar war contexts, such as Afghanistan.

To be sure, Colombia—a country of some fifty million people—remains a violent country that is politically polarized and wracked by organized crime linked to drug trafficking. New criminal groups, or *bacrim*, as well as neo-paramilitary outfits like the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, have filled the void left from demobilization.⁸ The long-term success of the peace accords should not be taken as a certainty, given the country's long history of recidivist violence. Yet it is remarkable that the FARC, one of Colombia's oldest, most active, and most notorious guerrilla groups, laid down its arms and is now part of the political process, even though some of its members and weapon stockpiles remain at large. Colombia's homicide rate is at its lowest point since the 1970s,⁹ and the cartels of yesteryear no longer exist, even though the drug trade continues to boom. The country has also emerged as Latin America's fastest growing economy.¹⁰

As the US military finds itself increasingly involved in civil wars that involve agrarian insurgencies that are a toxic mixture of grievances over land and greed from illicit drugs, Colombia is a case that should merit more study at the strategic and operational levels. Put simply, the Colombian peace accords and the American involvement in Plan Colombia, hold important lessons for a postwar Afghanistan, when that day arises. Consider the similarities: a predominantly rural insurgency fought using primarily irregular means and involving several groups often motivated by profit over ideology; a lifeline of narcotics production making the war profitable and introducing mixed incentives for local coca (Colombia) or poppy (Afghanistan) farmers; the presence of cross-border sanctuaries; the presence of US special operations forces to train and equip local troops; millions of internally displaced

⁸ International Crisis Group, *Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace* (Brussels: International Crisis Group 2017), 2.

⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰ "Passing the Baton: Colombia overtakes Peru to become the region's fastest-growing big economy," *The Economist,* August 2, 2014.

persons (IDPs) and refugees; an exceedingly complicated DDR process; and the perceived intractability of the conflict at large that risks destabilizing its neighbors.

This report will examine three areas that provide lessons for US military operations in counterinsurgency, civil war termination, and post-conflict reconciliation: the role of multibillion-dollar external interventions like Plan Colombia; the complicated process of DDR, with an examination of best practices; and the influence of narcotics and organized crime on conflict sustainment and war termination.

This report proceeds as follows: First, we provide some historical background to the conflict and detail its main causes and drivers. Next, we situate Colombia in the wider theoretical literature on civil wars, war termination, and transitional justice. Then, we examine three subsets of the war: the military (and United States') role played by Plan Colombia; DDR and post-conflict reconciliation; and the ongoing challenges of narcotrafficking and organized crime. We conclude with recommendations and US military lessons for Afghanistan and other war contexts.

Chapter I - History of the War

The violence in Colombia can trace its origins back to the country's independence on August 7, 1819. Originally composed of what is now Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia, Gran Colombia, as it was known, was too large to govern. So, the country split into three territories in 1830. Two main parties were established in 1849: Conservative and Liberal. The former sought a stronger and more centralized state, including greater influence of the Catholic Church over politics; the latter sought greater liberty and protections for the Colombian people and diffused power (and tax revenues) to local governments. Over the next half-century, Colombia experienced no fewer than eight civil wars and over fifty antigovernment insurrections, generally fought between these two factions. In 1899, a liberal revolt set off what is known as the Thousand Days War, leaving some one hundred thousand Colombians dead. In 1903, the United States signed a treaty with Colombia to grant itself use over the Isthmus of Panama in exchange for regular payments. Washington also fomented a secessionist movement in Panama, which declared its independence from Colombia in November 1903, on the pretext that an independent Panama would one day build a canal to facilitate greater trade (which it did in 1914). During this time, US involvement in the region was primarily commercial and meant to facilitate shipping between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. After the Great Depression, however, Colombia's economy, heavily dependent on commodity exports, turned downward, sparking a series of urban riots.11

Massive riots in Bogotá followed the April 9, 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a popular Liberal and mayor of Bogotá, and kicked off *La Violencia*—a 1948–1958 campaign of brutal violence that raged throughout Colombia's countryside. That episode left some two hundred thousand dead by hanging, quartering, mass rape, crucifixions, and scalping. The bloodshed showcased a level of personalized violence, involving vendettas between neighbors—infants were reportedly killed in cold blood—as well as more organized violence by armed groups associated with rich and powerful landlords. It also raised the class consciousness of peasants seeking greater access to land and higher wages.¹² The self-defense militias created during this time, both by landowners and by landless peasants, would later reemerge as the main protagonists in the country's civil war.¹³

¹¹ Gary Leech, The FARC: The Longest Insurgency (London: Zed Books, 2011).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kyle Johnson and Michael Jonsson, "Colombia: Ending the Forever War?," Survival 55, no. 1 (2013): 68.

In 1953, Gen. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla initiated a military coup and ruled until 1957. Upon banning the Communist Party, he launched a series of military offensives against peasant enclaves in Sumapaz, a locality in southern Bogotá. The displaced peasants resettled in Meta, Caquetá, and in the south near Tolima—all areas that would later become FARC strongholds. In 1958, conservative and liberal elites briefly put aside their political differences to form a National Front, an agreement whereby presidential power in Bogotá would rotate. During this time, however, discontent lingered in the countryside over land rights, rural poverty, inequality, indigenous rights, poor governance, and corruption.¹⁴

The Insurgency

This discontent fueled the creation of ragtag guerrilla groups, which grew out of various rural selfdefense leagues formed during *La Violencia* to protect peasants from violence perpetrated by far-right militias hired by landowners. This created a vicious cycle of violence that culminated in the onset of civil war in the mid-1960s. These groups gained legions of followers in the wake of US-backed government attacks in 1964 against communist peasant guerrillas in Marquetalia, an enclave in the Tolima department just west of Bogotá, which killed scores of civilians.

The three main rebel groups to form at this time were the FARC (founded mostly by rural *campesinos*); the National Liberation Army, or ELN, (largely an urban student movement); and the Movement of April 19, or M-19 (urban revolutionaries that employed terrorist tactics).¹⁵

FARC. In 1964, Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda, together with the Communist Party, organized an armed resistance in Marquetalia that became known as the FARC.¹⁶ They were a Marxistinspired rural insurgent organization, largely composed of peasants. "The FARC believes they are fighting for fair capitalism for the common rural farmer," said one expert.¹⁷ By the 1980s, the Sovietbacked group, one of the hemisphere's oldest, controlled the eastern and southern hinterlands of Colombia, including the departments of Tolima, Cauca, Meta, Huila, Caquetá, Cundinamarca, Urabá, and Middle Magdalena River regions. Around this time, the group altered its military strategy, shifting

¹⁴ Leech, *The FARC*.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Kyle Johnson and Michael Jonsson, "Colombia: Ending the Forever War?," Survival 55, no. 1 (2013): 69.

¹⁷ Interview with a Colombia NGO worker in Bogota, July 2018.

from a ragtag guerrilla group to one that was offensive-minded and sought out large-scale confrontations with the state.¹⁸

In other words, rather than wait to ambush the enemy, the FARC carried out a more comprehensive military strategy that included expanding into the political arena, expanding its military capabilities, and seeking an economic component to its armed struggle. It also sought to expand its control beyond the countryside and gain a foothold in Colombian cities. The FARC grew from a small group of revolutionaries in the 1970s to claim over sixteen thousand fighters, organized into at least sixty-four fronts, in 2000. The FARC also spread into urban areas, but maintained its base in Colombia's rural countryside. By 1985, the FARC had formed a political wing, the Unión Patriótica (referred to as the UP), which ran candidates and included a cell of spies and interlocutors to support its armed cadres.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the FARC sought alternative sources of funding, turning to illicit activities, including drug smuggling, kidnapping, illegal gold mining, and extortion. Colombia's periphery near Ecuador provided the group with an ideal area to cultivate coca leaves, used in the production of cocaine.¹⁹ This region drew thousands of peasant migrants to work the fields as coca growers, and provided the FARC with a vital financial lifeline as well as a base the size of Switzerland.²⁰ Between 1997 and 2004, the group more than doubled in size (from nine thousand to nineteen thousand), and carried out a string of successful attacks against government targets. As one report concluded, the group was simply able to "outgun the [Colombian] military."²¹ The group shifted its aims from seizing power in Bogotá to becoming an organized criminal outfit. By the late 1990s, the FARC had achieved such strength that some analysts believed that the group would be capable of achieving victory within five years.²²

¹⁸ Leech, *The FARC*, 25.

¹⁹ Peceny and Durnan argue that the FARC's surge in the 1990s was an unintended consequence of the United States' successful drug interdiction policies, as they pushed coca's cultivation areas toward those lands controlled by FARC rebels. See Mark Peceny and Michael Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend: US Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 2 (2006): 95-116.

²⁰ To be sure, the FARC had bases along the eastern border with Venezuela as far back as 1980. It was part of the group's larger guerrilla strategy, to make rural parts of Colombia ungovernable while benefiting from illicit cross-border trade of narcotics. See James Lockhart Smith and Nigel Inkster, *The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of Raul Reyes.* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011).

²¹ Douglas Farah and Glenn Simpson, "Ecuador at Risk: Drugs, Thugs, and the People's Revolution" (Alexandria, VA: International Assessment and Strategy Center, 2010).

²² Ibid.

ELN. The ELN formed in 1962 and was modeled more as a Cuban-style guerrilla outfit, motivated by liberation theology and anti-imperialism (among its members were Catholic priests). At its height in 2000, the ELN included some 4,500 members. The group refused to enter the latest peace talks and remains an active fighting force, although their presence has been marginalized and their influence and support waning among average Colombians. For the ELN, winning the war is not really its end goal; rather, it operates from a strategy of carrying out active and armed resistance at the local level.²³ The group is active primarily in Choco, a border region in western Colombia, where it has forcibly recruited child fighters and is accused of planting landmines. The ELN has also increased its involvement in drug trafficking in recent years.²⁴

M-19. The M-19, founded after rigged presidential elections in 1970, was a Marxist band of rebels, primarily urban and composed of university students and intellectuals. They were the first of the major groups to formally demobilize and enter the political fold. M-19 is perhaps mostly known for its spectacular, though failed, siege of the Palace of Justice in November 1985, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of hostages and nearly half of the country's twenty-five Supreme Court justices. The instigation for the siege reportedly came from Pablo Escobar, the notorious head of the Medellín drug cartel.²⁵

Until the 1980s, the guerrilla groups were dismissed by the Colombian authorities as mostly a nuisance to public order. They were violent, but much of the violence was contained in the countryside and far removed from Colombia's urban areas, and so the threat was considered manageable and one for Colombia's police, not its military. Around this time, the Colombian government had its hands full trying to curb the cocaine trade as powerful cartels took over some of its largest cities, including Medellín and Cali. There were numerous failed efforts to strike a ceasefire with the insurgent groups, largely due to lack of trust and presence of spoilers on both sides. Throughout the 1990s, the Colombian state—corrupt, inefficient, and unable to secure its borders—found itself unable to turn

²³ International Crisis Group. Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace, 7.

²⁴ Ibid., 8.

²⁵ Christopher Woody, "33 years ago, rebels allegedly backed by Pablo Escobar stormed Colombia's Palace of Justice — here's how the terrifying siege went down," *Business Insider*, November 8, 2018,

https://www.businessinsider.com/colombia-palace-of-justice-siege-2016-11, accessed on February 3, 2019.

the tide of violence. By 2000, the FARC controlled nearly one-third of Colombia's peripheral regions,²⁶ and the country emerged as the world's largest producer of cocaine.²⁷

It was at this time that the United States, together with the government of Colombia, developed Plan Colombia as a way to curb the flow of drugs into America. The plan, which we detail in this report, was unsuccessful as a counternarcotics strategy but widely successful as a counterinsurgency one. Still, coca cultivation dropped by over half between 2007 and 2012, as Colombia was eclipsed (briefly) by Peru as the world's leading producer of cocaine.²⁸ Part of the plan involved greater coordination between Colombia's interior and defense ministries. The 2002 election of President Alvaro Uribe also saw greater cooperation with the Bush administration, which resulted in a more offensive military counterinsurgency, greater intelligence sharing, and a decapitation strategy to take out the FARC's senior guerrilla leadership. Uribe ran on a platform of defeating the guerrillas, addressing the country's paramilitary problem, and combating illegal drug smuggling.²⁹ This strategy was not without consequences. There was an uptick in human rights abuses attributed to the Colombian military. The "parapolitics" scandal in 2006 revealed embarrassing links between lawmakers and illegal paramilitaries.³⁰ The 2008 cross-border raid that killed Raul Reyes, a senior FARC member, nearly provoked a wider war with Venezuela. A few months later came Operation Jacque, a daring mission to free Ingrid Betancourt, a former presidential contender, along with several American contractors held hostage for five years (these missions will be discussed in greater detail later in the report).³¹

The Peace Process

In 2010, Juan Manuel Santos, who was defense secretary under Uribe, became president and ran on a platform to step up the fight against the FARC. He was also a student of insurgencies and privately believed that there was no military solution to the conflict. "Santos believed the guerrillas

²⁶ "Colombia's FARC revolutionaries become a political party," The Economist, September 9, 2017.

²⁷ "Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service Report, updated December 14, 2018.

²⁸ Claire Felter and Danielle Renwick, "Colombia's Civil Conflict," CFR Backgrounder, January 11, 2017.

²⁹ CRS, "Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations," 4.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Felter and Renwick, "Colombia's Civil Conflict."

would never be defeated without a peace agreement," as one expert put it.³² That said, he believed that military momentum was necessary first to propel the FARC and other guerrilla groups to lay down their arms and sue for peace under terms favorable to the regime. In quick succession, thanks in part to greater intelligence and precision-guided munitions provided by the Americans, he authorized the killing of Mono Jojoy and Alfanso Cano, two FARC commanders—a daring move that threatened to derail the secret peace process that he had initiated in 2011 (the negotiations would be made public the following year). Instead, the killings appear to have provided the government greater leverage in their negotiations, as the FARC handed back hostages and made other concessions (e.g., abandoning the practice of kidnapping).

The peace process was a multi-year effort that started in Havana in 2011 between senior representatives of the FARC and the Santos administration. The final deal, reached in 2016 and signed in 2017 (the original agreement was rejected by a popular referendum), covered five important yet controversial issues: reintegration, rural development, drug eradication, victims/transitional justice, and political inclusion/participation. Santos won the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. Monitors registered and collected over seven thousand weapons at some twenty-six special transition "concentration zones" across the country, with seventy-seven secret arms caches of the FARC destroyed.³³ As part of the peace agreement, ten former FARC members now serve as members of Colombia's congress.³⁴

Still, why did the FARC begin peace talks if they could continue to sustain themselves by the cocaine trade and their leaders were previously hardliners who refused to negotiate? This is a puzzle, especially given that the FARC was militarily stronger than the ELN, which chose not to lay down its arms. By the time the peace process had become public in 2012, the FARC only fielded some seven thousand members. Some speculate that FARC leadership had simply grown tired of fighting. "Leaders simply got old, and after the assassination of FARC leader Alfonso Cano, they feared for their own lives."³⁵ Others have cynically speculated that the peace deal is merely a tactical ploy and that the group has the capacity to reconstitute its former self and fight another day, should its ability

³² Interview with Colombia expert in Bogota, July 2018.

³³ Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Welcome to peace': Colombia's FARC rebels seal historic disarmament," *The Guardian*, June 27, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/27/colombia-farc-weapons-war-government.

³⁴ Maria Cartaya, "FARC Members join Colombia's Congress," CNN, July 21, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/21/americas/farc-members-join-colombias-congress/index.html.

³⁵ Interview with Juan Carlos Pinzón in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18, 2018.

to influence Colombian politics stalls. Jeremy McDermott of InsightCrime, a well-known source on the Colombian drug wars, posits that the FARC leaders mostly lived outside the country and had little credibility among their rank and file.³⁶ Ultimately, the peace has lasted, at least as of the publication of this report.

³⁶ Interview with Jeremy McDermott (Executive Director of InSight Crime) in Medellín, Colombia, July 12, 2018.

Chapter II - Causes of the Conflict

This chapter aims to situate the civil war in Colombia into the broader civil war literature. It starts by examining the structural and proximate causes of the conflict and relating it to the broader literature on civil war onset. Next is an examination of some of the drivers of violence and the conditions that allowed the insurgency to not only sustain itself, but also thrive. The chapter concludes with an examination of Colombia as it relates to the broader literature on civil wars. Later chapters will review the literature on civil war termination to include an examination of DDR and the literature relating to credible commitments.

The civil war in Colombia was primarily a rural insurgency fought for reasons intermittently related to ideology, loot, land reform, narcotrafficking, and regional politics. For decades, Colombia's government teetered on the verge of collapse. In 2000, the regime was boosted by Plan Colombia, a \$7 billion infusion of American cash, arms, military, and intelligence support.³⁷ The Colombian military and government deserve credit for degrading the capabilities of the various rebel groups, implementing the DDR process, however fitfully, and paving the way for peace. The military, which owned the internal transformation process, has managed to maintain credibility with the population as demonstrated by its high approval ratings.³⁸

That being said, Colombia still faces a number of rebel groups that refuse to disarm, as well as a flourishing drug trade. There remain rampant inequality, corruption, and human rights abuses on all sides that have gone unaddressed. Since the 2016 peace accords were signed, over four hundred social and community leaders have been murdered by armed groups.³⁹ Even senior military officials believe that Colombia is still twenty or thirty years away from being stable, even as the US mission continues to reduce its military footprint.⁴⁰ Next door, Venezuela is now a failing state, resulting in

http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/01/17/colombia.us.drugs/index.html, accessed February 4, 2019.

³⁷ Some analysts put the estimated costs of Plan Colombia closer to \$10 billion but the Inter-American Dialogue estimates it closer to \$7 billion. For more, see Rafael Romo, "Plan Colombia Revisited: Mixed Results for US-Anti-Drug Initiative," CNN.com, January 17, 2011,

³⁸ Erica Hellerstein, "Supporting the Troops?" *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, Fall 2013. https://clas.berkeley.edu/research/colombia-supporting-troops, accessed February 3, 2019.

³⁹ "Colombia: Notre Dame Study Identifies Major Issues with Peace Efforts," TeleSUR TV, August 9, 2018, https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Colombia-Notre-Dame-Study-Identifies-Major-Issues-with-Peace-Efforts-20180809-0019.html, accessed November 9, 2018.

⁴⁰ Interview with senior military officials in Bogotá, Colombia in July 2018.

thousands of refugees fleeing across its border into Colombia. Peace, much less prosperity, is far from a sure thing.

There were structural as well as proximate causes of Colombia's civil war. There also were several factors that sustained the fighting once war broke out. Structural conditions included rampant inequality, particularly in the countryside; weak and corrupt governance; and ample safe havens. The proximate cause was the exclusion of the communist guerrillas from the power-sharing agreement that halted the violence known as *La Violencia* as well as the brutal crackdown of these groups.⁴¹ The insurgency picked up steam following a rural backlash against violence perpetrated by self-defense militias, and a surge in global demand for (and by extension, profits from) cocaine.

Structural Conditions

Several structural conditions make Colombia particularly vulnerable for civil war. First, the mountainous, jungle terrain combine with relatively porous borders to offer ample safe havens for the FARC, the ELN, and other guerrillas to hide from government forces. While nearly 80 percent of Colombia's population may be concentrated in urban areas, it doesn't negate the fact that the jungles remain under- or ungoverned. Scholars tend to find that "rough terrain" is highly correlated with civil war onset.⁴² Second, Colombia's relatively weak government—exacerbated by the rough, mountainous terrain—made it difficult for government forces to penetrate civil society, which allowed insurgent groups the political opportunity to grow. Others find that weak states also favor civil war onset.⁴³

A third condition was the unequal distribution of land, which fueled a level of inequality extreme even by Latin American standards. In the early 1960s, the government of Colombia launched a nationwide policy of industrial farming to jumpstart agricultural production and boost trade. The key component of the so-called Accelerated Economic Development policy was the generous subsidies given to larger private farmers, especially rich cattle ranchers.⁴⁴ This crowded out smaller farms and led to the forcible eviction of thousands of peasants. Some forty thousand families were

⁴¹ Felter and Renwick, "Colombia's Civil Conflict."

⁴² James D. Fearon and David D. Latin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-90.

⁴³ See, for example, Jeff Goodwin, No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War."

⁴⁴ Richard Gott, Guerrilla Movements in Latin America (London: Nelson, 1970), 516.

made landless over the course of the decade. Colombia still maintains one of the highest levels of inequality and unequal concentrations of land ownership in the world. Land reform is about redistributing arable land, whether previously collectivized by the state or held by rich farmers.⁴⁵

Land redistribution typically involves taking land from the rich and giving to it the poor, yet it rarely works smoothly. The process sometimes involves compensation schemes, but in many places, the government forces farmers to give up their land at prices the owners regard as unfair. Other times, large-scale landowners are simply evicted without their consent. The goals of land reform are multifold: reducing poverty, expanding rural development, or returning land to its previous owners. Over the course of the twentieth century, the government in Bogotá granted some twenty-three million hectares—a total area the size of the United Kingdom—to rural producers and landless (or poor) peasants, as a way to break up the country's large farms.⁴⁶ However, the land reform efforts have largely failed. As one officer put it bluntly, "Twenty-one families control Colombia."⁴⁷ A key sticking point of the latest peace process will be rural development and more equitable land distribution.

Drivers of Violence

There were several factors that sustained the war, chief among them the rise of self-defense militias and the surge in demand for cocaine abroad. Regarding the first, with the inability of the government to provide adequate security, landowners began to take security into their own hands by forming selfdefense paramilitary groups, which united in 1997 under the banner of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) totaling 20,000–30,000 members. The AUC formed under the leadership of Carlos Castano, a farmer whose father had been kidnapped and killed by the FARC, and his troops constituted a parastatal counterinsurgency force aimed at taking back territory previously controlled by FARC rebels. These groups were accused of carrying out a series of massacres—in addition to torture, mutilations, kidnappings, extortion, and sexual violence in rural areas—against guerrilla

⁴⁵ Lionel Beehner, "Q&A: Land Reform," The New York Times, December 24, 2005,

https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/cfr/international/slot1_122405.html?_r=1, accessed on November 28, 2018.

⁴⁶ Jean-Paul Faguet, Fabio Sanchez, Marta-Juanita Villaveces, "The Paradox of Land Reform, Inequality, and Local Development in Colombia," Working Paper at The London School of Economics (2016).

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/67193/1/Faguet_Paradox%20opf%20land%20reform_2016.pdf, accessed November 25, 2018.

⁴⁷ Interview with a US military officer in Bogotá, Colombia, July 2018.

groups and civilians until they were dismantled in 2003–2006.⁴⁸ At their height, they had a presence in seven hundred of Colombia's roughly 1,100 municipalities.⁴⁹ Previously these groups had targeted senior members of the Patriotic Union, the political party of the FARC, to weaken peace efforts in the 1980s. In 2001, the US government designated the AUC a foreign terrorist organization.⁵⁰

Drugs, however, and the lucrative profits to be made from them, were what fueled the conflict for so many decades. The Colombian civil war is perhaps most widely known for its trafficking of cocaine. Cartels in Medellín and Cali have become the stuff of Hollywood lore. Pablo Escobar, of the infamous Medellín cartel, carried out a slew of terrorist attacks and became a billionaire in the process. He was sent to prison in 1991—the infamous La Catedral perched high above Medellín—yet even while imprisoned he ran his cartel until his escape in 1992. A four-hundred-day manhunt would follow, ending with Escobar killed on a Medellín rooftop in 1993. Violence in Medellín actually increased after Escobar's death, though the killing paved the way for Medellín's remarkable transformation from a dangerous no-go-zone to a well-to-do tourist destination, replete with modern trains, shiny skyscrapers, and a pulsating nightlife.⁵¹

Escobar's death, however, did not end Colombia's drug production. The FARC quickly filled the vacuum that he left, earning as much as \$3.5 billion a year, according to Colombia's former defense minister, Juan Carlos Pinzón.⁵² Civil wars are expensive for violent nonstate actors, so the FARC had to become an effective business organization. The lack of state control in Colombia's rural area provided the FARC an option to cover the financial gap that resulted from the termination of support from the Soviet Union following the end of the Cold War. It was not only coca, but also illegal mining, which goes back to era of Spanish control, when African slaves were brought to Colombia to work in gold mines. "Essentially, in rural areas, illegal groups treat people like slaves," said Pinzón. "They force them to work with threats of death, then take profits."⁵³ The key difference with gold is that gold must get into the legal economic system at some point, whereas coca is illegal everywhere. Also, because

53 Ibid.

⁴⁸ Oliver Kaplan, Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴⁹ Stephanie Hanson, "Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries and Splinter Groups," Council on Foreign Relations, January 10, 2008, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/colombias-right-wing-paramilitaries-and-splinter-groups, accessed February 3, 2019.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jeff Zimbalist, Michael Zimbalist, "The Two Escobars," ESPN Films, August 27, 2010.

⁵² Interview with Juan Carlos Pinzón in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18, 2018.

the FARC was based primarily in rural areas, this made extortion, exploitation, and trade of primary commodities both profitable and less detectable. Kidnapping, too, provided a large source of the FARC's (and other groups') income, and it also helped drive recruitment. The AUC also was involved in the drug trade, and elements related to paramilitary groups continued to traffic cocaine long after the 2003–2006 demobilization process.⁵⁴

Review of the Literature on Civil Wars

Civil wars are sometimes described as "development in reverse,"⁵⁵ motivated at times by political grievances, relative deprivation,⁵⁶ or economic greed.⁵⁷ Colombia's war with the FARC dragged on for several decades, a function of its illegal markets, large swaths of territory with weak state presence, vast inequality, and weak institutions, according to Kyle Johnson and Michael Jonsson.⁵⁸ At the risk of oversimplifying the war in Colombia's central aims and root causes, the FARC is a paradigmatic case of how the motivation of rebel forces can shift from grievance (most notably, inequality) to one of greed (namely profits from drugs).⁵⁹ The initial onset of the war was a result chiefly of grievances among peasants over land inequality and forced evictions. Jeff Goodwin and others find that state sponsorship of unpopular economic and social arrangements, such as unequal land distribution, provide the grievance required to fuel an insurgency.⁶⁰ But after the war began, motivations for fighting are often in flux. Drawing on evidence from Sierra Leone, Jeremy Weinstein and Macartan Humphreys point to selective incentives and social sanctions as explainers of "who fights" and who stays on fence.⁶¹

Indeed, the war in Colombia fits—yet also contradicts, in some cases—scholars' prominent theories of civil war onset and termination. Perhaps the most cited rationale for war onset is from

⁵⁴ Hanson, "Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries and Splinter Groups."

⁵⁵ Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel, "Civil War," Journal of Economic Literature 48, no. 1 (2010): 4.

⁵⁶ Ted R. Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 22-30.

⁵⁷ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," Oxford Economic Papers 56, no. 4 (2004): 563-595.

⁵⁸ Johnson and Jonsson, "Colombia: Ending the Forever War?," 67-86.

⁵⁹ There is some debate over how much "greed," as it is operationalized in the academic literature on civil war onset, influenced the FARC senior leadership, given that they did not formally take salaries and the profits from illicit resources mostly when toward funding military operations.

⁶⁰ Goodwin, No Other Way Out, 35-64.

⁶¹ Jeremy Weinstein and Macartan Humphreys, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War, *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2006): 436-455.

James D. Fearon, who, drawing from the bargaining models of economics, noted that the essence of conflict is a disagreement over resource allocation when goods are scarce. That is, the incumbent government and the FARC cannot both control *all* of Colombia. He goes on to suggest that war arises typically as a result of one of three conditions: a misunderstanding of each side's relative power; the presence of credible commitment issues; or the perception of a good as being indivisible.⁶² Early on, the war in Colombia was fought by an insurgent group that felt it enjoyed greater military power than the government, as evidenced by its vast control over large swaths of the country. The breakdown of peace deals throughout also led to credible commitment issues—no agreement was worth the paper it was signed on, given the number of times that either the government or insurgents reneged on previous deals. There were also very low levels of trust on all sides, given that the AUC had previously targeted Patriotic Union politicians supportive of the FARC in past campaigns of violence. By forgoing their arms, the insurgent groups would be making themselves less secure and risking their extermination.⁶³

The war was not fought over a prized piece of terrain per se but rather over more abstract ideas like inequality, justice, and corruption (and later, arguably by greed and drug profits). Oliver Kaplan points to several structural factors to explain its longevity, including Colombia's illicit economy, its challenging terrain—Colombia is predominantly jungle and straddles the Andes mountain range, even though 80 percent of its population live in its major cities—and state weakness.⁶⁴ Others point to the support insurgents received from ordinary civilians—who demonstrate "pleasure in agency"—as explaining a civil war's longevity, which generally occurs because of rebels' perceived benevolence but is necessitated by rebel control of these pockets of resistance.⁶⁵ Stathis Kalyvas points to a "joint process" of political violence between individual (Deutschian) and group (Schmittian) motivations to explain patterns as well as longevity—namely that individuals are motivated by parochial or personal reasons to denunciate their neighbors, thus allowing the regime or rebels to engage in more selective and targeted violence.⁶⁶ We see evidence of both private and public types of violence throughout the course of the war in Colombia.

⁶² James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," International Organization 49, no. 3 (1995): 379-414.

⁶³ Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," Survival 35, no. 1 (1993): 27-47.

⁶⁴ Kaplan, Resisting War, 63.

⁶⁵ Elisabeth J. Wood, Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ See, for example, Stathis N. Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

The role of right-wing paramilitary groups and private militias, long ignored by scholars of civil wars, are increasingly instrumental in fueling conflicts like Colombia's. Sabine C. Carey, Neil J. Mitchell, and Will Lowe find that pro-government militias are present in four out of five civil wars going back to 1981.⁶⁷ A feature of both authoritarian and nominally democratic states at war, militias tend to lead to longer wars on average, as they are an important veto player of peace agreements, can play the role of spoiler, or can contribute negatively to commitment problems.⁶⁸ Typically communities exposed to collective targeting tend to be those that create counterinsurgent militias, as Livia Isabella Schubiger found during Peru's civil war. Militias, according to Kalyvas, are also useful for intelligence collection and help state authorities engage in selective violence.⁶⁹ Militias are obviously purveyors of public goods, such as local security, and so they often emerge as a vital component of counterinsurgents' strategies.⁷⁰ Andrew Thomson finds that para-institutional militias, sometimes of dubious allegiances, have long been a vital part of US statecraft when it comes to counterinsurgency and maintaining order in fragile states.⁷¹

Other scholars emphasize the role of external actors to explain drivers of violence.⁷² Idean Salehyan examines the presence of cross-border safe havens as a factor that sustains insurgencies.⁷³ The conflict in Colombia cannot be understood without appreciating the role played by the country's neighbors, most notably Ecuador and Venezuela, as sanctuaries once the rebels were pushed out of Colombian cities and provinces, as well as the important role played by sophisticated transnational

⁶⁷ Sabine C. Carey, Neil J. Mitchell, and Will Lowe, "States, the Security Sector and the Monopoly of Violence: A New Database on Pro-government Militias," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 2 (2013): 249-58.

⁶⁸ On these points, see, respectively, David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 875-92; Wendy Pearlman, "Spoiling Inside and Out: Internal Middle East Peace Process," *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009): 79-109; and Barbara F. Walter, "Bargaining Failures and Civil War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 243-61.

⁶⁹ Kalyvas, Logic of Violence in Civil War.

⁷⁰ Corinna Jentzsch, Stathis N. Kalyvas, Livia Isabella Schubiger, "Militias in Civil Wars," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 755-769.

⁷¹ Andrew Thomson, *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries and Contractors Support US Statecraft* (London: Pluto Press, 2018).

⁷² Patrick M. Regan, "Third-Party Interventions and the Duration of Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 55-73.

⁷³ David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, "It Takes Two: A Dyadic Analysis of Civil War Duration and Outcome," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 570-597.

organized crime networks.⁷⁴ Likewise, Lionel Beehner finds that cross-border strikes targeting violent nonstate actors have emerged as the most common type of military intervention.⁷⁵

Another prominent feature of the war in Colombia was its length, as the conflict dragged on for decades despite multiple ceasefires, well beyond the average civil war. There were credible commitment issues, per Fearon's logic and as previously mentioned. Yet scholars point to other factors. Edward Luttwak has famously postulated that premature ceasefires allow civil wars to drag on indefinitely as they allow both sides to rearm and fight another day—that wars have a teleological quality and outside interveners can perversely make wars worse by prematurely arresting violence.⁷⁶ There is evidence that both sides used the ceasefires to rearm and regroup, which may have contributed to the war's duration. That is, peace was prematurely imposed before conditions were "ripe."

Another theory of why wars of the mid to late twentieth century lasted longer than their nineteenth-century predecessors, according to Ann Hironaka, is that third parties in previous centuries intervened more decisively. In the proxy wars of the Cold War, many of the civil wars saw external sponsorship that was not decisive and that occurred on both sides, resulting in longer conflicts whereby neither side could win decisively—see, for example, wars in Angola, Afghanistan, Mozambique, and Vietnam.⁷⁷ During the Cold War, civil wars tended to end in military victory for one side or the other, whereas in the post–Cold War era they tend to end by negotiated settlements like the one seen in Colombia.⁷⁸ In the case of Colombia, the spigot of funds from the Soviet Union to the insurgent groups was largely replaced by contraband profits in the post–Cold War era. The way in which wars end matters, too, according to Monica Duffy Toft. She finds that negotiated settlements tend to lead to a greater likelihood of war and repression.⁷⁹ What matters for rebel victory, according

⁷⁴ Brian Petit, Going Big by Getting Small: The Application of Operational Art by Special Operations in Phase Zero (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2013), 125.

⁷⁵ Lionel M. Beehner, "A Means of First Resort: Explaining "Hot Pursuit" in International Relations," *Security Studies* 27, no. 3 (2018): 379-409.

⁷⁶ Edward Luttwak, "Give War a Chance," Foreign Affairs 78, no. 4 (1999): 36-44.

⁷⁷ Ann Hironaka, Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States and the Perpetuation of War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Lise Morje Howard and Alexandra Stark, "How Civil Wars End: The International System, Norms, and the Role of External Actors," *International Security* 42, no. 3 (2017): 127-171.

⁷⁹ Toft, "Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory?"

to Seth Jones, is great power support, something that largely dried up in the post–Cold War era, leading to more "draws."⁸⁰

Beyond external material support, Edward Miguel and Christopher Blattman emphasize exogenous political economy factors, namely that the escalating price of cocaine led to increased violence in coca-producing regions of Colombia.⁸¹ Along this same logic, Fearon finds that the presence of contraband tends to lead to longer civil wars, especially those fought for "sons of soil" reasons. Not all wars involving criminal networks are the same, of course.⁸² Benjamin Lessing distinguishes between the violence of criminal versus rebel groups. Rebels tend to fight the state in a "war of conquest," which end in either a decisive military victory or a negotiated political settlement. However, criminal groups engage the state in a "war of constraint," and use violence to minimize harmful state policies and maximize profits. Without a definitive end goal, it is difficult for the state to negotiate with criminal groups, who favor perpetual fighting and benefit materially from some level of conflict and criminal activity. Part of the problem in Colombia, Lessing notes, is that it was not a classical insurgency for conquest—and importantly, this distinguishes Colombia from, say, Afghanistan, which is closer to the classical insurgency definition, given the Taliban's war aims. Instead, Colombia's war refused to burn out precisely because of the constraint demonstrated by organized criminal syndicates.⁸³

The conclusion of peace in Colombia was not uniform across space or time. Kaplan examines the presence of "peace communities" as a template for how the war came to a conclusion in some local areas, pointing to the civilian autonomy and nonviolent strategies of Colombians to create pockets of peace, which were respected both by the military and the guerrilla groups.⁸⁴ He notes that similar communities existed in Dagestan, Russia, during the height of the fighting there. These zones are partly a product of social capital and trace their antecedents back to the time of *La Violencia*, when areas formed neighborhood watch and self-defense groups to guard against rebel violence.⁸⁵ Ana

⁸⁰ Seth G. Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare: Lessons from the Vietcong to the Islamic State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 159-175.

⁸¹ Blattman and Miguel, "Civil War," 35.

⁸² Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?"

⁸³ Benjamin Lessing, "The Logic of Violence in Criminal War," Journal of Conflict Resolution 59, no. 8 (2015): 1486-1516.

⁸⁴ Kaplan, Resisting War, 71.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Arjona similarly finds examples of order in rebel-controlled zones, whereby they were incentivized to build up institutions.⁸⁶

DDR also raises several challenges to a sustainable peace. There are obvious security dilemmas present whenever combatants disarm and try to reenter society, according to Barbara Walter.⁸⁷ To some extent, this has played out in Colombia where as many as eighty-five ex-combatants have been targeted and killed.⁸⁸ Jonathan Morgenstein finds that in DDR processes, there is a short window of opportunity to reintegrate ex-fighters and prevent their recidivism into violence.⁸⁰ If security dilemmas are not addressed, there is a real threat of backsliding toward violence. Transitional justice in postwar cases of negotiated settlements can be difficult, according to Joanna Spear; because there is no formally defeated party, neither side to a peace deal has clear control over their various forces, and chains of command are weak.⁹⁰ Discipline is also often poor, notes Stephen Stedman, giving rise to spoilers that may seek to disrupt the DDR process.⁹¹ There are also social-psychological factors, write Kaplan and Enxo Nussio, which include antisocial personality traits among ex-combatants, weak family ties, and lack of formal education. They point to three principle forces that mostly drive decisions on the part of ex-fighters' to turn to crime: economic conditions, security context, and criminal opportunities. All three of these are present in Colombia, a country where homicides against ex-guerrillas are commonplace.⁹²

This report will focus primarily on three subsets of the Colombian conflict: the military strategy and role played by external interventions like Plan Colombia; the DDR process and its application to other postwar contexts; and the influence of drugs in sustaining conflict and derailing peace efforts. For each, this report will pay greatest attention to the operational level of these military issues, at the risk of downplaying some of the political, social, or economic elements. Overall, this

⁸⁶ Ana Arjona, Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁸⁷ Barbara Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," International Organization 51, no. 3 (1997): 335-64.

⁸⁸ "Colombia Farc: 85 ex-rebels killed since peace deal," BBC News, January 1, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46726118.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Morgenstein, "Consolidating Disarmament: Lessons from Colombia's Reintegration Program for Demobilized Paramilitaries," US Institute of Peace Special Report 217, 2008.

⁹⁰ Joanna Spear, "Disarmament and Demobilization," in *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, eds. Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 142.

⁹¹ Stephen Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," International Security 22, no. 2 (1997): 5-53.

⁹² Oliver Kaplan and Enzo Nussio, "Explaining Recidivism of Ex-Combatants in Colombia," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 1 (2018): 64-93.

report will build on Toft's notion that negotiated settlements require both sticks and carrots, but the challenge is creating a durable peace and preventing ex-combatants from rejoining the fight or entering the criminal economy.⁹³

⁹³ Toft, "Ending Civil Wars."

Chapter III – Plan Colombia

The implementation of Plan Colombia is widely hailed as a successful effort at facilitating the process of peace in Colombia. But the view from the ground is more checkered. When the plan was first proposed in 1999, Colombia was largely a failed state and the US-led war on terrorism had not yet commenced, thus limiting the American military's latitude to counter Colombia's insurgency kinetically. The plan was initially meant to strengthen the Colombian state and eradicate coca production. Yet two decades later, Colombia is producing more cocaine than ever and large pockets of the countryside remain in the hands of guerrillas. In other words, Plan Colombia was successful as an intervention in counterinsurgency yet *unsuccessful* as an intervention in counternarcotics or drug interdiction. In 2009, it was estimated that the FARC was at least tangentially responsible for nearly 60 percent of the cocaine trafficked into the United States from Colombia. Even though the large cartels are no more, organized crime remains an issue and homicide rates have increased in areas formerly held by rebels.⁹⁴ FARC leaders who remain at large are still entrenched in the drug trade, a violation of the peace accords. Land reform (land titles and ownership rights, etc.) remains unresolved and rural development never materialized as promised.

US-Colombian military cooperation dates back six decades to the Korean War. Since then, there has been a long-term military-to-military IMET (International Military Education and Training) relationship, dating back to the establishment of Colombia's Lanceros School, an Army course focused on counterinsurgency. In 1959 and 1962, as part of Plan Lazo, the US Army sent small teams of special-warfare trainers from Fort Bragg to provide support for the regime's poorly trained forces to stamp out communist insurgents.⁹⁵ For the next several decades, US military support was intermittent and fairly minimal.

As the balance of power began to tip against the government in 1999, Colombian President Andrés Pastrana offered a plan to the United States requesting civil-military and development support, with an emphasis on bolstering Colombia's police and military infrastructure and operations.⁹⁶ Pastrana vowed to provide \$4 billion via tax revenue, with international donors providing the other

⁹⁴ Michael Shifter, "Will Colombia Make Peace with its Deal?" Foreign Affairs, May 23, 2018,

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/colombia/2018-05-23/will-colombia-make-peace-its-peace-deal, accessed January 20, 2019.

⁹⁵ Grace Livingstone, Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy, and War (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

⁹⁶ Petit, Going Big by Getting Small, 123.

\$3.5 billion. The United States chipped in \$6.13 billion for 2000–2008 and another \$722.3 million for 2008–2013.⁹⁷ Of this, \$4.86 billion went to Colombia's police and military, helping Colombia double the size of its military (from 113,081 in 1998 to 285,292 in 2013).⁹⁸ The Colombian authorities purchased newer and more proficient technological weaponry, to include Black Hawk helicopters.

The multibillion-dollar price tag raised more than a few eyebrows in Washington as the US Congress's initial authorization was only \$1.3 billion (this would eventually tick upward to \$4.5 billion by 2005), making Colombia the third largest recipient of US aid after Israel and Egypt.⁹⁹ Previously, US special operations forces had been providing support through a much narrower mandate, due to allegations of human rights abuses within Colombia's military and the fact that US assistance, prior to 2000, was the remit of the Drug Enforcement Agency and Department of Justice and focused primarily on counternarcotics units within the Colombian police.

That would soon change. In 2001, the FARC was at the height of its power, controlling fully one-third of Colombian territory and commanding a force numbering twenty thousand. Plan Colombia sought to reverse these trends, providing the Colombian government and military with an injection of cash, arms, and expertise to reverse the tide. The plan was mainly led and directed by the Colombian authorities, not the US government or military. At most, US aid composed no more than 7 percent of Colombia's defense budget. The fighting, dying, and securing of territory occurred almost exclusively by the Colombian military. The plan's overall effectiveness was also called into question, especially during its early days. "[Plan Colombia] was not decisive in its magnitude, nor . . . was it the overriding reason for security improvements at the turn of the century," write Mark Moyar, Hector Pagan, and Wil R. Griego, who point to qualitative rather than quantitative measures of US special operations forces' engagement with Colombia that proved most effective at capacity building.¹⁰⁰

Originally the focus of Plan Colombia was to train specific units within the Colombian military to a basic standard so they could deploy rapidly and gain short-term victories, at a time when they frequently suffered tactical defeats at the hands of the FARC. As units gained basic combat capability,

⁹⁷ Steven Jones-Chaljub, "Peace Negotiations in Colombia and the DDR Challenge," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 5, no. 11 (2013): 14-16. As a percentage of the overall effort, Plan Colombia was roughly one-twentieth of what the Colombians spent, according to US Embassy officials we spoke to in Bogota (July 2018).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Mark Moyar, Hector Pagan, Wil R. Griego, *Persistent Engagement in Colombia* (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2014), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 16.

the mission evolved to include greater sophistication in identifying and targeting the enemy. In 2012, the United States provided operational support teams to increase intelligence sharing. These efforts were nested with funding and homeland security priorities as a way to build greater institutional capacities—a "train the trainers" model. The long-term goals of Plan Colombia were to provide greater security in contested areas or zones with a greater guerrilla presence, combat the illicit economy that fuels the rebellion and violence, increase the size and capability of the Colombian police and military, and expand the presence of the government outside of the main three cities (Bogotá, Medellín, and Cartagena)—all of which allowed the United States to maintain a small military and diplomatic footprint.¹⁰¹

Specifically, Plan Colombia was effective at developing elite civil and military capabilities and allocating resources more efficiently, allowing for greater intelligence gathering and targeting. Juan Carlos Pinzón, former Colombian ambassador to the United States and minister of defense during President Santos's first term, said, among other things, that individual jungle units of the Colombian army improved. "Institutionally, there was more planning and a sustained effort," he said in his office in Bogotá. "This perspective was largely brought by the United States." He added, "Often times, the resources Colombia needed were not fancy military 'toys,' like tanks, F-16s, et cetera. Instead, we planned and spent resources more maturely."¹⁰²

Second, the US military advisory presence was vital to the professionalization of Colombia's forces. The technical expertise and use of advanced technologies Washington supplied them made the Colombian military more tactically professional, effective, and efficient. US military advisors, most notably the 7th Special Forces Group, only provided support and training to "vetted" units untainted by human rights abuses.¹⁰³ This was a function of the 1997 Leahy Law, which prohibits the US military from assisting units within foreign militaries found guilty of human rights abuses. US military advisors increased from 160 military personnel to four hundred military advisors, plus another four hundred contractors. This advising mission coincided with the infusion of advanced technologies. With the help of satellite-guided bomb "kits" (discussed later), and intelligence support of CIA operatives on

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 16.

¹⁰² Interview with Juan Carlos Pinzón in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18, 2018.

¹⁰³ Moyar et al., Persistent Engagement in Colombia, 17.

the ground, Colombian forces were able to more accurately target FARC leadership, including the killing of FARC leader Mono Jojoy in 2010.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, given the difficult terrain—dense jungle and impenetrable mountains—precision munitions allowed the Colombian military to strike rebel encampments.¹⁰⁵ This fundamentally shifted how the FARC could maneuver its forces, as they were no longer able to gather or travel in large groups or remain encamped in the same place for more than one night. Aviation support in the form of thirteen Black Hawk helicopters allowed the Colombian military to deploy more quickly at the tactical level and push guerrillas out of the country's smaller provincial cities and into the jungle and countryside, including across Colombia's borders. Finally, Plan Colombia was instrumental in funding and arming Colombia's counternarcotics battalions, paying for eighteen Huey helicopters to upgrade their aviation capabilities.¹⁰⁶ Each battalion consisted of approximately eight hundred troops. As one American special operations forces advisor put it, "We don't train the entire army, only units. And we train for specific capabilities.¹⁰⁷

Global War on Terrorism

In 1997, the FARC was placed on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations.¹⁰⁸ The global war on terrorism that followed the attacks of 9/11, while distracting the Bush administration from the Latin American region, led to the provision of greater resources for the Colombian government. In the early 2000s, the US military, as part of its global war on terrorism efforts, not only supplied Colombia with greater technical know-how and intelligence, but also gave the Uribe government greater political cover and military latitude to carry out targeted strikes against the FARC. By this time, groups like the FARC and the ELN had become more involved in the drug trade, further blurring the line between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency. The two were seen as two sides of the same coin. These groups financed their wars by taxing coca production. "It was a perfect storm

¹⁰⁴ "Colombian Army kills top Farc leader Mono Jojoy," BBC News, September 23, 2010, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-11399914, accessed November 16, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Nick Miroff, "Plan Colombia: How Washington Learned to Love Latin American Intervention Again," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ These Canadian models were not extremely coveted, as Moyar et al., *Persistent Engagement in Colombia*, 16 note, but they were a significant upgrade in Colombia's lethal capabilities.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with an American 7th Special Forces Group advisor in Bogotá, Colombia, July 11, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ See U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm, accessed January 10, 2019.

for Plan Colombia," one US military advisor put it. As US Southern Command Commander Gen. James Hill said, testifying before Congress in March 2004:

"Congress gave us Expanded Authority to use counter-drug funds for counterterrorism missions in Colombia because it concluded that there is no useful distinction between a narcotrafficker and his terrorist activity, hence the term narcoterrorist... Operations today are more efficient and effective because our expanded authorities allow the same assets to be used to confront the common enemy found at the nexus between drugs and terror."¹⁰⁹

Even during Plan Colombia's early days, the United States was prohibited from engaging in counterguerrilla operations, much to the chagrin of US military officials. The plan was meant solely to counter the cultivation of coca or opium poppy and put a stop to the production and transportation of cocaine into the United States. The US was not engaged in a counterinsurgency, at least not officially. But officials on the ground realized that distinguishing between drug traffickers and insurgents was a fool's errand. US-funded Colombian units were only permitted to engage the enemy in "unplanned" contacts, which created confusion on one hand—Colombians were not provided valuable intelligence to target FARC operatives in some cases—but also give US forces latitude to merge counternarcotics with their counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts.¹¹⁰ Relying on close air support and greater air mobility, indigenous units trained by the US military moved into the Putumayo and Caqueta departments (in the south of Colombia), at the time the heartland of Colombia's coca production, in 2001.

¹⁰⁹ Center for International Policy, "Testimony of General James T. Hill, Commander, United States Southern Command, hearing of the House Armed Services Committee: "Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization budget request"," March 24, 2004. https://adamisacson.com/files/old_cip_colombia/040324hill.htm, accessed on November 15, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Moyar et al., *Persistent Engagement in Colombia*, 19. A case in point was a July 2000 attack on a Colombian police outpost by guerrilla forces. Three Black Hawks were only 20 minutes away but US were not permitted to assist the 14 policemen because their attackers were guerrilla fighters, not drug smugglers, and they were later executed.



Map: Putumayo and Caqueta Departments¹¹¹

Plan Colombia also boosted resources for Colombia's National Police, increasing the number and capacity of its counternarcotics commando units, providing them with a pair of Black Hawks, a dozen Hueys, as well as other aircraft. Originally the police were tasked to maintain order within Colombia's cities while its military secured Colombia's borders and rural jungles. Yet, during the main phase of the counterinsurgency, these roles blurred. As part of this component of the plan, Colombia's judicial system received greater resources, including funds to train up to forty thousand judges, prosecutors, forensic analysts, and police investigators, under the aegis of the US Department of Treasury and USAID, as a way to reduce bribery and the revolving door of drug traffickers and insurgents escaping prosecution.¹¹²

A less discussed, yet important, component of Plan Colombia, was a simultaneous covert CIA program, which consisted of billions of dollars in intelligence and, beginning in 2006, \$30,000 worth of GPS guidance kits that could turn gravity bombs into smart bombs.¹¹³ These bombs were instrumental in in killing FARC leaders.

¹¹¹ "Political Map of Colombia," Nations Online, accessed January 29, 2019,

 $https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/colombia_map.htm.$

¹¹² U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, But Security has Improved" (Washington: U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2008), 59-60, http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-71, accessed on January 3, 2019.

¹¹³ Dana Priest, "Covert Action in Colombia," Washington Post, December 21, 2013,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2013/12/21/covert-action-in-colombia/, accessed on November 28, 2018.

Cross-Border Sanctuaries

The presence of safe havens—in Colombia's frontier, coastal zones, and across its porous border provided the FARC, the ELN, and other groups fighting the government an important rearguard base to plan operations, a transshipment station for illegal narcotics, and a vital recruitment center. It also gave them military shelter, allowing them to sustain their fight indefinitely. Countries controlled by leftist governments in Ecuador and Venezuela provided them safe havens, given their ideological kinship with the FARC and the ELN. Intelligence from computer files seized during Operation Phoenix, a 2008 cross-border raid into Ecuador, proved that the FARC helped fund the presidential campaign of Ecuador's president.¹¹⁴ It should be noted that since the beginning of Colombia's independence, the government has never been able to control all of its borders. "If you don't control territories, someone else will take it," said one expert. "In Latin America as a whole, these ungoverned spaces have been controlled by criminal groups."¹¹⁵ Another viewpoint is that these cross-border sanctuaries have become more pronounced as a result of the Colombian government developing greater state capacity and military effectiveness in rural parts of the country, forcing the FARC to seek a safe haven outside of the country.

The military's approach to counterinsurgency relied on killing senior FARC figures, but it rarely used its commando forces for intelligence gathering or clandestine operations. After implementation of Plan Patriota (the muscular successor and military component to Plan Colombia), the Colombian military changed its approach to counterinsurgency and reclaimed what Thomas Marks called "the strategic initiative." "We were no longer in a confrontation with the Colombian army," as Lucas Carvajal, a member of the FARC's negotiating team, told the *Washington Post* in a September 2016 interview, "We were facing an international intervention, and it took a toll."¹¹⁶

The military effectively reversed the FARC's advances, secured rural populations, and pushed the FARC out of key sanctuaries. As a result, desertions spiked with FARC membership dropping from its high of twenty thousand to nine thousand.¹¹⁷ In 2002, the FARC had a presence in four hundred of Colombia's roughly 1,100 municipalities; in 480 of them, the elected mayors were not even

¹¹⁴ Douglas Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute (2012), 45.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Juan Carlos Pinzón in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18, 2018.

¹¹⁶ Miroff, "Plan Colombia."

¹¹⁷ Farah and Simpson, "Ecuador at Risk."

physically present because of death threats from rebel forces. By 2010, FARC presence had decreased to one hundred municipalities and mayors in *all* of Colombia's 1,100 townships lived in their respective municipalities.¹¹⁸ The military's restructuring coincided with Colombia's economic rise.¹¹⁹ Colombia's Failed States Index measure fell from a 95 in 2005 to 88.2 in 2010, a significant drop indicating an improvement in governance.¹²⁰

The result, Douglas Farah and Glenn Simpson write, "has been that FARC's long-standing use of Ecuador as a rearguard area for rest, medical attention, diplomatic outreach and resupply has changed from being a convenience to a vital lifeline for the FARC's survival."¹²¹ In short, the FARC was pushed out of Colombia.¹²² Ironically, however, it was the *success* of Plan Colombia as a state-building enterprise that pushed various groups like the ELN and the FARC across its borders. As Mark Chernick put it, "We're very clearly seeing that they're being pushed over the border, and they are now strategically retreating on the other sides of the borders."¹²³ That set the stage for the Colombian military's most successful counterinsurgency operation: its March 2008 incursion into Ecuador by commando forces that killed the FARC's second-ranking commander, Raul Reyes, along with seventeen rebels. Some of Colombia's neighbors—most notably Peru—allowed the Colombian military to violate its sovereignty in pursuit of rebels holed up in its hinterlands.

Critique

Besides nearly drawing its neighbors into a war, the Colombian approach to counterinsurgency relied heavily on scorched-earth tactics that displaced more Colombians than all their wars in the previous century. With the increase in lethality from Plan Colombia also came greater human rights abuses by

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Petit, Going Big by Getting Small, 123-124.

¹²⁰ "Fragile States Index," The Fund for Peace, http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/country-data/, accessed December 10, 2018. The index, formerly named the Failed States Index, is an annual ranking that relies on proprietary content-analysis software and a composite index score comprising 12 social, economic, and political indicators.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Jose Fernandez and Matteo Pazzona, "Evaluating the Spillover Effects of the Plan Colombia in Ecuador," Department of Economics Working Papers 41/15, University of Bath, Department of Economics (2015), point out that the Ecuadorian military purposefully avoided patrolling its northern perimeter to enhance predictability to patrols on the ground. There is also some dispute over whether Plan Colombia inadvertently strengthened the FARC by weakening the drug cartels and driving the rebels into FARC-dominated territories.

sectors within the Colombian military and paramilitary outfits. The *Falsos Positivos* (False Positives) scandal was perhaps the most infamous example. Made public in 2008, it was revealed that rogue elements of the military had been staging the deaths of rebels by killing innocents—most of them young peasant males or urban poor¹²⁴—by dressing them in camouflage rebel attire to meet their kill quotas. All told, the scandal likely resulted in over three thousand victims.¹²⁵ Some critics point out that the violence against civilians simply shifted from the Colombian military to paramilitary outfits, loosely aligned with Uribe, who was accused by human rights groups of either encouraging or turning a blind eye to military or right-wing paramilitary groups that carried out the massacres. Even still, some of Plan Colombia's biggest critics admit that the US presence helped professionalize the Colombian military and reduced human rights abuses, thanks in part to the Leahy Law.¹²⁶

The persistent engagement of US special operations forces from 1998 to 2009 also provided their Colombian counterparts greater operational capacity, paving the way for eventual peace. As a 7th Special Forces Group officer remarked, "We had amazing relationships with the Colombians, to include [psychological operations] and civil affairs. . . . The unknown was usually the friction at the political level. . . . What was the Colombian capability and figuring out where the US fit into that picture."¹²⁷ To illustrate this point, we next examine two critical military operations that altered the balance of power between the regime and the rebels ahead of the peace talks: Operation Phoenix and Operation Jaque.

Operation Phoenix

The March 1, 2008 operation consisted of a coordinated attack by elite Colombian forces against a FARC camp a few kilometers across the Ecuadoran border. The operation killed nearly two dozen senior FARC operatives, including its second in command, Raul Reyes. The operation required intelligence—wiretapped satellite phones belonging to senior FARC leaders—which the FBI and the Defense Intelligence Agency provided to the Colombians. It was reported that they had intercepted a

perimeter to enhance predictability to patrols on the ground. There is also some dispute over whether Plan Colombia inadvertently strengthened the FARC by weakening the drug cartels and driving the rebels into FARC-dominated territories. From a July 2018 meeting with a member of Madras de Soacha and exhibition at Bogotá's National Museum of Memory.

¹²⁶ Moyar et al., Persistent Engagement in Colombia, 13.

¹²⁷ Petit, Going Big by Getting Small, 133.

phone call between Reyes and then President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, who was accused of assisting the FARC guerrillas. The intelligence reports pinpointed Reyes to a point near the Colombian-Ecuadorian border, near the Ecuadorian town of Angostura. Colombian forces moving south from Cali were able to capture a contingent of FARC forces, thereby cutting off Reyes's security.¹²⁸

Early in the morning of March 1, Colombia's Air Force bombed Angostura, while Colombian special operations forces, alongside members of the Colombian National Police, stormed the area. They were assisted by GPS-guidance kits supplied to them by the CIA.¹²⁹ Some reports indicate that the guerrillas were in their pajamas at the time. This marked the first time that a senior member of the FARC had been killed. As one special operations forces expert put it, the operation marked the "first time the FARC leadership stopped dying from natural causes."¹³⁰ (Although in May, the FARC's founding leader, Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda would die of a heart attack.) It also marked the first cross-border raid executed by the Colombian government. Colombia's president hailed the mission as "the strongest blow dealt to the terrorist group to date."¹³¹ Yet critics charged that the intervention "detonated the worst crisis in inter-American diplomacy of the last decade."¹³²

Venezuela, Ecuador's ally, mobilized forces along its border, calling any incursion by Colombia an "act of war." Bogotá did not reciprocate in tit-for-tat fashion by mobilizing its forces but did release evidence of Ecuadorian and Venezuelan complicity by providing the FARC with assistance and sanctuary. The incident did not provoke interstate war, but it highlighted the potential dangers of conflict escalation when states pursue guerrillas across borders. The operation came at a critical

¹²⁸ Simon Romero, "Colombian Forces Kill Senior Guerrilla Commander, Officials Say," *The New York Times* (March 2, 2008), https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/world/americas/02farc.html, accessed January 3, 2019.

¹²⁹ Miroff, "Plan Colombia," 2016.

¹³⁰ Interview with a SOF expert in Bogotá, Colombia, July 2018.

¹³¹ As quoted in Associated Press, "Colombia: No. 2 FARC Commander Reyes Killed in Gunfight," FoxNews.com, March 1, 2008, https://www.foxnews.com/story/colombia-no-2-farc-commander-reyes-killed-in-gunfight.

¹³² Ecuador condemned the attack as a "transgression of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity," a move the Organization of American States (OAS) reaffirmed in a statement. See "Regional Tensions Rise as Venezuela, Ecuador Send Troops to Border with Colombia," *Xinhua News Agency*, March 3, 2008. Theresa Reinhold argues that "the evidence falls short of establishing that FARC's activities should be attributed to Ecuador under the *Nicaragua*...standards [which establish effective control]." See Theresa Reinold, "State Weakness, Irregular Warfare, and the Right to Self-Defense Post-9/11," *American Journal of International Law* 105, no. 2 (2011): 244-286.

juncture, as the FARC was only a few years away from entering the secret peace talks with Santos's government¹³³



Map: Operation Phoenix and Operation Jaque¹

Operation Jaque

The Colombians executed Operation Jaque, or "Checkmate" in Spanish, on July 2, 2008. It was a daring hostage rescue mission of fifteen prisoners that the FARC had held for over five years, including three US defense contractors—Keith Stansell, Thomas Howes, and Marc Gonsalves—and a prominent former Colombian presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt.¹³⁴ The FARC earn ransom money from the roughly seven hundred army, police, and civilian hostages they kept. The operation

¹³³ Petit, Going Big by Getting Small, 136.

¹³⁴ Tim Padgett, "Colombia's Stunning Hostage Rescue," *TIME*, July 2, 2008,

http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1819862,00.html, accessed on November 28, 2018.

took place along the Apaporis River in Guaviare, an area of mountainous and mosquito-infested jungle terrain in central Colombia.¹³⁵

To locate the hostages, intelligence efforts began immediately after their capture in 2003, though the trail was dry until 2007 when the Colombian government successfully planted a mole within the FARC. Typically, the hostages were marched from camp to camp each night to avoid detection, which is more likely when they remained static. On July 2, the FARC believed the mole was leading them to the camp of the FARC leader, Alfonso Cano, but instead, he led them into a trap: A pair of Colombian troops disguised themselves as a cameraman and journalist from a fictitious pan–Latin American television station, while four others dressed up as aid workers from a nongovernmental organization and two more posed as fellow guerrillas. The plan was to trick a senior FARC leader to offload the fifteen hostages onto a Mi-17 helicopter that the leader believed to be controlled by the FARC.¹³⁶

The operation was a remarkable success and is often compared to the US raid in Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden.¹³⁷ Ultimately, the hostages were recovered without a single shot being fired. Yet the plan also owed its success to the tactical training of the Colombian military by the 7th Special Forces Group. With the help of US advisors, this partnership provided the Colombian reconnaissance units with the confidence to take more risks when conducting sensitive site exploitations of FARC camps. Around this time, Special Operations Command South also increased its combined operations training with the Colombians, with an emphasis on hostage rescue training. They developed a number of plans, coordinated by a US Special Forces colonel, which included a US-only force package, a combined US-Colombian package, and a Colombian-only force package.¹³⁸ According to Adm. James Stavridis, the commander of US Southern Command at the time, the plan required operational precision, organizational precision, and finesse, given the level of uncertainty regarding FARC locations in Colombia's dense jungles,.¹³⁹ According to Brian Petit, a retired US Army Special Forces colonel, "Disciplined improvisation was required to capitalize on fleeting opportunities."¹⁴⁰

140 Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Padgett, "Colombia's Stunning Hostage Rescue,"

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Petit, Going Big by Getting Small, 134.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 135.

Operation Jaque required months of tactical preparation and rehearsals, jungle reconnaissance, and contingency planning. However, the plan—its execution as well as its conception—was conducted by Colombian forces, with US support. Given the operation's timing, so shortly after the death of Sureshot and Raul Reyes, it dealt a strategic blow to the FARC, and was instrumental in pressuring the FARC to enter peace talks two years later. It also demonstrated the utility of training foreign security forces. In an interview with Petit, US Army Special Forces Maj. Russ Ames stated, "The highest praise for a [foreign internal defense] effort is when the host nation achieves a level of capability, that, when combined with their local knowledge and language, makes them more effective than [US forces] could ever hope to be."¹⁴¹ Ames continued, "This is the holy grail of Special Forces work."¹⁴²

Lessons from Plan Colombia

The execution of Plan Colombia provides policymakers and military strategists with several important lessons generalizable to other conflict and post-conflict zones.

- Peace requires sticks as well as carrots. Tactical operations like Operations Phoenix and Jaque, though fraught with risk, are important for strategic and political success and to reverse territorial or moral gains made by guerrillas. In other words, it is the required "stick" to get the enemy to the negotiating table before discussions of amnesty or other nonmilitary incentives (political representation, etc.), the "carrot," can occur. They can be sequenced or carried out simultaneously, but the military "stick" should not be removed from the process entirely.
- Preserve capacity to govern among local partners. As part of their "Safe Communities" plan—a countrywide effort to strengthen rural police in post-conflict villages—Colombian officials emphasized the integration of their police and military forces as a way to spread security beyond their urban centers. Yet this process was implemented unevenly. Colombia's sparsely populated countryside, especially around Tumaco in the south and Choco in the north, remained a hub of crime and coca production. The government was unable to demobilize all of Colombia's rebel groups, leaving large pockets of security vacuums that have

¹⁴¹ Petit, Going Big by Getting Small, 136.

¹⁴² Ibid.

allowed violence, displacement, and criminal activity to flourish. While Colombia's police force is one of the most militarized in the world, the integration of the National Police and military have posed significant challenges for US advisors, specifically when it comes to developing joint operations and integrating information/intelligence-gathering and special operations. A representative of each branch of Colombia's army trained with the national police as "ambassadors," which promoted cohesion, though there is still a lack of cohesion in some parts of the country.

- Crime and conflict are two sides of same coin. Insurgencies are increasingly fueled by contraband and thrive on illicit economies. This requires non-kinetic responses like detective work, as well as coordinated efforts between an indigenous government's police and military forces. However, for any conflict like Colombia's that involves the intersection of drugs, violence, and organized crime, a military will be hard-pressed to act as a policeman. Militaries, after all, are not trained to collect evidence but to kill insurgents. They are a blunt instrument when often what is required for operational and strategic success is patient and surgical handiwork of police. Intelligence is also a key factor. Without knowledge of and from local actors, militaries cannot target discriminately and will end up killing non-insurgents and turning locals against the government authorities.
- Monitor partners to prevent human rights abuses. Greater presence of armed forces in the countryside can often lead to an uptick in human rights abuses. Curbing these abuses will translate into greater military effectiveness. It is critical that the US military properly vets and monitors the units it trains and assists, not just because of the Leahy Law but also because it fosters greater trust between locals and the state and leads to more intelligence sharing.
- Avoid externalizing internal conflicts. An unintended consequence of Plan Colombia is that it pushed guerrillas out of their strongholds into Colombia's more difficult-to-reach periphery and coastal areas, and neighboring countries. This had the undesired effect of moving the locus of battle into terrain often more favorable to the insurgents and more difficult for counterterrorism or counterinsurgency operations. This move also threatened to externalize internal conflicts by pushing insurgents across borders and potentially drawing in outside powers. But it also demonstrated that cross-border operations, although fraught with risk, can be extremely effective.

- Sideline unhelpful actors (both internal and external). This is a key lesson developed by Mara Karlin in how to train foreign militaries in fragile states.¹⁴³ It is crucial to prevent conflicts from becoming internationalized, but also from allowing external countries—notably Venezuela and Ecuador—from prolonging the conflict or providing sanctuary. This has obvious parallels to US counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan, and the cross-border safe havens enjoyed by the Taliban in Pakistan.
- Emphasize development of justice mechanisms. Allowing the US government, together with local partners, to develop some kind of prosecutorial capacity is crucial in counterinsurgencies. Upon catching an insurgent, the only two options should not be "kill" or "let go." This is a lesson from Plan Colombia that the United States has not yet applied to other conflict zones, including Afghanistan.
- To be most effective, US efforts must have the right authorities. With only counterdrug authorities, US special operations forces in Colombia were not very effective. Following 9/11, special operations forces were provided additional authorities, which made them much more effective at capacity building. If the challenge is deemed significant enough to warrant the deployment of US forces, they should be granted the required authorities to accomplish the objectives that they were sent to accomplish in the first place.

¹⁴³ Mara Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

Chapter IV - Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

In an unmarked building on the outskirts of Bogotá, a bulky man wearing a black leather jacket and a rip-off American hat pulls out an iPhone. He busily pecks away as a member of the Colombian government's Reincorporation and Normalization Agency, or ARN (formerly the Colombian Reintegration Agency), processes his paperwork. He is a former member of the FARC. Above the exfighter is a picture of a someone shaking hands with a former female FARC military member. A baby cries in the background. This is the scene from an ARN center in the summer of 2018, two years after the signing of the peace agreement.

The key to any sustainable transition to peace is the ability of the government to undertake a DDR process for ex-combatants. This work traditionally falls on civilian institutions and international organizations like the United Nations Special Mission in Colombia. Yet, increasingly militaries are being called upon to provide security and assistance at the tactical and operational level. The military's presence is also important to ensure that transitional justice occurs. Colombia provides some useful lessons and cautionary tales on how militaries, both foreign and domestic, can assist in the DDR process to prevent demobilized fighters from returning to the field.

Colombia is in the process of a massive DDR effort. Going back to the 1990s, there have been six processes of DDR, some collective (AUC, 2003–2006; FARC 2016–present) and some individual (2003–2016). For the current FARC DDR effort, the government created a series of twentysix cantonments—or so-called "concentration zones"—for ex-fighters to disarm and rehabilitate themselves. For those not in these zones, the nationwide process primarily takes place in ramshackle offices, like the one in Bogotá described above.

As of the summer of 2018, some fifty thousand former rebels, including AUC paramilitaries, had joined Colombia's past and present DDR processes, with roughly twenty thousand having completed it. Of those, according to the ARN, roughly 70 percent of the ex-fighters had successfully reentered society. Most of those going through the process are between the ages of twenty-six and forty. The DDR process in Colombia consists of six stages: (1) disarmament; (2) an aid package for reinsertion; (3) a demobilization certification, which includes being provided temporary accommodation in Ministry of Defense peace households; (4) a transfer to ARN; (5) a defined path

to reintegration; and (6) commencing the reintegration process.¹⁴⁴ Each of the stages is fraught with risks of recidivism.

Disarmament

The initial disarmament phrase requires that combatants be forcibly separated from their weapons. All arms are surrendered and registered, with any armaments deemed unstable either destroyed on site or removed.¹⁴⁵ Disarmament comes in two forms: cooperative and coercive.¹⁴⁶ Typically the latter is carried out by war's victors (e.g., Somalia, 2006–2007) whereas the former is when there is no clear victor (e.g., El Salvador, 1992; Mozambique, 1992–1995). Documenting and disposing of these arms requires control, access, intelligence, and trust among local populations. After the civil war in Liberia, for example, despite over one hundred thousand rebels being disarmed in 2003–2004, fewer than twenty-eight thousand guns were collected.¹⁴⁷ This demonstrated the inability of the UN mission there to secure zones formerly controlled by rebels. Similarly in Mozambique, the 1992–1995 ONUMOZ operation there failed to completely disarm ex-combatants, as troves of small arms seeped out of the country and into South Africa, much less contain the criminal market of illegal arms sales.¹⁴⁸

According to Spear, in cases of "cooperative disarmament," where there is no clear victor (arguably Colombia falls into this category as there was no dramatic defeat of the FARC on the battlefield, instead there was a rather slow process of its leadership either being killed off or hitting retirement age), "power is likely to be very dispersed and the society is likely to be unstable."¹⁴⁹ This means that neither party to a peace deal has clear control over their various forces, and chains of command are weak. Discipline is also often poor. This also gives rise to renegade spoilers that may seek to disrupt the DDR process. Moreover, in these situations of negotiated settlements rather than decisive military victory, it is more difficult to distinguish between combatants and noncombatants,

¹⁴⁴ Jones-Chaljub, "Peace Negotiations," 15.

¹⁴⁵ Isabella Flisi, "The Reintegration of former Combatants in Colombia," *Oxford Research Group*, February 13, 2017, https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/the-reintegration-of-former-combatants-in-colombia.

¹⁴⁶ Joanna Spear, "Disarmament and Demobilization," in *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, eds. Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 142.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Jaye, *Transitional Justice and DDR: The Case of Liberia*, (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009), https://ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-DDR-Liberia-CaseStudy-2009-English.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Alex Vines, "Disarmament in Mozambique," Journal of Southern African Studies, 24:1 (1998), 191-205.

¹⁴⁹ Spear, "Disarmament and Demobilization," 151.

not to mention what some experts call "casual fighters," who go back and forth between the two categories, depending on the day of the week.¹⁵⁰

Second, in most cases of DDR, the state is generally weak, and not present in vast swaths of territory formerly controlled by the enemy. In cases where the violence was protracted or extreme, there will be issues of rebuilding trust and confidence. Demobilization, in these cases, can take several generations to work. It can also fuel resentment, as is the case in Colombia, where many people believe the former FARC cadres are being treated too generously (In fact, Colombians rejected the first draft of the peace deal.) In Angola, similar DDR challenges unfolded, as ex-UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) combatants and their families were accused of receiving better treatment than government supporters.¹⁵¹

Further, it is important to note that total disarmament may not be required and could even be unwise. According to Spear, it will depend on local norms.¹⁵² In societies with "gun" cultures, taking away all weapons could strike at their culture and offer them no means to defend themselves from attack, especially in remote areas, common in Afghanistan and Colombia, where the government lacks the ability to provide security. What must be removed are heavy weapons, such as mortars, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. Another important role that the army plays in the DDR process is the demining of the land, thus allowing a return to normalcy.

Demobilization

The second phase, demobilization, requires the dismantlement of these groups' command-and-control structures. In Colombia, a series of cantonments, or "concentration zones," were created for exfighters to relocate to for rehabilitation. According to military officials, they have successfully demobilized roughly five thousand FARC members to temporary concentration zones (in addition to the thousands of ex-cadres who enter the DDR process in offices like that described above). There are approximately twenty-three transitory areas and seven camps, and the government expects to demobilize over six thousand combatants in total. This phase introduces security dilemma–like

¹⁵⁰ Stephen John Stedman, Donald S. Rothchild, Elizabeth M. Cousens, eds., *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (New York: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 149.

¹⁵¹ Spear, "Disarmament and Demobilization," 152.

¹⁵² Ibid., 141.

dynamics, as these fighters are reducing their own security by entering areas nominally protected by their former enemies.¹⁵³

According to some critics of the process, however, the Colombian government failed to send sufficient numbers of troops or police into the countryside to secure these zones or replace the FARC when it demobilized.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, much of the countryside to this day remains overrun with rebels who refused to demobilize, paramilitary outfits, and drug cartels. As one observer noted, "The government has yet to complete the construction of many of the transition camps which are supposed to be processing demobilized FARC members."¹⁵⁵ A key component to DDR is securely walling off the demobilized concentration zones from being contaminated by criminal elements throughout areas lacking in state presence. Thus, they must be located away from civilian population centers.

The three biggest challenges with Colombia's postwar demobilization process are: first, the lack of trust between the ex-combatants and the government, which made the negotiations and initial phase of disarmament difficult; second, the lack of a formal process to demobilize FARC members in large groups—in other words, the DDR process tended to work more effectively at the individual level but failed at the collective level;¹⁵⁶ and third, the Colombian government's lack of a long-term strategy to protect DDR sites from turning into possible power vacuums or against the influence of narcotraffickers (e.g., the ELN) on unemployed, unintegrated populations. Increasing ex-FARC members' income is only a temporary disarmament measure, not a force for permanent reintegration.

Reintegration

Reintegration, the final phase, is often considered the trickiest to execute. The term refers to the formal process whereby ex-combatants adapt to and reenter society after leaving conflict.¹⁵⁷ Most former combatants have almost no education, and they face resentment, stigmatization, and ostracization from the society they are trying to reenter. "The most important part of counterinsurgency is at the end," said Ambassador Pinzón. "The government must provide those who were a part of the conflict a new source of income. The solution is economic development and state building in these areas.

¹⁵³ Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma."

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Toby Muse (journalist), July 6, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Skype interview with Toby Muse, July 6, 2018.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Enzo Nussio, July 6, 2018.

¹⁵⁷ Kaplan and Nussio, "Explaining Recidivism of Ex-Combatants in Colombia," 67.

Otherwise, conflict reinvents itself."¹⁵⁸ Reintegration is the role of Colombia's ARN. There are thousands of people taking part in the reintegration process—of them, roughly 47 percent are former AUC or paramilitaries, while 42 percent are ex-FARC.¹⁵⁹

The reintegration process requires several components, including social and economic assistance, psychological care, jobs training, and access to health care.¹⁶⁰ Upon registration, former combatants are given \$600 with the hopes of them getting a job. Many Colombians, especially those in Medellín, Bogotá, and Cartagena, view this as too lenient, but it was still much less than most demobilized AUC members previously received. Each person is assigned a counselor to help them develop a work and study plan. "They find it difficult to keep up with these things because of unstable lifestyles, poverty, and family [issues]," said one counselor. They must also conduct eighty hours of community service as part of their reintegration. The most common professions for ex-combatants include security and construction. In the cantonments, many prefer farming.¹⁶¹

Psychological care is another component for successful reintegration. Some 90 percent of those who enter the reintegration process suffer psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety. Guerrillas or paramilitaries who demobilize are provided with thirty months of psycho-social services from as many as three hundred psychologists. However, there are simply not enough mental health professionals to treat the thousands of ex-combatants requiring care.¹⁶² There is also a social stigma attached to these demobilized fighters that makes their reintegration back into society further challenging, according to Nussio.¹⁶³

In Colombia, the most difficult fighters to reintegrate have been middle-rank combatants, given that these cadres enjoyed a higher standard of living than their societal counterparts. Lacking education and technical skills, they assume higher opportunity costs when rejoining normal society. Making matters harder, many ex-fighters fear reprisals and thus refuse to fully "reintegrate." Roughly 45 percent of demobilized ex-rebels are left in concentration "zones" where they can live as a

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Juan Carlos Pinzón in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18, 2018.

¹⁵⁹ Flisi, "The Reintegration of former Combatants in Colombia."

¹⁶⁰ Interviews with officials at Colombian Reintegration Agency (ACR) office in Bogotá, Colombia, July 16, 2018.

¹⁶¹ International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace, 20.

¹⁶² Sara Reardon, "Colombia: After the Violence," *Nature*, May 3, 2018, https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-018-04976-7/index.html, accessed November 25, 2018.

¹⁶³ Skype interview with Enzo Nussio, July 6, 2018.

demilitarized family. Ex-combatants primarily find work in Colombia's informal economy (which by some estimates constitutes half of the economy). Some businesses refuse to hire ex-rebels unless given a monetary incentive. As one activist said, "This creates the perception that there is hostility deeply held in the hearts and minds of people, and that everything comes back to money."¹⁶⁴

Lessons Learned

Militaries face many challenges for successful DDR, including how to provide blanket security to allow fighters to demobilize and not be targeted from guerrilla groups, how to build trust to prevent exsplinter factions or other rebels from returning to violence or entering the informal or criminal economy, and how to integrate these ex-fighters into the fabric of society.

- Avoid a security vacuum. The biggest challenge is the provision of security in areas formerly controlled by rebels as well as in demobilization (or concentration) zones, to prevent exfighters from rejoining the conflict. Consider the case of El Salvador, where the DDR process resulted in a massive crime wave. "Amid the enthusiasm for peace, a disarmament and demobilization program overseen by the United Nations (UN) dismantled the coercive capacity of the state and rebel forces, resulting in a power vacuum at an acutely fragile moment, particularly as the creation of new forces, predictably, became a drawn-out and complex affair."¹⁶⁵ Similar dynamics played out after wars in Guatemala, Panama, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Libya.
- **Demobilize collectively.** Splinter factions that refuse to demobilize and reintegrate make a nationwide collective DDR process almost impossible. In the past, the government had a process for demobilizing individual fighters who deserted the FARC but lacked a process for large groups of deserters once the peace deal was signed. For DDR to be successful, both must be coordinated and institutionalized. Failing that, there must be majority buy-in from the demilitarizing group for the state to target kinetically those who don't abide by the peace accord.

¹⁶⁴ Interview at offices of Ideas de la Paz, Bogotá, Colombia, July 10, 2018.

¹⁶⁵ Carlos A. Ospina, Thomas Marks, and David Ucko, "Colombia and the War-to-Peace Transition: Cautionary Lessons from other Cases," *Military Review* 96, no. 4 (2016): 48.

- **Build trust.** Trust is perhaps the most crucial variable in assessing DDR processes. It is important for the government and military to build trust and establish respect with fighters who lay down their arms. It is helpful if the military provision of security and DDR must operate simultaneously. While this can potentially disrupt the process from disarmament to reintegration, further blurring the lines between conflict and post-conflict environments for countries like Colombia, without security and trust, DDR processes can come unraveled.¹⁶⁶
- **Provide training for ex-fighters.** Reintegration poses perhaps the most serious challenges. Ex-fighters must be provided a means, which includes needs like education, health care, money, and job training, to avoid being lured back into war. The stigmatizing of these fighters is also a major problem. Female ex-fighters contend with different kinds of stigmatization, given Colombia's traditional views on gender roles (which are ironically more restrictive than those of Marxist groups like the FARC). To facilitate reintegration and avoid ex-fighters fleeing the camps and rejoining the guerrilla groups, the military must provide greater security around demobilization cantonments.
- **Provide transitional justice.** Transitional justice is an essential element of any DDR process, yet this can raise complications. There must be some level of immunity, which is difficult for victims, but many feel the Colombian government gave ex-FARC fighters too much immunity. This turned the public against the peace process and has made reintegration a greater challenge. According to a senior Colombian army officer, there are important differences between normal and transitional justice. In the latter, the objective is to gather evidence and focus on things that happened in combat. Still, transitional justice is necessary, he said, to "make sure there are truth, justice, and reparations, to avoid repeating the conflict."¹⁶⁷
- Define an end game and move swiftly. In the end, what propelled the leadership of the FARC to the negotiating table was not political incentives but military pressure that changed the calculus of the group's leadership. It is important to define the end game: the end of hostilities with the FARC. Once peace talks got underway, however, military pressure lessened, thus removing incentives for the rebels to reach a peace agreement swiftly. Allowing all the guerrilla leaders to be concentrated in Havana—the site of the peace talks—without a ceasefire

¹⁶⁶ Jones-Chaljub, "Peace Negotiations," 16.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with senior Colombian Army officer in Bogotá, Colombia, July 2018.

in place was problematic. "Leaders learned they weren't at risk," said Pinzón.¹⁶⁸ A negotiator for the Colombian military in Havana told us, "For many in the military, it doesn't feel like a victory."¹⁶⁹ Another common criticism heard about the peace process was that it took too long—over four years. Still another was that the government conceded important leverage to the rebels. During peace talks and the subsequent DDR process, military pressure must remain an option on the table to compel rebels to participate in the process, otherwise they may be incentivized to shirk. Also important was the timeframe of the insurgents versus that of the government: the government must control the clock. A case in point: the government offered the FARC land planning and agrarian rights, which a few critics charged is more political power than the FARC ever had.

- Too much transparency can be harmful. In some ways, as the negotiations were ongoing in Havana, elements of the peace accord leaked out and created backlashes among Colombians. This hardened Colombians who would vote against the peace accord during the referendum. It also harmed the DDR process, as it turned locals off from welcoming rehabilitated rebels back into society. This is not an argument for less transparency but rather to control the release of information and to engage in more targeted public relations efforts to build support among society for peace and DDR processes.
- **Prevent spoilers from abroad.** A final challenge is the international environment. Colombia is hemmed in by states teetering on the brink of failure (Venezuela) or highly corrupt (Panama). This can lead to the flow of refugees and cross-border criminal activity, which can undermine peace efforts by providing demobilized persons incentives to abandon the DDR zones and join the shadow economy. As Karlin notes, external actors can also play the role of spoiler to derail peace for their own self-interest.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Juan Carlos Pinzón in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Omar Cortez in Bogota, Colombia, July 11, 2018.

Chapter V – Narcotrafficking and Organized Crime

The war in Colombia may have started out as a war over ideology, grievances, and land inequality, but it quickly morphed into a war over money, specifically the lucrative profits of Colombia's burgeoning coca production.¹⁷⁰ FARC leaders never enriched themselves or lived luxuriously the same way as Colombia's cartel leaders did, yet drug profits sustained their guerrilla operations long after the spigot of funding from the Soviet Union dried up in the early 1990s. The ELN and the FARC, as one expert put it, acted like "guns for hire," collecting taxes on the drug trade (roughly \$50 per kilogram of cocaine was a standard fee).¹⁷¹

While the era of large-scale cartel violence has passed, the smaller criminal groups who now control the drug trade, such as Clan del Golfo, use targeted assassinations of social advocates to maintain control of communities and maintain production levels of cocaine. They are what Jeremy McDermott of InSight Crime calls "invisibles."¹⁷² Per Benjamin Lessing's helpful typology, these kinds of "criminal insurgencies" are fought more as turf "wars of constraint," which means there are no decisive victories. Unlike the FARC, these criminal syndicates do not seek political control and so have less incentive to negotiate with the Colombian government.¹⁷³

The US intervention in Colombia contained an economic component to address its burgeoning coca cultivation. The United States devoted \$500 million to switch farmers from coca to alternative crops—and continues to spend about \$400 million annually to combat both producers and traffickers.¹⁷⁴ This crop-substitution policy was widely seen as a failure, however, as the FARC and other criminal groups were able to coerce farmers not to switch. There also were perverse incentives and moral hazards present, especially in later years, as farmers were incentivized to cultivate coca to receive double payments, first for cultivating their crops on the black market, then for destroying them. Aerial spraying to eradicate crops only further angered these farmers; by taking away their sole

¹⁷⁰ There is some academic disagreement on this point as many point out that the FARC commanders and rank and file do not use earn high salaries akin to the drug kingpins of the Cali and Medellín cartels of the past but rather use the profits from the drug trade to fund their military operations. Even at the height of their control of illicit markets, FARC camps were fairly sparse and not luxurious.

¹⁷¹ Interview with expert at US embassy in Bogota, July 2018.

¹⁷² Interview with Jeremy McDermott (Executive Director of InSight Crime) in Medellín, Colombia, July 2018.

¹⁷³ Lessing, "The Logic of Violence in Criminal War."

¹⁷⁴ Moyar, et al., Persistent Engagement in Colombia, 20.

source of income, it pushed them into the hands of FARC rebels who controlled these regions.¹⁷⁵ Similar dynamics play out in poorer areas of Afghanistan reliant on poppy growing. The important takeaways are that the counternarcotics and counterinsurgency strategy should be synchronized, ensuring that farmers are not negatively incentivized to shirk, and that these areas must be secured or they will fall under enemy sway.

Bogotá also bears part of the blame. Despite the ongoing peace efforts in Colombia, the government failed to effectively change or reform its coca-eradication policy. Although the current administration in Colombia claims that more than eighty thousand hectares of illicit crops were eradicated in 2018, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime showed in September 2018 that coca production acreage the previous year was the highest level on record (and 17 percent higher than 2016 levels).¹⁷⁶ Moreover, the drug trade is as robust as anytime during the decades-long war. Weaning local farmers in the countryside off coca production, especially when the paramilitaries and cartels are forcing peasants to continue coca production, has proved challenging. In Colombia, there are an estimated 1,000–2,000 FARC fighters still at large and in control of vast criminal networks.¹⁷⁷ Roughly 20 percent of the cocaine moving through South and Central America finds its way across US borders. According to Toby Muse, a journalist who travels frequently to Colombia, it will be impossible to put an end to mass violence until a credible alternative to coca farming exists.¹⁷⁸

Mexican cartels largely control the drug trade into the United States. Postwar Colombia has switched its focus to other markets in Europe and Asia, which pay more and have a lower risk of interdiction, extradition, or seizure. Even still, Colombia is producing more cocaine than ever. As opposed to the "visible" actors of the past such as the Medellín cartel, FARC, and paramilitaries, the Colombian drug trade today is mostly run by "invisible" actors. These people typically work legal jobs, coordinate drug trafficking, and hide under the protection of anonymity.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ "Colombia coca production: US 'deeply concerned' by rise," BBC News, January 3, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46743902.

¹⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace, 3.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Toby Muse (journalist), July 6, 2018.

¹⁷⁹ Jeremy McDermott, "'The Invisibles': Colombia's New Generation of Drug Traffickers," InsightCrime.org, March 15, 2018, https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/invisibles-colombias-new-generation-drug-traffickers/, accessed January 12, 2019.

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, there remained 146,000 hectares of coca crops in 2016, which is triple the 2013 levels (US estimates put the number at 188,000 hectares).¹⁸⁰ Several explanations account for the growth, chief among them the reduction in eradication, the moral hazards of crop-substitution policies from the peace accords, and a surge in farm productivity. Although the peace accord required the FARC to withdraw from the illegal drug trade, other armed groups, such as the Constru and Los Comuneros, have moved in to fill the vacuum. In places like the Cauca, the ELN has filled the gap. Although most of its members demobilized in 1991, the *Ejérito Popular de Liberación* (Popular Liberation Army), or EPL, is also active in the illicit economy. It is this competition for profits among these armed actors to fill the void left by the FARC that has fueled violence in places like Choco and Tumaco in the south.

Attempts to counter organized crime are also exacerbated by weak borders and contraband smuggling. There are increasingly economic asymmetries between Colombia and its poorer neighbors—not to mention an ideological gap between a center-right government in Bogotá and farleft governments in Caracas, Sucre, and Quito. A nearly failed state in Venezuela has led to thousands of immigrants pouring across the border, many of them who work in the informal and illicit economy.

The challenge is manifold. There is a lack of coordinated effort among Bogotá, Washington, and other regional allies, when it comes to coordinating their efforts to combat narcotrafficking. Currently, the Colombian government only targets the *production* of cocaine, which is facilitated in the rural parts of the country by groups such as the ELN. Additionally, the United States and other recipient nations typically only target the *consumption* of cocaine. Instead, the Colombian police should target the *transit* of cocaine and the "invisible" actors who actually control the drug trade. It is these transit areas that are also most violent. According to a 2017 International Crisis Group report, there is no direct or linear relationship between violence and the volume of coca crops.¹⁸¹ In fact, it often is the opposite. What the evidence suggests is that in areas controlled by one armed actor, violence against civilians tends to be low. Consider parts of the Meta department, south of Bogotá, controlled by FARC dissidents. On the flip side, transit regions such as the Choco department, in Colombia's northwest, are devoid of coca but control among armed factions is more divided. Hence, the province

¹⁸⁰ Chase Purdy, "Colombia is leading a massive resurgence in global cocaine production," Quartz, June 27, 2018, https://qz.com/1315884/coca-plant-cultivation-in-colombia-tripled-from-2013-to-2016-reversing-a-decades-long-trend/, accessed January 12, 2019.

¹⁸¹ International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace, 13.

is perhaps Colombia's most violent. This supports Kalyvas's theory of how control shapes the type—selective versus non-selective—of violence by guerrillas.¹⁸²

To successfully pacify these areas and interdict the drug smuggling requires greater coordination between Colombia's military and police, which not only have a long history of poor relations with one another but also poor relations with local communities. Given the demobilization of the FARC, the mission to improve internal security and eradicate crime should fall largely on the police, not the army. "We're currently in a challenging situation," said Pinzón. "The threat has changed. We're no longer fighting one large threat (cartels, FARC, etc.). Now there are many smaller threats. And so the line between a military and law enforcement threat is blurrier."¹⁸³

The military's strategy, called Victory Plan, calls for sixty-five thousand soldiers and fifteen thousand police officers to patrol some 160 priority municipalities. Yet they have failed to pacify these areas or curb the flow of narcotics. Reasons vary, but some point to corruption, especially in Tumaco (a coastal city in Colombia's southwest), where Colombian naval officers and members of the attorney general's office were implicated for their ties to drug traffickers.¹⁸⁴ Others point to fear of using excessive force and being criminally implicated by corrupt judges. Finally, some point to a simple shortage of resources, as military and police personnel are tasked to prioritize security around the twenty-six concentration zones. There are reports of the military reluctance to go on the offensive, for fear of violating the peace with the FARC.

It should be noted that Colombia's drug trade is primarily maritime, thus requiring greater coordination between its land and naval forces and cross-national cooperation and intelligence sharing. Even under the best of circumstances, this is a difficult task. Consider that only about a quarter of illegal shipments in the Pacific are interdicted by the US Coast Guard.¹⁸⁵ Drug traffickers have become increasingly sophisticated, using stealthy "narco subs" to ship their product unnoticed by authorities. Even still, joint US-Colombia efforts are viewed as a model for this beleaguered region.

¹⁸² Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars.

¹⁸³ Interview with Juan Carlos Pinzón in Bogotá, Colombia, July 18, 2018.

¹⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace, 20.

¹⁸⁵ "US Coast Guard Wants to Cut Rising Colombian Drug Trade at its Artery," Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, May 7, 2018, https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/8043-us-coast-guard-wants-to-cut-rising-colombian-drug-trade-at-its-artery, accessed December 5th, 2018.

The US Coast Guard is permitted to board Colombian-flagged ships and there are reports of greater success at interdicting these illicit ships.¹⁸⁶

Another challenge to combating Colombia's illegal drug trade is reducing the presence of coca crops. The 2016 peace agreement outlines a plan of crop eradication and substitution to encourage legal agricultural development. The current target is to forcibly eradicate fifty thousand hectares of coca each year and substitute them with legal crops. The plan involves providing local farmers with \$12,000 as part of two-year voluntary agreements. With 170,000 families expected to sign on, that will cost the government at least \$2 billion over two years.¹⁸⁷ But the policy has run into roadblocks, chief among them that rural land reforms promised by the government have a longer-term time horizon (10–15 years) than the immediate needs of local farmers. What is more, forcible removal of coca crops via spraying pesticides from drones or sending in ground eradication teams has fed a backlash against the government, and fueled distrust between rural families, which has pushed locals into the hands of armed actors.¹⁸⁸ Further, this brute eradication strategy is largely ineffective due to Colombia's inaccessible terrain.

Lessons Learned

Drug trafficking was a crucial driver of conflict during Colombia's civil war. Yet even though the government has struck a peace deal with the country's largest guerrilla force, organized crime and the cocaine trade continue to thrive. Even though they are inextricably linked, the case of Colombia highlights that war and drug trafficking have two separate logics and do not always correlate; in some cases, efforts to eradicate drug trafficking networks can fuel animosities that lead to war. Despite its failure on this front, Colombia provides us with some lessons on how to militarily end wars in countries with high levels of drug trafficking and organized crime.

• Properly incentivize farmers. Crop substitution or eradication plans are difficult to implement, and can be extremely expensive, given the promise of subsidies, equipment, and training for families to encourage the cultivation of legal crops. Often these efforts can

¹⁸⁶ Christopher Woody, "The Coast Guard is catching more drug-running subs, but most 'very stealthy' narco subs are probably going undetected," *Business Insider*, October 11, 2018, https://www.businessinsider.com/coast-guard-capturing-more-drug-smuggling-narco-subs-2018-10, accessed December 5, 2018.

¹⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace, 23.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 24.

backfire, by pushing otherwise non-ideological local farmers seeking to eke out an existence into the hands of insurgents, paramilitaries, or drug lords, or by perversely incentivizing them to plant coca as they will then be compensated twice for eradicating their crops, leading to moral hazards.

- Think regionally, not locally or nationally. Militaries tend to primarily view the problem of postwar security through a narrow national lens, when the issues that drive violence—drugs, etc.—often stem from transnational problems. Colombia is hewed in by states that are either failed (Venezuela) or highly corrupt (Panama), exacerbating the challenge of curbing drug flows. Most of the drug trade is maritime, often through small boats, skiffs, submarines, or commercial cargo ships, which requires greater coordination between one's land and naval forces but also cross-national cooperation and intelligence sharing.
- **Control the borders.** There has been a lack of coordinated foreign policy against crime in Latin America in recent years. Venezuela is a failed state. The hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants provide a "disposable criminal workforce" for criminal organizations in Colombia. These factors have contributed to an "increased opportunity for organized crime" in Latin America.¹⁸⁹
- Follow the money. As mentioned, organized crime is "inextricably linked" to conflict, and vice versa, such as the war between the Colombian government and guerrilla groups. Across the world, rebel groups are funded by organized crime (e.g., Paraguay, Lebanon, Bosnia, and of course, Colombia). To improve regional security and reduce conflicts in Latin America, governments must start by reducing crime, but also by dismantling the economic incentives of the illicit economy. How do postwar criminal networks sustain themselves? In this case, coca. To defeat a warring party, "go after its treasury." Neither the Colombian government nor its military and police have successfully done this.
- Target the transit of drugs, not just production. After peace deals, criminal economies often get "recycled." The Colombian government, along with its American backers, was not proactive enough to minimize the reorganization and revival of the drug trade after the 2016 peace agreement. Too much attention was paid to "visible" actors, such as the ELN, who

¹⁸⁹ Jeremy McDermott, "The Changing Face of Colombian Organized Crime," *Perspectivas*, September 2014. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/la-seguridad/11153.pdf, accessed February 4, 2019.

don't actually control the drug trade or its routes, yet little attention was paid to the "invisible" actors—many of them ex-guerrillas who traded in their camo fatigues for business suits—who profit from organized crime and control the actual trafficking into markets like Mexico and further abroad.

Chapter VI – Lessons for Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan is now in its eighteenth year. Despite President Donald Trump's decision in December 2018 to cut US support down to its lowest level since 2001, the prospect of a military victory seems far away.¹⁹⁰ Rather than US forces leading counterinsurgency operations, as they did for more than a decade, the Afghans are now clearly in the lead. For the United States, the conflict has shifted from an expeditionary counterinsurgency—in the mold of Vietnam or Iraq—to a more traditional "advise and assist" counterinsurgency mission. Thus, Afghanistan's war with the Taliban is starting to look more and more like Colombia's war with the FARC and it is useful to consider what lessons can be learned from Colombia and applied to Afghanistan, especially with the prospect of a negotiated peace agreement seeming to become a more likely possibility.

Yet prior to jumping immediately to lessons from Colombia and applying them to Afghanistan, it is important to consider if the lessons apply, given that civil wars can vary greatly. Gen. David Petraeus achieved great success leading the counterinsurgency in Iraq during "the Surge" in 2007–2008, yet many warned that "Afghanistan is no Iraq" and we couldn't simply apply the model from Iraq to Afghanistan when he was sent to replace Gen. Stanley McChrystal as the commander of US forces in Afghanistan in 2010.¹⁹¹ So first it is important to consider why lessons from Colombia might also apply to Afghanistan.

In terms of geography, both have porous borders and mountainous terrain that offer ample safe havens. Likewise, both conflicts are ideologically based, albeit different ideologies. Significant portions of the populations of each sustain a living through agriculture, with the production of drugs the most profitable crops for many farmers. The future role of the insurgents (the Taliban and the FARC) in the postwar political process is controversial. There are those who favor marginalizing such groups as punishment or to isolate their ability to destabilize the political process, whereas others believe that they represent a vital constituency and so must be given political representation (and are likely to moderate their views once in congress or parliament, as they will have to form coalitions). Finally, both cases are characterized by relatively weak governments that are unable to provide security

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Mujib Mashal, "U.S. to Withdraw About 7,000 Troops From Afghanistan, Officials Say," *The New York Times,* December 20, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/20/us/politics/afghanistan-troop-withdrawal.html.

¹⁹¹ See, for example Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Why Afghanistan is No Iraq," Brookings, July 6, 2009, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/why-afghanistan-is-no-iraq/.

and governance for vast portions of their populations, especially in the rural areas where drugs are farmed.¹⁹²

Given, these similarities, it is useful to see what can be learned from Colombia's experience with the FARC. But it is also important to consider the literature on conflict resolution. Barbara Walter finds that credible commitment is critical to successful peace negotiations. Negotiations frequently do not fail because conditions on the ground are not "ripe for resolution" or because bargains cannot be struck, they fail because combatants cannot credibly promise to abide by the terms of the agreement that create opportunities for exploitation after the treaty is signed and implementation begins. Combatants will not enter into an agreement unless there is some protection against exploitations to end civil wars resulted in a successfully implemented peace (62 percent of negotiations led to a signed bargain, and of those, 57 percent were successfully implemented). Combatants almost always returned to war unless a third party stepped in to enforce and verify post-treaty transition. If a third party assisted with implementation, negotiations almost always succeeded.¹⁹³

Negotiation is the three-step process. The first step is the initial negotiations between the government and the rebels, where each can decide to negotiate or continue fighting. The second step is compromise on goals and principles, where both parties must agree to compromise, or they will return to fighting. The third step is to implement the terms of the treaty, during which both sides must agree to continue with implementation or return to war. At each step, the rebels will return to fighting if they do not see a solution to the commitment problem.¹⁹⁴

Creating credible commitments must protect against two potential sources of exploitation. The first is military exploitation, which is typically characterized as a surprise attack by the government against ex-combatants after disarming and demobilizing, when they are particularly vulnerable. The second potential source of exploitation is political. Most agreements address the distribution of political, military, and territorial power in the first postwar government.¹⁹⁵ In Colombia, the FARC

¹⁹² Lionel Beehner and Liam Collins, "Can Military Force Create Peace?: Lessons for Afghanistan from Colombia," *Army Magazine* 69, no. 1 (2019): 28-29.

¹⁹³ Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1-7.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 19-43.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

were guaranteed a minimum of five seats in the Colombian Senate and House of Representatives for the first two postwar elections, but no guaranteed seats after that. Yet, with 108 total seats in the Senate and 172 in the House, the FARC might feel their concerns are being unaddressed.¹⁹⁶ Walter argues there is too much focus on democratic elections, which risks tyranny of the majority. The rebels fear a permanent exclusion of military power, so it is necessary to consider power sharing beyond the first postwar government. The second postwar government often determines the long-term viability of peace. If the former rebels feel disenfranchised, they may return to war if the political "guarantees" do not amount to a real voice in government.¹⁹⁷

Virginia Page Fortna argues that the mechanisms within the peace agreement matter and can make durable peace more likely by changing the incentive to "cheat" or break the agreement. She argues that agreements are difficult to achieve due to fear of the other side cheating. War is costly and thus it is not desired for its own sake if one assumes that states behave rationally. Yet war is the equilibrium outcome because the ex-belligerents are incentivized to cheat. Each side knows the other is incentivized to "cheat" to lock in gains permanently when the power ratio because favorable—such as the surprise attack discussed earlier or reneging on a power sharing agreement when the conditions are favorable. Thus, a third party is required to alter the incentives to cheat. It does this by reducing uncertainty about the actions or intentions of the other party and by controlling accidents.¹⁹⁸

Third party monitors or peacekeepers reduce uncertainty about the actions and intentions of the parties by providing credible reporting. Additionally, third parties are often required to establish a joint commission for dispute resolutions. This provides a mechanism to address implementation challenges and prevent them from derailing the entire peace process. Additionally, they can provide a mechanism to prevent spoilers for derailing the peace implementation.¹⁹⁹ Ultimately, Fortna finds that peacekeepers do help maintain peace and it endures after the peacekeepers leave.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ June S. Beittel and Edward Y. Gracia, "Colombia's 2018 Elections," Congressional Research Service, July 12, 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Walter, Committing to Peace, 19-43.

¹⁹⁸ Virginia Page Fortna, "Scraps of Paper? Agreements and the Durability of Peace," International Organization 57, no. 2 (2003): 337-372.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Virginia Page Fortna, "Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace After Civil War," *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 269-292.

Given the case of Colombia and the broader literature on negotiating and implementing successful peace agreement, what follows are several lessons that can be applied to Afghanistan.

- Ending civil wars requires patience. The civil war with the FARC lasted sixty-three years. Sri Lanka's thirty-three-year civil war finally came to an end by military victory in 2009 after several failed peace agreements. With the war in Afghanistan in "only" its eighteenth year, it may last many more. As some scholars describe, fighting is simply part of the "bargaining process."²⁰¹ It is a way to communicate capability and resolve. Thus, it is important to remember that attaining a favorable bargain at the end is dependent on maintaining the upper hand during the fighting.
- An outright victory will be difficult to achieve. Porous borders and mountainous terrain, combined with a relatively weak government that is unable to provide security and governance for vast portions of the population (which also allows insurgents to profit from the production and trade of drugs), makes it difficult for the government to achieve an outright military victory, so a negotiated settlement may be a solution to end the conflict.
- Bargain from a favorable position. Three previous attempts at negotiations—from 1984 to 1989 under President Betancur; 1989 to 1991, starting under President Barco; and 1998 to 2002 under President Pastrana—all failed.²⁰² They failed for several reasons, but one factor was that the FARC viewed continuing to fight as a better option. To change the FARC's "best alternative to a negotiated agreement"—its BATNA, as it is known in negotiation theory—President Santos ratcheted up military pressure against the FARC under Plan Colombia and Plan Patriota. Killing senior FARC leaders and denying them cross-border sanctuaries changed the FARC's calculus and contributed to them signing an agreement in 2016 after four years of negotiations. Likewise, in Afghanistan, the Taliban will be more likely to enter into an agreement, favorable to the government, after sustained and significant military pressure. On the other hand, the Taliban are unlikely to seek reconciliation if they believe they can win.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Dan Reiter, "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War," Perspective in Politics 1, no. 1 (2003): 27-43.

²⁰² Camilo Gonzalez Posso, "Negotiations with the FARC, 1982-2002," Accord, no. 14 (2004): 46-51.

²⁰³ Tellis, Reconciling with the Taliban?, 14.

- **Cross-border raids can be effective but come at a political cost.** While Operation Phoenix was an operational success, it nearly ignited a war with Venezuela and likely made its neighbors less cooperative. However, it killed Raul Reyes, the FARC's second in command, and increased pressure on the group to enter negotiations. Taliban leadership is reported to use Pakistan as a safe haven and much like Colombia's neighbors, Afghanistan's neighbors do not seem overly committed to support what they view as an Afghan problem.²⁰⁴ Thus, there will be times that Afghanistan (or the United States) should consider decapitation strategies or cross-border raids to kill senior Taliban or al-Qaeda leaders, such as the Abbottabad raid that killed Osama bin Laden, but we (or our partners) should use them sparingly given the political costs. The strategic payoff of conducting these operations also depends on the hierarchical nature of the insurgent group we are fighting.²⁰⁵
- Negotiate behind closed doors. Media releases nearly derailed Colombia's peace process. Premature releases of negotiations with the Taliban are likely to do the same. It is important to note that any peace agreement will be between the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan, not the United States, but it would be naive to believe the United States would not have influence. Given the US investment, it is likely to be an extremely polarizing issue, especially in the current political environment, so it will be important to consider shaping this environment. This is not an argument for less transparency but rather to control the release of information and to engage in more targeted public relations efforts to build support among society (in Afghanistan and the United States) for peace and DDR processes.
- **Don't put it to a popular vote.** Civil wars are difficult enough to end without putting it to a popular vote. It is extremely difficult to reach a majority for any agreement. Even if a majority want a negotiated settlement to end the conflict, only a minority will like any "Goldilocks" agreement that is proposed; the remainder will oppose because it is either too lenient or too harsh. When the Colombian peace agreement was put to a referendum on October 2, 2016, it

²⁰⁴ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why Pakistan Supports Terrorist Groups and why the US Finds it So Hard to Induce Change," Brookings Institution's "Order from Chaos" blog, January 5, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/05/why-pakistan-supports-terrorist-groups-and-why-the-us-finds-it-so-hard-to-induce-change/, accessed January 20, 2019.

²⁰⁵ For more on this, see Paul Staniland, Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

failed by a 48.8 percent to 50.2 percent margin.²⁰⁶ The biggest opposition came from urban areas, with most feeling the agreement was too soft on the FARC. Yet, those in the rural areas, who bore the brunt of the conflict and the violence, overwhelmingly voted for the referendum.²⁰⁷ Thus, allowing a popular vote allowed those with the least at stake in the conflict to nearly derail the peace agreement.

- **Bigger is not necessarily better.** By all accounts, Plan Colombia was critical to ending the war, yet the investment was relatively modest, totaling some \$10 billion across a span of time that exceeded a decade.²⁰⁸ By contrast, the cost of the Afghanistan War has exceeded \$1 trillion.²⁰⁹ For far too long, US forces led operations and attempted to build an Afghan army that many believed was unsustainable without significant outside assistance. While the investment and missions are clearly different, the important lesson that can be learned from Colombia is that the United States did not try to do too much—Plan Colombia was based on a small advisory footprint and providing limited military aid *that the nation was capable of sustaining*. Likewise, in Afghanistan US efforts should be based on supporting Afghan programs that are sustainable.
- Be prepared to shift from counterinsurgency to counternarcotics. While the violence in Colombia may be at its lowest level in years, the disbanding of the FARC has not resulted in a corresponding decrease in coca production. In fact, quite the opposite has occurred, with coca production now at an all-time high.²¹⁰ Some of the underlying causes of the conflict, including rough terrain and a relatively weak government, set conditions that are favorable to both insurgent groups and criminal groups to thrive. Without addressing these problems, many former combatants simply shift from insurgent to criminal. For others, it is a lack of government-provided security that allows criminal drug trafficking organizations to coerce

²⁰⁶ "Colombia referendum: Voters Reject FARC Peace Deal," BBC News, October 3, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37537252.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. and based on interviews.

²⁰⁸ Rafael Romo, "Plan Colombia Revisited: Mixed Results for U.S. Anti-Drug Initiative, CNN, January 17, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/01/17/colombia.us.drugs/index.html, accessed January 21, 2019.

²⁰⁹ Niall McCarthy, "Th Financial Cost of U.S. Involvement in Afghanistan," *Forbes*, August 17, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/08/24/the-financial-cost-of-u-s-involvement-in-afghanistan-infographic/#1985c3021ee3.

²¹⁰ Nicholas Casey, "Colombia's Coca Acreage for Cocaine Production at All-Time High," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/americas/cocaine-colombia.html.

farmers into producing the coca. Thus, it is important to consider that reconciliation with the Taliban is not likely to result in a decrease in opium emanating from Afghanistan. In fact it may have the opposite effect if the government remains incapable of providing governance to rural areas.

- **Reintegration is extremely difficult.** The challenge for many former FARC combatants is trying to find a job to produce an income. While jobs training and attempts to find employment are challenging in Colombia, they are even more challenging in an underdeveloped nation like Afghanistan. A lack of suitable job prospects makes recidivism on the part of former combatants more likely. While it is too early to confidently gauge the prospects for sustainable success in the Colombian peace process, signs thus far are promising.
- International peacekeepers will likely be required. While the likelihood of a sustainable peace in Colombia, vis-à-vis the FARC, continues to trend in a favorable direction without international peacekeepers, it would be dangerous to assume that they would not be needed in Afghanistan. Given Walter's findings that combatants almost always returned to war unless a third party stepped in to enforce the treaty, it would be dangerous to assume they would not be needed in Afghanistan.
- Some sort of power sharing will be required. As part of the peace agreement, the FARC was given a handful of seats in Colombia's congress. Likewise, in any future postwar Afghanistan, power should be shared with the Taliban as preliminary evidence from Colombia indicates that the FARC commands a following among the rural poor and that it is preferable for the group to push for its demands peacefully through formal institutions rather than taking up arms.

Conclusion

The case of Colombia offers not a shining success story but a cautionary tale of how the US military can assist a foreign military and a weak government in fighting a counterinsurgency to bring about peace. A signed peace agreement does not mean that all is instantly well, as the January 2019 terrorist attack against the police academy in Bogotá highlights, and cocaine continues to emanate from Colombia at record levels. Still, the conditions in Colombia are significantly improved from what they were a decade ago. Land reform, once a pie-in-the-sky dream for many Colombian peasants, is now being discussed in the corridors of power, where ex-fighters now vote in parliament. A helpful flood of foreign investment and tourism dollars is also turning around the country's reputation as a no-go zone run by drug cartels or guerrilla groups.

The main aspects of this report focused on three issues related to the achievement of peace in Colombia: the implementation of Plan Colombia (especially the military component), the ongoing DDR process, and the powerful destabilizing role of the drug trade. The case of Colombia is especially relevant to military planners as the United States seeks a peace agreement with the Taliban in Afghanistan as a first step toward withdrawing forces from the region, given the similarities between the two cases. Colombia is ont Afghanistan and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The level of governance in Bogotá is considerably higher than it is in Kabul. Also, the Colombian war does not have an ethno-religious component. Nor is Venezuela or Ecuador as destabilizing a force in Colombia as Pakistan is in Afghanistan. Finally, the US military has spent considerable blood and treasure to stabilize Afghanistan, whereas in Colombia the US spent a fraction of what it has in Afghanistan, and the peace process has mostly been a local and regional effort, with Washington advising from the sidelines and letting Colombians "own" the process, mindful of its checkered role in Latin American politics going back to the turn of the twentieth century.

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