

HOW COLOMBIAN INTERAGENCY COOPERATION REESTABLISHED SECURITY AND STRENGTHENED DEMOCRACY

BY

COLONEL RUBEN D. ALZATE
Colombian Army

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**HOW COLOMBIAN INTERAGENCY COOPERATION REESTABLISHED SECURITY
AND STRENGTHENED DEMOCRACY**

by

Colonel Ruben D. Alzate
Colombian Army

Colonel (Ret) George Teague
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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In 2002, the Colombian government developed a new counterinsurgency strategy based not only on understanding the theory of attacking the birth-pillars of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), but also on integrating all the Colombian institutions and agencies. Since then, the narco-terrorist groups have seen the worst years in their entire history.

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HOW COLOMBIAN INTERAGENCY COOPERATION REESTABLISHED SECURITY AND STRENGTHENED DEMOCRACY

Any of us from all over the world can learn from what has happened with respect to the very successful developments of Plan Colombia

—Adm. Mullen¹

In 2002, the Colombian government developed a new counterinsurgency strategy based not only on understanding the theory of attacking the basic pillars of the insurgent narco-terrorist groups within its borders, but also on integrating Colombian government agencies toward this goal. The strategy was successful by undermining within the insurgency each of David Galula's four prerequisites for a successful insurgency: a cause, a weak counterinsurgent government, favorable geographic conditions, and outside support.² At the same time, the interagency process successfully restored the rule of law and strengthened security and democracy. Since then, the narco-terrorist groups have seen the worst years in their entire history.

This paper will analyze, under the lens of the Galula's counterinsurgency doctrine, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known by the Spanish acronym of FARC) to understand Colombia's challenges and the measures that were taken by the government. This study will also review the state posture toward Colombia's security objectives and the effectiveness of the government's policies and strategies. Next, in order to understand the integration of the military objectives with civilian agencies, it will examine the consolidation program launched by the Minister of Defense. Finally, it will explain the anti-kidnapping program as an example of the Colombian interagency process.

Historical and Doctrinal Analysis of the Main Threat

The narco-terrorist group FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) was established in 1964 as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party. It is Colombia's oldest, largest, most capable, and best equipped Marxist-Leninist insurgency.³ For almost a half of a century, the FARC enjoyed relative success in its struggle. In his landmark work dedicated to helping governments fight against insurgent forces, David Galula cites four prerequisites for an insurgent movement to succeed: a cause, a weak counterinsurgent government, favorable geographic conditions, and outside support.⁴ The FARC has exploited each of these conditions during the more than fifty years of its existence, albeit each has significantly changed as the revolution has evolved over time. During the four decades that followed its formation, the FARC slowly grew across the Colombia countryside, attracting disaffected peasants and communist intellectuals. But unlike most insurgencies in Latin America, the FARC'S biggest achievements came after the end of the Cold War, when the group started earning hundreds of millions of dollars by taxing coca growers, selling cocaine, extorting businessmen and kidnapping for ransom.⁵ By the mid-1990s, the FARC derived 65 percent of its income from the drug trade. With this massive revenue source, the FARC modernized its weapons and launched a military and political campaign called "the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia."⁶ The money was used to increase their military power to not only attack the military armed forces but also to very nearly bring the Colombian government to its knees. By 1998, the FARC had the government on the run (Analysts considered that year the highest point reached by the FARC). It ambushed an elite counter-guerrilla

battalion, capturing or killing most of its 154 men. Months later, it overran an army base in Miraflores, in the southern jungle province of Guaviare. The FARC's conventional guerrilla weapons include explosives, landmines and bombs camouflaged as necklaces, soccer balls, and soup cans. It has also orchestrated prison revolts, attacked police and military personnel, and regularly set up roadblocks in order to kidnap people. These and others are the representation of the power that FARC reached because of the weakness of the counterinsurgency policies strategies adopted by successive Colombian governments.⁷

The FARC has embodied as its cause the long-term vision of taking control of the state, with acceptance from the local people. Based on the historical premise that an insurgent group cannot be viable without mass popular backing, and Galula's first premise, that a successful counterinsurgency must have a cause, the FARC's political strategic objective is to build, maintain, and expand its popular support bases. Additionally, these bases must sustain not only the armed structures but also form the basis for the political movement.⁸ When Jacob Arenas and Manuel Marulanda established the FARC in the Cauca area, they brought with them a vision of a Colombia where the peasant farmers had a share in the government equal to that of the wealthy landowners.⁹ This vision resounded with the peasants in the southern region of the country, where government presence was minimal and not believed to be representative of the needs of the people. According to Bard O'Neal, "The strategy of Protracted Popular War articulated by Mao is undoubtedly the most conceptually elaborate and perhaps the most widely copied insurgent strategy." As he also put it in his writings, "Mao came to the conclusion that the revolutionary struggle would be a

long one and that the peasantry, not the urban proletariat, was the most important revolutionary class.”¹⁰ This kind of approach fit perfectly with the FARC’s peasant background.

Then why has this been unsuccessful for the FARC? As the insurgency has evolved and become more involved in the trafficking of narcotics as a means to fund its revolution, its cause has become somewhat diluted. While it has grown in fighting strength, often attributed to the profitability of the cocaine trade, it hasn’t captured the support of large segments of the population. Galula explains this phenomenon when he says, “The lack of an attractive cause is what restrains an a priori apolitical crime syndicate from attempting to assume power, for they realize that only criminals will follow them.”¹¹ The FARC eventually became a huge drug cartel; this change instigated the use of terrorism as a mechanism of political pressure through intimidation and, in turn, instigated the loss of the FARC’s values and political orientation. Local and international communities have always condemned kidnapping, coercion, forced contribution, human rights violations, and terrorism as legitimate forms of revolutionary struggle. Recently, the FARC has proven Mao’s theory: “Insurgent groups, weaker than their enemy, could not be effective or even survive without strong, well organized popular support.”¹² Today, the FARC has no popular support and it is not able to produce any type of mass movement. The Colombian population has changed from indifference to solid rejection of the activities of the narco-terrorist group. The change in the FARC’s cause, and therefore its strategy, has contributed to its lack of success in recent years.

Changes in the political environment have also affected the FARC's ability to take advantage of David Galula's second of four prerequisites necessary for an insurgent movement to succeed – a weak counterinsurgent government.¹³ The Colombian government demonstrated weakness throughout much of the long history of its counterinsurgent efforts. The government's inability to govern, protect, and provide options for people in the remotest regions of the country allowed the FARC to remain in "control" throughout most of its history, and to influence the people even in areas where it did not have outright control.¹⁴ The 1990s were characterized by significant FARC military accomplishments, and a general weakening of the central government. During this time the FARC membership reached its high point of nearly 20,000 terrorists, and was mobilized in the departments of Guaviare, Putumayo, Caquetá, Norte de Santander, and Bolivar. President Pastrana granted large plots of land twice the size of El Salvador to the FARC's demilitarized zone (DMZ). He intended that the FARC would retreat to these areas to allow negotiations to take place free of conflict. The main goal of the DMZ was to provide an incentive and create territorial space for negotiations between the government of Colombia and FARC. However, this group proceeded to use the DMZ as a resupply base from which it launched massive attacks against the government in all directions – even in the direction of the capital Bogota.¹⁵ After fierce fighting, the Colombian Army was able to stop the FARC advances, but not without heavy losses.¹⁶ Some analysts believe that the size and intensity of the renewed offensives from the DMZ signaled the FARC's transition from guerrilla warfare to a war of movement (according to MAO's doctrine, the last step before an insurgent group can

take power), with a goal of conventional military victory over the Colombian Armed Forces.

The FARC's attacks from the DMZ brought about another change: the end of the Colombian people's patience. In 2002, the electorate voted in President Alvaro Uribe, who implemented a new strategy: the Democratic Security and Defense Policy (DSDP). Before Uribe, most administrations had placed national security at the end of their list of priorities. The strategic vision for the DSDP was the complete opposite of its predecessors. In order to achieve socio-economic growth, Colombia would invest in security first; it would be first and foremost a strong counterinsurgent government. The Military Strategy plan was developed and implemented. The successful outcome has meant that FARC has lost the strategic initiative and is on the run. Operations Fenix (Phoenix) and Jaque (Check), as well as others that have contributed to reducing the FARC's destructive capacity over recent years, have shown the international community an efficient, effective, competent Army and National Police with a high level of military and police preparation, an excellent capacity to produce strategic intelligence, solid operational planning and excellent high-risk mission training.¹⁷ The FARC lost its highest level of command, Manuel Marulanda; the historical leader and symbol of unity for the terrorists, Raul Reyes; and the terrorist in charge of political and international strategy, Ivan Rios, who was also the symbol of the FARC's new generation. They no longer have the capabilities to undertake operations with high concentrations of men and means. They are in a stage of conserving their scarce forces, which are assigned primarily to protect their leaders, kidnap victims, and their drug production. When faced with a strong counterinsurgent government, the FARC was forced to change its strategy

and reduce its long-term political ambitions which, at the same time, reduced its appeal to the population and therefore its potential for success.

Galula's third prerequisite for a successful insurgent movement is favorable geographic conditions.¹⁸ The geography of Colombia is one of the two strongest factors that support the longevity of the FARC's struggle. In most aspects of the geographical analysis posited by Galula, Colombia scores high in favor of insurgent survival. The country is extremely large, with many areas inaccessible due to a lack of roads, heavy jungle, and forbidding mountains. Colombia contains a long, porous inland border in terrain also characterized by jungle in the east and mountains in the south. This allows the insurgents freedom of black market commerce and movement of resources, not to mention a possibility of safe haven across the uncontrolled borders. While a demographic shift of the majority of the population to urban areas hampers the FARC with respect to its ability to live and survive among the population, it is aided by a climate that allows guerrilla members to live and work year-round in primitive conditions. In all, the geographic conditions in Colombia make it extremely difficult for the government to exert control over all of its territories and control its extensive border areas. Even though Uribe couldn't change Colombia's geography, the government was indeed able to make changes and relocate the security forces that diminished the geographic advantage of the FARC.

Galula says that outside support is the one pre-requisite that is not entirely necessary, but becomes more important in the latter stages of the insurgency.¹⁹ Communist support for the cause of the FARC from sources in Cuba and the Soviet bloc completely dried up in the 1980s. A different type of outside support, in the form of

a vibrant and all-consuming drug economy, replaced and surpassed the aid previously given by the Communist benefactors. While this support has had the effect of strengthening the FARC's war-making capabilities, it has diluted its message of social reform. Relying exclusively on an internationally recognized illegal enterprise - not to mention kidnapping, the FARC's second- largest grossing income source - has made the group vulnerable to distaste among the population, and rallied support of the population from numerous countries. As was mentioned above, in the Check Operation, the FARC lost an important political tool relative to the international community. The FARC planned to pressure the Colombian government to grant not only military but also political and international concessions. FARC used the kidnap victims to get the "humanitarian agreement" in order to establish the DMZ with the assistance of the international community for promotion of its "revolutionary project." Even the leaders of Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Cuba, who have proclaimed to be close of the FARC's cause, have mentioned their disdain for the use of kidnapping as a source and political pressure. The Colombian Democratic Security Policy's success has demonstrated to the international community that the FARC does not have legitimacy as an insurgency group. The international community in 2008 gave a resounding and unanimous "no" when the President of Venezuela asked them for FARC recognition as an insurgency movement. No government in Latin America or Europe agrees with this request; on the contrary, several countries have kept the FARC on their list of terrorist groups.

State Posture toward Colombia's Security Objectives and the Effectiveness of the Government's Policies

In addition to undermining Galula's four prerequisites for a successful insurgency, successful counterinsurgency requires unity of effort in bringing all instruments of national power to bear. The year 2002 is significant in the history of Colombia, because it is the year that Alvaro Uribe became president of the nation. From the start, the main goal for Uribe's government was to make Colombia a secure country. He defined security as "the permanent and effective presence of the democratic authorities across the national territory as a result of a collective effort of the whole society."²⁰ One of his main objectives was to regain state control of areas affected by the activity of the illegal armed groups and drug traffickers. The goals for his 2002-2006 term guided the governmental institutions, and particularly the Ministry of Defense and the public security forces, to develop the Democratic Security and Defense Policy (DSDP). Its stated goal was "to protect the rights of the citizens and democratic values and institutions and foment solidarity and civilian cooperation in the defense of democracy." This included strengthening the judicial system, modernizing the state security forces and improving security-related coordination between civilian and military state institutions as an example that the interagency system should be involved and work in this kind of conflict. To this end, there are five pillars of the policy: consolidation of state control over the national territory; protection of the population through the increase of state presence; destruction of the illegal drug trade; maintenance of deterrent military capabilities; and, transparency and efficient management of resources.²¹ The successful establishment of the Democratic Security and Defense Policy and the increased security throughout the country has made the Republic of

Colombia the best example for societies that are dealing with insurgencies or terrorist groups to build a future with progress and social justice.²²

The successful outcomes of Uribe's first term were decisive. More than 32,000 members of the illegal self defense groups and their leaders demobilized. From 2002-2006, Colombian Military Forces, the National Police and all security institutions were able to reduce the numbers of homicides by 40%, the number of kidnappings for extortion by 83%, the number of victims from collective homicides by 72%, terrorist attacks by 61%, and kidnappings at illegal roadblocks by 99%. The application of justice and the strengthening of the judicial system were essential to diminishing the strength of the Colombian paramilitary phenomenon.²³ The narco-terrorist group FARC recognized it could not engage in a war of movements and was forced to return to guerrilla warfare with sporadic terrorism acts in order to demonstrate that they were still alive. Drug traffickers were forced to invent other techniques to develop their business, switching from large plantations of illicit crops to small parcels in difficult access sites with the coca hidden under legitimate crops.

By the start of Uribe's second term in 2006, there had been dramatic changes not only in the Colombian perception about security affairs, but also inside the different groups threatening the community, making it necessary for the government to respond by being more focused on the new environment and putting more emphasis on the changes. After 2006, the Colombian government was able to gain control of the vast majority of the national territory. The new challenge was to consolidate that control not only with the presence of the public security forces but also by bringing together the diverse institutions and agencies that provide government services. The Policy for the

Consolidation of Democratic Security was prioritized by the Minister of Defense, establishing criteria and instructions on how efforts by the Armed Forces and the National Police would be organized to face the new fields of operations. This included new element such as a three-phase strategy – Territorial Control, Stabilization and Consolidation phases – in order to consolidate territory in different areas in the country according to the individual security character (see Figure 1, Consolidation Strategy). This meant that the intensity of military operations and police presence would vary according to the presence of the illegal armed groups, drug traffickers, and criminal bands.



Source: Colombian Ministry of Defense

Figure 1: Consolidation Strategy

The Integration of the Military Objectives with Civilian Institutions

Because of the security and defense implications of the DSDP, the Armed Forces became the key enabler of the government's plan. This approach of combining all elements of national power in one purpose brought great interaction between civilians and the military, strengthening these relations for the long term. Within a year of establishing the DSDP, the "Patriot Plan" was launched by the Armed Forces' senior leader as part of the new DSDP.²⁴ The plan was designed to get military presence to the most remote areas of Colombia where the guerrillas had enclaves and enable the introduction of social programs. The interaction between Patriot Plan and Plan Colombia - created by the Colombian government with the support of the United States for peace, prosperity and the strengthening of the state - was able to confront and neutralize all narco-terrorist strategies' plans and long term effects.²⁵ The Patriot Plan emphasized its efforts not only in the southern jungles of Colombia, but also in the heartland of the country. Plan Colombia and Patriot Plan are the demonstration of well-defined political ends, and how the effort of establishing and integrating military objectives with civilian agencies can be successful. With the resources from Plan Colombia, the Armed Forces and the National Police were able to create specialized units, reorganize their components and receive new equipment, mainly helicopters to increase their mobility and ability to cover all Colombian land. As the Colombians expected, the FARC's presence and influence declined in most of the Colombian territory, including the eastern and southern parts of Colombia, their traditional base of support and point of deployment.²⁶

The interagency process that requires these complex organizations to discuss and agree on goals and coordinate a response is a process involving human beings and

complex organizations with different cultures, and different outlooks on what is good for the national interest and what policies are best.²⁷ As noted by Dr. Marcella of the U.S. Army War College, the tensions generated by cultural differences between organizations, battles over turf, and competition for limited resources will always be part of the interagency process.²⁸ These issues clearly had an impact in Colombia before Uribe's administration. Critical factors such as no communication, no articulation of the common goals, failure to conceptualize the threat, and bad distribution of the budget between agencies were issues that not only caused the failure of some counterinsurgency strategies of earlier governments, but also allowed insurgency movements and other terrorist groups to increase the violence in Colombia. The interagency process of the DSDP enabled the government to improve the indicators of Colombian security, promote effective governance and change the direction of the narco-terroristic group FARC's strategy. The DSDP established the right parameters in order to lead the interagency system in a decisive battle against narco-terrorism in Colombia. The interagency process not only integrated and guided the efforts of all Colombian institutions, but also those of U.S. government agencies such as the Department of State, the U.S. Military Group, intelligence agencies, the Narcotics Assistance Section (NAS), the DEA, and SOUTHCOM, among others.

Minister of Defense as Coordinator of the Governmental Actions

Based on the principle that the citizens' rights are essential to democracy, and one of the most important of these is security, in 2002, the Colombian Minister of Defense developed the Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security as part of the national strategy²⁹. More than ever, the coordination of the security forces with other state institutions and agencies was essential, especially with those in charge of social

action and the administration of justice. The strategic objectives were well defined: 1) Consolidate territorial control and strengthen the rule of law across the entire national territory; 2) Protect the public and hold on to strategic initiative against all threats to citizen security; 3) Drastically raise the cost of trafficking drugs in Colombia; 4) Keep public security forces modern and effective, with a high level of legitimacy based on public confidence and support; and, 5) Maintain the downward trend in all crime rates in the country's urban centers.³⁰ A discussion of each of these strategic objectives follows.

1) Consolidate territorial control: Territorial control is the center of gravity of the Colombian problem, and so has been considered a strategic objective since the Democratic Security Policy was formulated. The lines of action for this policy not only attack the FARC's basic tenets, but also concentrate and align the efforts of the security forces and different agencies. Interagency coordination becomes the most important tool in order to work to strengthen democratic institutions. Intense military operations will dismantle and neutralize criminal organizations and at the same time break up drug trafficking networks and infrastructure in the zone.

2) Protect the public and hold on to strategic initiative against all threats to the security of citizens: It is the job of the security forces to engage in offensive operations across the nation, including the most remote areas. The role of military and police intelligence was basic to this effort. It provided opportune analysis and reporting for effective offensive operations, which, in turn, helped the institutions maintain strategic initiative against all threats to the public.

3) Drastically raise the cost of trafficking drugs in Colombia: Eradication, interdiction and neutralization of illegal armed groups that participate in any stage of the

business, as well as the armed structures of drug trafficking organizations were the main focus of this line of operation.

4) Keep public security forces modern and effective, with a high level of legitimacy base on public confidence and support: The focus here was on making special investments to strengthen the operational capabilities of the public security forces, and at the same implement a series of structural reforms at the Ministry of Defense, the Armed Forces, and the National Police, with a clear orientation toward legitimacy as their center of gravity.

5) Maintain the downward trend in all crime rates in the country's urban centers: The National Police had the mission of reinforcing its citizen security strategy in order to neutralize and dismantle organized gangs and groups of common criminals that affect the security and harmony of urban population groups.³¹

Anti Kidnapping and Anti Extortion Program

This program is part of the second objective of the Ministry of Defense Policy. It is the best example of interaction between civilian agencies and the Colombian Armed Forces against narco-terrorist groups. Kidnapping and extortion are more than just a criminal and police problem. Like illegal drug trafficking, they constitute a fundamental means of financing the terrorism acts committed by illegal armed groups.³² Kidnapping and extortion each have brought in between US \$200 and US \$300 million annually.³³ Kidnapping is also used by illegal armed groups as a method of political blackmail. It is evident that the kidnapping and extortion business is what fuels the criminal, logistic and financial capacity of illegally armed groups. These activities also negatively affect Colombia in other ways. In particular, kidnapping and extortion discourage international

investment. They also have serious psychological impact on the individuals concerned and their families, while society at large lives with a feeling of constant vulnerability.

A Brief History of Kidnapping in Colombia

Kidnapping in Colombia has two different roots. It was practiced in rural areas by some late “bandits” of the political violence period in the 1950s. On the other hand, urban kidnapping of foreigners was imported from groups such as Tupamaros (Uruguay) and Montoneros (Argentina). Perhaps the main contribution of Colombian armed groups to kidnapping technology was the capacity to fuse these two roots, catching bourgeois hostages in rural areas, and reproducing at the local level the scenario of alien victims. By the late 1990s, indiscriminate massive kidnapping appeared when the pool of potential middle class urban victims was reduced because they tightened their security. Since that time, kidnapping in Colombia has been a highly centralized and coordinated activity, very much correlated with the main actors of the armed conflict.³⁴ Colombia in 2000 was the country with the most kidnappings in the world; it had a veritable kidnap industry. The illegal armed groups, guerrillas and paramilitaries were responsible for the majority of the kidnappings in this period, which they used to help finance their criminal actions.³⁵

There is no doubt that recent indicators show kidnapping has decreased (see Figure 2, Development of the Kidnapping Problem in Colombia 1980-2007); nevertheless, the DSDP outlines a long-term state policy to combat kidnapping and extortion. This policy should be improved on by integrating all government agencies in

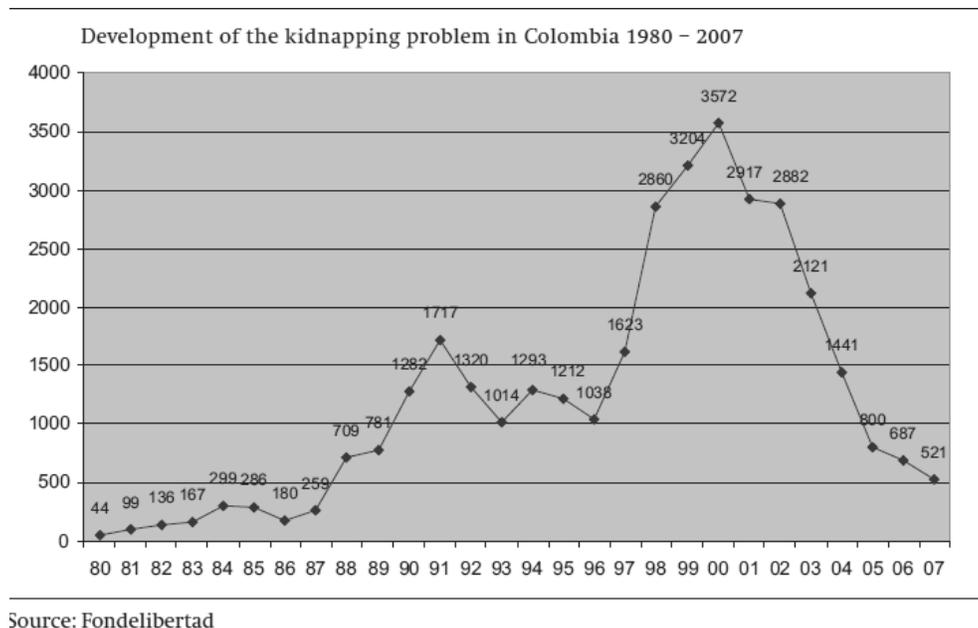


Figure 2: Development of the Kidnapping Problem in Colombia 1980-2007

order to eliminate this current threat from the reality of the Colombians. For years there was a great vacuum in the activity of other state institutions in some critical areas of Colombia territory and governments structures. It is precisely that vacuum that explains the growth of the kidnapping and extortion in Colombia, particularly during the 1990s. That was why the achievement of complete control of this issue, so as to guarantee the rule of law and democratic governance, was the pillar of the DSDP. Decisions and actions implemented were fully framed within the following concepts:

- 1) A special inter-ministerial strategy created an organization to deal with kidnapping and extortion to dismantle the finances of the terrorist organizations;
- 2) The integration of the Colombian Interagency process supported by the Military Armed Forces and National Police structures for centralization of not only investigations and offensive operations, but also strategic and operational intelligence to dismantle specific criminal groups and their organizations;

3) Protection of the population is one of the five strategic objectives to counter the threats to Colombian security and fulfill the general aim of the Democratic Security and Defense Policy, which is to strengthen the rule of law throughout the country;

4) Reduction of kidnapping and extortion has been appointed by the DSDP in order to pay special attention because many Colombians have suffered and continue to suffer directly at the hands of the illegal armed groups;

5) Guaranteeing the security of all Colombians is the responsibility not just of the Minister of Defense, the Armed Forces and the National Police, but also of the entire Colombian state and all of society; and,

6) The Armed Forces have not only the obligation but also the duty to participate actively in the strengthening of democracy, to support the institutions, to back the efforts of the security forces, and to show solidarity with the victims of extortion, kidnapping and violence in general.

The key to fighting against the kidnapping and extortion was to dismantle criminal organizations that systematically commit these offences. The Minister of Defense created an interagency working group acting under the Armed Forces, National Police and the public prosecutor's office, with the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) and the Technical Corp of Investigation (CTI) as support structures. The Minister of Defense led joint meetings of the intelligence services of the Armed Forces, National Police, DAS and CTI of the public prosecutor's office in order to see the benefits of these mechanisms. Under the basic concept of teamwork the Armed Forces coordinated with Government security agencies, building solid and effective relationships committed to facing the extortion and kidnapping, and building social

programs to support the victims. The Armed Forces took the first step in the effort to articulate a comprehensive response to Colombia's anti-kidnapping challenges.

In order to find joint solutions, joint security policies were assigned a central role to the prompt administration of justice in order to better manage anti-kidnapping finances and integrate the state intelligence community in this process. The Minister of Defense drew up a long term state policy that involved not only the intelligence institutions of the state but also the judicial system of the country. Every effort was made to complement the professionalization process with increased coordination and jointness, both within the security forces as well as between these and other state investigative and judicial bodies.

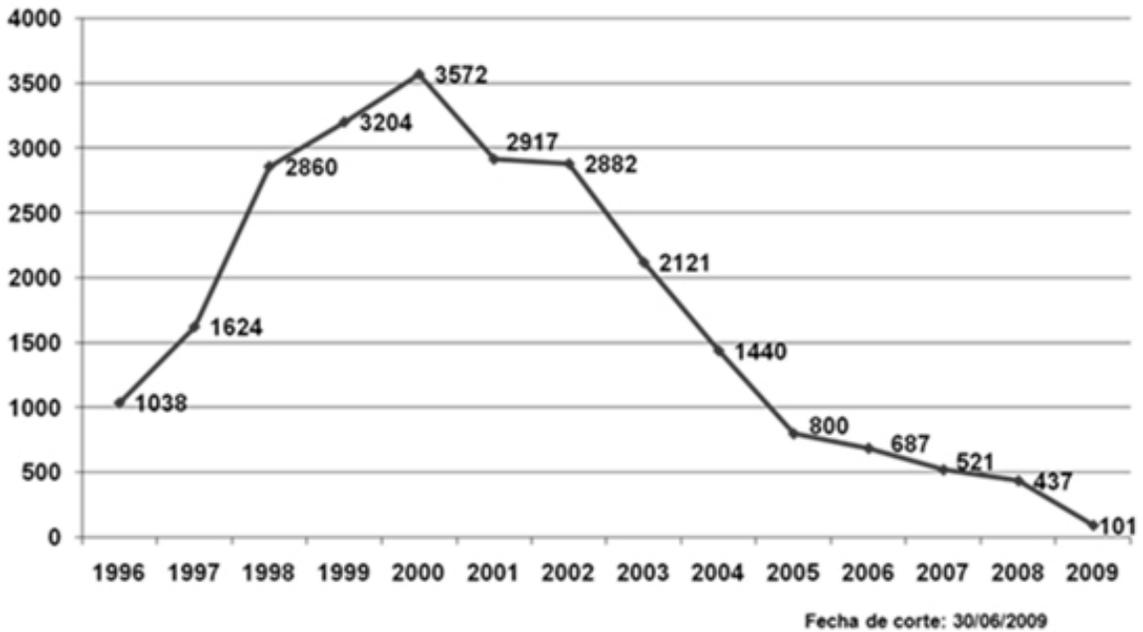
The Armed Forces and National Police designed interagency work groups in order to not only give the anti-kidnapping operations capability to maintain their initiative with enough flexibility, capacity for deployment, agility, cleverness and quickness, but also integrate the most important government agencies to achieve the National policy objectives. To achieve this objective, resources were allocated for the purchase of up-to-date electronic intelligence and investigation equipment; to train joint teams from the Armed Forces, the National Police, the DAS, the CTI and the public prosecutor's office in investigation; and to fund reward payment programs for information leading to results. Finally, this objective was reached with effectiveness and transparency; effectiveness in terms of results focused toward weakening these groups' armed structures, and transparency in observing human rights and international humanitarian law.

Unified Action Group against Kidnapping and Extortion (GAULA)

The Unified Action Group against Kidnapping and Extortion (GAULA) is an interagency group that consists of elite units, created by Act 282 of 1996, that are

exclusively devoted to preventing and acting against kidnapping and extortion. They are composed of highly qualified personnel who carry out hostage rescue operations and dismantle criminal gangs responsible for the crimes that infringe on personal freedom of Colombians.³⁶ To fulfill their mission, they are organized as follows: a unified leadership by the prosecutor and the respective military or police commander concerned, in their own jurisdiction; an assessment and intelligence unit comprised of intelligence analysts, communications technicians and database operators, responsible for collecting and processing information and propose to the unified leadership the different alternatives of action; an operational unit composed of personnel from the Armed Forces, National Police or the Administrative Department of Security; and an investigative unit composed of officers, detectives and technicians from the judicial police. Each unit operates under the command of an officer and is responsible for the planning and execution of operations necessary for the rescue and protection of victims and the arrest of those responsible. Each unit operates under the direction of the competent prosecutor and is responsible for advancing criminal investigations. In addition to the official public bodies that supervise and control, GAULA also includes the Special Administrative Unit National Tax and Customs National that supports the functions of the GAULA in the detection of assets from kidnapping and extortion.³⁷ The outcomes after these components begun to work were amazing; the number of kidnappings decreased dramatically (see Figure 3, General Development of Kidnapping in Colombia).

COMPORTAMIENTO DEL SECUESTRO GENERAL EN COLOMBIA 1996-2008



Source: National Direction of the Gaulas

Figure 3: General Development of Kidnapping in Colombia

US Anti-Kidnapping Initiative

For the past 22 years, the U.S. government's Antiterrorism Assistance Program (ATA) has been highly successful in strengthening international efforts to defend against, and eradicate, the threat of international terrorism.³⁸ The ATA Anti-Kidnapping/Extortion Program in Colombia, which began in March 2003, is designed to combat the continuing problem of kidnapping and extortion of Colombian and foreign nationals by Colombian terrorist and paramilitary organizations. Since the inception of the program, ATA has trained 143 Colombian National Police (CNP) officers and 176 Colombian military (COLMIL) personnel in crisis response techniques.³⁹ ATA also trained 22 members of the Departamento de Seguridad, or Security Department (DAS) and the Cuerpo Técnico de Investigaciones, or the Technical Agency for investigations

(CTI), which are assigned to Colombian military units as judicial police personnel.⁴⁰ ATA is overseeing the development of a computerized data management system in Colombia named the Sistema Integrado de Informacion Extorcion y Secuestro, or the Antiterrorism Assistance Program (SIIES). SIIES provided the government of Colombia with a comprehensive database containing information on kidnapping, accessible to all participant agencies. SIIES is also designed to support the government's efforts to prosecute kidnapers.⁴¹ The system connected all GAULA Units, the CNP, COLMIL, the Ministry of Defense (MOD), Fondelibertad (MOD Fiscal Controller) and the Fiscalia (Colombian equivalent of the U.S. Department of Justice). An important goal of the ATA program is to give the Government of Colombia the ability to sustain the anti-kidnapping program.⁴²

U.S. agencies have supported Columbia not only in anti-kidnapping issues, but also in other affairs. Since the year 2000, the U.S. State and Defense departments have provided nearly \$4.9 billion to the Colombian Military Forces and National Police. Notably, over 130 U.S.-funded helicopters have provided the air mobility needed to rapidly move Colombian counternarcotics and counterinsurgency forces. U.S. advisors, training, equipment, and intelligence assistance have also helped professionalize Colombia's military and police forces, which have recorded a number of achievements including the aerial and manual eradication of hundreds of thousands of hectares of coca, the seizure of tons of cocaine, and the capture or killing of a number of illegal armed group leaders and thousands of combatants.

Summary of Lessons Learned

There are several lessons learned from this study that should be considered not only for improving what has been done up to now in Colombia, but also for use in

combating narco-terrorism in other regions of the world. Some of the more important lessons learned are outlined below:

1) The key factor for success in counterterrorism is unity of effort in applying all elements of national power. This concept must continue to be a main consideration in the development of all of Colombia's future government policies. Further, this should be considered in the development or modification of U.S. policies in Afghanistan.

2) The Strategy for consolidation design by the Minister of Defense must continue having emphasis on rapid and sequenced action coordinated on an interagency basis.

3) Colombia must continue working with the U.S. agencies in order to obtain support and cooperation for the wars on drugs and terrorism. This cooperation will serve not only to achieve Colombia's strategic objectives, but also to support United States' interests.

4) The Republic of Colombia has particular experiences with programs such as crop eradication, fusion centers for social development, and anti-kidnapping programs that have been successful and could be employed by other countries involved in the same kind of conflicts. Therefore, the doctrine should be published and shared with the governments of those countries.

5) The concepts used to design the Unified Action Group against Kidnapping and Extortion could be applied by U.S agencies in Afghanistan or Iraq where the governmental institutions need to be strengthened.

6) In order to integrate the efforts by multiple agencies, it is essential to apply the principle of unity of command, using a professional, experienced and well-trained interagency advisor team.

Conclusion

After years of struggle, the vision of President Uribe, as laid out in the DSDP and implemented across the Government of Colombia by military, security, and civilian agencies, has changed the FARC's operating environment and undermined that organization's strategy, ability to operate, finance its activities and most importantly, attract the broad based popular support it depends upon for success. Without doubt, under the leadership of President Uribe, the Republic of Colombia has become a model of a country of security for all Colombians within a democratic framework. Achieving the goals designed at the DSDP to transform Colombia in a secure country was possible first of all with the help of many friendly countries, including the United States through its commitment to Plan Colombia, and secondly by integrating the efforts of the Colombian agencies. There is growing consensus among national security planners, politicians, economic advisors and senior military officers in favor of the statement that the interagency system proposed in the DSDP forced and guided all Colombian institutions in a single direction and, as a result, restored the rule of law, established security, strengthened the democracy, and enabled more effective application of all elements of national power. History will have the last word.

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