Coercion, Compromise, and Co-optation Under the New Security Dilemma: Addressing Colombia's Armed Groups[*]

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Abstract

Resolving the Colombian armed conflict and strengthening the country's democratic institutions remains one of the most daunting, urgent, and underanalysed priorities in the western hemisphere. After three years of progressively escalating violence during the laudable but ultimately unsuccessful efforts of the Pastrana administration to negotiate a peace accord with the leftist guerrillas, *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), the administration of Álvaro Uribe Vélez inherited a socio-political system in 2002 that has been described as nothing short of "besieged." From 1998 to 2002, guerrilla control expanded and consolidated in the south of the country, counter-insurgency movements directed against the guerrillas grew exponentially, nearly all categories of human rights abuses increased, and the government found itself with a stable presence in less than 60% of Colombian territory. In such circumstances the promotion of human rights and the rule of law were largely illusory.

In this context of fragmented sovereignty, the first priorities of the Uribe administration have been to re-establish governmental control over physical territory and to limit the influence of all non-state armed groups. Approaching its second year in office, the administration's successes have been noteworthy, despite some lingering problems of corruption and human rights abuses by members of the security forces. In the past two years homicide and kidnapping rates have decreased

substantially for the first time since the early 1980s, a police presence has been re-established in almost every community in the country, and demobilization/peace talks with some armed factions have displayed signs of progress. The aperture of hope has been re-opened.

In approaching the conflict from a pragmatic "peace-building" perspective, this analysis demonstrates that the coercive component of the administration's democratic security policy, despite numerous problems, remains a necessary central feature of the country's security strategy. It urges readers to consider the illegitimate and socially marginalized non-state armed groups to be the primary *cause* of the country's violence, inequalities, and corruption, rather than the *result* of these maladies. It also emphasises the need to make some political compromises in order to prioritize the demobilization of these groups. Accordingly, this analysis supports many of the Uribe administration's more controversial policies, such as the expansion of the armed forces and police, the deployment of community-defense "peasant soldiers" (*soldados campesinos*), as well as the granting of limited, conditional pardons or lighter sentencing for some non-state combatants in order to increase the probability of their demobilization. However, it also suggests that the final resolution of the conflict will hinge upon the administration's ability to garner increased support from the NGO community and rural workers, by enhancing regional economic development plans and increasing the accountability of the armed forces and police.

Part I: Theory and Practice of Colombian Security

It seems like the most perverse of logic: in order to increase the security of its war-wearied population, the Colombian government must first declare war upon many of its own citizens.

One of the most controversial debates in contemporary Latin American security analysis is the role of the Colombian military in the eventual disarmament of the country's non-state armed groups. The military is either viewed as being the primary component of the conflict resolution process, one of many components, or the principal impediment to the overall process.[1] To date, the discussion has been relatively polarized between two camps: NGOs and the political left, who continue to support a negotiated settlement, and strategic security analysts, who promote the total military defeat and/or incarceration of all non-state combatants. This paper maintains that short-term military confrontation is a necessary precursor to the demobilization and reintegration of Colombia's non-state armed combatants, but that the strategy must be nuanced, flexible, and accompanied by a broader agenda of public accountability and rural development.

The goal of the paper is twofold. The first is to justify the logic, and indeed necessity behind the highly criticized military component of the Colombian security strategy. The second is to advance knowledge about how and when coercion can be justifiably employed to end immediate conflicts and build a lasting peace within weak states. The recent shift in Colombia's national security strategy, as initiated toward the end of Andrés Pastrana's

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[1] For an overview of the groups that unconditionally oppose a military solution to Colombia's conflict, see Amnesty International's "Colombia: Security at What Cost?" December 10, 2002. (http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-col/index). For a strongly pro-coercion stance, see Gabriel Marcella, "The United States and Colombia: The Journey from Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity" (Strategic Studies Institute, 2003). One of the only advocacy groups (outside of Washington) that supports a continuation of the coercive strategy is the International Crisis Group, which claims that the most important task for the Colombian government is to "strengthen its order of battle against the insurgents, if necessary by exercising the discretion it has to assign additional troops to anti-insurgency rather than anti-narcotics operations". See the International Crisis Group, "Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace, March 2002.
 (http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=594).

Presidential term in early 2002 and continued by Álvaro Uribe Vélez at present, provides such an example. A non-coercive strategy would likely produce a worse outcome than a coercive strategy: the expansion of non-state combatants, prolonged low-intensity conflict, and the further deterioration of democratic norms and human rights. Until the government establishes a monopoly over the *legitimate* use of force throughout the entire country, civil liberties and human rights will continue to be violated by the armed groups that exploit this environment of uncertainty and instability. Without a stable and secure political environment in which to operate, there will be a limited possibility for the representation of organized labour and the rural poor.

The resolution of the Colombian conflict will ultimately possess two elements: establishing governmental control over physical territory, and maintaining an environment of peace, political inclusion, and open contestation. But the ability to achieve the latter will depend upon the manner in which the former is established. This reveals the deeper problem of peacebuilding under the "new security dilemma" mentioned in the title: how to establish a norm of non-violent conflict resolution when a coercive approach may be needed to limit or reverse the widespread expansion of political violence. This paper argues that the government will be required to legitimize its own use of coercive force in contrast with the arbitrary use of force by non-state groups, by being non-partisan and accountable in the application of coercion. It also argues that the government is justified in utilizing coercion based on the principles of "just war," with the most important justification being the exhaustion of "soft power" measures to diffuse the conflict. This research accordingly highlights the numerous soft intervention mechanisms that have been unsuccessfully attempted in Colombia, including moral persuasion, political reform, humanitarian accords, legal indictments, and other non-coercive mechanisms.[2]

Another central element of the new security dilemma that must be considered is that instrumentally rational decisions that are made by the government often require morally questionable acts in order to achieve specific goals that would otherwise be impossible to achieve, such as expanding the role of military tribunals and establishing morally dubious citizen informant networks. Some more conservative Colombian analysts would also include in this list the supposed need for the armed forces to

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[2] The Armed Groups Project at UBC's Centre of International Relations, Liu Institute for Global Issues, has been developing a comprehensive typology that outlines the numerous non-coercive intervention mechanisms for non-state armed groups. See www.armedgroups.org.

collaborate with paramilitaries. These acts then limit the possible resolution of the conflict by polarizing public opinion and eroding the perceived legitimacy of a government that is increasingly viewed as being excessively corrupt, self-serving, and repressive. In essence, it is a dilemma that involves a tradeoff between power and legitimacy — but both are required to construct a cohesive and viable state. In order to balance its power with legitimacy, the Colombian government will need to be transparent and accountable in its coercive practices, ensure that its repression of non-state actors even-handedly addresses groups on both the right and left, and always maintain its willingness to pursue a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In addition, it cautions the Colombian government to be especially vigilant in assuring that any violations of civil liberties, especially the mass detention of suspected guerrilla supporters, does not further degenerate into a partisan assault against its opponents on the democratic left.

The Colombian Policy Change

In May 2002 the Colombian electorate unequivocally expressed its desire to embark upon a new strategy to address the seemingly endless civil conflict that has been indirectly responsible for more than 140,000 homicides in the past 40 years. The voter turnout for the Presidential elections was relatively high at 46.5%, considering the widespread urban bomb threats, the even more ominous security threats in the rural areas, and the fact that nearly one in fifteen eligible voters was internally displaced as a direct result of the conflict. In a historically unprecedented first-round victory, 53% of the electorate chose the independent candidate, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, endorsing his coercive strategy to ending the country's conflict. The decision to engage the nation's armed forces in an all-out war against its own citizens was not taken lightly, for even if the strategy were to achieve its stated goal of defeating the insurgents, it would almost certainly result in the increased curtailment of civil liberties and increased social fragmentation.

Uribe's "democratic security" platform was symbolized by his campaign slogan: *mano firme, corazón grande* (firm hand, big heart). This platform was centred around the direct confrontation of the guerrillas, while conditioning further negotiations on a prior ceasefire. While the policy of not negotiating amidst conflict is a common conflict resolution strategy in government-insurgency situations, it was not undertaken by the previous administration of Andrés Pastrana, which had attempted to negotiate a settlement with the leftist guerrillas, *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de*

Colombia (FARC) in the midst of escalating conflict.[3] Rather than improving the security environment, this strategy had the opposite effect, with the FARC seizing the opportunity to expand its military campaign against the government in order to increase its bargaining leverage. At the same time, the country's main counter-insurgency group, the Autodefensas Únidas de Colombia (AUC, or paramilitaries[4]) attempted to derail the negotiations, which they viewed as legitimizing the FARC's demands.

Uribe's strategy since August, 2002 has comprised several tactics: bolstering the armed forces and professionalising their operational procedures, developing a citizen informant network, deploying community-based peasant soldiers, and utilizing the constitutionally-sanctioned *estado de conmoción* (state of unrest) in order to increase the powers of the armed forces and police.[5] The latter has involved the curtailment of some civil liberties, expanded the search, seizure and surveillance capabilities of the police, and extended additional policing roles to the military. After completing nearly two years in office, Uribe has steamrolled several bills through the Colombian Congress, negotiated more than $500 million in additional U.S. aid, and in June 2003 presided over a disarmament agreement with the paramilitaries — the Ralito Accord. He has also re-established a police presence in almost every Colombian municipality, re-taking numerous regions formerly dominated by either the FARC or AUC.

On the other hand the new administration has also undertaken hundreds of mass arrests and arbitrary detentions, which human rights groups claim violate the Geneva Conventions.[6] Millions of people remain internally displaced,

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[3] Note that references to the FARC are pluralized in this paper, as the FARC's name in Spanish is pluralized: Las Fuerzas Armadas (The Armed Forces).

[4] It should be noted that the term "paramilitaries" is technically a misnomer, insofar as an armed group is considered to be "paramilitary" when it is officially sanctioned, supported, and organized by the state. While the Colombian AUC certainly retain ties to some members of the armed forces, they are far from being supported by official military policy, much less the executive. However, for lack of a better term, and in light of the fact that these groups are undoubtedly not the legitimate "self-defense" forces that the claim to be, the term "paramilitary" is used hereafter.

[5] Uribe attempted to prematurely extend the second state of emergency in April, 2003, but this was struck down by Colombia's Constitutional Court, citing that he would need to wait until the end of the three month period, and then pass the extension through Congress.

[6] For example, see Human Rights Watch's Report of Feb. 10, 2004: "Colombia: EU Should Hold Uribe to Rights Commitments". It should be noted here that the Fourth Geneva Convention allows for the arrest and detention of

with an estimated 320,000 new internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 2002. This figure did, however, decrease dramatically in 2003 – to perhaps 150,000. The FARC has also escalated its attacks on urban centres, resulting in dozens of urban bomb attacks and hundreds of civilian fatalities. It has been a volatile and uncertain first half of the administration's term.

The Conflict in Historical Perspective

The present conflict in Colombia certainly possesses antecedents in earlier conflicts, such as the eight civil wars of the 1800s, the War of 1,000 Days (1899-1902), the ultra-violent period of partisan strife known simply as *La Violencia* (1948-1953), and the political genocide of the left from roughly 1983 to 1991. Many of these conflicts were centred around the control of land, with alternating periods of agrarian reform (land distribution) and counter-reform (displacement and land concentration).[7] As this history has been well-documented, it will not be elaborated in great detail, except where needed to illuminate the discussion about the possible trajectories of a coercive state security strategy.[8]

However, it is easy to overemphasize the connection between these past conflicts and the present conflict(s), at the expense of recognising how the present contains several critical disjunctures from the past. While Colombia has vacillated between years of lesser and greater conflict among different

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civilians without trial "if the security of the Detaining Power makes it absolutely necessary" (Articles 42 and 78).

[7] See Catherine Legrand, "The Colombian Crisis in Historical Perspective", *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28 (56) 2003, pp. 165-209.

[8] Probably the best overview of Colombian history from pre-Columbian times to the present is Frank Safford and Marco Placios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (Oxford University Press, 2002). For comparative 19th Century state formation, see Fernando Lopez-Alves, *State Formation and Democracy in Latin America*, 1810-1900 (Duke University Press, 2000). For 20th Century history and La Violencia, see Vernon Lee Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions; Military Rule and Social Revolution in Colombia 1930-1956* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957). For more recent Colombian history, see Charles Bergquist et al, *Violence in Colombia – the Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992); Charles Bergquist et al., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000, Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001); Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *The Colombian Labyrinth: the Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability* (Rand Corporation, 2001). Mauricio Romero, "Changing Identities and Contested Settings: Regional Elites and the Paramilitaries in Colombia," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 14 (1), 2000.

groups without ever really witnessing stable and long-lasting peace in its 193-years, the recent return to high death tolls is in many ways quite distinct from the partisan and class-based conflicts of the past.

In the early 1960s, residual rural conflict from *La Violencia* still permeated much of the Colombian countryside. While some of this violence was relatively apolitical banditry, much of it retained vestiges of the conflict between the Colombian armed forces under Laureano Gomez (1950-1953) and reform-minded rural *campesinos* (rural agricultural workers).[9] At the end of *La Violencia*, peasant communities in the south-central Colombian departments of Huila, Tolima, Meta, and Caquetá declared themselves independent republics in an attempt to distance themselves from the political establishment, which continued to foment partisan violence between Liberal and Conservative peasants. This declaration of independence provoked a harsh response from the highly reactionary elements within both the Liberal and Conservative Parties, sparking intense military repression against these communities. This brought about the birth of the FARC in 1964, under Pedro Antonio Marín, otherwise known as Manuel Marulanda or *Tirofijo* (Sureshot), who continues as head of the FARC to this day, at the age of 74.

Between 1966 and 1970, the Liberal government of Carlos Lleras Restrepo followed the example of many Latin American countries in the wake of the Cuban revolution, attempting a process of land tenure reform that was highly unpopular with many of the wealthy managers of the *latifundia* (large estates) and their political allies in the Liberal-Conservative coalition. This resulted in the reversal of agrarian reforms when the executive automatically shifted to the Conservatives in 1970, under the terms of the consociational agreement (an automatic alternation of political leadership between the Liberals and Conservatives every four years).[10] This exacerbated the process of peasant revolt, who turned to kidnapping and extorting "taxes" from the wealthy estate owners. With the massive infusion of narco-dollars into the

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[9] On non-political banditry in this period, see Gonzalo Sanchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandits, Peasants and Politics – The Case of "La Violencia" in Colombia* (University of Texas, 2001).

[10] Agrarian reform was implemented in much of Latin America, with different levels of success: some success in Mexico, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Chile,; limited success in Peru and Nicaragua; and, very little success in Colombia and Brazil. Cristobal Kay shows that there is a strong correlation between states that have not successfully implemented agrarian reform and increasing incidence of rural violence. See Cristobal Kay, "Reflections On Rural Violence in Latin America." *Third World Quarterly* 22 (5), Oct 2001, pp. 742-3.

Colombian economy during the 1970s and 1980s, these "guerrillas" increasingly began abducting the wealthy members of narcotics cartels of Medellin and Cali to fund their insurrection. In response, cartel members established the vicious and immensely powerful group known *Muerte a Secuestradores* (Death to Kidnappers — or MAS) in collaboration with associations of cattle ranchers and industrialists. Meanwhile, the government was both unable and often unwilling to effectively limit the influence of either group.[11]

Since 1982, various administrations have attempted to arbitrate Colombia's rural conflicts, successively alternating between repression and negotiation. However, every administration failed to achieve either outright military victory or a negotiated settlement because of compromises imposed on their agendas by rural economic elites, anti-communist military officials, political elites in Bogotá, the narcotics cartels, and rural workers. As a result of these multifarious and conflicting interests, the more repressive administrations retained small, corrupt, unaccountable, and ineffective militaries that alienated rural peasants and many urban elites, while failing to coerce insurrection groups as "effectively" as their counterparts in the authoritarian regimes of Argentina, Chile, and Peru. On the other hand, attempts at achieving a negotiated resolution to the conflict were opposed by rural elites, members of the armed forces, and the narcotics cartels, which eliminated any possibility of political reconciliation with the guerrillas. When the administration of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) negotiated a cease-fire with the leftist guerrillas, offering them amnesty and political inclusion, as many as 3,000 members and supporters of their newly-formed political party, the *Unión Patriótica*, were assassinated by right-wing paramilitaries, hired assassins, and even some members of the armed forces and police. This partly explains the continued

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[11] Human Rights Watch researcher and historian, Robin Kirk, describes the relationship as one in which politicians agreed to grant independence to the military in return for the military's promise to avoid political involvement. See Robin Kirk, *More Terrible Than Death: Massacres, War, and America's War in Colombia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003). My own explanation focuses more on the insalubrious combination of post-civil war partisan convergence, the historical legacy of regional independence, resolute anti-military sentiment among political elites, urban elite antipathy toward rural elites and guerrillas, the military's dogmatic and inflexible anti-communism, and the difficulty of centralising control in such a vast and geographically diverse country. See Peter Larose, *Coercive Entrepreneurs and State Capacity: Colombian State Weakness (1750-2004)*. Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2004.

reluctance of the guerrillas to seek formal political representation and their overall distrust of the Colombian political system.

Armed Actors and Colombian Democracy

At the commencement of the Uribe administration's term in August 2002, there were approximately 35,000 non-state armed combatants in Colombia. The left wing guerrilla group, *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) consisted of roughly 17,000-18,000 combatants, and the main right-wing counterinsurgency group, *Autodefensas Únidas de Colombia* (AUC) consisted of between 10,000 and 13,000 troops, depending upon the estimates one trusts and where the line is drawn between regular armed combatants, unaffiliated community self-defense troops, occasional armed supporters of convenience, and mere sympathizers. The *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), another smaller leftist guerrilla group, contains perhaps 4,000 members. Collectively, the three groups have been responsible for approximately 3,500 deaths of mostly civilians each year over the past fifteen years.

Leading up to the Presidential elections of May 2002, the government maintained a presence in approximately 55-60% of the country, but control over some of this territory was tenuous. Many of the major oil and coal producing areas of the south (FARC territory) and the north and central highlands of the west (AUC territory) were not controlled by the government, nor were many of the main riparian or coastal transportation routes northern interior or north coast.

Despite the various destabilizing forces of drugs, armed groups, and periods of socioeconomic recession in the past 20 years, Colombia's democratic institutions have remained intact, and many been significantly reformed since the re-drafting of the Constitution in 1991. This paradoxical strengthening, *de jure*, has occurred in those sectors most directly affected by the insurgency, such as the Colombian judiciary and the electoral system. (These reforms will be discussed in Section II).

On Ethics and Warfare

Any time that coercive force is sanctioned to achieve political goals, the moral and ethical ramifications must be carefully weighed. One of the pre-eminent figures on politics and

ethics, Max Weber, contends that ethical political action must be considered in a different manner than ethical social or personal interaction, as politics "operates with very special means, namely, power backed up by violence."[12]

In the realm of contemporary conflict studies, Michael Walzer has most comprehensively theorized on moral justifications for both the just declaration of wars (*jus ad bellum*) and how to battle in a just manner (*jus in bello*).[13] The principle of *just ad bellum* states that declarations of war must have just cause, be declared by a proper authority, possess the right intention, have a reasonable chance of success, utilize means that are proportional to their ends, and be the last resort. The principles of *jus in bello* state that only necessary, military targets should be attacked, and that force should only be applied to the degree that it is necessary to ensure victory. This latter point is central to the discussion of the Uribe administration's decision to curtail of civil liberties in the effort to retake the country from guerrillas and paramilitaries. It also has important ramifications for our assessment of the decisions of past administrations to turn a blind eye toward the actions of paramilitaries, the decisions to create the the controversial self-defense communities, such as the *CONVIVIR* and the *Buen Vecino* (the "Good Neighbour") programs, and for future considerations of partial amnesties for human rights violators who agree to disarm.

Stathis Kalyvas has also assessed the ethical dimensions of classifying conflicts as "civil wars," "revolutions," or "terrorism."[14] His analysis outlines the difficulty and even futility in attempting to clearly distinguish between the exalted "just revolutions" of the past and the seemingly senseless "terrorist" actions of many present-day insurgency movements. This ultimately leads one to reconsider whether the many successful struggles for independence in the past have been as just or righteous as they are perceived, and whether "terrorism" is the appropriate label for the

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[12] Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation" in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 119.

[13] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed. (New York, Basic Books, 1992). While Walzer's analysis is centred upon the use of violence in inter-state conflicts, it can also be applied to any situation where force is used in order to achieve political outcomes, such as humanitarian intervention situations (e.g., Kosovo in 1999), or in the repression of violent intra-state groups (e.g., Colombia). In fact, the requirements of *jus ad bellum* should be easier to meet in intra-state conflict situations, as claims about the necessity to respect state sovereignty are not applicable.

[14] Stathis Kalyvas, "New and Old Civil Wars," *World Politics* 54 (1), 2001.

tactics of many of the present insurgency groups throughout the world.

In order to begin thinking about the appropriate trajectories of state responses to such a complex assemblage of actors, interests, and identities, an evaluation of these groups must be undertaken. However, this is not sufficient to establish the legitimacy of a coercive response, as such an analysis is inherently subjective, as the following table demonstrates. See *Figure 1*, below.

Figure 1: Evaluation of Colombian Armed Groups' Legitimacy (Means / Ends Analysis)[a]

MEANS

	FARC	ELN	AUC
Primary means	Kidnapping, bombing public spaces and infrastructure, extortion and racketeering, taxation of coca growers in south/ southeast, assassinating public officials, attacks on AUC-supported coca growers	Kidnapping, bombing public infrastructure (especially oil pipelines), extortion and racketeering	Ultra violent attacks on peasants thought to support FARC (>70% of civilian deaths in 2001/2), intimidation/ extortion of public officials and suspected leftist sympathizers, theft of petroleum, extortion and racketeering, forced displacement and land concentration
Funded by llegal drugs	Yes - heavily	Somewhat	Yes – heavily
Loot to wage war or wage war to loot?	Both	Mostly loot to wage war	Both
Violence as a last resort?	?	?	?

ENDS

	FARC	ELN	AUC
Goals	Weaken or overtake state, agrarian reform, nationalization of major industries, establishment of socialist state, vague references to "justice" and "equality"	Primarily nationalization of oil/energy sector, agrarian reform, and increased rights/opportunities for peasants	Bolster armed forces in battle against guerrillas, protect wealth of regional elites and narcotics traffickers, and gain political influence and public legitimacy
Level of popular support in Colombia	Overall low High among some rural peasants – especially in southwest, some support with leftist groups	Overall low-medium support Some support among rural campesinos, indigenous groups, and leftist groups	Overall low, but growing Some support among middle and upper classes and some members of the Colombian Congress
Motivation for joining	Revenge, survival, obligation/ necessity (forced recruits), ideology, economic	Revenge, survival, ideology, economic	Economic, revenge, survival, ideological
Present goals different than original goals?	Somewhat Generally considered to be increasingly driven by drug profits	No	Yes/somewhat In some ways have become more "parastatal" – seeking to gain political legitimacy
Results	Weaken and destabilize state, hamper economic growth/ investment, employ peasants in coca farming	Weaken and destabilize state, articulate and aggregate some interests of rural poor, hamper economic growth/ investment	Violate civil liberties and human rights of civilians and limit political inclusion/ representation

Notes to Figure:

a. The information in these tables is compiled from various sources, including official statements by the armed groups, interviews with members from the groups, witness testimonies, news and media sources, and scholarly publications. Where applicable, the responses are based upon the author's assessment of the groups rather than the formal statements made by the groups.

There are several conclusions that one should arrive at with Figure 1. The first is that it is not a simple exercise to distinguish the estimable victims from the licentious aggressors. Even the FARC, who claim to be fighting for the cause of rural workers, massacred 34 poor rural coca farmers alleged to be under the employment of the AUC, on June 15, 2004. Additionally, all groups have a low probability of achieving their goals, and none can claim a substantial support base. Thus it is erroneous (and dangerous) to undertake ethical analysis of the Colombian armed groups by appealing solely to normative claims about the legitimacy of the various actors, deciding in favour of one side or the other about who has been the recipient of more social injustice, and working to ensure this group's successful achievement of its goals. The problem with this approach, aside from its inherently subjective nature, is that it does not address the trajectory of possible outcomes. As the International Council of Human Rights (ICHR) claims, conflict resolution should not focus on discussions of the relative merits of combatant groups, but rather, should address the possible outcomes that can plausibly be achieved, and work toward these.[15] Otherwise, the analysis quickly opens-up a normative Pandora's box of victims and perpetrators, which when applied to Colombia, logically results in blaming the exclusionary consociational regime of 1958-1974, or perhaps the 19th Century Catholic Church for dividing the pro-clerical Conservatives from the more modern and secular Liberals, or Simon Bolivar for dividing the country with his insistence on establishing a monarchical constitution in the 1820s, *ad infinitum*…

Figure 1 also illuminates the main goals and motivations behind each of the armed groups, some of which are long-term, structural conditions that will need to be addressed by the government if a negotiated settlement is to provide a stable base upon which to stabilize governing institutions.[16] If a resolution to the conflict is reached in order to merely end the present conflict, without consideration of the underlying powers and the motivating factors behind the various actors, then any peace agreement will be short-lived. For example, as Romero shows, a solution that merely involves governmental co-optation of regional elites and the paramilitaries while excluding the rural campesinos will revert Colombia to a similar condition as existed

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[15] International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP), *Ends and Means: Human Rights Approaches to Armed Groups* (ICHRP, 2000).

[16] One of Colombia's foremost historical and political analysts, Gonzalo Sánchez, argues that while past negotiations focused upon political reform, the next negotiations will need to focus on socioeconomic reform. See Gonzalo Sanchez, "Problems of Violence, Prospects of Peace" in (op. cit.) Bergquist et. al., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000*.

prior to 1982, which could ultimately be more volatile than the present configuration of actors and interests.[17]

There is, however, some utility in this mode of deontological reasoning in relation to Walzer's "sliding scale" of moral justification for violating *jus in bello* (fighting well) in order to achieve victory in cases of *jus ad bellum* (the just war). In other words, the analysis of actor legitimacy may show the degree of justification that the Colombian government can claim with regard to both its militancy against the armed groups and its willingness to make the compromises necessary to end the conflict. This point needs to be emphasized, for it is the small but crucial space in which Colombian ethical discussion must be situated. In all battles, moral compromises are made, and groups with dubious qualities co-opted in order to ensure that the desired ends are achieved.[18] In Colombia's history, this has occurred several times, for example, from the 1920s until his assassination in 1948, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán successfully co-opted elements of Colombia's revolutionary political left, including elements more violent, radical, and more moderate than himself, despite the moral compromises involved in doing so, in his quest to give voice to Colombia's working classes. More recently this occurred when César Gaviria's administration expressed its willingness to negotiate softer sentencing, amnesty, and governmental relocation/protection for various drug cartel members in order to elicit their cooperation during the early-1990s. And Uribe's present efforts to induce combatants to disarm are centred on the granting of amnesty and reintegration assistance for both guerrillas and paramilitaries.

The dilemmas of ethical compromise during warfare are central to Walzer's theory on just wars. One of the pivotal dilemmas of warfare occurs when *jus ad bellum* (the moral

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[17] Mauricio Romero, "Negotiations with the Self-defense and Paramilitary Groups and Trajectories of State Consolidation in Contemporary Colombia." From Bogotá workshop, May 29-31, 2003: *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts,* sponsored by Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University, Bogotá.

[18] Mauricio Romero has shown that governments often acquiesce with groups that operate on the interstice of legality and illegality, as these groups have often played an important role in forming and consolidating the national state, in Colombia and other countries. Other examples include the Russian mafia and the local "bosses" in Rio's slums that protect private property rights, organize informal economic activity (much of it illegal), provide protection to citizens, and supply other forms of social infrastructure. For a discussion of the role of the socially productive nature of organized violence where there is no state with a monopoly over violence, see also Robert Bates, Avner Greif, and Amita Singh, "Organizing Violence," *Journal Of Conflict Resolution* 46 (5), Oct 2002.

justification to declare war) exists, but winning the battle is impossible via the principles of *jus in bello* (fighting honourably) due to the nature of the conflict. According to Walzer, this dilemma has been resolved in the past by allowing soldiers to violate the laws and norms of warfare, maintaining them at arms distance, publicly condemning their practices while they do the "dirty work," but never really attempting to stop them entirely. This process is what Walzer describes as "the dishonouring of Arthur Harris."[19]

Arthur Harris was the British Air Marshal who directed the Royal Air Force's saturation bombing of Germany in World War II. In response to Germany's violation of international humanitarian law in their bombing of dense urban centres such as Greater London during WWII, the Allied Forces contravened the same conventions of warfare by saturation bombing German cities — the most devastating being the fire-bombing of Dresden in 1945, which killed over 100,000 civilians. After the war was over, the Allies needed to restore the international laws of warfare that they had intentionally violated in Dresden. The most convenient method to achieve this was to cast a shadow upon the actions of Harris by denying him any special commendation after the war, despite the success and perhaps even heroism of his squadron's bombing campaigns, and the Royal Air Force having ordered the attacks. This appears to have been the Colombian military's approach to the paramilitary groups, which it had sanctioned to undertake the particularly horrific campaigns of the counter-insurgency, especially until the mid-to-late 1990s. And in June 2004, paramilitary commanders responded with the same outrage that Harris displayed after the war, accusing the government of facilitating their creation, then claiming the moral high ground by denouncing their actions and seeking to imprison them for human rights violations.

The intention of this comparison is not to justify governmental co-optation of paramilitaries, much less the actions of paramilitaries themselves. Rather, it is merley an attempt to demonstrate the inherent moral ambiguity of warfare, and how the tactics utilized in warfare are always justified vis-à-vis the actions of "the enemy." For this reason, this analysis does not elaborate on the numerous components of *jus ad bellum* or *jus in bello* to justify the Colombian government's use of coercion, as these parameters can be easily manipulated to justify even the most nefarious military manoeuvres, such as self serving pre-emptive attacks. Rather, it relies on an analysis that balances the probability and desirability of outcomes, and invokes the only

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[19] Walzer, op. cit., pp. 323-325

component of just war theory that is difficult to manipulate and that can be most easily quantified: the principle of "last resort."

Part II: Justifications for Coercion

As any student of Colombian politics can attest, describing the present configuration of actors, interests, and even the basic "facts" of the conflict as merely being complex is to be guilty of acute understatement. Despite this complexity and uncertainty, there are two categories of justification for why, after 2002, a coercive response was required. The first is the failure of non-coercive "soft" measures in the past, and the second highlights trends in the domestic environment that would facilitate the application of force against the country's armed groups.

The Failure of Non-Coercive Approaches

At the heart of the justification for a coercive security strategy is the failure of non-coercive intervention measures in the past. These include moral persuasion, political reforms, legal measures, and lengthy attempts at peace negotiations.

Moral Persuasion

One of the most notable failures of "soft" intervention mechanisms is the moral persuasion campaign of domestic and international human rights groups. The FARC and ELN continue to assert that they are justified in employing any tactics that are required to undermine the repressive and exclusionary political "oligarchy." Conversely, the AUC justifies its tactics as being the mirror image of the FARC's guerrilla tactics, with both groups focusing their attacks on the civilian population, and being unconstrained by the "crutch" of public accountability, which limits the means at the disposal of the armed forces. Extensive "naming and shaming" campaigns against these groups have been more or less fruitlessly undertaken for several years by the human rights community, focusing on three main areas: the banning of anti-personnel landmines, the recruitment of child soldiers, and the kidnapping of civilians, especially children. International human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch have been actively petitioning the guerrillas and paramilitaries to discontinue all of these practices for years, with few tangible results. In fact, the FARC have actually increased their deployment of landmines

over the past four years.[20] Indiscriminate civilian deaths caused by landmines is the only demographic to continuously worsen in each of the past four years in Colombia. This is despite the fact that the Colombian government has ratified the Ottawa Treaty, which requires it to completely ban the use of landmines, remove those presently in place, and eliminate existing stockpiles. Independent observers have verified that the government has completely suspended the deployment of landmines, and is on target for eliminating all existing stockpiles by February, 2005.[21]

Political Reforms

Since the drafting of the 1991 Constitution, Colombia has undertaken many laudable reforms of its formal democratic institutions, but these reforms are rendered *de facto* impotent by chronically undermined civil and political liberties. The electoral system has been re-structured to give enhanced representation to rural populations and third parties. The armed forces have been placed under greater civilian oversight, via the Prosector General's Office (Fiscalía) and the Inspector General's Office (Procuraduría). The Constitution also created the office of the Ombudsman (*Defensor del Pueblo*) which enables citizens to bring charges of human rights violations (*acciones de tutela*), against public officials for the first time in Colombia's history.

Political decentralization has been one of the chief political accomplishments of the past 20 years, especially since the creation of elected mayoral offices in 1985, under Betancur's *Legislative Act No. 1*. Furthermore, regional Governors are now directly elected rather than being appointed by the executive. Analysts agree that Colombia has implemented one of the most, if not the most, comprehensive agendas of political decentralization in the Americas.[22] But improvements in decentralization have been

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[20] On the other hand, the ELN has entered into very promising discussions on the issue of landmines with the international NGO, Geneva Call. These discussions have revitalized dialogue between the ELN and the government, which could potentially lead to a ceasefire and peace accord between the government and the ELN.

[21] See Campaña Colombiana contra Minas, "Destrucción de minas antipersonales de Colombia," http://www.icbl.org/news/2004/497.php)

[22] See Eliza Willis, Stephan Haggard, and Christopher da C.B. Garman, "The Politics of Decentralization in Latin America", *Latin American Research Review* 34 (1), 1999. Also Ana-María Bejarno, "The Constitution of 1991 – An Institutional Evaluation Seven Years Later", in Charles Bergquist et al. (eds.), *Violence in Colombia 1990 – 2000* (Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

tempered by attacks on local politicians, including the assassination of 138 mayoral candidates during the 1990s.[23]

Legal Indictments

Perhaps the most destructive effect of the armed groups is their undermining of the judiciary, which is too overburdened to prosecute the vast majority of crimes. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, rates of criminal violence increased by 400%, while criminal prosecution rates decreased by approximately 500%,[24] despite the fact that Colombia possesses the second-highest number of judges per capita in the Americas, with 17.1 magistrates per 100,000 people.[25] This suggests that judicial weakness should be deemed more a product of the internal conflict than the cause of it.[26] But despite these escalating pressures on the judiciary, in Uribe's first year in office the Attorney General increased investigations of paramilitary members by 105% and of armed forces members suspected of colluding with paramilitaries by 61.6%.[27]

In such an environment, legal indictments have been ineffective at either incarcerating armed combatants or in altering their behaviour. Numerous warrants have been issued against the leaders of all three armed groups, using both the Colombian court system and American courts, and the only successes have been made with the strengthening of the ability to physically apprehend indictees. As an illustration, on September 25, 2002 a Washington District Court subpoenaed Carlos Castaño, former

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[23] In the leadup to the national municipal elections of October 26, 2003, 26 candidates were assassinated, eight kidnapped, and at least 160 removed themselves from the running after being threatened by non-state armed groups, especially the FARC. See El Tiempo, "Álvaro Uribe asegura que las Farc ordenaron asesinar candidates", Oct. 24, 2003. http://eltiempo.terra.com.

[24] Mauricio Rubio, "La justicia en una sociedad violenta", in Maria Victoria Llorenta and Malcolm Deas, eds., Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz (Bogota: Cerec, 1999).

[25] See Marcella, op. cit. However, the United States Office on Drugs and Crime claims that Colombia has 3,995 judges and magistrates, which equates to approximately 9.9 per 100,000 citizens. Regardless, even this figure is extremely high when compared with most other Latin American countries, such as Venezuela (2.5/100,000) and Chile (3.6/100,000).

[26] Larose, op. cit., pp. 17-24.

[27] See International Crisis Group, "ICG Report No. 5 – Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries" (ICG Press, Sep 16, 2003). Despite these increases in prosecutions, the Attorney General's office remains mired in controversy over alleged infiltration by armed groups, including both guerrillas and paramilitaries.

leader of the AUC, and three high ranking AUC officials, on charges of trafficking 17 tonnes of cocaine to the United States between 1997 and 2002.[28] This became a major point of division within the AUC leadership, with Castaño agreeing to comply with the indictments, and the others refusing to acknowledge foreign courts. In the end, Castaño was assassinated by fellow AUC members, who then reiterated their refusal to recognize the authority of foreign courts.

Furthermore, formal economic sanctions have little influence with non-state armed groups. Whereas sanctions may help to persuade states to alter their behaviour, they are of little use against groups that either do not seek moral legitimacy, or that traffick in illicit goods that are already beyond the regulatory sphere.[29]

Peace Negotiations

Perhaps the most commonly cited justification for a coercive approach to the non-state groups is the failure of peace negotiations, with the most obvious example being the lengthy and unsuccessful talks of 1999-2002 between the Colombian government and the FARC. The FARC claimed to have broken off these talks on two occasions mainly due to the government's unwillingness to deter paramilitary attacks on FARC supporters and their own troops in the demilitarized zone. However, many observers of the peace negotiations, including *Washington Post* foreign correspondent Scott Wilson, claim that the FARC likely did not enter into the peace talks with the goal of achieving a settlement, but rather, were using the negotiated demilitarized zone (their carrot for agreeing to engage in peace talks) to expand drug cultivation in order to increase their economic base and strengthen their forces. The FARC also made excessive demands about the breadth of agenda items that would need to be addressed, such as the re-writing of the Colombian Constitution and the nationalization of private property and major industries. They frequently referenced the problems with capitalism and liberal democracy, and merely generalized about the evils of the political and economic "oligarchy" in Colombia without making

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[28] United States Department of Justice, "Attorney General and DEA Director Announce Indictments in AUC Drug Trafficking Case", www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/pressrel/pr092402.html

[29] See Pablo Policzer, "Human Rights and Armed Groups: Toward a New Policy Architecture," Armed Groups Project, July 2002. http://www.armedgroups.org/_media/0207policzer_humanrights.pdf

many concrete or plausible proposals.[30] In fact, the negotiations did not get past the preliminary stage of defining the agenda, much less reaching any agreements that would lead to the demobilization and reintegration of FARC combatants. In February 2004 the FARC displayed their intransigence yet again, declining the offer of French President Jacques Chirac to provide exile for FARC soldiers detained by the government, in a humanitarian prisoner swap for FARC hostages. The FARC refused the offer without explanation.

The Domestic Environment

Despite popular opinion regarding the weakness of Colombia's political institutions, Colombia's institutions would facilitate a coercive response to the armed groups. Perhaps most importantly, the military has been placed under greater civilian control and poses little threat of becoming "deliberative." As mentioned above, the 1991 Constitution granted citizens the right to bring charges against government officials for violating or failing to protect their fundamental human rights. In addition, the top branches of the judiciary now operate with greater independence.[31] Due to these reforms, the Colombian military is beginning to reign-in military corruption and professionalizing the armed forces.[32]

Many past administrations had undertaken unsuccessful military offensives against the guerrillas. However, these offensives were often ill-eqipped, unaccountable, and lacking in broad-based public support. Military expenditures reached "Swiss Army" levels in 1987, with only 1% of GDP spent on defense. The administration of Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) also reversed defense spending increases undertaken by Gaviria (1990-

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[30] Juan Guillermo Ferro M., "Las FARC: Aun Lejos de una Negociación en Firme," and Manuel Salazar, Colombia's Peace Process 1998-2002. Towards the understanding of its ultimate failure. Both from Bogotá workshop, May 29-31, 2003: *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts,* sponsored by Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University, Bogotá.

[31] Corporación Transparencia por Colombia, "Colombia National Integrity System, 2001", p. 15.

[32] See Marcella, ibid., and Romero, op. cit. Romero claims that one of the biggest fears of army personnel is of being brought before the Prosecutor General, who has been actively prosecuting human rights violators within the army for several years, due to increasing pressure from civil society.

1994), from 1.7% to 1.4% of GDP, which was, not coincidentally, the worst period of human rights violations by the Colombian military, with more than 3,000 allegations against public officials for human rights abuses.[33] At present, spending on national defense in Colombia is similar to that of many other Latin American countries that are not involved in major internal conflicts, refuting the popular myth of Colombia as a "garrison state."

Figure 2:   Defense Spending by Country, 2002

Colombia	Ecuador	Chile
3.4%	3.4%	3.1%
Brazil	**U.S.A.**	**North Korea**
1.9%	3.2%	31.3%

Source: CIA Factbook, 2003

The recent increase in defense spending since Uribe's inauguration has helped the Colombian army to retake much of the territory formerly dominated by the armed groups, with the state extending its military and police presence to over 600 new districts by June 2003. Without additional increases in the state security apparatus, the government will face great difficulty in re-taking the remaining areas still under the control of non-state armed groups.

This myth of the Colombian garrison state is dangerous for two reasons. First, it bolsters the resolve of human rights groups and anti-conflict analysts who view armed confrontation as antithetical to the establishment of peace. With Colombian society inaccurately regarded as being historically militarized yet incapable of defeating the guerrillas, the plausibility of successful armed coercion appears low. However, this is not the case. There has never been a powerful and professional Colombian army, under the control of civilians, supported by the vast majority of Colombians, which has attempted to confront the country's armed groups in a sustained and transparent manner.

Second, the myth of the garrison state artificially inflates the actual abilities of the armed groups to such a level that any methods undertaken to achieve a military resolution to the conflict may seem to be justified by the ends. Yet the establishment of peace must provide the necessary antecedent conditions for eventually undertaking the process of combatant reintegration and

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[33] Comision Colombiana de Juristas, Colombia, "Derechos Humanos y Derecho Humanitario", Bogota, 1996.

social reconciliation, and an excessively draconian spirit of confrontation could ultimately win the proverbial battle while losing the war. For this reason, a more accurate assessment of the capabilities of the armed groups and the government forces is necessary.

Colombia also possesses one of Latin America's strongest party systems in Latin America, despite the plethora of anti-democratic forces that exist in the country. This means that the electorate can clearly express itself and articulate decisions about their preferences through the political system. Uribe's capture of 53% of the votes in the 2002 Presidential elections was the first time a Colombian President was chosen in a first-round vote since the constitution implemented the 2-round system in 1991. His support rating as of mid-2004 remained above 70%, which means that his coercive approach to the non-state armed groups is largely supported by a broad cross-section of Colombian society. This does not mean that violence is always justified when supported by the volatile majoritarian impulses of the electorate, but rather, it signifies that the international NGO community has little right to demand that Colombia heed its advice and immediately return to negotiations. As unpopular as Uribe's strategy may be outside of Colombia, he has the overwhelming support of the people who must live with the problems that he has been mandated to address. If and when his administration and its coercive strategy loses the support of the Colombian people, he can be expected to peacefully accede power to the new President-elect, who could then change the direction of the country's security strategy.

Support for both the AUC and the FARC is also extremely low in almost all regions of the country. While it is difficult to accurately gauge the precise level of support for the guerrillas and the paramilitaries, it is most likely lower than 5% nationally, depending upon whether one considers a "supporter" to be someone who believes that the armed groups have justifiable grievances, or actually supports the continued insurgency in the hopes of a better future.[34]

Uribe also provides the type of leadership that is required in Colombia at the moment. Being a political outsider in Colombia (not from one of the two main parties), he is more insulated from the limitations of the parties' clientelist ties. Uribe has not been a

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[34] The BBC News Corp. frequently cites the support rate of the FARC as being below 5%, whereas Eduardo Pizarro and Ana Maria Bejarno claim that the FARC and AUC collectively have the support of around 2% of the population. See Eduardo Pizarro and Ana Maria Bejarno, "Colombia: A Failing State?" *Revista - Harvard Review of Latin America*, Spring 2003, p. 12. Neither cites the source of the polling information, and both appear somewhat low, especially the latter.

rigid and inflexible ideologue or war-monger who decries the dangers of minority groups, the natural rights of the upper classes, or the need to reduce taxes and eliminate social security. As Governor of the Department of Antioquia from 1995-1997, he raised taxes and diverted the funds toward primary education, sending 103,000 children to school, and created a community decision-making network, the *Estado Comunitario* (State Community) that incorporated the general public in key governmental decision-making. He extended health care coverage to 200,000 of Antioquia's poorest residents, and trained 40,000 citizens in peaceful dispute resolution techniques. As President, he has increased taxes on individuals listing assets with values in excess of (US) $65,000, and expropriated dormant lands from large landholders suspected of having accrued wealth through the drug trade. He has also laid out the path to a negotiated settlement several times in the past year.[35] He may be one of the least charismatic leaders in Latin America, possessing none of the prototypical qualities expected in a populist right-wing ideologue, and as such should not be labeled thusly.

Another important factor in the domestic environment that limits the possibility of a negotiated settlement is that the present balance of powers is not conducive to another round of negotiations. Successful negotiations to end insurrections usually occur when there has been either a stalemate that incurs greater costs than benefits upon the armed factions, or when the insurgents have been forced into an unfavourable bargaining position.[36] With the massive drug profits continuing to flow in, it can hardly be claimed that the FARC leadership have been accruing greater costs than benefits over the past 10-15 years. And one must consider that the decision calculus for the FARC is different than for the armed forces: the FARC "win" by merely surviving. On the other hand, the government "loses" if it fails to eliminate the insurgency.

Drugs and the Political Economy of Conflict

This leads us to the most commonly cited (and the most contentious) element of Colombian security analysis: the drug trade and the wartime economy. This is a relatively intuitive connection, and requires little in the way of explanation. Since the mid-late 1980s, both the FARC and the AUC have expanded their

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[35] See Fernando Cepeda Ullola, "El Gobierno de Alvaro Uribe: Puntos de Vista desde Colombia," Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) Policy Paper Series, 2002. www.focal.ca.

[36] See Sweig, op. cit.

financial resource base by increasing their involvement with coca production and cocaine trafficking, thus allowing them to grow in size and strength. However, the correlation between drug cultivation and the internal conflict requires further elaboration.

Drug profits should be considered a significant contributing condition, rather than a necessary or a sufficient condition for the survival of both the FARC and AUC. Indeed, the expansion of the conflict in the past ten years can to some degree be attributed to opportunism, greed, and the furthering of specific interests in perpetuating the wartime economy, rather than actually "winning" the war.[37]

The balancing of the "greed" and "grievance" aspects of the Colombian conflict will certainly remain contentious. Indeed, a recent survey of combatants has shown that individuals join non-state armed groups for several reasons, including their desires to seek revenge, to elevate their social status, as well as for selfish economic reasons and to satisfy politico-ideological grievances.[38] Perhaps the most common claim about the FARC in the media and even in some academic research is that "they have strayed from their revolutionary aspirations and ideological commitments" to become merely another organized crime group with primarily economic motivations.[39] However, most Colombian analysts from within the country,[40] but also some foreign military analysts,[41] do

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[37] See Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia.* (New York State University Press, 2002). "The war system has been able to sustain itself because of the lack of institutional mechanisms to quell conflicts between antagonistic groups, all of which benefit from the war situation as long as none achieves outright victory".

[38] See Francisco Gutierrez Sanin, "El discreto encanto de Collier," El Espectador, May 2, 2004.

[39] For example, see Marcella, op. cit., and Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, op. cit.

[40] For example, see Romero, op. cit. 7, and Mauricio Romero, "Reform and Reaction: Paramilitary Groups in Contemporary Colombia," in *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation*, Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 204. Romero claims that the growth of the drug trade should be viewed as a result of the failure of peace talks and decentralization rather than an independent factor that explains the survival of the resistance. Others who argue that drugs are merely an ancillary component of the conflict include Colombian sociologist Ricardo Vargas Meza, and Colombian historian Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez.

[41] For example, see Gregory Phillips, "Liberty and Order: Reintegration As Counter-Insurgency in Colombia". Strategic Studies Institute, National War College, 2002, pp. 16-17. Phillips claims that the "centre of gravity" for the FARC - the key, independent variable associated with the perpetuation of a conflict - is the "popular will of the disaffected (rural

not view narcotics trafficking as the sole raison d'etre for either of the armed groups.

FARC profits are estimated to be around (US) $300-500 million per year,[42] depending upon market price, the relative successes of the aerial fumigation campaign, the amount of area directly under their control and, thus, the taxes they can exact from the *cocaleros*.[43] Estimates of AUC revenues from illegal drugs are unknown, though they likely exceed those of the FARC.[44] Drug revenues have been increasing steadily for the past 15 years for both the FARC and the AUC, with the total amount of cultivated coca and cocaine exports reached an all-time high in 2001. As reducing the level of funding that the FARC and AUC receive from drug trafficking will be a necessary component of the groups' eventual disarmament, this may be the best justification for the re-taking of the demilitarized zone granted to the FARC in 1998 and for confronting both groups militarily.

The aerial eradication program is another highly contentious component of the agendas of both the Pastrana and Uribe administrations. Since it began in earnest in 1998, it has shown only limited successes in terms of reducing the overall supply of raw coca. These decreases have unfortunately been accompanied by commensurate increases in coca cultivation in both Peru and Bolivia, in a reverse of the process that occurred in the 1990s, when successful eradication in Peru and Bolivia shifted cultivation to Colombia.

Colombians) to continue the insurgency." Economic incentives are only one aspect of this.

[42] Richani, ibid.

[43] Cocaleros are the coca growing peasants in the rural regions. For an excellent discussion of cocalero mobilization and struggle for rights and social inclusion, see Maria Clemencia Ramirez, "The Politics of Recognition and Citizenship Rights in Putumayo and in the Baja Bota of Cauca: The Case of the 1996 Cocalero Movement," in Reinventing Social Emancipation, Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal, 2000.
www.ces.fe.uc.pt/emancipa/research/en/texts.html

[44] One indicator that AUC revenues are greater than the FARC's is that they are able to pay $250 (US) per month for new recruits, while the FARC are unable to offer any financial compensation to new recruits aside from providing basic living expenses. In addition, the total value of all cocaine exports is considered to be approximately half of the (US $) 13.6 billion earned by Colombia's annual exports for 2002, and the armed groups are suspected to be responsible for at least half of this. If FARC profits are less than $1 billion, the total value of exports is around $6 billion, and half is regulated by the two groups, then AUC profits may be as high as $2 billion or more. This is, however, speculation.

There is also an almost perfect positive correlation between the amount of coca that has been eliminated via aerial fumigation, and the amount that is re-planted, leading to a process of environmental damage and rural displacement without significantly decreasing the drug supply.[45] The aerial eradication programs reify the process of peasant marginalization and displacement that is so necessary to ensuring a steady pool of recruits for the armed groups. In addition, the glyphosphate herbicide is an agnostic (indiscriminate) chemical compound, destroying food crops, poisoning water supplies, and causing respiratory illness, serious digestive damage, and possibly even non-hodgkins lymphoma — a form of cancer that impairs the lymphatic system.[46] As such, funds from the aerial eradication programs could be better used in enhancing the military and police presence, investigating human rights violations, and reintegrating combatants back into society.

Another problem with supply-side regulation of drugs is that when and if eradication efforts succeed, the price of the raw coca leaf increases, creating a further inducement to grow the illegal plants. As the disparity in market prices between legitimate agricultural products and coca increases, the Colombian government will need to consider more enticing packages of inducements to the *cocaleros*. This has been one of the biggest problems with introducing crop substitution programs in the Andean region — the high price of coca leaf simply makes other forms of agricultural enterprise untenable.

A better policy would be to restore a governmental presence in all regions of the country, and encourage crop substitution with the incentive of recognizing land title for substitution compliance, such as Peru's largely successful, though draconian coca reduction policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The United States will need to play the key role in decreasing coca cultivation in Colombia, by reducing domestic consumption and thus the demand, as well as continuing to expand market incentives for Colombian agricultural products, such as those specified under the Andean Trade Preferences Act.[47]

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[45] Ricardo Vargas, "The Anti-Drug Policy, Aerial Spraying of Illicit Crops and Their Social, Environmental and Political Impacts in Colombia," *Journal of Drug Issues* 32 (1), Winter 2002.

[46] AG Biotech Info-net, "Herbicide Tolerance."

www.biotech-info.net/glyphosate_cancer2.html

[47] While drug legalization would almost certainly be a simpler and more effective strategy, the Clinton administration's lukewarm response to Samper's many suggestions of legalization should demonstrate the implausibility of such a recommendation. For an excellent account of the domestic sources of influence of US foreign policy toward Colombia

Part III: The Decision Calculus[48] –
Responses to the FARC and AUC

As mentioned earlier, any attempt to understand the present dynamics of the Colombian conflict would benefit from first proceeding with a rationalist analysis, assessing the strategic actors as unified and rational utility maximizers, and mapping out their interests and expected behaviour. While such simplification omits much of the nuance and complexity of the conflict, it nonetheless provides a beneficial starting point for assessing the conflict. With the groundwork now laid for justifying a short-term coercive strategy, a heuristic decision calculus device would help to clarify the variety of options, their desirability (utility)[49] and chances of success (probability) — see Figure 3.

The decision calculus estimates the desirability of specific trajectories of action based upon the "expected utility" function, wherein the expected utility of an outcome is defined as a product of the probability and the desirability (utility) of the outcome: $Ue=(P*U)$. In this analysis is a simple scale from 1 to 4 is used to rank outcomes, as further elucidation of both probabilities and utilities is really not possible to make in even a moderately objective manner.

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during Samper's administration, see Russell Crandall, "Explicit Narcotization: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia During the Samper Administration", *Latin American Politics & Society* 43 (3), Fall 2001.

[48] It should be emphasized that this is not a comprehensive three-player game theoretic analysis. While such analysis would be of potential benefit, it is also extremely unlikely that the conflict possesses the type of interdependent predictability required to map out potential outcomes. For a more comprehensive rationalist analysis of impediments to the Colombian conflict resolution, see Elisabeth J. Wood, "Forging an End to Civil War: Distributional Aspects of Robust Settlements". From Bogotá workshop, May 29-31, 2003: *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts,* sponsored by Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University, Bogotá.

[49] For these purposes, "utility" is based on the author's own assessment of the desirability of specific outcomes. These would include the fewest overall deaths (including combatants), the least number of pardons for human rights abusers, and also some political reforms demanded by the guerrillas, such as land distribution and regional development assistance, which the author views as being entirely desirable outcomes.

Figure 3: Heuristic Diagram — Expected Utility Estimates of Responses to Armed Groups (as of August 2002)
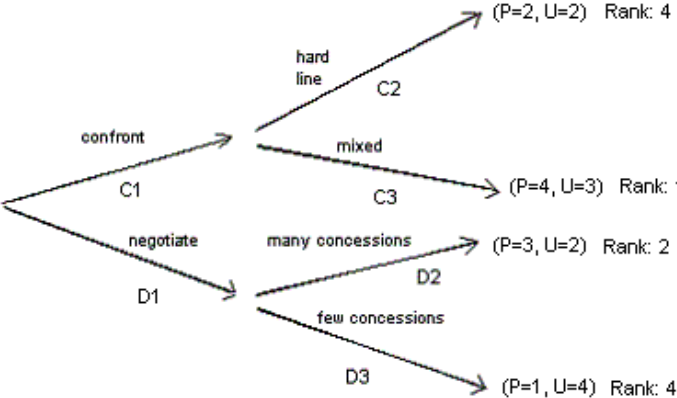
Expected Utility is estimated as the product of the Probability (P) and Utility (U) ~ Ue = (P) (U)

(1=low; 4=high)

Colombian Government Toward FARC:
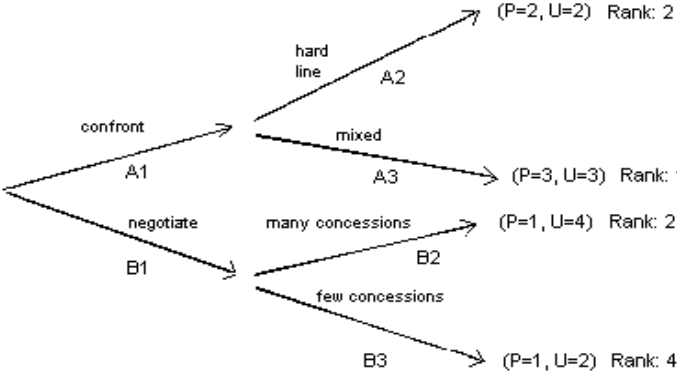
Colombian Government Toward AUC:

Responses to the FARC

Many analysts of the Colombian security situation have been opposed to military confrontation of the FARC, citing that military escalation will only perpetuate itself, polarize Colombian society, and continue to oppress an already marginalized peasantry.[50] However, much of this analysis neglects consideration of the many possible trajectories that the conflict could take under both a confrontational and negotiated strategy. Indeed, the most likely outcome is also one of the most desirable — that of a mixed confrontational approach.

First, with regard to a confrontational strategy against the FARC (A1), the government can pursue either a hard-line (A2) or a mixed strategy (A3). The hard-line strategy (A2) would involve the bolstering of military force and confronting the insurgents with the intention of killing a sufficient number to either physically eliminate all guerrillas or weaken them to the point that they voluntarily disarm and dissipate without any negotiated settlement. Their sources of illicit funds would also be constrained by a continuation or expansion of the aerial eradication programs to reduce the supply of both coca and opium poppies. This tactic would also involve legal channels, through indictment of all guerrillas by both Colombian and American courts. The hard-line approach is endorsed by many US military analysts, and it should be emphasized has not been the policy of the Uribe administration.[51]

The mixed strategy (A3) involves the immediate escalation of conflict with the FARC, with the intention of drastically weakening their capabilities and morale in order to coerce them into a negotiated settlement on the government's terms. This tactic would also offer amnesty and reintegration for defecting guerrillas, as well as amnesties for combatants and other conciliatory inducements. This is the precisely the strategy that has been employed to date by the Uribe administration.

On the other hand is the negotiated settlement (B1), in which the government returns to the negotiation table and attempts to negotiate an end to the insurgency. This could involve several

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[50] For examples of this line of reasoning, see Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org), Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org), The Information Network of the Americas (www.colombiareport.org/index.htm), The Center for International Policy (www.ciponline.org/colombia/), and the high profile Znet community (www.zmag.org/CrisesCurEvts/Colombia/colombiatop.htm). In fact, it is nearly impossible to find an NGO that supports Uribe's coercive strategy.

[51] For example, see Gabriel Marcella, ibid.

aspects to improve on the past negotiations, such as insisting on a tighter agenda that is driven by the government, bringing new parties to the table, limiting the scope of the agenda, or other modifications. Negotiations can also pursue two paths, one offering many concessions (B2) and the other offering few concessions (B3).

The primary reason for the high desirability (utility) of the negotiation with many settlements (B2) is that the FARC, rural campesinos and cocaleros, simply deserve to have many of their demands met, especially those related to rural development, political inclusion of the rural regions, and leftist political representation. The mixed confrontational approach (A3) possesses the next highest desirability (utility) as it assumes that the utility of actually removing the capabilities of the FARC is a necessary precursor to stabilizing the rural communities, and that the conciliatory inducements would address some of the needs of the rural campesinos and disenfranchized combatants, and would help build trust and solidarity between the government and the defecting guerrillas — a necessary antecedent to producing a stable peace.

With regard to probabilities, the outcome that possesses the most certainty of success is that of a mixed confrontational strategy (A3), as hard-line confrontation (A2) would eventually pit the government forces against a core group of highly trained, committed guerrillas in the remote corners of the country's dense jungle, likely with increasing support from the rural poor that continue to be ignored and marginalized.[52]

The least likely outcomes are the negotiated settlements (B2 and B3). Had the past negotiations shown some semblance of progress after three years, this figure would likely be higher, but considering the myriad obstacles to a negotiated settlement that continue to this day, a negotiated settlement is still not tenable in the short-term future.[53] Perhaps one could reasonably argue that the value of the negotiate/many concessions (B2) stream should have a higher probability of success than a "1" in light of recent events, such as Marulanda's request to reconvene negotiations with the Uribe administration in May 2003 (with the insistence that the government return the demilitarized zone in the south to

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[52] Even the draconian policies of the Fujimori/Montesinos campaign against Sendero Luminoso in Peru was not able to completely eliminate the movement, despite the estimated 40,000 to 60,000 deaths attributed to the campaign, which is beginning to show signs of resurgence in the country. This shows that social movements with some degree of legitimacy can simply not be ignored and eliminated.

[53] For the causes of the failed negotiations, see Salazar (op. cit.) and Ferro (op. cit.).

the FARC) and his seeking of an audience with the Rio group of Latin American Heads of State in early June 2003. Indeed, as the confrontational strategy continues, this probability will continue to increase, and as of June 2004 it could evefn be argued to be higher (possibly a 2 out of 4). However, even if this empirical reality is changing, it actually supports the initial decision of confrontation, as the probability of a negotiated settlement prior to the first round of negotiations was certainly a 1 out of 4.

Of all the options, the option with the highest Expected Utility (Ue) is the mixed confrontational approach (A3), followed by negotiation with many concessions (B2) and the hard line confrontational approach (A2), and the worst overall option is seeking a negotiated settlement with few concessions (B3).

Responses to the Paramilitaries (AUC)

The AUC have historically had a considerably poorer public perception both within and outside of Colombia than the FARC, and for good reason. Their attacks on suspected FARC sympathizers and the concentration of land under their control exacerbate the inequality and injustice that has been endemic to Colombia's history. However, they have not posed as significant a threat to the Colombian state, and have been an aid to the state in combating the guerrillas and in securing economic infrastructure in some regions. Unfortunately this has been concomitant with the forced displacement of many farmers, hundreds of human rights violations, and the weakening of representative democratic institutions, especially political parties on the left, media independence, and the free operation of interest groups/NGOs. As such, successive Colombian administrations since Betancur (1982) have embarked upon a Faustian bargain of historical complicity with various types of paramilitary organizations, and the Uribe administration came under heavy criticism from NGOs for beginning negotiations with the AUC in December 2002.

In May 2002 the Pastrana administration was the first to admit that the Colombian army sometimes cooperates with the paramilitaries, especially in the area of intelligence. Since then, the information about army-paramilitary collusion has abounded. However, conceiving of the paramilitaries as merely an extension of the Colombian armed forces is a substantial embellishment, and the dozens of documented cases of collaboration should be counterposed against the literally hundreds of cases of confrontation, especially since the start of the Pastrana administration in 1998. Additionally, one must merely witness the open and virulent public confrontations between paramilitary leaders and armed forces officials to understand their animosity.

A telling illustration of this is that Colombian paramilitaries have not asked for any compensation or reparations from the Colombian government for performing their "service," unlike the Salvadorn paramilitaries, who were directly facilitated by the armed forces and have thus been actively engaged in seeking such compensation from the Salvadoran government for twelve years.

Carlos Castaño, former leader of the AUC,[54] claims that the paramilitaries arose out of a governmental gap, where the Colombian military was shown to be unable to fight the FARC alone and protect estate owners, including both the legitimate ranchers and those associated with the drug trade. While this statement has some validity, it also downplays the excessive brutality of the AUC, their self-serving goals of personal enrichment, and their devastation of rural communities. However, their continued existence is also partly due to their historical willingness to undertake actions that the Colombian army is unable and unwilling to undertake. As AUC leader Carlos Castaño claims, the Colombian army has not actively sought to dismantle the paramilitaries because the paramilitaries simply work "better" than the army — especially their intelligence gathering.[55] When confronting a group such as the FARC, which has few procedural limitations, the army has been at a historical disadvantage. The paramilitaries, on the other hand, have not. Again, this is not a justification of the brutal tactics of the paramilitaries, but rather shows how the government has been seduced into ignoring, co-opting, or cooperating with the paramilitary groups. To complicate matters further, the AUC presently enjoys the support of a considerable portion of Colombia's Congress — the exact degree is unknown though is likely sufficient to make them a significant political force that must be addressed carefully.

Considering the complexity of the historical relationship between the AUC and the government, the decision calculus is somewhat more complex and uncertain than that for the FARC. However, for the Uribe administration, there are still essentially two decisions that can be made with regard to the AUC — they

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[54] Castaño was captured by rival paramilitary members, allegedly for agreeing to extradite members of the AUC to the United States on drug trafficking charges.

[55] For an interesting and foreboding account of the AUC's views regarding Colombia's future, including their political aspirations and their determination to remain a powerful entity in Colombian politics after the end of the FARC, see Scott Wilson, "Interview with Carlos Castano, Head of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia", *Washington Post Online*.
www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47019-2001Mar9.html

can either be confronted (C1) or the government can seek negotiation to disarm them (D1). Like the strategy toward the FARC, the confrontational approach can have either a hard line (C2) or a mixed (C3) approach. The hard-line would likewise entail military confrontation with the intent to achieve outright victory, and physically re-occupying the many areas controlled by the AUC. This approach would also involve judicial indictments and expanded policing efforts to control the drug trade and influence of regional elites that support the AUC. The mixed approach would also initially entail some military confrontation in order to demonstrate that a governmental military victory is possible, but would also include conciliatory inducements such as offering amnesty and reintegration for combatants, and some guarantees that land titles and property claims will be respected.

A negotiated settlement would likewise entail both a flexible, conciliatory option with many concessions made to the AUC (D2) and one which is less flexible and offers few concessions (D3). Concessions would be similar to the conciliatory inducements in the mixed confrontational approach, such as amnesty, reintegration, and guarantees about both the security of landowners and former AUC members from attacks by leftist groups.

The most desirable outcome (with the highest "utility") in addressing the AUC is that of a negotiated settlement with few concessions (D3), as this would involve fewer deaths and compromises on behalf of the Colombian government regarding amnesty for perpetrators of human rights violations. The next most desirable outcome is that of a mixed confrontation, as some degree of confrontation will be necessary to limit the power and influence of the AUC and the regional elites whose interests they generally promote, especially the more nascent and narcotics-implicated fronts. In addition, confrontation will also establish legitimacy for the Uribe administration as it attempts to distance itself from the paramilitaries. This option is more desirable than a hard-line confrontation (C2) because of the probable number of deaths that a hard-line confrontation would entail, the likely fissure that it would create between the armed forces and Bogotá, and the dangerous polarization of Congress and the upper classes. Moreover, as the previous analysis in Figure 1 displayed, some AUC fronts possess some degree of legitimacy, however small, and as such some conciliatory inducements should not be considered entirely undesirable.[56]

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[56] A problem with generalizations becomes apparent when one defines "many concessions" in more detail. For example, political amnesty and re-integration could be considered to be excessively conciliatory, whereas the granting of political patronage, refusing extradition to the United

The trajectory with the highest probability of success is the mixed confrontational approach (C3). A display of the armed forces' strength will be needed to induce the AUC to disarm, as this demonstrates the conviction of the government to dismantle the group, yet offers the conciliatory inducements required to persuade the heavily funded, highly trained paramilitaries to willingly disarm. According to military analysts, as many as ten soldiers are required for every non-state combatant,[57] and with only about 80,000 combat ready ground troops as of mid-2002, the Colombian army simply could not sustain a prolonged battle against the approximately 12,000 combatants among the ranks of the AUC, while simultaneously confronting the more than 20,000 members of the FARC/ELN.

As the Uribe administration continues to increase the capabilities of the armed forces and confronts the FARC/ELN, a negotiated settlement with many concessions also possesses a high degree of probability for success. With increasingly successful confrontations of the FARC, the paramilitaries lose their raison d'etre and thus lose their legitimacy. In addition, with the many charges of drug trafficking and human rights abuses leveled against the AUC leadership, the government possesses many conciliatory "carrots" to induce the AUC to disarm, through the use of humanitarian accords of progressive application.

The next most probable outcome is a hard-line victory against the AUC (C2). It should be emphasized that a hard-line military victory over the AUC (C2) would be exceptionally difficult to achieve — perhaps more so than the FARC. The AUC have practically unlimited financial support due to their involvement with narcotics trafficking, and support of wealthy landowners and the conservative upper classes of Colombia. In addition, a military confrontation of the AUC would be logistically impossible while simultaneously confronting the FARC and ELN. However, an AUC confrontation that did not confront the FARC would almost be certain to demoralize the armed forces, which clearly view the FARC as more the enemy than the AUC, and could quite possibly cause serious division within the armed forces — not to mention the inevitable opposition from many members of the Colombian Congress and the business community.

The least likely outcome is a negotiation with few concessions (D3). In interviews with the Colombian media in June 2003, former AUC leader Carlos Castaño stated that the AUC leaders would not disarm unless they were offered amnesty from the

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States, and formalizing property claims may be the litmus test for excessive conciliatory inducements for others.

[57] Sweig, op. cit.

charges laid against them, including human rights violations and narcotics trafficking. The AUC continue to insist that all of their actions, including massacres of civilian populations, were necessary to successfully limit the expansion of the FARC. This analysis completely rejects that claim, and strongly condemns all attacks on civilians by both the FARC and the AUC. However, if offering conditional pardons or lighter sentencing to some members of the AUC would represent the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful disarmament process, it should be a part of Uribe's DDR strategy.[58] On the other hand, if the Uribe administration can guarantee the successful DDR of the paramilitaries without offering amnesty to human rights abusers, this should obviously be pursued.

In overview, the trajectory with the highest expected utility (highest combination of probability and utility) is a mixed confrontational strategy (C3), followed by a negotiated settlement with many concessions (D2), then a hard line confrontation (C2) and a negotiated settlement with few concessions (D3).

While the above decision calculus clarifies and categorizes the various options available to the Colombian administration, it is certainly not a comprehensive model of all the possible options, and it does not consider the inter-linkages between the two sets of decisions. This was intentional, as the addition of narrower, more nuanced, and relational approaches would certainly obfuscate the basic sets of options facing the government. By adding all of these contingencies into the analysis, the probability of correctly predicting the trajectories diminishes, while the utility of accurately assessing the minutiae of possibilities also diminishes — giving less marginal utility to a continued expansion of the exercise past its initial stages.

There are also elements of uncertainty that will clearly conflate the decision calculus, such as: the expansion of the government-sponsored armed defense communities (the *soldados campesinos*); the role of the international community and its support for the present Colombian administration (which has been mixed); the global demand for cocaine and heroin and the effects this will have on drug cultivation in Colombia; the relationship with Colombia's neighbours, especially Venezuela, Brazil, and Peru; and, the stability of the global and Latin American economies.

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[58] This has been the element most highly criticized by human rights NGOs since the announcement of the disarmament talks in June 2003. For example, see the ICG Latin America Report No. 5, op. cit. 17.

Nonetheless, barring any drastic changes in these exogenous factors, the decision calculus should still point to the preferability of a mixed confrontational approach to both groups.

The Limits to Rationality

While the previous rationalist analysis helps clarify the relationship between the two armed groups and the state, the analysis needs to be buttressed by non-rationalist considerations. For example, the rationalist account assumes that the interests and identities of members of the armed groups are exogenously given and unified. In the case of all the armed groups, as Figure 1 shows, individuals may join for financial gain, to redress social inequities, out of necessity (perhaps even coercion), or more problematically, for revenge, honour, and/or to achieve social recognition. The rationalist account assumes that the FARC/ELN will simply put down their arms once they are coerced into a more favourable bargaining position — indeed many may do so. However, for those whose friends and families have been massacred by the AUC, FARC, and/or the army, this will not be the case. The leaders of the AUC (Castaño), the FARC (Marulanda), and the Colombian government (Uribe) have all witnessed family members assassinated by opposition groups.

The importance of these non-rational aspects of the conflict demonstrates the need to examine additional factors, such as the psychology of warfare, subjective interpersonal dynamics, and the construction of interests and identities. As Janice Gross Stein has shown, complex cognitive processes, such as "anchoring", "attribution schema", "cognitive consistency" and "association" must be carefully examined in conflict situations.[59]   In a country laden with so much violence in its history, new enemies will be associated with old ones, inaccurate historical analogies will be made, positions of various groups will be misrepresented and misunderstood, and compromises will be difficult to make.[60] For these reasons (among others) the coercive strategy of Uribe's administration must not become a myopic ideological struggle of "good" against "evil" — and as such associations with the US *War on Terror* must be made carefully. Indeed Uribe's mimicking of

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[59] Janice Gross Stein, "Psychological Explanations of International Conflict", in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth Simmons (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations*. London: Sage Publishers, 2002, pp. 298-308

[60] Indeed the Colombian army is cognizant of this, and has been increasing its psy-ops in the Rio Magdalena region, with army soldiers dressing as clowns, playing music, and spreading its message about the evils of the guerrilla groups.

U.S. President George W. Bush's "anti-terror" rhetoric will no doubt damage his international credibility more than help it — though it has helped Uribe become the most popular Colombian President with the US Congress and the White House in more than two decades, virtually ensuring American support for his counter-insurgency strategy.

Understanding the psychology of warfare will be one of the most important elements in what may prove to be the decisive factor in the conflict: the creation of community self-defense groups throughout the country — a central component of Uribe's *mano firme* platform. By June 2003 the Colombian government deployed approximately 10,000 *soldados campesinos*, securing 562 new communities. At the same time, it also instituted a police presence in 157 municipalities for the first time.

These self-defense units have an inauspicious history in Colombia, especially in Medellin, where the *CONVIVIR* groups (meaning "co-existence") were created under the Samper administration in 1995, while Uribe was the Governor of Antioquia. The purpose of these groups was primarily to banish the guerrillas from Medellin, but often resulted in a blurring of the line between the sanctioned community policing groups and the illegal paramilitary organizations. Retaining the perceptual distance between the AUC and the government-supported *soldados campesinos* will be one of the more pressing tasks of the Uribe administration. However, the community defense groups may also prove to be the decisive factor in the struggle against building communities that are resistant to the infiltration of the guerrillas and the AUC.[61]

In Peru, similar groups, called the *Rondas Campesinas*, were successfully deployed by Alberto Fujimori in the 1980s, and were a central component in the successful disarmament of *Sendero Luminoso* (the "Shining Path") guerrillas that occupied much of the country. However, in a recent revision of the total fatalities from the counter-insurgency against *Sendero Luminoso*, a Peruvian truth commission has discovered that there were between 40,000 and 60,000 deaths — compared with the approximately 30,000 that were estimated in the early 1990s.[62] Nonetheless, the armed peasant groups may ultimately prove to be the only means of establishing a stable governmental presence in peripheral communities.

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[61] The International Crisis Group remains cautiously optimistic about the role of the *soldados campesinos*, and rather than recommending they disband, recommends that their effectiveness and integrity be subject to review in the forthcoming year.

[62] Note that there are approximately 30,000 homicides in Colombia per year, and approximately 3,500 political homicides per year.

If the Colombian army is able to eliminate, or significantly reduce, the threat posed by the FARC/ELN and the AUC, it will then be faced with the long-term problem of how to construct a society that respects the role of non-violent resolution to conflicts. As many of the Central American countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala have witnessed after demobilizing non-state armed groups in the past 10-20 years, much of the former political violence was only slightly worse than the criminal violence that plagues these countries today. As Gross-Stein has shown, the reason why some societies resolve their conflicts in a peaceful manner is due to the "stability of democratic pluralist systems where citizens have internalized norms of conflict resolution … because they are committed to norms of fairness and due process, and they expect that these commitments will be reciprocated by their counterparts."[63] In Colombian society, this process will be long and painful to construct, and as such a military solution can be only one component of this.

Another important non-rational component is the subjective interpersonal dynamics that led to the breakdown in the talks and that continue to foster deep resentment and animosity between the armed groups. Camilo Azcarate has emphasized how such subjective dynamics contribute to the continuation of the conflict. For example, army officials often describe the guerrillas as being merely "bandit narcotraffickers", whereas the guerrillas describe the armed forces as "merchants of power and supporters of the oligarchy."[64] These historical animosities will be difficult to overcome, regardless of how strong the armed forces become. The severity of this tension was never really calculated into the past negotiation process, and as such there was little ability to foster any spirit of cooperation between the government and the FARC. This lack of trust between both governmental negotiators and the guerrillas prevented meaningful dialogue from occurring and the recognition of mutual goals at the bargaining table.[65]

The Colombian conflict would also benefit from additional constructivist analysis, such as an examination of the processes in which political identities that fuel the conflict are developed. In order to establish a sustained peace, one must be cognizant of the

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[63] Gross-Stein, ibid., p. 299.

[64] See Azcarate, C. "Psychosocial Dynamics of the Armed Conflict in Colombia" On-line Journal of Peace and Dispute Resolution 2:1, March 2001.

[65] Juan Camilo Cardenas, "En Vos Confio: An Experimental Exploration on the Micro-Foundations of Trust, Reciprocity and Social Distance in Colombia". From Bogotá workshop, May 29-31, 2003: *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts,* sponsored by Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University, Bogotá.

relationship between socially constructed identities and expected behavioural patterns, for as recent literature on constructivism has shown, "actors conform to norms in order to validate social identities, and it is in the process of validating identities that interests are constituted."[66]

Mauricio Romero has undertaken an illuminating constructivist analysis of the evolution of the Colombian conflict, arguing that loyalty to the "national community" was eroded by several factors. These included the centralization of power in Bogotá, and the inability to protect landowners, even-handedly arbitrate disputes, and allow for political representation and participation by the rural masses. This resulted in the intensification of animosities between both the rural elites and the poor toward one another, as well from each group toward the urban elites in Bogotá, whom they viewed as an obstacle to their fulfillment of regional objectives.

This line of reasoning is perhaps the strongest argument against a sustained hard-line confrontation as Colombia's security strategy. The militant and revolutionary social environment in which the young *campesinos* and rural elites live is an environment that reinforces cycles of repression and political violence, creating further distance between the rural periphery and the national government. Where no avenues for non-violent conflict resolution exist, a clear enemy can be identified (the ineffective state, according to the AUC, or the repressive state, according to the FARC), sustained military engagement against both groups will be met with vigorous opposition and resistance by supporters and members of the AUC and FARC — who view the government as one of the chief causes of the present state of insecurity. For these reasons continued decentralization and conciliatory inducements will need to be central components to the conflict resolution process, allowing rural workers and elites to feel that their voices are being heard by the *politicos* in Bototá. The confrontation can be expected to create further social dislocation between the core and periphery, and if this dislocation completely destroys the social fabric of the country, then indeed the anti-confrontation camp is justified in asking "confrontation at what cost?"

Indeed the self-perpetuating internal logic of violence remains the strongest argument against coercion as a security strategy, however the more that one studies Colombian security, the more that one becomes seduced by the logic of violence as the means to achieve instrumental goals. Fluharty describes this

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[66] See Richard Price and Nina Tannenwald, "Norms and Deterrence: The Nuclear and Chemical Weapons Taboos", in Katzenstein, Peter ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 125.

process as the central theme of Colombian politics, when discussing the evolution of Laureano Gomez from a pacifist Conservative to a militant promoter of repression:

> What worked the metamorphosis in Gomez from enemy of violence to that of ruthless suppressor by violence of all opposition will never be known. This human drama of spiritual change may, in fact, be the very drama of Colombian politics.[67]

While these non-rationalist perspectives demonstrate the complexity and contingency of the Colombian security environment, none of them entirely negates the argument that a short-term escalation of the conflict against the armed groups will be the necessary precursor to achieving a negotiated settlement and the construction of inclusive political institutions that can reflect the diverse needs of the population.

Conclusions

In many ways the diagnosis of Alberto Lleras Camargo, President of Colombia's National Front (1958-1962) and the first Secretary General of the Organization of American States (1948-1954), that Colombia's problems can be attributed to a lack of "social, economic and political integration" is as applicable today as it was in the 1950s. The biggest challenge facing future administrations in Bogotá will be to integrate those areas not under governmental control and include them in the country's governance structures.[68]

There are several principles that a society can seek when constructing a social order: justice, equality, liberty … however none of these will be possible until order and security are first provided to Colombians in their daily lives. But this can not be an order fraught with divisive partisan loyalties or the repressive hand of an authoritarian government, but a carefully crafted order that is supported by the general will of the majority of Colombians.

Approaching the second year of the "mixed coercive" strategy of the Uribe administration, there have been many positive results that are often overlooked. In Uribe's first year in office, 4,602 guerrillas and 1,986 paramilitary combatants were

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[67] Fluharty, op. cit., p. 51.

[68] In Fluharty, op. cit., p. 27.

arrested.[69]   Homicides decreased by 27%, from 28,837 to 20,960, and kidnappings decreased by 32%, from 2,986 to 2,043.[70] Forced displacements also decreased substantially, from around 300,000 in 2002 to 150,000 in 2003.

As a result of Uribe's increasing vigilance against both the FARC and the AUC, the AUC entered into official disarmament discussions with the Colombian government in December 2002, and signed the Ralito Accord in July 2003, which stipulated that the AUC would disarm entirely by the end of 2005, and cease all involvement in the drug trade. Recognizing the necessity of conciliatory inducements to the disarmament process, the Uribe administration has offered partial amnesties and lighter sentencing to members of the AUC, except for those that have been responsible for grave human rights violations.   Not surprisingly, this has been highly criticized by human rights groups around the world.

With Uribe approaching the second half of his term in office, the expectations of the Colombian electorate will begin to increase. In the post-9/11 international context and following self-proclaimed successes in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States can also be expected to become increasingly involved in Latin American security issues, as many security experts now claim that the Colombian conflict is one of the biggest long-term threats to U.S. National Security.[71]   However, this raises yet another dilemma: Colombia will require financial and military assistance from the United States in order to resolve its security problems, yet the United States will likely not be willing to provide a nuanced and dynamic foreign policy regimen, as its narrower "intermestic" issues will continue to drive the Colombian foreign policy agenda.[72] The historically reductionist American interpretation of Colombia's problems as merely a counter "narcoguerilla" strategy, or merely another facet of the amorphous war against terrorism could ultimately destabilize and polarize the country more than aid it if it doesn't recognize the complex history of country's internal conflict. This is where the

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[69] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Embassy in Colombia, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2003", www.http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27891.htm.

[70] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, ibid.

[71] Barry R. McCaffrey, "Challenges to US National Security", *Armed Forces Journal International* 140 (3), Oct 2002.

[72] These are issues that have an international origin but where the primary effects are felt in a single country, and this country takes steps to resolve the issue in the country of origin, such as the American concern over first over drugs in the 1980s and now by terrorism. See Crandall, ibid.

international community, including the Organization of American States, the European Union, the United Nations, and countries like Canada can be of greatest assistance by facilitating the non-military components of disarming and reintegrating Colombian combatants, and addressing the socioeconomic conditions of the rural regions that contribute to the growth of the non-state armed groups.

The European Union must also increase its levels of funding for Colombia, especially in light of the narrow focus of American aid toward military and anti-drug operations. Much of the widespread European opposition to providing aid to the allegedly "corrupt and repressive" Colombian regime could be assuaged if aid were unpackaged into "development" and "military" categories – with only military aid being conditioned on the verified improvement of the government's human rights record – which has already improved considerably over past administrations.[73]

One of the principal obstacles to progress in Colombia remains the polarized views among academia, the security establishment, policy analysts, and the NGO community concerning the efficacy of confrontational versus non-confrontational strategies. Future debate among these groups needs to consider the complexity of the issues facing Colombia, and must be creative, flexible, and pragmatic, rather than dogmatic and myopic. This means that the NGO community, especially human rights groups, will need to consider the realistic, though less than perfect options facing the present administration, while continuing to expose human rights violators. Their disproportionate emphasis on the Colombian government's role in human rights violations and army-paramilitary collaboration has contributed to the inaccurate view of the paramilitaries as merely another branch of the armed forces, and bolsters reactionary opposition to all decisions of the Colombian government, such as the unreasonable assessment of the Uribe administration's decision to call a state of emergency upon taking office, made by Amnesty International:

> The security situation in Colombia is indeed very serious and has deteriorated over the last year, but it does not pose a new threat. It might thus be possible to argue that the nation is not facing a new or exceptional emergency.[74]

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[73] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, op. cit.

[74] Amnesty International, op. cit. It should be noted that Amnesty International is not the only group to criticize Uribe's declaration of a state of emergency.

Policy recommendations such as this beg the question: would 3,500 politically-motivated assassinations, dozens of urban bomb attacks, and literally thousands of kidnappings each year justify the invocation of emergency measures in countries like Canada, the United States, and Great Britain? Without a doubt.

Because of this excessively critical stance by international NGOs and the international media,[75] the Uribe administration has witnessed the tide of international opinion moving in the opposite direction of that inside of Colombia.

Conversely, the "pro-confrontation" camp will also need to learn when to change unsuccessful tactics, such as the aerial crop spraying programs. Uribe must also cease his verbal attacks on the NGO community, which undermine the crucial work of human rights monitors. And he needs to apply greater rigour in ensuring that arrests of suspected guerrilla supporters do not become partisan attacks upon the democratic left. There have been allegations that some of the mass arrests have been intentionally aimed at peaceful leftist organizations, criminalizing legal dissent and marginalizing the left from the democratic process.[76]

Unfortunately, numerous challenges lie ahead. The confrontation of the guerrillas is beginning the more difficult phase of combating them in the more entrenched and isolated jungle communities. The AUC has also adopted a more inflexible attitude on the issue of imprisonment after the deposing of Castaño. The conflict has also spilled across Colombia's borders, with particularly destructive effects on Ecuador and Venezuela.[77] Finally, the Colombian newsweekly *Semana* has documented

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[75] For example, the assassination of ten FARC captives during a failed rescue attempt by the government in early 2003 was actually reported by much of the international media as being the fault of the government for attempting the rescue operation, rather than the fault of the FARC for committing the executions. See the *Associated Press* coverage of the ordeal, by Margarita Martinez, "Colombia Gov't Blamed in Hostages' Death", released to global media by the AP on May 7, 2003.

[76] For example, see Human Rights Watch, "Colombia: EU Should Hold Uribe to Rights Commitments," February 10, 2004.
See http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/10/colomb7328.htm.

[77] In March, 2003 Venezuelan armed forces embarked upon their first offensive against Colombian paramilitaries, pursuing them across the Colombian border with helicopters and strafing a Colombian villages with machine-gun fire. And in May 2004, the Venezuelan army foiled a Colombian paramilitary plot to assassinate Chavez, in Caracas. The security situation along the borders with Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil has also deteriorated.

numerous allegations of infiltration of the Prosectuor General's Office (Fiscalía) by narcotics trafficking elements of the AUC and the FARC. Notwithstanding these challenges, defeatism and apathy need not be the only responses to this complexity and uncertainty, as the domestic security situation is certainly better in mid-2004 than it was in mid-2002.

The final lesson to be extracted from the Colombian conflict is a warning against the dangers of faulty analogical reasoning and excessive reductionism. The FARC are not Al-Quaeda, Hezbollah, nor are they merely an organized criminal or terrorist group. The AUC also should not be deemed merely a narcotics trafficking organization with no political agenda. Nor does the conflict bear any resemblance to Vietnam, where literally millions of peasants united in opposition to successive imperial powers. The conflict can not be reduced to the enduring American imperial project, much less Occidental Petroleum's greedy quest for oil dollars – though these obviously have had their impacts on the country's security situation – both negative and positive. The important lesson is that despite many useful comparisons that can be employed in the service of resolving Colombia's internal conflict, its present situation really has no historical precedent and thus will require a set of dynamic and multi-faceted solutions that have never been attempted in the past.

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