

**ARE WE APPROACHING
THE REAL DEFEAT OF THE
FARC IN COLOMBIA?**

BY

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ARE WE APPROACHING THE REAL DEFEAT OF THE FARC IN COLOMBIA?

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ABSTRACT

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The last military and political results against the FARC's guerrillas have created different and controversial opinions about the future of this movement. For more than 40 years of internal struggle, this is the most optimistic period in history; not only because of the recent military defeats (Its main leaders have been killed in military actions, with more than 2000 members demobilized or in jail), but also because of the national and international rejection of the group as legitimate combatants and its reconfirmation as a "terrorist" group.

Is this the end of the FARC, or simply a change of strategy? The experiences show that it is a very unpredictable group, with the capacity to recover the initiative easily. What is its future as a guerrilla organization? Could it become a group of delinquents to survive or continue as drug dealers? Which would be the next government move in order to maintain the initiative and to be successful? And finally, is the government prepared to face an eventual massive demobilization and to accept the political price?

ARE WE APPROACHING THE REAL DEFEAT OF THE FARC IN COLOMBIA?

“In Colombia every indicator that can be measured is proceeding in a positive direction, from the decline in murder and kidnapping rates, to the growth of the economy and freedom of movement. These factors can be quantified, but there is no way to tell when a magic line is crossed where one less murder makes all the difference in the way Colombians see their country” Gen. (ret.) Carlos Ospina, Colombian Army.

To have a clear concept about this argument it is necessary to go back eight years before President Alvaro Uribe's election in 2002 to see how Colombia desperately needed deep reforms to avoid the advance of communism. At that time the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Comunistas) organization represented in the military and clandestine political arms was very optimistic about beginning its “strategic project”. In the previous years, the FARC accumulated 15,400 armed rebels, distributed in seven “blocks”¹ around the country, and after three years (1999-2002) in the “demilitarized zone”², they were well prepared politically, military and logistically, to face the first great offensive phase against the government of Colombia.

After 40 years of internal war, it is not a big challenge to identify the FARC's intentions. The application of the “all forms of struggle”³ to reach its strategic goals are a clear demonstration of its lack of interest to finalize the conflict. More than one failed process demonstrated the real FARC's interests to waste the government's time. As a clear example we have the government of President Belisario Betancourt⁴ that in the early 1980s started negotiations with the FARC. At that time, the FARC and the government agreed to a cease-fire in 1985, months later the FARC broke the negotiation unilaterally. In 1999 during the government of President Andres Pastrana⁵,

the FARC decided to talk about peace in the middle of the war, deceiving the country again, taking advantage of that period of time.



Figure 1: Colombia, regional location

Since Alvaro Uribe arrived as the President of Colombia, the situation is more optimistic for the first time. His “Democratic Security Policy” has demonstrated that it works. The results are a clear demonstration of governability and institutional confidence. During these eight years, the government has achieved the best results against all “violent actors”⁶, but especially against the FARC’s delinquent organization. For the first time, the international community recognizes it as a terrorist group, and its leaders are in INTERPOL files. In the military arena, for the first time members of the untouchable “secretariat”⁷ were killed and other important members were captured or demobilized.

This study intends to analyze the impact of the government's National Security Strategy over the FARC's long term strategic plans, and how the last successful events allow us to believe that the end of the war is close, creating an optimistic vision, but which is nonetheless extremely dangerous in terms of obtaining the final defeat of the FARC. To illustrate this, it is necessary to provide an understanding of the FARC's strategic environment, as a clear concept of war by attrition, in order to understand the correct path, and to finally start the post conflict preparation phase.

On the other hand, this analysis intends to demonstrate that the actual Colombia National Security Policy without a doubt is the path to follow. Factors like the design of the plan, the formulation of objectives, the methodology used, and the tools required to achieve the goals have been well structured, assimilated and applied. To find the end of this conflict, we necessarily need to increase the effort; not only in budget, and strategic alliances, but also in demanding more sacrifices, and the participation of the entire Colombian and international community.

Historical Antecedents

For more than 40 years the FARC's strategic plans have been accomplished through the complex political and military environment, where the different actors have played a historical role. The different "Conferencias Guerrilleras"⁸ are a clear example of strategic plans implementation. The first conference was in 1965, the next in 1966, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1993. Finally in 2007 the FARC tried to have its ninth conference, but it was unsuccessful, because of the military operations against it. In short, all these conferences have tried to make a strategic analysis, looking for demanding changes around a great final goal. The objective always has been to seize

national political power through violence. The next map shows the strategic location of the FARC different fronts and demilitarized zone.



Figure: 2 FARC's fronts distribution

Another important historical event occurs in the 80's, when this organization made another unusual decision that would define a new direction in the execution of plans. It was then that the FARC decided to get involved in the drug trafficking business. With this activity they increased their economic resources, and drugs became its main source of income. The injection of drugs has completely changed the mentality of this organization passing from having some communist ideology, to becoming a very strong drug cartel. Today the most important fronts are dedicated to attend the drug business, the entire process, including the trade, while the secretariat and main leaders have an excellent life, because of the benefits that easy money offers.

Militarily, since the creation of the "mobile columns"⁹, the FARC became confident, achieving a few military results against the Army. During that time, between 1993 and 1997, a hundred soldiers were killed in different actions, another important

number were kidnapped during attacks on posts, and many little villages were destroyed during continuous assaults. The government's and the military's credibility were very low, morale was too weak and the irregular groups more optimistic about their capacities and possibilities to achieve the next strategic phase.

Having accomplished this, the next step was to siege the capital (Bogota). To achieve this phase, the FARC distributed three "columns"¹⁰ in the Department of Cundinamarca, trying to form a belt around the capital. Inside the capital the "militias net" were well structured organizations that had very clear objectives through clandestine actions. Taking the El Salvador civil war model, the strategic concept was to asphyxiate the city, with the only difference that they did not pretend to negotiate the peace like in Central America; the FARC's intention is to take the power and total control of the government.

But definitively the most critical period of time in the last recent years was the political decision of President Pastrana to authorize a "neutral zone". The demilitarized area created for the dialogue of peace and controlled by the guerrilla detachment occupied 42,000 square kilometers. During this time the FARC had the opportunity to prepare its next strategic movements. Militarily, they found the way open not only to increase the number of members, but also to maintain a continuous training and develop new terrorist alliances, like the (Irish Republican Army)¹¹ support. This was the best chance to create the "economy of war"¹², by taking total control of the production, process and commercialization of cocaine.

"The demilitarized zone allowed FARC to build and control landing strips from which the illegal trade could be conducted. One issue raised by these actions in

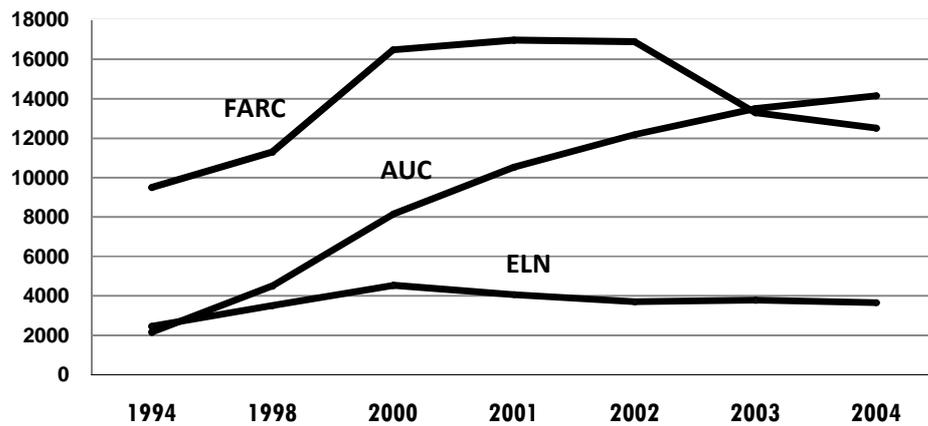
whether FARC is a drug cartel". "There were talks between the government and FARC, but they did not even agree on an agenda of the issues to be discussed. It may be argued that FARC realized that it was gaining military strength while confronting a weak state. In that case, the main goal of FARC could have been to delay the beginning of negotiation indefinitely".¹³

With this view, it is clear that before the implementation of the new Security Strategy in 2002, the Colombian situation was definitively critical. The illegal armed organizations (FARC, ELN, EPL, ERG, AUC)¹⁴ and the drug trafficking organizations (Medellin cartel and Cali cartel) transformed the country into an insecure place, and created a high level of instability not only within, but also for the regional and international community.

To sustain and face this permanent and growing menace, the government had its military forces (Army, Navy, Air Force), and National Police outfitted with obsolete equipment, low training, and insufficient number of members, unable to face the different threats. But the weaknesses were not only the military organization and structure; at that time the guidelines to conduct the military effort were compiled in the "Plan Tricolor"¹⁵, which was an unusable document without any strategic vision, which for 40 years controlled the destiny of the Army and the country.

The conduct of the war until 1999 was through "operational directives", where each Unit (brigade and battalion) conducted its fight independently. The responsibility of the internal conflict was only for the Army; the Air Force and the Navy just supported these efforts occasionally and superficially, and the National Police without any major possibility to act. The situation each day grew more critical, the troop's morale lowered,

and the most essential military necessities went without attention. With a 100,000 man Army, badly equipped, badly trained and without leadership, the hopes to defend the country were unachievable. The next graphic shows the growing scale of these irregular groups.



SOURCE: National Defense Ministry (Annual report)

Figure 3: Evolution of Narcoterrorist Organizations in Colombia

Colombian National Interests

As a democratic state, the Colombian government has a clear responsibility to focus all the efforts with the purpose to guarantee the country's survival. The national interest framework is a clear demonstration of commitment and vision. Guarantee its national integrity, development and social welfare, national cohesion, and finally Latin-American integration. All these strategic purposes, added to the permanent national objectives: sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, social state right, institutional coherence, and healthy economy, allows developing our national Political Strategic Appraisal.

According to the Colombia national political strategic appraisal, there are different external factors that could affect our country. From the geopolitical point of view, they are: weak democracies, social tensions, human rights violations, terrorism, transnational crime, economical imbalance, and environmental threats. In addition the “neighboring environment”, governmental crisis, social and political restlessness, insecure borders, and conflict. On the other hand, we have internal factors that involve terrorism, illicit drug trafficking, illicit finances, arms trafficking, and social economical gap, makes it necessary to implement smart and innovative measures.

Colombia’s National Security Policy

In order to address the country’s security situation, the Uribe Administration developed and is currently implementing a long-term strategy, entitled the Democratic Security and Defense Policy.

“The basic principle behind the strategy is to establish and reinstate the rule of law in Colombia and protect the population. The security strategy takes into account that this is not just a military matter. The policy’s objective is to weaken illegal narco-terrorist groups through a variety of political, economic and military means and force a negotiated settlement that leads to a lasting and democratic peace. In order to ensure a State presence that is, restoring law and order and regaining control over the entire Colombian territory, the Democratic Security Policy sets out to.”¹⁶

- **Consolidate State control**, to deny sanctuary to terrorists and perpetrators of violence;
- **Protect the population** through the increase of State presence.

- **Destroy the illegal drug trade**, to eliminate the revenues which finance terrorism and generate corruption and crime.
- **Maintain a deterrent military** capability as a long-term guarantee of sustainability.
- **Transparently and efficiently manage resources** as a means to reform and improve the performance of government.

Financing

Policy formulation was the great first step, but the most important concern was the resources to support the entire project. The main sources of funding came from the proper and efficient collection of taxes, such as the property tax earmarked specifically for security matters; and the government's improvements such as the pension and tax reform and the restructuring of state institutions which freed the resources needed for security and social spending. From 2005 onwards, tax revenues were expected to provide the necessary funding required to implement the democratic security policy.

It is necessary to emphasize the tremendous amount of resources necessary to achieve the plan mentioned and at the same time show how the government made the necessary fiscal adjustments to achieve the economic goals. In the same evaluation we can see how much is the United States support in order to analyze its importance and necessity to have strategic alliances.

CONCEPT	Million US \$
USA Resources	408
Public Force total Budget	4.381
TOTAL	4.789

Fuente: Decreto liquidación del presupuesto 4731 de 2005
NAS - MILGROUP

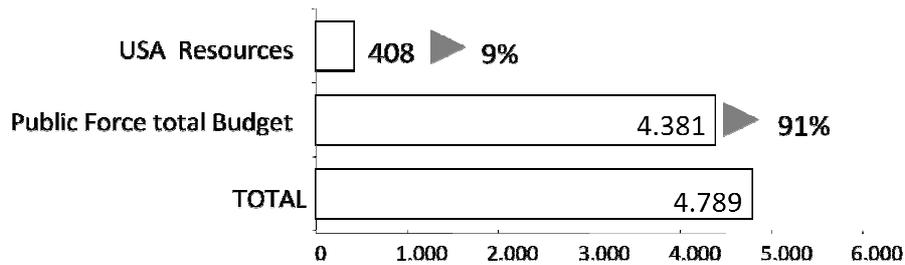


Figure 4: Counter Drugs and Terrorism Resources 2006.

According to the “National Council in Social, Economical Politic” (CONPES)¹⁷, the new plan adjustment considers the national resources against the drug trafficking and terrorism. This process shows a growing dynamic not only in terms of investment, but also in terms of operations. The bilateral cooperation resources acquire importance in the decisive level where the internal confrontation is right now. As we can see in figure 5, these resources are a fundamental complement to achieve the suggested goals in the Democratic Security Consolidation Plan.

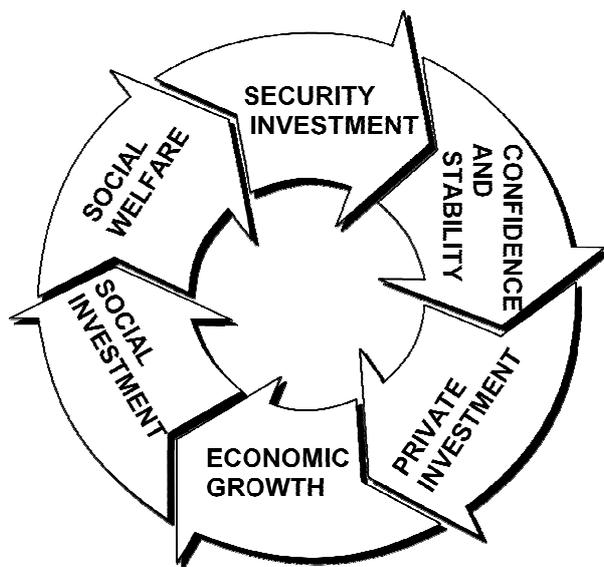
NATIONAL RESOURCES (million)	INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT
ORDINARY \$US 22.000	\$ US 1.800
EXTRAORDINARY \$ US 3.300	

Fuente: CONPES 3460 Febrero 7/ 2007

Figure 5: Budget 2007-2010

The Democratic Security Policy Results

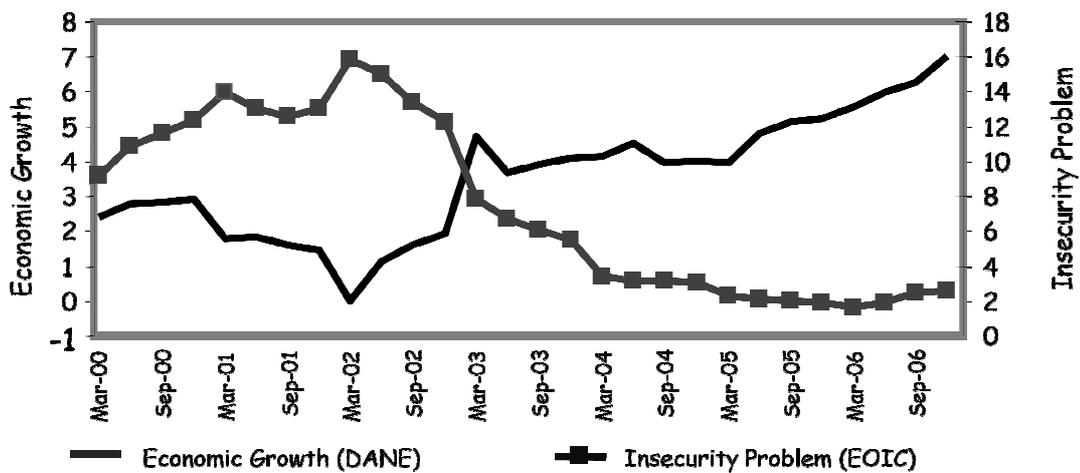
During the eight years of the implementation of the Democratic Security Policy, the government has achieved important results in all the levels of the integration plan, demonstrating the effectiveness of the process. Figure 6 shows the different areas that the plan already has successfully covered.



Source: Ministry of Defence (annual report)

Figure 6: The Democratic Security Policy, Virtuous Circle

Today we can observe clearly important achievements in six important areas that the plan covers: “The first one is positive effects on economic growth and citizens welfare, second is the unprecedented “Public Force”¹⁸ deployment; third, major territorial control; fourth, progress in the fight against illicit drugs; fifth, reduction of armed groups, and finally criminality reduction”¹⁹. The next statistics allows seeing the effectiveness of the plan.

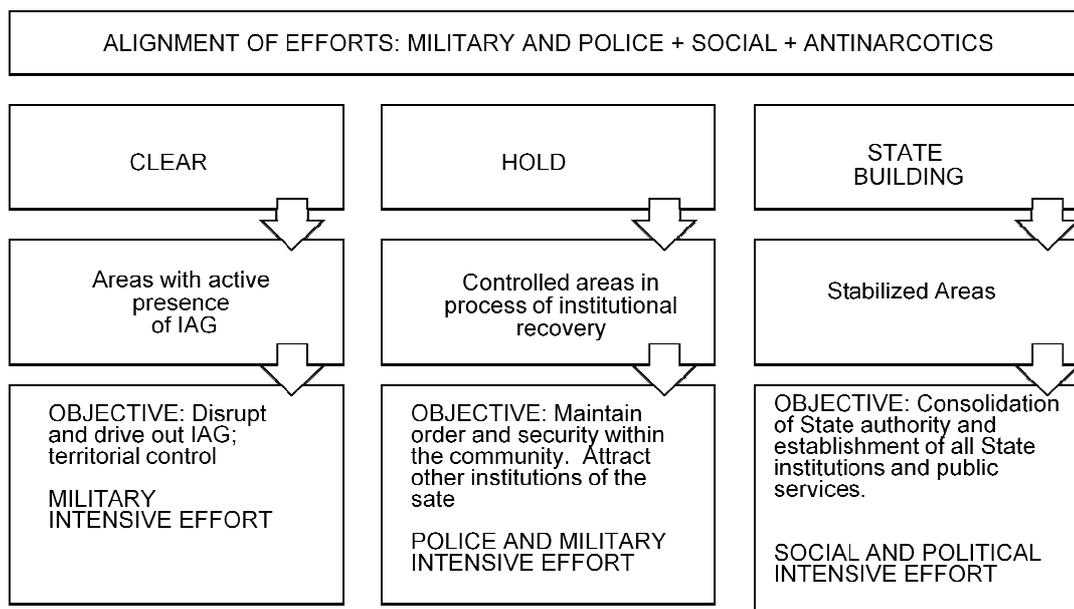


SOURCE: National Defense Ministry (Annual report)

Figure 7: Economic and Security Growth Achievement

After the first four years of the implementation of the **DSP**, it was fundamental to make the first analysis. The successes of the Policy generated a new strategic scenario; the reason was that the criminal groups have been forced to change their strategies. Even though the threats have been weakened, their new forms of action impose new security challenges. In this way the decision to design and implement the complement of the Plan, called “Democratic Security Consolidation Policy” (**DSCP**).

After the evaluation of the Security Policy the necessity to maintain the effort is clear, but especially at this point it is important to have a better social economic component. The next chart allows us to see the strategy implemented for the government in order to face the consolidation phase:



SOURCE: National Defense Ministry (DSCP Lines of Action)

Figure 8: Consolidation Strategy

Today, it is imperative to say that the DSCP is accomplishing the goals; we can see the economic growth and social well-being. Now, we can say that Colombia is overcoming its security problems; even all the issues that the country has to face, the Colombia's Military and Police are examples of legitimacy, and commitment. And finally the excellent results achieved give the country new hopes and realistic optimism.

FARC's Strategic Withdrawal

As a result of one of the main strategic lines of action, the FARC had to retreat, not only from its main strategic plans, but also from its entire FARC's staff, and secretariat members. With the implementation of the Omega Joint Task Force²⁰ Joint Command, unconventional units were created, and the first phase of "Plan Patriot"²¹ started. The main goal of this military campaign was to localize the FARC's central

command (secretariat), and destroy the entire military infrastructure, organized with the purpose to deploy its strategic plans over the main cities and especially over Bogota.

After four years of progression the Omega Force compelled the FARC to move to the borders with Colombia's neighbors, where they are trying to find better conditions to survive. The existence of the FARC camps in other countries is confirmed by clear evidence of the FARC presence in Venezuela and Ecuador.

Assessment of the Current Situation of the FARC

"It is important to recognize, however, that the FARC have not yet been definitively defeat and still represent a serious and clear threat to the national security of Colombia, in the measure that they continue to have significant military capacity, as well as sources of financing that still bring in major resources, in particular drug trafficking."²²

This assessment is the result of the actual government effort and could be a new reference point for new strategic reforms that the same government is doing right now. The first important evaluation is in the political scenario. The main purpose of this stage is to convince and manage the society together around the revolutionary project; it is clear that the FARC has failed in achieving this. Permanently we can see the demonstration of rejection over the actions of this group; the huge march on February 4, 2008 when more than five million Colombians poured into the streets to protest against the FARC, and their terrorist actions, it's the best example.

In the military stage, the FARC's situation could not be worse. The loss of their main ideological leaders, Manuel Marulanda (aka, Tirofijo) and Raul Reyes²³ and other important high and medium level leaders killed in action and the new main leader "Alfonso Cano", who is not totally recognized by the entire organization as a "Tirofijo's"

replacement. On the other hand, the impossibility to conduct decisive military actions, mainly because of the lack of communications, allows us to see serious weaknesses in its channels of command and control.

Without a doubt today we are seeing a real crisis inside this organization. It is not only because the regular military forces pressure, but also the Security Policy “lines of action”, like the “Plan Nacional de Reinsercion”²⁴, and the “reward payments”²⁵, that have allowed a continued number of combatants demobilized. It is also the critical internal crisis where low, medium level leaders and combatants lost completely the reason to continue fighting. These arguments, the popular rejection and low sympathy, are affecting daily the core and sense of this organization.

The internal FARC situation could not be worse; two different currents are dividing the organization. The first is the members who are convinced that it is time to finish the military effort to reach power, and are claiming a political way with all the benefits and alternatives. On the other hand, the radical position of some members, especially those involved in the drug business, which maintain the conviction that they have the capacity to continue the military fight. This new situation will break the FARC cohesion, creating different postures, in a fragile structure. As a result we will see further divisions in the FARC.

Without other significant variations, we could see the drug traffickers current, formed by the fronts in charge of the drug business, become absolute narco-trafficking dealers (the FARC cartel). Today they know very well the drug environment. The second current is the radicals, formed by the warriors, who do not accept any government alternative, except the military way. To maintain this position, they are

looking for “fusion”²⁶ with ELN and other irregular armed groups. These two currents are connected because of the necessary budget to survive.

The FARC’s Strategic Response

The main FARC attribute has been patience; publicly they have expressed their negative position to talk with the actual government. This is one of their strategic resources, waiting until the end of the Uribe presidential mandate, hoping that the new government will reestablish dialogue and offer them political alternatives. With this movement, the intention is to recover lost spaces (political and military), to gain time, and continue with their undercover plans. Today the main FARC alternative plan is the “defense of the strategic assets” in order to maintain its survival and avoid the government pressure and final extermination.

FARC Strategic Assets

Today the only possible response is avoiding losing more terrain in the military and political arenas. The FARC’s alternative had been protecting the last strategic components, which are allowing its survival. The first is the guerrilla leaders; 2008 is the worst year for this illegal group, its main leader and founder Manuel Marulanda died, the second leader Raul Reyes was killed in a military raid, as previously mentioned. Other high level rebels and medium level rebels were killed or captured. With this terrible view and trying to maintain its morale and internal stability, the secretariat decided to protect the rest of its leaders by avoiding its participation in direct actions and to limit its exposure to being discovered by intelligence.

The second strategic asset is the “kidnapped hostages”, especially those who represent international attention: personalities such as the presidential candidate Ingrid

Betancourt²⁷ and the more than one hundred other people like politicians, police and military officers. This gives them advantage and leverage to press the government at home and abroad. Finally, they are expecting to receive the support of the international community, looking for what they have called “humanitarian exchange”²⁸. With this strategy they could recover the “mandos medios”²⁹ (mid level commanders). More than fifty are in jail, and in this way, they would fill the critical personnel gap necessary to reorganize the chain of command.

Finally, the third important asset is the “illicit crops” and narcotrafficking industry, which are needed to maintain the war economy and sustain the necessary political, economic, military and social fronts. To achieve this purpose, the FARC’s secretariat stipulated the use of all the necessary men to take care of the crops, production and trade of the drugs. Relying on the narcotrafficking will continue to be the FARC’s main motivation.

Urbanization of the Conflict

As they are trying to achieve the necessary popular support, the FARC decided to move their actions from the rural areas to the urban. August 2008 was a terrorist activities month in the main cities in Colombia, showing that the desperate group was trying to recover the initiative. In another episode, on November 8, 2008 the government captured five members of the FARC’s militia’s network, professors and students in three important public universities. “It is well known also that through intense activity, for these under cover groups that the FARC has infiltrated different educational centers”³⁰.

It is important to mention the recent speech of “Mono Jojoy”, commander of the eastern bloc, and member of the secretariat, where he emphasizes the necessity to

“urbanize the war”³¹. In addition, after the Manuel Marulanda’s death, his successor Alfonso Cano has been trying to retake his previous approach of stimulating the radical student’s movements located mainly in the public universities. This urban scenario could be one of the FARC’s new strategic projects.

The scenario could not be better; all Colombian main cities have the “marginal belts”³², where the rebels can find not only the seeds to feed the organization (new recruits), but also a camouflaged location, where they can plan, hide and launch terrorist actions. The poverty and social inequality are the best arguments to use against the government, and the FARC knows how to use them. With the state unable to solve the basic necessities of the people, and the lack of resources, unfortunately we will have FARC for a long time.

Another important mechanism that the FARC is pretending to use is the movement called “Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana”,³³ Venezuelan organization dedicated to expanding and maintaining the political ideological ideas against the democratic principles. Using this channel of communication the FARC pretends to find the support necessary to continue from the ideological arena. The last controversial event was the tribute to Manuel Marulanda celebrated in Caracas, realized and financed for this organization and approved by the Venezuela government.

Political War

This is a well known term in the FARC’s strategy. We are referring to the “actions” (such as the use of some ONG’s “pre-paid lawyers”³⁴, corruption, etc), that they make continuously, trying to involve the operational results and military actions within the human rights violations. The second concept is “the dirty war”, well known in

the irregular war because its clandestine actions, which allows the FARC to hide its responsibility, because it is difficult to prove or to accuse (the assassination of political people, union members, community leaders, among others). All of this in order to create general mistrust, international censorship and demoralization around the military community.

Unfortunately the recent episodes in Colombia that involved the dismissing of 25 Army officers, in relation with human rights cases, give the FARC enough arguments to continue discrediting the role of the Military Forces. But not only we will see the consequences in the near future because of the FARC's campaign, but also because of the international community's rejection and the position of the human rights organizations, which will give them sufficient reasons to increase their position against President Uribe's Democratic Security Policy.

It is very clear that these types of episodes have been isolated cases. But it is clear that there are human rights violations, committed by a high level credible organization in the best historic moment against the FARC. It means maybe a new breath for the FARC, who did not find any new argument against the government in the last recent months. On the other hand, an inconvenient backward movement for the Security Policy and against the credibility of the Colombian military institution will be too difficult to overcome.

Nonetheless the big question today is: Is the FARC adapting their structure to create clandestine urban nets or are they going to keep the traditional military structure? "After the strategic plans of the FARC began to fail in 1988 and having gone back to the guerrilla war (in practice since 1964), the temptation to commit an offensive in the level

of multiple terrorism (economic sabotage, regional destabilization, urban panic) is big³⁵. After 40 years of struggles and efforts, the FARC will try to do what's necessary to survive.

FARC's International Scenario

Even today, when the International community recognizes the FARC as a terrorist organization, when its violent actions are well known, and it is demonstrated that they are a drug cartel; when kidnapping and extortion are part of its strategic resources, it is amazing to find governments that in one way or another support their ideology, cause and legitimacy. "Chávez has repeatedly expressed sympathy for the FARC. In his effort to persuade the International community to stop classifying the FARC as a terrorist group, Chávez said in January 2008 that the FARC had "a political and Bolivarian project that is respected here [in Venezuela]." Chávez also called for a national moment of silence in Venezuela for senior FARC leader Raúl Reyes and praised him as a "good revolutionary" after he was killed in February 2008.

From the e-mails found in the computer of Raul Reyes: "The emails raise serious questions about Venezuela's relationship with the Colombian guerrillas that deserve serious answers. At the very least, they appear to show that the guerrilla commanders who were engaged in horrendous abuses believed they had the backing of the Venezuelan government."³⁶ Another government that has openly demonstrated its unconditional support is Nicaragua, which after the death of the FARC's leader Raul Reyes mentioned: "The Colombian assault on FARC encampments is state terrorism. Daniel Ortega nonetheless retracted his termination of diplomatic relations with the

Colombian government, proclaiming that "the agreements reached permit Nicaragua to backtrack in its rupture of relations with Colombia."³⁷

Other regional support that apparently the FARC group is receiving comes from Ecuador. The intelligence documents obtained after the Raul Reyes death allowed the Colombian Presidential spokesman to mention the relationship between this government and the FARC group. We can see also a few organizations that don't know the real situation in Colombia, and support the FARC. It is the case of the "fighters and lovers" group, (Danish activists)³⁸, who collects, sends money and expresses its solidarity continuously; lately accused of supporting terrorist organizations. If the position of those governments and "innocent" societies doesn't change, the FARC posture will be the same, rigid and radical, avoiding talking about peace, either with the actual government or with the next.

The President of Nicaragua's support is another interesting communist pact between these couples. Ortega's position is very clear and as is his open respect for the FARC, and this organization decided to recognize it by decorating him in a special guerrilla's ceremony in the Colombian region of Caguan in January 1999. On the other hand, it was well known that the past 19 of July, during the twenty-nine Sandinista revolution anniversary, Ortega received a FARC delegation as a special guest, to commemorate this day. The last Nicaraguan charity gesture was to allow political asylum of two FARC combatants (Susana and Diana), survivors to the Colombia's Army attack on the Raul Reyes camp.

Recently in the book "*The Peace in Colombia*", written by the Cuban ex president Fidel Castro, he mentions a few historic Colombia's moments, but the most important

issue was the declaration about the peace process during the President Andres Pastrana administration: “The FARC’s intention was to take advantage of the national crisis, and prepare the final offensive”....³⁹ It lets us see clearly that the FARC so far does not have a peace process in its plans, neither before nor currently.

With this regional and international background it is important to analyze if the future of the FARC is uncertain, or if it has undercover alliances that will allow its political and military recovery, soon and stronger than previous years. It is also important to analyze, if the mentioned governments are determined to pay the political price. Do these governments who support FARC, constitute a real threat or simply a smoke screen to cover other national crisis? Colombia needs to be alert, at least with countries like Venezuela, where President Chavez is making sinister alliances and the FARC organization constitutes a key piece in his Machiavellian plans.

FARC’s Actual Strategy

The new FARC leader Alfonso Cano⁴⁰ first purpose has been to unify a very weak organization, find alliances, and look for the right way to recover lost terrain. To achieve this after assuming FARC’s leadership, he wrote a document called “Plan Renacer”⁴¹. These are 14 points that describe the new FARC redirection in order to give the necessary parameters to be followed for the entire organization. In this document we can read the strategic and tactical goals, which according to Cano are needed to recover the initiative. What is clear in a recent intelligence analysis is that there isn’t anything new or unknown about the FARC’s plans and objectives.

Other Insurgent Models

It is important to analyze the situation of other illegal organizations. The “Sendero Luminoso”⁴² case is the typical description to affirm that military victories are not enough to defeat completely one irregular armed organization. In October 2008, in two different armed actions this allegedly defunct group killed fifteen Peruvian soldiers and two civilians. These actions have a special message; that this “organization” is still alive, that “Abimael Guzman’s”⁴³ capture is not enough to completely defeat this insurgent organization. According to the government of Peru, “there still remain two reductions with the capacity to perform armed actions; in addition between 2000 and 2003 this group sealed an alliance with narco-trafficking organizations”⁴⁴.

The El Salvador Model (FMLN)

“In the military level, the FARC is very far from reaching the “military balance”, as the “civil war” happened in El Salvador, (Colombia is 50 times bigger than El Salvador, and the population as well); the Colombian guerrilla needs to gather at least 100,000 men, to approach to the balance threshold”⁴⁵. Even with this necessary approach, it is also important to know the peace process details, but especially how the Salvadorian insurgents, the FMLN, achieved the strategic initiative to coerce the government to negotiate peace.

Even when the FARC has tried to take the Salvadorian civil war model, there are two main issues that differentiate the conflicts, and give any advantage to the FARC. The first was the FMLN military success until November 1989, when they decided to launch the large offensive over the capital. Second, the political situation of the

Salvadorian armed forces, which had lost its legitimacy completely and as a result the international and national support and credibility.

The El Salvador model is an important reference point for a clear vision about the future of Colombia, political and military. The consequences to negotiating with an irregular group not defeated in the military field, conditioned the government to sit at the negotiating table. Opposite to this situation is the Peru phenomenon, where the government never left any alternative to the Shining Path other than military defeat. Almost exterminated, defeat obligated the Shining Path to abandon their military or political objectives.

These two models are the closest approach to Colombia's internal situation. Each one obligates us to reflect well. On one hand what is the appropriate way to find the durable peace, even with the different consequences that each one represents? On the other hand, what is the price that is necessary to pay in order to construct the bases for a better country?

Is Colombia a Regional Threat?

"It is evident that the criminal gangs and paramilitaries have maintained a strong presence for a long time, and the security and defense deployment is not enough to face the national and international challenges that this large territory demands."⁴⁶

Colombia's difficult national geography makes it easy for the illegal organizations to use the borders with our neighbors, especially where the dense jungle does not allow maintaining permanent effective control. To offset this situation, the government increased the number of regular troops, military bases and National Police posts along

the frontiers. Today the statistics of the war against the organized crime are important, and the levels of recovery show amazing achievement never seen before.

The information is surprising and curious; for instance, we can see that “whereas Colombia has an 18% homicide rate, countries like Venezuela has 87%, El Salvador 55%, Jamaica 49%, Guatemala 45%, and Honduras 43%. The reduction of 80 % in kidnapping, makes other countries like Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil, Haiti, and Venezuela, reach the first places”⁴⁷.

The FARC’s strategic withdrawal had made this organization to cross borders, avoiding the military offensive in its strategic rearguard, relocating its camps in countries like Ecuador, where in the past months the Colombian Army killed one of the most important leaders and others 14 combatants. They are a threat menacing our neighbors, and Colombia is trying to work with our friends to protect our mutual interests. But it is necessary to have the same determination, sometimes this is suspiciously avoided.

What Are the Necessary Elements to Completely Defeat the FARC?

More than willingness, Colombia needs to reinforce the current Security Policy, not because it’s not the right model but, simply because the circumstances and the results after six years demand special feedback. It is true that the results have never been seen before, also that we are doing it the right way, but something is missing, and it is necessary to adjust the mechanism to continue successfully.

We know perfectly that the FARC’s center of gravity is drug trafficking, and for this reason our efforts against this phenomenon must continue, even when right now, we do not know the future of Plan Colombia. What is clear is that without demand there

would be no supply. This is the driving force and factor because of the world is continually flooded with illegal drugs. It is necessary to continue attacking this phenomenon from all the necessary fronts: planting, production, trade, consumption, etc, in both, national and international scenarios.

Another important element is legitimacy. We cannot continue to receive the amount of judicial reports that involved mainly with human rights, because this wear out the current security policy and especially the military institution and the risk is losing popular credibility. Even though, it is necessary to continue achieving results in all the arenas, military, social and political. This legal answer will allow us to maintain the core of the security policy, and affect the FARC purposes in the national and international ways.

Even with all the government's effort, which is outstanding compared with previous years, the main ingredient that is feeding the FARC's supposed motivation is still alive. The poverty and social inequality in Colombia have been the causes and the fuel that maintain the flame. To avoid the main war argument, it is necessary to implement strong economic measures, to establish generous and innovative alternatives, and implement other social models. Only by closing the inequality gap, will it be possible to put down the FARC's main justification, and find confidence in government intentions.

One element important to consider is the difference between the previous and actual FARC's leader. Manuel Marulanda was the founder of the group; he was of peasant origin and without any education or important background who lived all the circumstances of the Colombian conflict. On the other hand, Alfonso Cano, the new

leader, is a middle class Bogota citizen who after his law studies joined the organization in the eighties. It has been speculated that such a change in leadership of the FARC could eventually change their policies according to current global economic and political guidelines, perhaps opening the possibility for future negotiations.

“After four years of the Democratic Security Policy, and then the implementation of the Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security as of 2006, there is no doubt that 2007 and 2008 are the worst two years in the entire history of the FARC”⁴⁸. To continue to weaken this organization and to finally obtain a real and firm peace process, it is necessary to find and capture the FARC’s heads, especially those who maintain a radical posture. More military defeats on the battlefield are necessary, but at the same time it is important to improve the “demobilization program”⁴⁹, because it is the main motivation factor for the massive demobilizations based on the experience of those who are right now receiving the benefits of the plan.

The current government is working hard, covering all the necessary fronts to achieve the best possible results, at the same time visualizing the future. It is necessary to create a motivating plan in case of an eventual process of peace, to allow the FARC to accept the negotiations as an excellent alternative; given them the necessary arguments to believe that the process is confident and offers the best solution possible. Then the question is: if the government is determined to pay the political price and to accept the FARC conditions with all the implications and consequences?

Conclusion

With the views previously described, it is possible to understand and to maintain optimism about the defeat of the FARC. It is definitively possible at this point, but not

necessarily easy. As mentioned before, the FARC has demonstrated itself to be a flexible organization with a few secrets still to be known. Are the FARC prepared to quit? Could the next question be what hopes allow them to maintain the dream of power?

The most critical aspect could be the allies that they have in the international scenario, all working with the same purpose, particularly the Venezuela position, especially when it is well known that the socialism scenario Mr. Chavez is trying to bring, involves all the revolutionary cells in the region. With this emerging situation in South America the FARC's hopes of achieving power will never end, and even with the last defeats in Colombia, their allies will maintain this organization alive.

Secondly, it is necessary to observe carefully the FARC's possible shift from the rural model to the urban through the clandestine militias. It is a very active and powerful net; especially because they have sufficient arguments to conduct the fight and have the necessary support. Their objectives is to reach the educational centers, by infiltrating the public universities, exploiting the new regional movements (the Venezuelan "Continental Bolivarian Committee"), and the large levels of poverty and social inequality in Colombia, are part of purpose articulated in "Plan Renacer", announced by Alfonso Cano on August 16, 2008.

The civil wars in El Salvador against the FMLN and the internal situation in Peru against the "Shining Path" are two clear examples about the conclusion of two different conflicts. It is necessary to recognize that the military way to defeat completely one organization like the FARC is not possible; the results in this arena must be interpreted as a contribution to achieve the necessary conditions for the end of the war. The

Colombian government has a clear conviction of this argument that means to allow the FARC to consider the political definition as an only option.

To be realistic, it is important to emphasize if at this point of the conflict, the FARC will do what is necessary to recover the initiative. The strategic goals that its main leader announced in recent months, add nothing new, it is the same well known speech. But who knows what the FARC's real purpose is? The intelligence analysis is realistic and very optimistic. So the big question is, whether we are definitively approaching the defeat of the FARC, or something unclear is coming and that we have just not seen it so far.

Endnotes

¹ "Blocks", The FARC's structure are constituted for different levels of units. The lowest is the squad, consisting of 12 men, followed by, guerrilla, company, column and front. Block consists in 5 or more fronts.

²"Demilitarized zone", the FARCS a demilitarized zone in the area of Caguan (departments of Meta/Caqueta) of 42.000 km ², that is to say roughly the size of Israel, Palestine and Lebanon joined together. This enclave in the middle of the virgin forest must be a pledge of good will on behalf of the government but will be never anything else but the official country of the FARC's which made use of it to cultivate coke and its transformation into cocaine, with the storage of weapons and the training of terrorists.

³ Revista del Partido Comunista de Colombia, *Resolución Política de la JUCO: Documentos Políticos*, (Bogotá, Editorial Colombia Nueva Ltda, Enero-Febrero 1973 No. 103), 90.

⁴ Belisario Betancourt, former President of Colombia between 1982 to 1986

⁵ Andres Pastrana, 38th former President of Colombia between 1998 to 2002

⁶ "Violence Actors", refers to all criminal organizations that for years are challenging Colombia, (FARC, ELN, EPL, ERG, AUG, drugs cartels, organized crime.)

⁷ FARC's secretariat. Seven members constitute the secretariat (Guillermo Leon Saenz, Victor Julio Suarez, Rodrigo Londono, Luciano Marin, Milton de Jesus Doncel, Jaime Alberto Parra, Jorge Torres.

⁸ Conferencias Guerrilleras (“Guerrillas Conference” in English), refers to the highest level meeting concerning the decision making process, and strategic plans formulations, in which the FARC makes a periodic balance.

⁹ “Mobile column” organization adopted by the FARC group in the nineties, as a response to the creation by the regular Army of the “mobile brigade” as it looked for a qualitative jump during the war development.

¹⁰ Larger fronts (between 300 and 500 men), constitute the *columns*

¹¹ IRA (Irish Republican Army), was involved with the FARC in terrorist training during the distension zone time.

¹² “Economy of war”. Refers to the logistical zones located in strategic regions, where the FARC could obtain all kind of resources to sustain continuous military operations.

¹³ Dina Siegel, Henk Van de Bunt and Damian Zaitch, *Global Organized Crime, Trends and Developments* (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic. 2003) 40.

¹⁴ Illegal armed organizations: FARC(Communism Revolutionary Armed Forces), ELN (National Liberation Army), EPL (Popular Liberation Army), ERG (Guevarista Revolutionary Army), AUC, (Peasants Self Defenses)

¹⁵ “Plan Tricolor” (or “Tricolor Plan” in English), guidelines followed by the Army for more than 30 years.

¹⁶ Ministry of National Defense, *especial report* (Bogota, Imprenta Nacional de Colombia 2006),15.

¹⁷ Highest national authority in planning and main presidential advisor on economic issues.

¹⁸ Colombian National Constitution. Cap VII, Art 216. (Army, Navy, Air Force and National Police, constitute the Public Force)

¹⁹ Colombian Ministry of Defense, *DSCP achievements*, “Toward a new strategy” (Bogota April 2006).

²⁰ The JTF in Spanish: *Fuerza de tarea conjunta OMEGA*, is a joint task force involving the Military of Colombia in support of Plan Patriota was formed by the best 20,000 soldiers selected from the Army, Air Force and Navy. The task force is based in military installations in Apiay Air Force Base, in the Department of Meta, Fort Larandia in the Department of Caqueta and Tres Esquinas Air Force Base in Caquetá.

²¹ “Plan of war designed by the General Command, assigned to the new “Omega Force”, in order to confront the FARC in its strategic rearguard.

²² Ministry of Defense of Colombia, *the FARC at their worst moment in history*. (Bogota, January 2008), 3.

²³ Manuel Marulanda, nicknamed “Tiro Fijo”, Colombian guerrilla’s leader who was a founder (1964) and commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), died

in 2008. Luis Edgar Devia, nicknamed Raul Reyes of, the seven-member secretariat of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; killed in combat with Colombian Army the March 1, 2008.

²⁴ Plan Nacional de Reinsercion, or (National Reinsertion Plan) refers to the program that the government implemented looking for a massive demobilization. In the period from 2006 to May 2008, 5.316 FARC guerrillas demobilized.

²⁵ Reward payments, refers to the government program to allow paying special amount of money about illegal armed groups but especially for the leaders of this organizations.

²⁶ FARC “fusion” one of the fourteen points, established by Alfonso Cano in the “Renacer Plan”, where they express the necessity to establish alliances with this terrorist organization.

²⁷ Ingrid Betancourt, Presidential Candidate for the Oxygen Green party, kidnapped by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) on February 23, 2002 in San Vicente del Caguan (Guaviare) Colombia. Rescued with other 14 hostages during a military operation in September 2008.

²⁸ humanitarian exchange refers to the change of guerrilla’s prisoners in jail prosecuted, for kidnapping civilian, (especially personalities like politicians and military)

²⁹ “Mandos medios”, refers to the commanders in the medium level, such as a guerrilla, company or column.”

³⁰ RCN news, “*New videos about the presence of the FARC in public universities*”, (Bogota, September 10, 2008)

³¹ FARC’s strategy. Consist of reinforcing the militia nets and conducting terrorist actions in the main urban centers.

³² “Neighborhoods around the cities, where the poor population is located, without public services or basic infrastructure.

³³ The main purpose is to spread the socialist ideals and to create spaces of nonconformity opinions, especially for Latin America and Caribbean countries (<http://www.conbolivar.org>)

³⁴ “Refers to some corrupt lawyers working for the terrorist groups, trying to involve the armed forces in false accusations, and defending the rebels captured.

³⁵ Eduardo Pizarro Leon gomez, “*Una Democracia Aseñada*”: balance y perspectivas del conflicto armado en Colombia. Como caracterizar el conflicto (Bogota: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2004), 79.

³⁶ José Miguel Vivanco, “*Human rights news*”. America’s Director at Human Rights Watch (Washington. Jun 3, 2008).

³⁷ Daniel Ortega, Declaration of the President of Nicaragua in the “Rio Meeting”, after the Raul Reyes Death in Ecuador. (www://elnuevodiario.com.ni)

³⁸ Fighters+Lovers is a controversial group that has made a clothing company, brand and record label which sells controversial T-shirts, perfumes and CDs. The t-shirts feature logos of the FARC and the PFLP

³⁹ "The Peace in Colombia", segments of the book. Pages 117 and 134.

⁴⁰ Alfonso Cano's real name is Guillermo Leon Saenz. Founded and became the leader of the Clandestine Colombian Communist Party. Ideologically he is a hardliner, with the belief that his ideas and side will triumph absolutely

⁴¹ Document written by Alfonso Cano, dated August 16, 2008, gives orientation and instructions to the FARC's secretariat. Consist of 14 points with strategic and tactic lines of action.

⁴² Sendero Luminoso or "Shining Path" was one of the most successful insurgent groups in the Western Hemisphere in the late 20th century. Formed as a splinter group of the Communist Party of Peru, based ideologically on the writings of Marxist scholar José Carlos Mariátegui

⁴³ Abimael Guzman, Historic founder and main Sendero Luminoso leader, captured in September 1992 in Peru.

⁴⁴ Paola Pinedo Garcia, *De la mano del narcotrafico resurge Sendero Luminoso*, (Bogota: El Tiempo, October 18 2008). 1. www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/home

⁴⁵ Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, *Una Democracia Asediada, Balance y perspectivas del conflicto armado en Colombia*. (Bogota, Grupo Editorial Norma 2004). 64

⁴⁶ Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia, *Colombia, la seguridad y la defense de las fronteras*. (Bogota, November 2008),19.

⁴⁷ Alfredo Rangel, *Un vecindario inseguro* , (Semana, November 13, 2008). www.semana.com/wfinfoArticulo.aspx?id art.

⁴⁸ Ministry of National Defense of Colombia, *The FARC At The Worst Moment in History*, (Bogota, June 2008), 2.

⁴⁹ From 2006-to May 2008, 5,316 FARC members demobilized, and from 2006 to 2007 the individual demobilizations from that organization went up from 1,565 to 2,480 combatants.